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THE GENERAL STAFF, ITS ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS
by
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THE GENERAL STAFF, ITS ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS

1. The origin of the General Staff is a matter of considerable controversy. Some claim that its existence in our Army began as far back as 1797, when Congress passed an Act gathering in one body the Brigadier General, The Quartermaster General, and The Judge Advocate General and designated them to form the "General Staff". Others claim that it had its beginning with the Act of Congress approved February 14, 1903. However, the General Staff, as it is constituted today, is an outgrowth of experience in the World War and is provided for in the National Defense Act. This Act prescribes, among other things, the duties and composition of the General Staff. The duties of the War Department General Staff are enumerated as follows.

National Defense Act:

"The duties of the War Department General Staff shall be to prepare plans for national defense and the use of the military forces for that purpose, both separately and in conjunction with the naval forces, and for the mobilization of the manhood of the Nation and its material resources in an emergency, to investigate and report upon all questions affecting the efficiency of the Army of the United States, and its state of preparation for military operations, and to render professional aid and assistance to the Secretary of War and the Chief of Staff.

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"Hereafter, members of the General Staff Corps shall be confined strictly to the discharge of duties of the general nature of those specified for them in this section and in the Act of Congress approved February 14, 1903, and they shall not be permitted to assume or engage in work of an administrative nature that pertains to established bureaus or offices of the War Department, or that, being assumed or engaged in by members of the General Staff Corps, would involve impairment of the responsibility or initiative of such bureaus or offices or would cause injuries or unnecessary duplication of or delay in the work thereof."

Act of February 14, 1903.

"That the duties of the General Staff Corps shall be to prepare plans for the national defense and for the mobilization of the military forces in time of war, to investigate and report upon all questions affecting the

efficiency of the Army and its state of preparation for military operations; to render professional aid and assistance to the Secretary of War and to general officers and other superior commanders, and to act as their agents in informing and coordinating the action of all the different officers who are subject under the terms of this Act to the supervision of the Chief of Staff, and to perform such other military duties not otherwise assigned by law as may be from time to time prescribed by the President."

2. In performing the duties prescribed by law it may be said that the General Staff assists the Secretary of War and the Chief of Staff in exercising their command functions over the military activities of the War Department. The command functions of the Secretary of War and of the Chief of Staff are based on the command authority delegated to them by the President, who is designated in the Constitution as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. These command functions may be summarized as follows:

a. The preparation of the existing military forces for immediate and effective use.

b. The preparation of mobilization plans and war plans needed for national defense, including the determination of the requirements in men, supplies, hospitalization, construction, and transportation for such plans.

c. The preparation and execution, in peace and in war, of the military program, which is the program of the needs of the Army as submitted to and authorized by the Congress.

The General Staff, however, does not concern itself with the non-military activities of the War Department nor directly with work of an administrative nature that pertains to established bureaus or offices of the War Department; nor with the duties assigned by law and regulations to the Assistant Secretary of War.

3. It will be noted from the above quotations of the National Defense Act that the General Staff is charged, among other things, with responsibility for "the mobilization of the manhood of the nation and its material resources in an emergency". This duty concerning the mobilization of the nation's material resources was transferred to the Assistant Secretary of War in a memorandum, G-4/861, signed by Major General J. G. Harbord, Acting Chief of Staff, December 26, 1921, which contains the following statement:

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"2. The Secretary of War has decided that the responsibility for the 'mobilization of ~~the~~ material resources' devolves upon the Assistant Secretary of War under the provisions of the National Defense Act, as amended June 4, 1920."

The transfer of this responsibility from the General Staff to the Assistant Secretary of War is authorized by Section 5a, of the National Defense Act, which indicates that the duties of the Assistant Secretary of War shall be those specified in the National Defense Act and those assigned to him by the Secretary of War.

