

REPORT OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE BRITISH ARMY ON THE
AUTUMN MANŒUVRES.

HORSE GUARDS, WAR OFFICE,
October 31st, 1871.

SIR.—In preparing a general report of the result of the Autumn Manœuvres for submission to Her Majesty, I must explain that a longer delay than I could have wished has taken place, from my desire to collect as much information as I could, previous to expressing my own opinion upon various important points requiring consideration.

It having been decided by the Government to form a larger concentration of troops than usual for the purpose of inaugurating a course of manœuvres on a more extended scale than has hitherto been the practice of this country, and to bring together if possible, some portion of the reserve forces, including Yeomanry, Militia, and Volunteers, to be associated with the Regular Army, it was after much consideration, decided to take Aldershot as a basis for such concentration, as affording facilities for supply and varieties of ground which it would be difficult to combine in any other locality. It must be remembered that this was the first essay of any concentration of this kind, if we except Chobham in 1853, which, however was small in comparison, and took the form of a standing camp, whereas the present concentration was to be one of manœuvre over a large tract of country to the extent that circumstances would admit.

Accordingly early in September the troops and reserve forces (as per annexed return) were brought together from various parts to Aldershot, and there formed into three distinct divisions of three brigades in each division, one of cavalry and two of infantry, with their proportion of Artillery and Engineers, including reserves of Artillery; the whole three divisions forming a *corps d'armée* amounting in strength to 30,000 men.

I thought it might be as well if I took general charge myself, and having received your concurrence in this view, I assumed the command of the force on the 9th September, having Lieutenant-General Sir Hope Grant as my second in command in charge of the 1st division, Major-General Sir Charles Staveley and Major-General Carey commanding the other two divisions. The details of formation of the force are herewith annexed. I was anxious at once to bring these respective divisions into working order, and with this object in view, as also for the facility of supply and the requirements for watering so large a body of men and horses, the 2nd and 3rd Divisions were moved, on Friday, September 8th, to Hartford Bridge Flats and Woolmer respectively; the former in one day, the latter in two marches. Major-General Carey had charge of the 2nd Division, Sir Charles Staveley of the 3rd. The 1st Division was retained somewhat longer at Aldershot to enable us to judge of the amount of transport required for its movements which depended, to a certain extent, upon what was found necessary for the other two divisions, and did not, therefore, move off till Tuesday the 12th, when it marched in two marches to Chobham. My own headquarters I established and retained during the whole period of concentration at Aldershot, as the most central and most convenient position for conducting the necessary duties of command.

And here I would remark on the mode in which these divisions moved off to their respective stations. All things considered, it was satisfactory: but it cannot be denied that some confusion and difficulty arose as

regards the 2nd and 3rd Divisions from the circumstance that the staff of the force had been brought together from various out-stations, and had only been put in charge of its duties on the day prior to movement, and that the corps themselves only joined their respective brigades and divisions on the morning of departure. This must in future be corrected, and the troops when concentrated must be encamped with their respective staffs several days, if not a week before any actual movement takes place, so as to enable all the force, and more particularly the staff including that portion belonging to the Control Department, to settle down to their respective duties previous to any strain being put upon them, as must inevitably be the case whenever an actual movement of troops takes place. The 1st Division having had several more days to prepare, and having attached to it a large portion of the Regular Staff of the permanent Aldershot Division, had, in this respect, advantages over the two others, which it was only reasonable to expect would be the case. From the dates of departure from Aldershot up to the 15th, the several divisions were left to themselves to drill and work independently, according to the discretion of their respective generals of divisions. I visited, and was present at a general drill of the 2nd division on the 11th, having seen the same division take up its camping ground on the previous Friday. I saw the 1st Division march off on Tuesday, combining with its march a supposed movement for covering a retiring force towards Chobham; and I was present on Saturday the 9th at the 3rd Division moving to its camping ground near Woolmer, and at a manœuvre on Wednesday the 13th of half the division against the other half on the Woolmer ground, in a very fairly executed movement, well devised, and well carried out, the ground being very favorable to the object in view. I had thus an opportunity of seeing the several divisions in their details, and I was satisfied with the progress made, and with the zeal and anxiety evinced by all branches of the service to avail themselves of the opportunities afforded them for learning the practical details of the profession. The main difficulties which presented themselves were questions of transport, and to some extent of supply, to which however, I will refer in a later portion of this report.

