

**Sir Cedric Willoughby KCBE, Secretary to the Imperial Intelligence Committee.
Opening Address of the Annual Grand Meeting,
17th June 1895, held at XXXXXXXXXX.**

Introduction

It is refreshing to see this annual grand meeting of the Committee so well attended. I gratefully acknowledge the attendance of His Royal Highness Edward, Prince of Wales, the Secretaries of State for War - Lord Rothbury, the Foreign Office - Sir James Challenger and the Home Office - Sir Edwin Clunes-Hallow, the First Sea Lord - Sir Jeremy Arbuthnot, honourable members of Parliament, XXXXXXXX and representatives from the Admiralty, the Army and Scotland Yard's Special Branch.

Although I am sure that none of you good gentlemen need reminding, the briefings that you shall be privy to today are of the greatest confidentiality. Official records will be made by my staff, subject to certain sensitivities, but as attendees you may neither make notes nor remove any papers from this building. The agenda for the day has been distributed to each of you as you entered the hall. So I shall begin by inviting to the floor His Royal Highness, Prince Edward.

Gentlemen, Good Morning!

I feel I need not, in this informed gathering, go into the reasons for this meeting or reinforce that we stand at a critical juncture in the affairs of the Empire. Her Majesty has asked me to attend this occasion on her behalf and to speak for her on the matters of policy and strategy. She has been briefed on the content of this assembly by Sir Cedric and made her opinions known to us both.

For today, and to make best use of this little time that we can bring all such important men together, we shall cast aside much of the etiquette normally applied at these meetings. What we must discuss is of such import that we cannot allow ourselves to be restricted by excessive formality. With that in mind, I shall cease my monologue! Sir Cedric ...?

[Applause]

Thank you Your Royal Highness. Before we start, a small matter of security. Today we are protected by the full Extraordinary Company in

honour of their Colonel-in-Chief, the Prince of Wales. These are the best of men, but they have a tendency to be abrupt in their manner when danger presents. If you should hear whistles you are requested to return to this hall immediately. You will be escorted by soldiers of the Company. If any of the men behave less than courteously during such a move they do so from a desire to protect you.

This evening, before dinner, Prince Edward shall be presenting medals to seven of the men of the Extraordinary Company. This shall include two Victoria Crosses. A further four Victoria Crosses have been awarded posthumously to members of the Company. Unusually, this evening one man shall also receive the Légion d'Honneur for actions in French Tangiers. Letters explaining these commendations are on display in the drawing room.

The Opening Address

Few of the great men of the Age of Glory that was the Napoleonic conflict could have imagined the changes which have been wrought since then upon the Royal Navy and upon our Army by what, to many, is a simple arithmetical device.

The Duke of Wellington, the Earl of Oxford and Sir Charles Napier would easily recognise the troops assembled upon Horse Guards to greet the Queen-Empress this Friday last, and may have noted the many small changes in dress. However, and I say this with little fear of contradiction even amongst those traditionalists that cling to such past glories, I doubt they recognise the ways in which we must now wage war.

Gone are the neatly formed battalions marching to the sound of the drums. The rattle of machine gun fire, the infernal accuracy of the artillery and the whirr and clank of mechanized monstrosities of war have long put paid to such dreams of Albion ascendant beneath honoured colours.

Now our brave troops must burrow towards the enemy like moles or walk warily in the lee of steam-powered and armoured machines of war,

forever alert for the sound of the gas sirens. Indeed the fear of this terrible weaponry has made such large conflicts rare. The last war between the great powers, the Franco-Prussian affair of twenty-five years since, hammered in the coffin nails of the grand battalions. Despite their overwhelming victory, the horrendous casualties amongst the French turned General Staffs throughout the civilised world against the prospect of war with a comparable power. For this limit on Prussian ambitions we must be grateful.

The photographic plates showing the mechanised assault on the Paris barricades in 1871 were smuggled out by dirigible and printed around the world. I think it apposite to remind you of the immensely moving photograph of the immolation of the young nun Josephine de Gaulle as she stood praying in the path of an early pattern Krieg-walker. This became a rallying image for all those who would oppose the waging of such heartless war between civilised Christian nations. Her later beatification by the Pope made her an icon of the age.

But the world is not at peace. Every civilised nation watches the others as they each strive to create that singular weapon or device that would give them superiority. Small conflicts break out daily on the fringes of these nations and empires, and across their colonies. Even within the Great Empires cracks have formed as the imperial wars of the first half of this blighted century have given way to wars of ideology. Nationalism, Fascism, Socialism, Communism, Anarchism and a hundred other philosophies are taken up by the uneducated and wielded as a tool to upset the rule of their betters.

Out in the colonies where the great nations have brought peace, prosperity and the blessing of Christianity the native peoples have begun to learn those of our ways that would best have been left at home. They take our weapons and stratagems, wed them to their own and turn them back upon us. Some of our parliamentarians rail against the ingratitude and disloyalty of such rebellious subjects. Honestly, and I shall make no friends by saying so, if I were in these natives' shoes I might well do the same.