4. The War Department General Staff is composed of

a. The Chief of Staff, whose duties are prescribed by law as follows

"The Chief of Staff shall preside over the War Department General Staff and, under the direction of the President, or of the Secretary of War under the direction of the President shall cause to be made, by the War Department General Staff, the necessary plans for recruiting, organizing, supplying, equipping, mobilizing, training, and demobilizing the Army of the United States and for the use of the military forces for national defense. He shall transmit to the Secretary of War the plans and recommendations prepared for that purpose by the War Department General Staff and advise him in regard thereto - upon the approval of such plans or recommendations by the Secretary of War, he shall act as the agent of the Secretary of War in carrying the same into effect."

b. The Deputy Chief of Staff, who in addition to acting for and in the absence of the Chief of Staff, is really the director and coordinator of the whole General Staff.

c. The Personnel Division, G-1, is charged in general with those duties of the War Department General Staff which relate to the personnel of the Army as individuals. These duties include such subjects as the procurement and processing of personnel; decorations, religious, recreational and morale work, enemy aliens, prisoners of war, and conscientious objectors.

d. The Military Intelligence Division, G-2, is charged in general with those duties of the War Department General Staff which relate to the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of military information. The more important duties assigned to this division include those connected with topographical surveys and maps, military attaches; relations with the press, codes and ciphers, censorship in time of war; and intelligence personnel.

e. The Operations and Training Division, G-3, is charged in general with those duties of the War Department General Staff which relate to organization, training, and operations of the military forces and which are not assigned to the War Plans Division. The more important duties of this Division are those connected with tables of organization, the mobilization, organization, and assignment of units, military training, troop movements, and priorities relating to equipment, replacements, and mobilization.

f. The Supply Division, G-4, is charged in general with those duties of the War Department General Staff which relate to the supply of the Army. This Division is mainly concerned with the preparation of plans and policies and the control of activities relating to the types and quantities of supplies required by the Army in peace and war, the distribution, storage, and issue of supplies, annual estimates and the programs of expenditure of appropriated funds, and the various logistical features connected with war plans.

g. The War Plans Division, WPD, is charged in general with those duties of the War Department General Staff which relate to the formulation of plans for the use in the theater of war of the military forces, separately or in conjunction with the naval forces, in the national defense. This Division is particularly interested in the location and character of coast and land fortifications, the estimates of the forces required for the various situations affecting national defense, the preparation and initial deployment of forces; and the development and distribution of the major items of equipment.

h. The Budget and Legislative Planning Branch handles certain legislative and budgetary questions as directed by the Chief of Staff.

5. It can be seen from the foregoing that the Divisions of the General Staff are organized on a functional basis. In each of the five Divisions there are several branches which are organized to handle specified classes of subjects pertaining to that Division. Questions affecting more than one Division of the General Staff are of frequent occurrence. However, in most of these questions some one Division has a paramount interest. That Division normally consults with the other interested Divisions in the preparation of action on such questions and refers the study to such Divisions for formal concurrence before the study is presented to the Chief of Staff.

6. General Staff work is done either by individuals or by committees. On the larger problems such as the preparation of a new mobilization plan, which involves two or more Divisions of the General Staff, the work is done by informal Committees, the members of which are designated by the heads of the various Divisions. The studies prepared by the General Staff are in the

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form of a Memorandum for the Chief of Staff as prescribed in the "Green Book". It is essential that these memoranda be concise and cover the important facts relating to the questions under consideration and that the actions recommended follow logically from the facts presented in the studies. In every case, the form and content of the action must be complete so that when the Chief of Staff approves it no further General Staff action is necessary except as indicated in the wording of the action itself. After approval, the studies are referred to The Adjutant General for the necessary administrative action. The Deputy Chief of Staff and the Assistants Chief of Staff are authorized, on matters under their supervision, to issue instructions in the name of the Secretary of War or of the Chief of Staff. These instructions are normally prepared in the form of a memorandum for The Adjutant General.

7. The matter of concurrence is of great importance because by no other means can uniformity and continuity of action throughout the War Department be secured. These concurrences are important for two main reasons. One is to incorporate in the action all the views of the interested agencies of the War Department so that the action may be accurate and complete, and the other is to familiarize the interested agencies of the War Department with what is being done in respect to the particular subjects in which they are interested.

