

Hoping that the foregoing account of my naval experience at Mobile may be found interesting by your readers, and with great personal esteem, I remain respectfully yours,

J. D. JOHNSTON.

VOLUNTEER FIELD BATTERIES.

The following letters on this subject, referring to Lord Elcho's letter, which was published last week, have appeared in the columns of several of our contemporaries. Letters on the subject from Colonel Harcourt and Major Ray will be found among our own Correspondence, and we have made some remarks on the whole controversy in a leading article:

To the Editor of the Times. Sir.—In your number of this day Lord Elcho pleads for the Volunteer Field Artillery, and argues that it would have been wise to give that class of our Volunteers an opportunity of showing what they could do during the present Hampshire Campaign, even at the charge to the public of 100*l.* per gun. He justly remarks that if Volunteer Field Artillery is to be discouraged by the War Office, it is time to decide whether it be advisable to retain that description of force at all.

Now, from the first, many experienced officers of Artillery doubted the wisdom of attempting to create so elaborate and complex an arm as Field Artillery out of Volunteers, however intelligent and zealous they might be as individuals.

Without going as far as an old Peninsular officer of the Artillery, who used to say that "a perfect shaft driver was the most perfect of God's creatures, and more difficult to find than a Lord Chancellor," it is apparent that a body of men, many of them, it is believed, gentlemen, unaccustomed to grooming and working horses in harness, cannot be expected to do and endure through a campaign all the rough and hard work of looking after a pair of horses, and driving over all kinds of roads and ground where a gun can possibly go. They may drive tolerably under certain circumstances, and with hired help from men accustomed to horses; they may get through their duties incident to a Brighton Review or do a week or two of campaigning; but could a battery with such drivers be depended upon for continuance of such work before an enemy.

There are more questions than that of the efficiency of the drivers.

Unless the horses are efficient, and kept permanently at the command of the Volunteers, it is not to be conceived that these Volunteer batteries could be fit for service if called out at short notice, which is the case to be provided for.

Again Volunteers may learn to work their guns respectfully and fire blank cartridges at a sham fight, but is it to be looked for that they can have practice enough, and receive instruction enough, to fire round shot, canister, and shells, and fix fuzes under fire with the requisite accuracy and rapidity?

There are also the duties of foraging, encamping, bivouacking, and getting the guns out of difficulties, and the ceaseless work of keeping the whole *material* of the battery in good order.

Above all, there is the question of the efficiency of the officers for without duly qualified officers a battery can be of little value.

With every respect for the officers of Volunteer Artillery, they can scarcely be efficient unless the greater part of the instruction given to the officers of the Regular Artillery be deemed superfluous.

How can it be expected that the Volunteer officer can have that knowledge of the tactics of infantry and cavalry, of the best choice of positions for the action of his guns of the mode of attacking field-works by artillery fire, and of many other branches of the art of war which go to make a good commander of a field battery? In truth, sufficiently good field artillery cannot be improvised cannot be got together in a hurry, and if inefficient, may be little more than an encumbrance to any army in the field.

Lord Elcho estimates that an army of 40,000 men should have 130 guns. This seems to be somewhat of an over-estimate—120, or three guns per 1,000 men, would be a very full proportion for a British army, for it is a well-established maxim, the better the infantry the smaller the proportion of artillery they require. Assuming that 100,000 men is the greatest stable force that could be landed in this country, we may well consider that 336 guns, or more than are requisite for a defensive army of that amount, constitute a very satisfactory provision of Field Artillery in time of peace, and in case of danger threatening it would be probably easier to expand that force of Regular Artillery, so as to increase the number of batteries we now possess by drawing upon the garrison Artillery, than to prepare for the field thoroughly efficient batteries of Volunteers.

The Volunteer Field Artillery deserve the greatest credit for their zeal, patriotic exertions, and for the pecuniary sacrifices they make, but they seem to many military observers to be attempting impossibilities under the circumstances in which they are placed.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant.

E. N. WILFORD, Major-General.

Winchester, September 20.

