

UNITED STATES ARTILLERY.

A REVIEW, BY MAJOR G. MACKINLAY, R.A.

"HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE ARTILLERY, UNITED STATES ARMY,"

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At the present time when our colonies are seriously making use of their armed forces in our behalf, the consideration of the history and progress of the United States artillery may be of interest; as, although many conditions in each are very different, the points of resemblance are considerable. In each we have countries of vast area, great parts of which are only thinly inhabited by English-speaking races, whose permanent military forces cannot be large and are generally scattered. Our colonies (taken as a whole) have happily been more free from war than European nations, and until lately they have depended almost entirely on Imperial troops; thus they have not been practically taught in war, and consequently have obtained many officers of our army to organize their lately developed forces. At one period of its history the artillery of the United States had to engage several officers from abroad, as properly qualified ones could not be found in their own country. It would be interesting to have sketches of the progress of the various colonial artilleries in these "Proceedings," by the various officers of the Royal Artillery who are at present directing and commanding them.

Glancing at the book under review, an English officer is at once struck with the regard felt towards the Royal Artillery. The author points out that the United States artillery of the revolution possessed as nucleus a colonial force, which had previously served with the Royal Artillery against the French: the organization resembled ours, even to the names of the ranks of the various officers; our carriages were copied and our text book of instruction was reprinted. As time went on it was only natural that divergencies should occur; but even now, when all the systems of Europe have been carefully searched, the author constantly refers to our matériel and to our organization.

The United States artillery has been subject to many fluctuations in its numbers and arrangements: perhaps its fortunes in these respects have been more varied than the corresponding arms of other nations. On the declaration of independence the artillery was at first commanded by Colonel R. Gridley, a half-pay British officer; but he was soon superseded by Henry Knox, a young man of 25, who had served with distinction under General Washington as a volunteer; under this young commander the United States artillery rapidly grew in numbers and efficiency, and it was most fortunate to be thus early placed under an officer of acknowledged ability, business habits, and who had an aptitude for the Arm. Besides directing the artillery on service an opportunity soon arose, after the reverses in 1776, when the whole American army was reorganized, to consolidate the artillery corps: Knox took a broad and comprehensive view of the subject; recommending an arsenal at a distance from the seat of war, and also the establishment of a place similar to the R. M. Academy, Woolwich; to which he stated "our enemies are indebted for the superiority of their artillery to all who have opposed them." He further recommended that a company of 60 artillerymen should be attached to each infantry battalion of 1,000 men, and he estimated the total for the army at some 3,360. He also made valuable suggestions for the supply and repair of warlike matériel in the field. In consequence of these suggestions, the artillery was organized in five battalions, one being composed of artificers; a part of them played a prominent part in the campaign ending in the surrender of Burgoyne.

In addition to these four battalions of regular artillery, numerous local bodies sprang up, as for instance, two companies in New Jersey, and 300 men in Rhode Island to guard the coast.

In 1780, came further changes of minor importance: it was then enacted that the artillery of the United States should consist of four regiments, each of 10 companies composed of 65 enlisted men. Some of the artillery suffered severely in the south with Gates, and others took part in the memorable siege of Yorktown.

At the end of the war came a great reduction, when the regular artillery, for a short time, consisted of only 138 men, but this was soon increased, though the whole army was small; at this time the artillery was separated from the infantry, with which it had previously been much intermingled; but nevertheless it frequently, and for many years, performed the duties of infantry, in addition to its own legitimate rôle. As an instance of the changes to which the artillery has been subjected, it may be mentioned that years afterwards one company was mounted as horse artillery, it was then temporarily turned into cavalry, and afterwards became field artillery. In 1794 the artillery and engineers were combined, but they were separated in 1802, and have ever since remained separate. The manufacture of warlike matériel is

not, as with us, confided to artillery officers, but it is superintended by the ordnance corps, who also supply matériel in the field. On one occasion on active service, the author records with indignation, that this semi-civil corps usurped the duties of the combatant branch, by manning a rocket battery; but this was apparently contrary to regular usage, and was the result of temporary causes.

During the time which followed the revolution military affairs were neglected; and several foreign officers were posted to the artillery, as it was difficult to find Americans properly qualified: this, however, was naturally not a popular measure, and it was difficult to foresee what French officers in their employ might do in case of a war with France, which was imminent. At one time it was proposed to obtain heads for both the artillery and engineers from abroad: but the plan was not carried out; on the contrary, the French officers actually serving were gradually eliminated.

A few years later the question of mounted artillery came forward; but such constant changes and alterations were made that in the war with England in 1812, scarcely anything was accomplished by this arm; it was not until the Mexican war in 1846, in the Rio Grande valley, that the light companies distinguished themselves, when one (at least) in each regiment was mounted. Major Ringgold commanded a fine horse battery, which did good service: he himself fell mortally wounded at Palo Alto.

Owing to the smallness of the force of mounted artillery, various devices were employed to train a considerable number of officers in field artillery duties: nearly all the subalterns were detailed to serve one year in the light companies, but this was not very satisfactory: another plan was to have the mounted companies commanded by their own officers on some days of the week, while they were handed over to other officers on other days for purposes of drill; but this arrangement naturally did not last long. At one time (in 1869) four mounted batteries were collected at Fort Reily, Kansas, for combined drill; but after two years the plan was abandoned. Throughout its history, except at the very first, the United States artillery seems to have felt the want of some superior officer at its head, whose influence would have been sufficient to secure due regard to its requirements on the part of the Government, and who could have instituted a settled régime.

On the breaking out of the civil war the mounted artillery was scattered far away on the Indian frontier, and was consequently of little use; the greater part of the remaining regular companies were mounted, and they became the nucleus round which the volunteer batteries assembled; but the want of previous training, even on the part of the regular officers, told heavily and prevented efficiency from being rapidly attained. At first a company or battery was attached to each infantry brigade; but afterwards masses of divisional and army corps artillery were formed: the Confederates being rather more forward in this organization than the Northern States. The amount of artillery employed in the field was considerable, as some 300 guns accompanied McClellan's army, and very great energy was shown in the equipment and preparation of the batteries; but the difficulties of manœuvring such large masses of guns by officers whose previous training in this direction was slight, prevented its usefulness from being very fully developed; some of the most practical officers depending on experience in the Mexican war, where only small bodies of artillery had been used, rather tended to delay progress. Owing to various causes the senior artillery officers were often employed on the staff away from the artillery, and thus a regular battery was commanded by a captain or subaltern, who, as senior officer of regular artillery commanded all the batteries (most of which were volunteer) of an artillery brigade,—a command often equal to that of a division of infantry; under these circumstances it is not surprising that the artillery did not distinguish itself so much as might at first be expected. It must be remembered also that the use of artillery in the field under modern conditions of warfare had not fully developed in Europe at that time, as was shown by the want of skill in its handling in the Prusso-Austrian war of 1866.

Since the civil war the artillery has of course been greatly reduced, and it now consists of four regiments, each composed of some 10 companies. Each regiment has one light company or mounted battery, and a second also in each is mounted, at the will of the President of the United States. Fort Munro, where there is a course of instruction somewhat similar to ours at Shoeburyness, and that under the director of artillery studies at Woolwich, appears to be the chief bond of union to the various regiments, as it affords a meeting place to officers, who might not otherwise come in contact with each other.

With regard to matériel, it appears that during the revolutionary war many guns were obtained from France, while carriages were made in the States on English models, carefully following the various improvements. Cast-iron was used for a long time for field guns,