8. It is important to stress the connection which exists between the General Staff and the Chiefs of the Arms and Services. The Chiefs of the Arms and Services have responsibilities prescribed for them by law and regulation as has the General Staff. Their authorities within their respective provinces should not be invaded. However, it is necessary for the General Staff to coordinate their activities for the purpose of unity of effort and for carrying out the wishes of the Secretary of War and the Chief of Staff. In the matter of supply responsibilities I wish to point out that the General Staff sets up requirements. That is, it specifies the types of equipment and supplies needed, the amounts needed, and the time when needed. Obviously these details are necessary in order for the Assistant Secretary of War to prepare and execute plans for procurement. After the items have been procured they then come under the authority of the General Staff for the purposes of storage, distribution, and issue. It can be seen, therefore, that the Supply Arms and Services work continuously in the matter of supply; part of the time under the supervision of the General Staff in preparing requirements, part of the time under the supervision of the Assistant Secretary of War in all matters of procurement; and then again under the supervision of the General Staff in matters of storage and issue. It is important that these distinctions be understood.

9. In addition to the above mentioned duties the General Staff has quite a number of special subjects and duties assigned to it such as those in connection with the CCC and in other dealings with the other governmental departments and agencies.

10. Somewhere within the administrative machinery of the War Department there exists an agency to which every problem, no matter how unusual, can be properly referred for action as being within the legislative scope of the activities of that agency. It is the duty of the General Staff to find out what that agency is and then to put the matter in such shape that, if possible to do so, it can be handled thereafter administratively by that agency. Failure to follow this procedure always results in the General Staff becoming involved in administrative work which, in principle and because of the specific provisions of law, it must avoid. Whenever cases referred to the General Staff tend to become routine it is a signal that the General Staff is unnecessarily invading the domain of administration.

11. In my opinion, for an officer to qualify as a "good General Staff officer" he should possess among others, two abilities which seem to me to be most essential. First, he should be able to distinguish between the important and the unimportant. Because when a large file of papers is presented to him to make a study, which must conclude with a definite action, it is necessary for him to be able to pick out the essentials and not become encumbered with a lot of unimportant details. Otherwise he can never think clearly, present his thoughts, nor arrive at sound conclusions. Secondly, he should be able to distinguish between spheres of responsibility. He must understand that other Divisions of the General Staff and other agencies of the War Department are more competent than he is, as a rule, to handle subjects pertaining to their particular spheres of responsibility. Furthermore, valuable information concerning any subject is frequently obtainable from every other agency having a responsibility in connection with that subject. In other words, no General Staff officer should attempt to usurp someone else's authority or to become self-sufficient.

12. From the foregoing I hope you will understand that there is nothing mysterious about the General Staff and that it has definite, legal responsibilities in connection with the functioning of military establishment.

DISCUSSION FOLLOWING LECTURE BY

Lt. Colonel T. A. Terry, GSC
December 4, 1935

Q - Assuming such legislation were possible, will you give your reaction to the idea of having the purchasing activities under the General Staff rather than under The Assistant Secretary of War?

A - I think that with the training we give our officers in our schools, and particularly in the Army Industrial College, they will take any kind of a law that Congress passes and do the best they can with it. Until you try these various set-ups it is pretty hard to make a comparison; so I don't know - except that when and if such a law is passed we will do the best we can, just as we are doing under the present law.

Q - What changes if any are contemplated in the peace organization of the General Staff and what are contemplated in war-time?

A - The only change I can see would be one of expansion, and of course, there would be more activity going on. Each division of the General Staff has a ready plan which provides for its expansion and allocation of responsibilities during an emergency.

Q - What would happen to the War Plans Division and the Legislative Planning Branch?

A - It depends very largely on what kind of war we are in. It is contemplated that certain members of the War Plans Division will go out to G.H.Q and take important positions there. However, their plans must be kept up to date. We may get into the green plan but at the same time we could not just drop work on the other color plans because they might come into use before the war was over. However, a number of officers

would go to G.H.Q. and hold important positions on the staff of the commanding general.

Q - What about ^{Budget and} the Legislative Planning Branch?

A - That is a creation of the General Staff and I assume the Chief of Staff would have it continue to prepare the annual estimates. That is important and arduous work.

