

ORGANIZATION OF THE ROYAL ARTILLERY.

BY A FIELD OFFICER OF THE CORPS.

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The following details relative to the artillery of the British army will, at the commencement of a fresh epoch of peace, probably prove interesting. They will, it is hoped, while they comment freely on the past, be suggestive of some improvements for the future, not only with reference to the efficiency as a military body of the corps, but also as relates to that just and requisite economy which experience has shown to us it is the best wisdom to follow. No amount of money voted by the House of Commons will ever place the artillery on an efficient footing unless the principles of a correct organization are first recognized, and the administration of the corps placed in efficient hands. It will not do to have men at the head of affairs who dream during peace, and who suffer themselves to be caught by war without any pre-arranged plan for meeting its requirements; neither is any man quite justified in remaining in office, and drawing the salary attached to it, when every suggestion he makes is set aside, and every opinion he may bring forward, on matters for which he is or should be responsible, is coolly neglected. There are general principles, applying to every one alike. It is unfortunately too much the fashion of the day to sacrifice them to our personal interests. It passes in ordinary times, but the late war, and its melancholy consequences, in many respects, has been a Nemesis at least in conscience, if not more directly, to many.

Unprepared as our military establishments generally were at the commencement of the late war, none could have been less fit to encounter an enemy at the moment than the Artillery.

The system of the artillery (if system of any kind existed) was conducted in such a manner that a peace establishment numbering, according to the estimates of 1854 and 1855, little short of 16,000 non-commissioned officers and men, was unable to do more (and even that little with difficulty, and of the most crude materials,) than furnish 51 guns to take the field,—not one of them being a gun of position or exceeding the calibre of a 9-pounder and its corresponding howitzer; and after sending this small force, absorbing little more than 1,500 artillerymen, it required upwards of twelve months to organize any reserve. In March 1854, when the expedition, of which so few ever saw England again, began to be formed, there was not a single field battery in the United Kingdom considered to be in such a state of efficiency as to justify a departure from the usual routine of the roster of companies for foreign service by sending it to the East;—showing that the bare existence of a field artillery at all in England was very nearly a myth, and that one capable of expansion or offering a foundation for an addition to our field guns, so as to meet the exigencies of war, was altogether wanting. The declaration of war made it necessary to create the arm; and it may with truth be said that it was hurried into existence. Fortunately for those who might have been held responsible, there was no one who could judge of the state of things; or it was perhaps considered wiser to take them as they were in silence, than to find fault where time was too limited and the circumstances too pressing to admit of improvement.

With our usual belief that everything English must be infinitely superior to everything foreign, we took it for granted that we surpassed every nation in the world in our artillery. It was too late to get rid of the notion, and to set about realizing the fact just at the moment of commencing a war.—Never, surely did a great nation seem so satisfied with her efforts, or rest with a more placid appearance of contentment as to the results, than England when she sent forth her 10,000 infantry, and a few raw and untrained field batteries of artillery, to make war with the absolute ruler of 60,000,000 of people. The general breakdown in our military system, and its incapability of meeting a war, has been but too deplorably exposed. It is the subject of the artillery only that calls for notice here. The arm is becoming one of more and more vital importance daily. It has unfortunately long been one of indifference and neglect in England. Instead of keeping it up in peace (as the sums voted by Parliament would easily admit of doing if properly expended,) so as to have an efficient number of field batteries always ready for any emergency, with others coming on, and more or less advanced, as a reserve, our artillery was in such a state at the commencement of the late war, and the efficiency of the few batteries we had was of such little worth that they were broken up. Their horses and a great proportion of their men were turned over to the companies ordered for service, and the latter, by the mere magic of their uniforms and their designation as gunners, and little else, became transformed into field artillery. They took over their equipment, and had little time to do more than show themselves once or twice on Woolwich Common before they embarked to meet the enemy. The first of these service batteries (3 in number) were formed by order dated the 14th February, 1854, and by the end of March they were on board ship. These six weeks of hurried instruction (if the term instruction is not altogether inapplicable to the state of things,) was all, or nearly all, that great numbers of the non-commissioned officers and men had ever received in field duties. Our peace establishment had never been considered with reference to a war, and offered no means, considerable as was the outlay upon it, of raising a war structure without difficulty and an absence of all efficiency. In England, from want of management and head, we can only get on by force of a profuse expenditure. To enable our military establishments to meet a war; we must keep them up in peace to a war standard. It is wonderful, in the face of contending outcries for greater economy, or increased outlay to see how much is spent, and, from want of proper organization, how little is got in the shape of a perfect army.

