

Correspondence.

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THE ALLEGED FIELD ARTILLERY HANDICAP.

Editor Militia Gazette.—While I have no desire of provoking any further controversy in the matter that forms the subject of Major H. P. Van Wagner's communication which appeared in your issue of the 14th of March, I think that it is, perhaps, hardly fair to your readers to allow them to remain under many erroneous impressions that they would undoubtedly conceive by perusing the letter in question. What Major Van Wagner's object can be in so violently assailing the D. A. A.—an association which has indisputably done gigantic work in promoting the efficiency of the field artillery of the Dominion—is beyond the powers of my comprehension.

Major Van Wagner undoubtedly feels much disappointment at the failure of his battery to win the Governor General's prize for general efficiency during the past year, but a calm and unbiassed consideration of the matter would, I think, compel him to acknowledge that there is very slight, if any, ground of complaint towards either the D. A. A. or its executive. It is a well-known fact amongst the officers of the artillery that the executive of this association has left no stone unturned to render the efficiency competition as equal in the conditions under which the several batteries compete as possible. It is true that equal conditions have not always been secured, but it is also true that with the funds at its disposal it has never been possible to render even conditions which, to the uninitiated, may appear controllable, equal so far as individual batteries are concerned.

Major Van Wagner's views as to the propriety of counting the scores of batteries in the credits in the efficiency competition and standing of the batteries is one that I think is hardly open to argument. Artillery fire being the very essence of "efficiency," and being the point to which all artillery instruction leads, it would, I think, be a grave error were the efficiency of a battery thus tested excluded from the general efficiency competition, even though the shell practice may necessarily have to be held under "varying conditions." In the near future, however, we look to seeing many of the "varying conditions" of the past done away with by the concentration of competitors from the various batteries at one central point. The executive of the association have worked to attain this object for very many years, and now that success has crowned their prolonged and energetic efforts, it would certainly be a great pity for any battery to retire from the competition through disappointment caused by the uncontrollable circumstances of the past.

Major Van Wagner hardly places the matter of signalling blind shrapnel before your readers correctly. It is true that there is no specific rule laid down for signalling blind shrapnel, but neither is it necessary. The error in signalling would appear to me to have been caused by the range officer not having fully comprehended the instructions laid down by the Inspector of Artillery as to signalling. To my mind the instructions are quite clear. The difficulty arose through the range officer attempting to improve on the signalling as laid down by allowing his private judgment to decide whether a shell striking the water was a common or a shrapnel shell. A shrapnel shell "blind" striking the water has all the appearance and cannot be distinguished from a common shell, and had the range officer treated the blind shrapnel of the Hamilton Battery as what they would appear to be (common shell), and signalled accordingly, Major Van Wagner would have known within ten yards of where his shell struck—and I do not think he will claim that the use of a telephone could have given him any more definite information than this. The register keeper and the competitor knowing the shell fired to have been a shrapnel, the range officer treating it in his signal as what it would appear to be (a common shell), no confusion would have ensued. It would be at once apparent at the firing point that the shrapnel was blind.

I cannot, however, leave this point of Major Van Wagner's communication without drawing attention to the fact that there can be no difficulty in recognizing from the firing point whether the shrapnel fuze has been good or blind. The burst of the shrapnel is distinctly visible with the naked eye, and how any officer could allow *thirteen blind shrapnel* to be expended is a mystery. Even supposing that the shrapnel burst at the moment of impact it must still be apparent to the competitor that though he might receive value for the shell as good, still the shell having burst so low, he would surely realize that the fuse had been bored too long and improve it in his next round. The battery that would fire 13 blind shrapnel, signal or no signal, could hardly be called "efficient," as the unnecessary waste of ammunition with such a battery on service (where neither telephone nor flag signalling could be expected) would render its employment a very useless expense. It appears to me that this is the attainment of "an efficiency at target practice that would put the marksman of the old smoothbore to the blush."