On Thursday, the 14th, it became necessary to concentrate the three divisions for combined operations against one another, and, in order to carry out these movements for a practical purpose, it was assumed that an enemy had landed on the south coast of England, had refused the direct roads upon London, and was endeavoring to turn the strong positions between Reigate, Dorking, and the Hog's Back, and so to gain the valley of the Thames, and march upon London.

His advanced corps (2nd Division) had reached Hartford Bridge Flats, and the main body (the 3rd Division) was at Woolmer.

A defending force (1st Division) supposed to have been collected in the vicinity of London, had moved to Chobham. Accordingly the 2nd Division was moved on Thursday the 14th to Aldershot, and on Friday the 15th to Frensham Common, to join the 3rd Division, which on Friday moved up equally to Frensham from Woolmer, these two divisions combined representing the enemy's force to have landed on the coast; whilst the 1st Division, which represented the defending force, moved up to Purbright, prepared to defend the position of the Hog's Back. The first day devoted to combined movements was Saturday, the 16th, when the 1st

Division, having occupied the Hog's Back in reduced strength, and being supposed to occupy Hungry Hill, with a force of 2,000 men, represented by the troops left in permanent charge of the station at Aldershot, supported by some artillery, was attacked by the combined 2nd and 3rd Divisions, the former on the left against Hungry Hill, the latter on the right by a direct attack on the Hog's Back position, which was held but feebly by the 1st Division, which retired on Fox Hill, where it made a powerful and successful resistance, thus closing the operations of the day. The chief points which presented themselves to the observer on this occasion were the great difficulty of the ground to be walked over, which was much cut up by hedge and ditch, and cultivated lands, thus rendering combination extremely difficult, at times impracticable, and disturbing thus the general harmony of a movement which depended so much on closely-combined action. The ground worked over was also rather too extended for the force employed; and the troops chiefly engaged were so eager to push on the moment the slightest opening presented itself for going to the front, that the leading corps outstripped their reserves; an incident which reality would have checked as a matter of course, but, which is likely always to occur when these checks have to be assumed instead of being actually felt. The marching of the troops on this, as on all occasions, was admirable; the keenness of all remarkable; and, for a first attempt, much fewer faults were exposed to view than might have been expected: but evidently very broken or intersected ground makes all manœuvres extremely difficult, and adds much to the requirements of the imagination, which on these occasions has to be largely drawn upon. The transport on this day was to some extent very defective, and there was a consequent delay in supplies, which will be remarked upon hereafter. The troops had several hard days' marching, I gave them an entire day's rest for the following day, Sunday, even withdrawing all outposts, and only requiring the ordinary and necessary duties of the camp. The 1st Division encamped on Chobham Ridges, the 2nd on the Cove Common, the 3rd at Purbright. During the period of rest thus accorded, I took an opportunity of going carefully into the questions connected with the regulations for the umpire staff, which required some revision. I have omitted to refer to this important point in the earlier portion of this report. On all occasions of troops acting in distinct bodies as opposing forces, it is essential to have umpires to watch the proceedings, to prevent the too close contact of the advancing or retiring bodies, and to decide upon such points as must constantly arise as to the success or otherwise of a movement performed, the body which is bound to give way, or the errors committed; having power to direct any portion of the operating force which has laid itself open to destruction from taking any further part in the movements of the day. In order to give weight to their decision, I selected these umpires from amongst the general officers of distinction who were available for such duty, and gave them assistants to carry out more effectually their extended and difficult task, myself taking the position of umpire-in-chief, to whom all reports were brought at the end of the day's operations, when the umpires and general officers in command were assembled around me by signal. The incidents of the day were then discussed, the remarks of the umpires commented upon, after hearing the explanations of the generals in command, and directions given