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AMMUNITION SUPPLY.

By Brevet Major C. N. Buchanan-Dunlop, R.A.

MODERN Q.F. equipment necessitates a supply of ammunition which a few years ago would have been considered abnormal, and its amount will certainly not be lessened by the most recent methods of artillery fire tactics which are now employed. This is a universally acknowledged fact, and in consequence large reserves of ammunition must be collected within reasonable distance of the battlefield, but there seems to be no obvious reason why so much of this ammunition should be brought into the firing line at the same time as the guns, *i.e.*, in the first line wagons. In explanation of this, it should be noted that a battery consists of six guns and twelve wagons. When the guns come into action six of these wagons known as the "Firing Battery Wagons," are driven up beside the guns, one wagon to each gun, and there left, the teams then retiring to the wagon line, where the other six, or First Line Wagons, and the gun teams form up under the orders of the battery Captain. The "First Line Wagons" and "Firing Battery Wagons" are interchangeable, and, when the latter are empty, or a change of position requires that the battery should move with a large supply of ammunition, the "First Line Wagons" take the place of the partially empty wagons, which in their turn are refilled as opportunity offers from the Brigade Ammunition Column.

As organized at present, the method of ammunition supply is cumbersome and rather uncertain. A form of Brigade Ammunition Column corresponding to the German Light Ammunition Column, formed of the First Line Wagons and the existing Brigade Ammunition Column might be less clumsy. The Brigade Ammunition Column, as it exists on paper, consists of one wagon per gun, and seems to be a superfluous link in the chain of ammunition supply.

The present Brigade of Field Artillery, with its 18 guns and 36 ammunition wagons, is a most cumbersome unit, of which the unwieldiness would obviously be much increased if the gun ammunition wagons of the column were joined to those of the first line, while the S. A. A. Carts, which form part of the column, would, under these circumstances, be stranded. This arrangement then appears less suitable than the alternative suggestion, *viz.*: To relegate the First Line Wagons to the Brigade Ammunition Column.

It is proposed to consider this suggestion under the following circumstances:—

(1) Advance. (2) Battle. (3) Retreat.

(1) ADVANCE.

If a force of any strength is advancing the columns of the fighting troops must be kept as short as possible, and the main body of the infantry must be close to the head of the column.

Considering the case of a division on a single road. With the advanced guard, according to more recent German ideas, a force of two F.A. Brigades would not be out of proportion. The road spaces, neglecting distances between units, would work out as follows :—

Two Brigades=6 Batteries. With these are 36 First Line Wagons.
=36 x 20 yards.
=720 yards.
Say, roughly, half a mile.

By relegating all these First Line Wagons to the Brigade Ammunition Column, which would move in rear of the fighting troops, the length of road occupied by this advanced guard would be shortened by half a mile, *i.e.*, 15 minutes' marching. The length of the road occupied by the fighting troops of a whole division would be shortened by twice this amount, the same alteration being made in the 3rd F.A. Brigade and the Howitzer Brigade. Total distance by which the column of fighting troops in a division is shortened :—

3 F.A. and 1 Howitzer Brigade=4 Brigades.
=72 wagons.
=72 x 20.
=1,440 yards.

i.e., nearly one mile, or 30 minutes' marching.

F.A. Training, para. 152 (2), states that the artillery of the advanced guard " by a wide dispersion of available guns, or liberal expenditure of ammunition " will help to deceive the enemy as to the strength of the force opposed to him. Even taking into consideration this liberal expenditure of ammunition, it is difficult to imagine the case of an advance, or of an advanced guard action, where fire would be so rapid that the 100 rounds carried in the firing battery wagons and gun limbers would be expended before the wagons from the Brigade Ammunition Column could trot up from their position in rear of the fighting troops.

If the division were marching on two or more parallel roads the time necessary for the arrival of the Ammunition Column would be much shortened. A rough calculation, based on the data given in F.S. Pocket Book, puts the Ammunition Column some seven miles behind the head of the column. Assuming that no cross-roads or by-lanes could be

used to reach the batteries, two-and-a-half hours, or at the outside, three hours, might elapse before more ammunition could reach the guns.

Is then the ammunition carried in the gun-limbers and wagons sufficient to last the batteries this space of time?