Q - In time of stress we have seen the SOS and the PS&T established. That was 17 years ago. Do you think the development of organizations in the War Department has reached a stage where they can stand a period of stress without reorganization?

A - I think so - but we don't know without trying it. I heard an officer a few days ago discuss the relative merits of the present system and the PS&T system during the war and he thinks, (and I have a great deal of respect for his opinion) that this system is superior and that it will work. Every one is trained to it now and we did not have that during the war. I think this training is going to act as a lubricant to the machine in the next war and I think with the training our officers are getting they will be able to make almost any kind of system function.

Q - Do you think that G-4 having been trained as staff corps can carry out the functions of the PS&T?

A - If G-4 functions as I think it should it will not try to become a Quartermaster General. It could make plans so that the Quartermaster General and the other chiefs of branches can see what their job is. I think the Quartermaster General is as capable of doing the

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job as anyone else. When you make known to the Chief of Ordnance or any other chief just what his job is, he is perfectly able to carry it out. The duty of the General Staff is to make known the requirements and say whose job it is to carry it out.

Q - Take the Orange war. I see a great volume of supplies going through San Francisco. Do you think without any definite coordinating agency you will be able to keep your supplies flowing into the Pacific as smoothly as they could?

A - We expect to have a coordinating agency. The Quartermaster General is the traffic agent for the whole War Department, he handles all movements and would doubtless have a regulating officer who would check the flow of supplies to the port and prevent it being jammed as Hoboken was during the World War. He has sitting at his elbow the representatives of the railroads telling them what we want and to what extent movements can be made, so far as the railroad viewpoint is concerned. But there must be regulation and the General Staff has set up the necessary regulatory system - not an operating system. The Quartermaster General, Chief of Ordnance, and the others will do the operating.

Q - Can you tell us a little about the duties of the Executive for Reserve Affairs?

A - I have not had much contact with him. The Chief of Staff refers certain studies to him and he advises in matters pertaining to reserves; he also contacts reserve organizations so that they will feel there is a point of contact for questions that come up and where they can find out what they want to know. He can tell them or find out for them.

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I am not very familiar with his job but I know he advises the Chief of Staff and the Chief of Staff refers to him studies on the features of the reserve. He is the contact for all reserve officers and organizations.

Q - What provisions is there for this traffic control you spoke about together with priorities on requirements of the front - supposing it is an overseas campaign?

A - The theatre of operations has got to make known its demands. During the World War there was a cablegram to Washington every day- sometimes many of them - about what the A.E.F. needed, and we expect to be informed from any theatre as to what the theatre commander needs for his campaign, and then the War Department has got to see that these needs are supplied as well as they can be. For instance, the theater commander may want a large shipment of ammunition and it is a matter of procuring these things and shipping them to him in the most expeditious manner. It is hard to say how each item would be handled but that is the idea of these procuring services. The Quartermaster General would see that he got Quartermaster supplies, and the Chief of Ordnance that he got Ordnance supplies, etc. They would be regulated by the General Staff. The General Staff coordinates but does not operate, and should not operate. If it does it will fail. The Quartermaster General can do the job better than any General Staff officer could, and so with the other chiefs.

Q - Would you care to discuss the relationship between the War and State Departments in war planning? You said the State Department refers matters to the War Department.

A - I don't know of any particular interest the State Department has in war planning except as a matter of general information. The State Department has charge of issuing licenses for the export of arms. The

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Espionage Act of 1917 forbids disclosing ~~the~~ military secrets so when anyone applies for a permit to export airplanes or weapons the Secretary of State asks if there is any military secret about this and if we say no he lets them have it if it is within regulations. He simply contacts the War and Navy Departments about secrecy in its relation to national defense. That is all. That has just been decided, by the way, but it is only of interest to the War and Navy Departments in that way.

Q - In the last war it appears that there was a great deal of interference with the various branches of the War Department by restrictive legislation and it was quite a while before it was lifted. I notice the General Staff drafts emergency legislation. Is it the policy of the Staff to draft it so as to get it approved quickly in war?