You cannot blame a man for wishing to be free. That they cannot see the benefits of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law is as much our fault as theirs. Not all of our Colonial Administrations, especially those run by the East India Company, have been pursued with the moral rectitude that one might expect. We should have treated these native subjects of the Crown as our children. If we beat a child throughout its childhood without clear moral purpose then we must not be surprised that when the child becomes a man he might take the rod from our hands and beat us back.

In this confusing and dangerous age, where then lies the role of the Army? It is a question we shall ask again later today, but please bear with me for this brief moment.

As a professional fighting force it is renowned as the best in the world and rightly feared by those who would be our enemies. However, it is very small. Our over-reliance on the Royal Navy to keep any potential invader at bay, the expansion of the County Militias and Yeomanry companies, and the promotion of native forces to defend the colonies has perforce led to a steady reduction in its strength.

However, this is not a polemic by which I try to petition or bully those members of Parliament here present into restoring the Army to Napoleonic levels. I, like most right-thinking Englishmen, understand that a large standing army is a danger to our cherished freedoms. The cruel example of the power of the New Model Army in Cromwell's Protectorate should be enough to lay any such argument to rest. Though I do propose that we should feed more money to the Army, it is for other purposes.

As has been seen in the last decade our enemies are developing a wide range of armaments of the most modern design. Although we still lead the world in the production of rifles and machine guns, ceramic-steel hybridised armour and perhaps in rocket grenades, we lag badly in terms of artillery, mechanised walkers, dirigibles, gas weapons and in some of the more exotic areas such as Arc weaponry.

The Royal Armouries, and its commercial subsidiaries, should have their economic resources increased dramatically if we are to

merely stay level with our neighbours across the Channel and the North Sea. For if we do not, and if our naval superiority ever be pierced, a landing in force might prove near impossible to repel. You may call me what you will for slicing through the general complacency on this issue, but in my position I see a very different world to that perceived by the general public. Daily reports pass across my desk describing the increasing mechanisation of the Prussian and Austrian armies. How the French are experimenting with chemicals to turn their men into creatures best not thought about. How the Americans can now deploy entire brigades of Marines by rocket. Yet these are just the advances that we know about. Potential developments behind the impenetrable curtains of Russia and the Ottoman Empire do not bear thinking upon.

We must also develop our capabilities by building upon that very professionalism that has made us so feared. We should begin to train our men in a new style of warfare. Given the direction of technological advance, it is likely that most land engagements in the coming years, will be at battalion, company or even lower level.

For example, take the campaigns against the accursed Mahdi in Egypt and the Sudan. We had to commit a division to defeat his savage hordes - a task that would now take but a single battalion amply equipped with Vickers guns, Walkers and Congreves, and fed intelligence by a Royal Engineers Dirigible Troop. Across our colonies our mechanical advantage serves to make a single British Soldier, suitably trained and equipped, the match for a hundred natives. This ratio however is being steadily revised downwards as the natives adopt our methods and acquire modern weapons from our enemies.

There is, of course, that other war which we must fight. One where we hazard the lives of a dozen men at a time to frustrate those who would come at us from the shadows. Although there are those at Horse Guards who would play down the effect that The Prince of Wales's Extraordinary Company has had since its formation in 1893, neither I, nor many in Horseguards, are amongst them. They have stood as a thin red line against a tide of filth and villainy time and time again. Their

expertise, their use of modern small unit tactics and their sheer bloody-minded pluck has prevented untold horrors being unleashed upon the Capital.

The price, though, has been high. In their first year they lost a fifth of their number killed in action and another fifth were invalided out. This last year has been little better - but there seems to be no shortage of volunteers from the Officer corps and other ranks. Men are actually competing to apply for positions in the Company.

Now imagine, if you will, expanding upon this experiment. If we used this Company as the cadre to provide duplicates in each great city of Britain and across the Empire. With the best equipment the Armouries can provide, utilising the tactics proposed and proven effective by Major Bullington-Smythe MC and led by the finest Sandhurst can turn out, there is not a force in the world that they could not defeat.

As a certain Sergeant Borrage is wont to say to recruits to the Extraordinary Company, "Listen lads, it is not the length or weight of a bayonet that will kill a man, it is how sharp the point is and where you shove it." We must create this sharp point and develop the skill to 'shove it' where it shall do the most harm.

Much of this day shall be spent discussing the topics I have just outlined. It is hoped by His Royal Highness and by Her Majesty that by the end of the day we shall be of one accord and prepared to put into action that which shall be necessary to take the Empire forward securely into the next century.

[Applause]

Thank you, you are all most kind. Now if you examine the agenda before you we shall be splitting up into five groups to discuss various matters and shall join together again for luncheon. Officers and NCOs of the Extraordinary Company are on hand to lead you to the rooms set aside for this purpose.