Four more batteries from England followed the three first ordered to the East; the last of them after an interval of some months. They were all of them formed in the same ill-considered and confused manner, as men and horses could be got together. No arrangements could ever have been considered beforehand with regard to them. The experience of the Peninsular war was a dream and the long peace which followed it a profound slumber. The department of the Adjutant General of Artillery, with which all power for good or evil with regard to the corps rested, was in very aged hands—and the mere possibility of a state of hostilities, in which England should take a part, and a field artillery be required, would seem never to have been discussed or

* The nation was not satisfied.

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thought of. There was no efficient nucleus kept up on which to form it. To get together so small a force as 51 guns required a great effort. The whole corps had, as it were, to be broken up, and the required force for the field made up out of it. On taking over the material, the artificers' tools and some of the iron work of the harness, carelessly examined on its first delivery by the contractors, were found on inspection utterly unserviceable and useless. The tools broke in the hand as if made of glass, and a number of the iron hames were found defective. The old hames which had been years in use were more to be depended on than the new ones just issued out of store. In everything relating to the kits and necessities for the men uncertainty and want of head prevailed; and in no respect was the peace soldier, except in his personal qualities, fit for the active duties of his profession. In himself he was everything that could be desired; in whatever related to regulation, or authority, or instruction, he was a complete failure.

Each of the batteries formed consisted of 2 captains, 3 lieutenants, 1 surgeon, 15 non-commissioned officers, 9 artificers, 2 trumpeters, and 158 gunners and drivers. Their guns consisted of 4 9-pounders, with 6 waggon carrying 174 rounds each. There were besides, 1 forge, 1 store limber waggon, 1 store cart, 1 spare gun carriage, and 1 12-pounder rocket tube,—the whole moved by 170 horses. The detail for the two troops of horse artillery was almost precisely similar, at their guns were light 6 pounders and 12-pounder howitzers. They had each of them 188 officers and men, and 204 horses, including the officers' chargers.—These establishments were soon found inadequate. They were altered and increased from time to time, until, at the close of the war, the number of carriages arrived at 28; the number of officers and men being, for a troop of horse artillery, 259, and the number of horses 272; and for a field battery 242 and 210 respectively.

The horse artillery had been ordered to equip themselves with 9-pounder guns and 12-pounder howitzers, the same as the field batteries. Both remained at six pieces of ordnance as when first sent out, although the number of carriages and the personnel generally had been so much augmented.

The batteries and troops embarked from England by divisions of 2 guns each, and at first in sailing ships. Each battery, therefore, required three ships. No veterinary surgeon accompanied any of them; nevertheless, such was the care and zeal of all concerned, that but few horses were lost. Casualties in this respect hardly exceeded 2 per cent; and the horses landed after an average passage of seven weeks, in such condition that they were harnessed to the guns immediately after they touched the shore, and proceeded over a very bad road a distance of two or three miles, to the quarters allotted for them. Two ships out of three for each battery had no medical officer on board; and the only medicine given to the commanding officer of one of them (and it was probably the same with all the rest) was a box of pills and six seidlitz powders. Each of these ships contained from 60 to 70 artillerymen, and with nearly the same number of horses, in a very confined space,—the liability to accident was very great.

At the same time that the batteries for service were formed, a brigade to carry reserve small-arm ammunition was also organized. It consisted of 45 carriages, 189 officers and men, and 200 horses. Some of the carriages were not horsed, although if