A - They have a number of acts drafted and ready to present to Congress in the hope that Congress will pass them promptly. It is pretty hard to get a law on the books removed but they have a number of drafts of desired legislation already prepared and ready to present at the first opportunity - hoping that it will be speeded through. That is particularly true of the draft, and several others.

Q - Would you explain the relationship between the Budget Officer of the War Department and the Budget and Legislative Planning Branch of the General Staff?

A - The Budget Officer of the War Department is the Chief of Finance, designated by the Chief of Staff as Budget Officer. The Chief of Staff could designate any one else he desired. As Budget Officer the Chief of Finance is really the adjutant general of the budget, and the

budget having been prepared, he issues authorities for expenditures and keeps books on what has been allotted and what is held in reserve, the amounts of various appropriations allotted, and the record of the expenditures of the supply branches. The Chief of Staff would also ask how much was in reserve in such and such appropriation, and that is the job of the Budget Officer for the War Department who happens to be the Chief of Finance.

Q - What does the G-4 Section do in its supervision to prevent competition between the various arms and services in the procurement of supplies?

A - Nothing. That is the job of The Assistant Secretary of War.

Q - Do you have any way of preventing competition between Corps Areas in case of emergency or would that also be a function of the A.S.W.?

A - Do you mean after the materiel is procured and on hand?

Q - In the procurement and requisition from Infantry and say, the Chemical Warfare Service - two different branches that are after the same material - how is it coordinated so there won't be competition between the two branches? Say a dealer handles one product and it is required by two branches of the service. How do you keep the two from bidding against each other?

A - Let us take for instance a machine gun. Suppose the Colt people make them, and the Infantry and Cavalry together need 1,000. The Assistant Secretary of War tries to procure the thousand machine guns. His concern is to get them and he doesn't care whether the Cavalry or

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Infantry uses them. The Cavalry does not do any procuring, and neither does the Infantry, that would be done by the Chief of Ordnance under The Assistant Secretary. Any problem of procurement between the two branches is handled by The Assistant Secretary.

Q - How can you control that when you have competition between two Corps Areas - where you have decentralized control activity, and two branches after the same material?

A - All purchasing is done by the procurement districts on authorization of The Assistant Secretary of War. It is not a function of the General Staff.

Q - As I understand it, in mobilizing the CCC they expanded up to 500,000 men. How much additional personnel was necessary on the General Staff and did they have to do any reorganizing to meet that?

A - That is a special case and I am glad you brought it up. The CCC was an unusual set-up. It has a Director and he is given authority to pass on all policies and make decisions about locations of camps, types of supplies and buildings - whether they should be built locally or contracted for in quantity and shipped. In order to prevent this Director of the CCC ^{from} giving orders to the Quartermaster General, the Chief of Ordnance, etc., they had all orders head into one office, and that happened to be G-4 on matters of supplies and all others, G-3. There have been detailed in G-3 about two officers to handle matters of the CCC. Likewise, in G-4, Colonel Jones has handled all the supply matters from Mr. Feckner and getting them into shape to go to the Quartermaster General or the Surgeon General to carry out the ideas. We have not had any increase in personnel except some stenographers - clerks

to handle the extra paper work. Colonel Jones is attempting at the present time to have a certain amount of decentralization - to prevent as much of that work as he can from going to the General Staff.

Q - You have indicated that G-4 has an interest in the distribution of funds after the annual appropriation is made and that it sets up requirements. Can you indicate a little of the method and procedure of how those requirements are set up and what they are based on?

A - After the appropriation bill is passed by Congress G-4 has an expenditure program which is approved by the Chief of Staff after conference with every one concerned. That sets up under each appropriation how much shall be held in reserve, how much turned over to the Supply Arms and Services. That happens about the beginning of the fiscal year. At the beginning of the fiscal year the chiefs of Supply Arms and Services put in requirements programs because what was initially set up in the estimates very rarely comes out at the other end looking like it did in the beginning. You may put in for 100 tanks, and you may get 5 or 10. Let us go back to the old question of machine guns. Suppose the Chief of Ordnance puts in for 100 - 50 caliber machine guns, and the estimate is defended and the appropriation only provides for 60. When he gets this allotment he has to say how he would like to spend it. So he says he would like to buy 60 machine guns and other Ordnance property because they are needed for the service and to keep his establishments going. That is finally approved by the Chief of Staff and is called a Requirements Program. After approval it then becomes, so far as The Assistant Secretary is concerned, the basis of a procurement program.