To the Editor of the Times. Sir.—I must ask the favor of a small space in your paper to correct a mistake into which Colonel Harcourt has fallen as regards the comparative cost of Royal and Volunteer Field Artillery. Colonel Harcourt says, in the *Times* of today, "I believe I am giving more than a personal opinion when I refuse to admit that 'half a loaf is better than no bread,' if the result is that for an expense of 15,000*l.* we are to have 100 half-trained Volunteer field guns instead of seventy five Royal Artillery guns." His mistake arises from his having taken the figures 75 as they originally appeared in my published letter, without having regard to the sense, context and other figures of the passage upon which they bore. Had he done this, he would at once have seen that the figures 75 ought to have had a dot between them—as I subsequently explained in a note to the *Times*—and that, instead of readings as 75 guns, they should have read 7·5, or 7½ guns. I can hardly believe that Colonel Harcourt, or any Royal Artillerist, will maintain that 7½ Royal Artillery field-guns could hope successfully to encounter in the field in actual war 100 Volunteer field-guns such as Colonel Shakespeare's which, I am glad to see, Colonel Harcourt admits to be "in a state of creditable efficiency." He nevertheless thinks that "in the name of economy and common sense" Volunteer Field Artillery would have been better dispensed with, and he ends his letter by an expression of opinion that any further Government assistance should be given to the Volunteer Garrison and Movable Siege Artillery. It is, perhaps, not unnatural that on the principle of nothing like leather, a garrison gunner should take this view of Volunteer Field Artillery,

but, with all due respect for Colonel Harcourt's opinion, and that of Royal Artillerists, who are also inclined to the nothing like leather view of this question, I venture again to express a hope that taxpayers and economists will not allow our Volunteer Field Artillery to be knocked on the head until it has been fully and publicly tested in the surest way by actual work in the field in the manoeuvres of 1872. If the 1st Middlesex Volunteer Field Artillery (Colonel Shakespeare's) have attained to "a creditable state of efficiency," there can be no reason why a sufficiently high standard, having been attained by one brigade or battery, others should not be forced to work up to the same standard by making their existence dependent upon their so doing.

I remain,

Your obedient servant,

ELCHO.

St. James's place, Sept. 26

To the Editor of the Times. Sir.—Major General Wilford thinks we may learn to work our guns respectfully, and to fire blank cartridge at a sham fight, but doubt the possibility of our ever being able to "fire round shot, canister, and shells, and to fix fuzes under fire with the requisite and rapidity." This opinion is somewhat unfortunate and damaging to his whole argument, if what has been stated in the United Service Institution in reference to the relative use of arms be correct, and not having been contradicted, it may be assumed as true.

"Everywhere the Regulars, the long continuous service corps, are beaten by the Volunteers."

"The scientific corps, the Regulars of the Artillery, are beaten by the Volunteers."

As to the fixing fuzes, &c.—why, from the nature of the operation, both Regulars and Volunteers learn in the same school of inoffensive target practice, a target with a return *feu d'enfer* being inadmissible, even if invented. I believe there is no doubt that the Volunteer gunners have beaten the Regulars; I can only say, speaking personally, I wish they had not, but the success is only the result of the law of nature which gives greatest power to most thinking men, and is unavoidable.

To reply to General Wilford seriatim would necessitate an amount of repetition which would be wearisome; so I will go straight to my point, with definite ideas.

I do not want 40 pounders, such as we are threatened with, because their weight is excessive, requiring eight horses to drag them; all the details about them are clumsily heavy for inland service, and the ammunition must be carried on another carriage. I understand 50 rounds only accompany each gun in that carriage. But two 12 pounders, each carrying 33 rounds on their own carriages, will travel very well indeed with four horses each, as I saw one doing at the "Buttle of Fox Hill," but to please my opponents I will say six horses each.

So we have one 40 pounder, two carriages, 40 rounds, and 14 horses, against two 12 pounders, two carriages, 66 rounds, and eight or twelve horses.

Now, as a good blow from one or the other would shut up either, and as the elevation up to 1,500 yards is in favour of the smaller guns, and up to 3,000 yards the larger has not as much as one degree in its favour, it is reasonable to believe that with half the number the two 12-pounders would lick the 40-pounder out of the field in no time.

We want then, the 12 pounder breech-loading Armstrong gun, which is an exceedingly good gun, and which is shortly to be obsolete. Give us that, let me then equip