It is not apparent that any ill results would ensue through a shrapnel shell, fuse good, bursting between banneroles 4 and 5 being signalled the same as between 1 and target; fuse blind, as the impact of the shell is clearly visible from the firing point, and the great distance that Major Van Wagner complains about is, itself, the surety that there would be no confusion as regards the result of the signalling.

It is also worthy of note that while the Hamilton Battery made six points more than the Welland Canal Battery on the same range, the same day, and employing the same signal system in the preliminary practice, the latter battery made 47 more points than the Hamilton in its final practice. This difference in the final practice cannot be laid at the door of an inferior signal system, because in the final practice no signalling is permitted. How, therefore, can this falling behind in the final practice be accounted for? I have heard it stated that while the commanding officer of the Welland Canal Battery was present himself at the final practice and gave much assistance in the way of advice and instruction to the competitors, the officer commanding the Hamilton Battery did not consider it worth while to be present at the time of the final practice of his battery. I think that had the Hamilton Battery been properly overlooked in its final practice by its own officers it would have won the general efficiency prize—and nothing would have been heard about the "varying conditions" of the practice.

By the way, nothing was heard in 1887 about "varying conditions" although the Hamilton Battery was awarded the general efficiency prize and had used the telephone at its shell practice, notwithstanding the fact that the Sheffield, Newcastle, Richmond and Winnipeg batteries had to be content with flag signalling instead of a telephone. It all depends on "whose ox is gored."

The insinuation that the executive of the D. A. A. permitted the use of the telephone at Toronto for the purpose of giving an undue advantage to the batteries under the command of the President of the Association, I shall pass unnoticed. It is simply a matter of surprise to those who know the members of the executive that an officer occupying the responsible position of Major Van Wagner should lend his name to such a statement.

Now a word as to the studless shells. I have made full inquiries into the lengthy arraignment of the D. A. A. for having *compelled* the Quebec Battery to fire Canadian manufactured shells. Major Van Wagner asks "Can a D. R. A. member imagine the D. R. A. compelling some competitors to fire the Canadian ammunition a few years ago when it was unsatisfactory, and allowing others to use imported ammunition, and when the competitor failed to make a good score disqualify him for another competition? What a furore there would have been. But this is practically the way Quebec was treated by the D. A. A. Quebec did not protest. Nobody objects to anything in the competition except the 'Hamilton kickers.'"

The statement made in the quotation is a sufficiently serious one to have warranted Major Van Wagner in making the most complete inquiries before sending it broadcast through the country in the way he has done. It is a direct misstatement. The Quebec Battery had the studless shells issued to them through an error, and through no fault of the D. A. A. or its executive.

Major Lindsay's application to be allowed to fire his common shell over again with the imported ammunition received the warm endorsement and recommendation of the D. A. A. executive. The Department, however, could not, unfortunately for the interests of the Quebec Battery in the competition, see its way clear to authorize the expense attached to the additional expenditure of ammunition. Quebec did not protest, as Major Van Wagner has stated, because Major Lindsay had a sufficient sense of fair play not to lay the blame in the matter at the door of those who had no control over it. The protesting has been done on Quebec's behalf, but without its consent, by the self-designated "Hamilton kickers" on insufficient grounds and in entire ignorance of the circumstances.

Major Van Wagner's peroration is not any more creditable to him than his misstatements as to the alleged handicapping of the Quebec Battery by the D. A. A. He states that before 1885, from various local causes, the Hamilton Battery was out of the competition for any place in the efficiency list. His ground of complaint, therefore, dates from 1885. In that year he ascribes his inequality with the fortunate batteries in the competition to no credits being given his battery for dismounting drill; but I find on reference to the report of that year, that had the full points for this drill been allowed the Hamilton Battery, it would not have been any more successful as to the winning of prizes than without the credits. Hamilton, with full marks added for dismounting drill, would only have occupied a third place in the competition. The same complaint is made as regards 1886, and with just about as much justice. The full points for dismounting added to the others awarded to the Hamilton Battery would only have given them a third place in this year also. In 1886 no complaint was made. There were no "varying con-