

GOLDEN GLORY-

The Royal Tournament, which is being staged in London this month, is a brilliant money-spinner. Last year it made £30,000 for Service charities

A group of Volunteer officers who organised a display of military exercises to amuse the competitors in the 1878 National Rifle Association Meeting were bitterly disappointed.

The rifle meeting took place on Wimbledon Common and the display was held there too, but the competitors had no time for military exercises. They were too eager to get away to the delights of Victorian London — to the pleasure gardens and the music-halls.

The military display was a failure, but one man at least had seen its possibilities. That man was the Duke of Cambridge, who decided to give it official Army support. Queen Victoria became a patron and, on the principle of Mahomet going to the mountain, the show was moved to London. By 1880 the idea had been further developed. Regular troops took part and the display was staged at the Royal Agricultural Hall, Islington, under the title of the "Royal Military Tournament." That year it made £500 for Service charities.

Ever since then, with time out

for wars, the tournament has been an annual feature of London's entertainment. Its aims are still those of 1880 and its programme is strongly traditional, but its profits have risen from the original £500 to £30,000 in 1949. Musical rides, dismantling and reassembling of guns, gymnastic displays and skill at-arms competitions have all figured in the programme from its earliest days.

In 1904 *Punch* reported that men of the Royal Marine Artillery unlimbered a gun in less than no time "and fired it point-blank at a line of little girls of the Duke of York's School." It

later reassured the reader that there were no casualties amongst the girls. *Punch's* praise was a trifle ambiguous — "Every display was brought off with miraculous punctuality — within twenty minutes after the time announced in the programme." The tournament was also criticised for its "circus-masquerading" atmosphere.

King Edward VII opened the tournament that year. Eight years later, as a guest in the Royal box, another Royal figure made his last public appearance in Britain — Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany. Did he think that the traditional "olde worlde" atmosphere of the tournament was a real representation of the British Army? And was he encouraged thereby in his dreams of conquest?

In 1920 the tournament's only concession made to the passage of the greatest war in history was a whimsical conversation with "Old Bill" and a display by machine-gunners.



The 1934 poster was one of the few which broke away from horses.

Not a single petrol-propelled vehicle had yet invaded the arena. The first was in 1927, when horses jumped over a stationary motor-car. Even in 1933, when the Signallers gave a purely mechanical display, the programme announced that "All motor-cycles used in this display are kindly lent by the Triumph Motor-Cycle Co. Ltd." That was the year Hitler came to power. Did he think that the British Army was not equipped even with motor-cycles?

In 1939, with war looming inescapably ahead, the new British Army first made its appearance in the arena. The three-inch mortar, the Bren carrier and the barrage balloon shattered the 50-year-old tradition of historical pageantry.

Since then, every effort has been made to include in the programme incidents in the training and action of modern units. Commandos make cliff-face assaults, parachutists drop from the roof and engineers throw Bailey bridges over "rivers." But a modern battle is fought on so vast a scale that to try to compress it into the space of an indoor arena would put an impossible strain on the imagination of the audience.

This year the Royal Tournament is held at Earl's Court — the largest indoor place that can be found. The move, which was contemplated between the two wars, has been made necessary by the large numbers of would-be spectators who have been unable to get tickets in past years. In 1947, 1948 and 1949 an estimated total of 100,000 people were unable to see the Royal Tournament. At Earl's Court arrangements have been made to accommodate between 350,000 and 400,000 spectators.

POSTSCRIPT: Once again SOLDIER suggests to the Tournament authorities — Why not stage the assembly of a jeep in three minutes? Plenty of teams have done it and there are plenty more who can.



Rehearsal in Regent's Park, 1950: On the day itself the riders will wear full-dress uniform, as on opposite page.

- And here it is in Rehearsal

RHEARSALS for the Royal Tournament start well beforehand. One reason for this is that in the Army of today, with its continuous stream of National Servicemen passing through, units cannot hold the same team together for two years in succession.

Even traditional items like the musical drive of the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, have to be learned all over again.

Passing Londoners have recently been hypnotised by the sight of troops of magnificent horses, towing old-fashioned, iron-tyred guns and limbers, churning the dust on a cinder-strewn patch of waste ground in Regent's Park. Each of the six guns is drawn by six horses and the whole of the non-stop series of intricate drills is done at the canter. The guns and limbers are quite springlike, and have to be skidded and bounced round corners.

For rehearsals, men acting as markers stand on the boundaries

of the area that represents Earl's Court arena. It is not so easy on the nerves to stand stock still pretending to be a wall while 24 hooves and a ton-and-a-half of swaying, skidding gun-carriage go thundering past a foot away from your pet bunion.

The crowd outside the railings and the dust cloud inside them get thicker as the battery changes from grid inclines, through the double circle (a new item in this year's drive) to the "scissors." Swarms of children skir-

ish round the edges of the arena. Major F. W. C. Weldon, MC, who is in charge of the drive, watches the teams intently. Suddenly he feels a tweak at his sleeve and a shrill voice pipes, "Hey mister, is there goin' ter be anuvver war?"

"Not today, sonny," he answers absently.

"Then wotcher doin' orl this for?" demands the urchin.

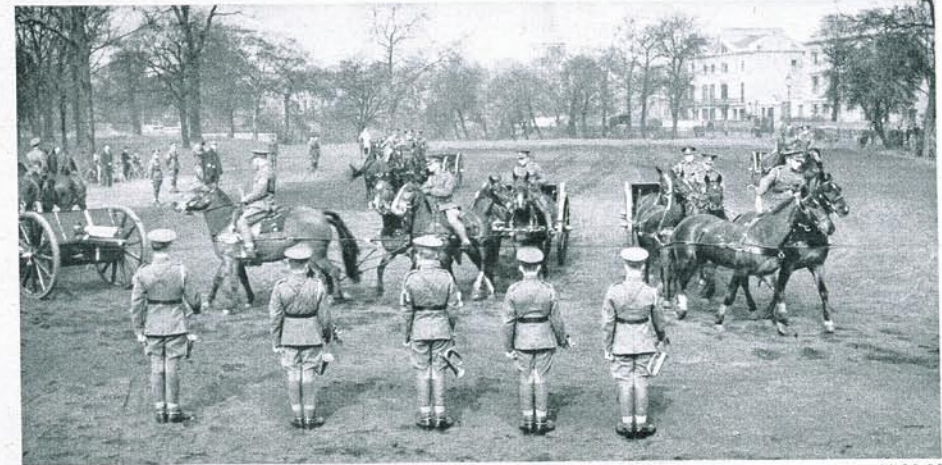
Another crowd of children hovers round Gunner T. Smith, who is holding his horse in readiness to join in the next rehearsal. "Will 'e bite mister?" they ask anxiously, and scatter in all directions when the horse nods his head.

Three times the battery goes through its tournament drill, with intervals for a few short

words from Major Weldon. There is always room for improvement. By the time they call it a day horses are in a muck sweat and the Gunners dizzy with going round in circles. As they return through the streets to their barracks at St. John's Wood, the crowd slowly disperses, happily conscious of having seen something for nothing. Only one small girl is dissatisfied; her imagination has conjured up an even better spectacle.

"Lookit them guns," she says, nudging her companion, and her voice takes on a kind of hopeful gloating as she adds, "I 'spose they went orf. They'd kill all them 'orses." Some people are never satisfied.

The tournament riders of the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery change from year to year. That is why plenty of practice is needed.



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Artists are not slow to find inspiration in the Musical Drive of the Royal Artillery. This picture is from the 1935 poster.



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