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That applies primarily to such things that we call Control Items.

The Chiefs of Branches can buy things on their own - like cleaning and preserving materials, rations, etc.

Q - Why does the Deputy Chief of Staff report directly to the Secretary of War without going to the Chief of Staff on a great many matters?

A - I presume it is because the Secretary of War told him to.

Q - How does the Four Army Plan and the General Headquarters Air Force fit into this picture. Does the General Staff exercise supervision?

A - The General Staff is charged with preparing plans for mobilization. Of course, the Four Army set-up and the GHQ are set up by the Chief of Staff as proper organizations of the Army. Having made that decision it became the duty of the War Department to work out a plan for supplying it. There is a mobilization plan for that. Now we have a finished requirements program of supplies and equipment needed for those forces; it has just been approved. So far as that is concerned, the A.S.W. now has a statement of requirements for the Mobilization Plan of 1933 which covers the Four Army and GHQ and he has had to go ahead with procurement planning operations. The General Staff prepares plans for whatever forces the Chief of Staff indicates shall be provided for.

Q - The Army is working at the present time on changing the organization of the division. About how much change will that make in supply requirements?

A - I don't know. It depends on what they approve. It has just begun and they have not yet gotten the agenda of that committee

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approved by the Chief of Staff. I do know we are having a study made on the motorization of the supply system in the field forces. What that will be finally, I don't know. It is aimed at making the Army more mobile. How successful it will be is a matter of speculation because everybody wants everything they can get their hands to go along with the forces when they take the field.

Q - Will you explain the functions of the Secretary of the General Staff?

A - The Secretary of the General Staff is really the assistant to the Chief of Staff and to the Deputy Chief of Staff. His function primarily is to receive all studies from divisions of the General Staff, he looks them over and familiarizes himself with them. If you stop to realize that probably thirty or forty or a hundred come in each day you will see that the Chief of Staff obviously could not read over them all and still do anything else, so the Secretary reads them over and goes in to the Deputy or the Chief of Staff (whichever is to handle them) and gives him a resume of the case. Whether or not the Deputy or the Chief of Staff wants to read it over depends upon how important it is, and then action is taken. His principal job is to prepare cases for consideration by the Chief of Staff or Deputy Chief of Staff, and also, he handles such things as arranging conferences, etc. He is, in fact, secretary in the office of the Chief of Staff.

Col. Harris - With reference to Captain Wilterdink's question on coordination, I shall endeavor on Friday to cover that subject. I should like to call attention to the fact that Colonel Terry is closer to a coordinator than any member of the General Staff in that he is a member of the Army

and Navy Munitions Board.

Colonel McFarland. My comment would be that Colonel Terry has been entirely too modest in the tremendous importance of the work done by the General Staff. My observation has been that G-4 does most of the work done by the General Staff. It seems to me that every paper that comes to our office comes through G-4 and it is not always because it pertains to procurement. No matter what the set up, it seems that G-4 has had that paper referred to it. Certainly the General Staff now enjoys a position in the Army that cannot be replaced and before its establishment I think the Army must have been run on the principle of a dictatorship. Perhaps it ought to be, but that dictator has to be very very well advised and before the establishment of the General Staff I think we have plenty of instances in history to show that that dictator was not well advised. I am sure the Chief of Staff now is very well advised by his General Staff and I cannot imagine our Army running without it.

Colonel Jordan. Having served a tour on the General Staff in G-4, I want to say that what Colonel McFarland has said about the amount of work is absolutely true. I circulated around among the other divisions of the General Staff and I don't believe one of them has the hard problems G-4 has. Colonel Terry's particular position in the Planning Branch of G-4 is, to my mind, one of the most important in the whole General Staff. You can get men to do all kinds of things but the man who has to realize the limit on munitions is the man who occupies the key position. Colonel Terry is that man.