Ammunition carried:

Gun limber	... 24 rounds
Wagon limber	... 38 rounds
Wagon body	... 38 rounds
Total	100 rounds

Maximum rate of fire allowable for three hours is $\frac{180}{100}$ or 1.48 minutes per gun, rather quicker than section fire, 1 min., or battery fire, 20 seconds.

Few batteries could keep up either of these rates of fire for three hours.

Continuous bursts of rapid fire might exhaust this supply in considerably less time, but it might almost as easily exhaust the extra ammunition available at the guns if the First Line Wagons were up, and no battery so extravagant in expenditure of ammunition would be tolerated for long at the front.

(2) BATTLE.

During the actual fight, F.A.T., para. 229 (5), suggests one mile to the rear as a suitable position for the Brigade Ammunition Column, while para. 193 (5), lays down half a mile as the maximum distance to the rear of the wagon line. From the point of view of the accessibility of the First Line Wagons the difference between these two distances is practically negligible.

In the same para. F. A. T., 193 (5), the great difficulties that the captain of a battery will have in finding sufficient space under cover for the large number of wagons and teams that he commands is anticipated, and a sub-division of the wagon line suggested. This sub-division would be unnecessary were the size of the wagon line reduced by the relegation of the First Line Wagons to the Brigade Ammunition Column.

(3) RETREAT.

In a retreat the first thing to be done is to send back the First Line Wagons to some convenient position in the rear, whence they replace the empty Firing Battery Wagons. This could be done most effectively from the Ammunition Column one mile in rear.

On manœuvres in Great Britain First Line Wagons are rarely present, so that the congestion on the roads and the obstacles to manœuvre on to the battlefield, which they would present, are perhaps hardly recognized.

Some of the advantages of relegating the First Line Wagons to the Brigade Ammunition Column would seem to be:

(1) That the freedom for manœuvre of the batteries and other fighting troops, would be greater.

(2) That the supply of ammunition would not, appreciably, suffer in the preliminary stages of the fight, whilst in the later stages the supply would be more continuous and uniform.

(3) That the Brigade Ammunition Column would be in direct touch with the Firing Battery on the one hand, and the Divisional Ammunition Column some two miles in rear, on the other. A further advantage would be an added lustre to that most important, if unappreciated, unit, the Brigade Ammunition Column.

PROPOSED ORGANIZATION OF BRIGADE AMMUNITION COLUMN.

In the following remarks the question of ammunition columns is regarded chiefly from the artillery point of view, though, as regards ammunition supply, a few minor details of organization and training would make this nucleus of an ammunition column expert in its dual capacity of supplying ammunition to infantry and artillery.

On paper an ammunition column forms part of each field artillery brigade, and in India these columns actually exist, while in England they exist in War Establishments, and would presumably be formed on mobilization, and entrusted with the vital duty of supplying ammunition to the artillery and infantry. This duty sounds a simple one, but the fact that in many, probably most cases, wagons and S.A. A. carts would have to find their way to various units, unattended by any officer or N.C.O., indicates that some previous training is advisable, if not indispensable, to insure the safe arrival of ammunition at the units to which it is dispatched.

In war time an ammunition column supplies its batteries with men, horses and equipment, as well as with ammunition, and undoubtedly battery commanders would be glad to ensure the efficiency of some of those officers, N.C.O.'s and men who would be likely to join them on service for the replacement of casualties. Both these requirements can be fulfilled. By relegating their First Line Wagons to the Brigade Ammunition

Column each battery would form the nucleus of its own section of that column, and thus possess a trained cadre capable of expansion on mobilization. As regards *personnel*, one extra subaltern and one sergeant would be required for each section of the column.

In the foregoing case batteries on the higher establishment only have been considered. In the case of batteries on the lower establishment each six-gun battery could form a four-gun battery and a section ammunition column. No extra officer or sergeant would then be necessary as an officer and two sergeants would be detached with the section. In both cases batteries would train their own sections of the ammunition column, and on brigade parades a complete ammunition column of three sections could be formed and manœuvred as such.

On mobilization cadres of ammunition columns would already exist, and would be brought up to strength simultaneously with their parent batteries, each unit drawing the necessary extra equipment.

A Brigade Ammunition Column at war strength would then consist of 36 ammunition wagons with limbers, the remaining vehicles as in war establishments, with the addition of one G.S. cooks' wagon and one telephone cart per brigade. Lower establishment batteries could be expanded into six-gun batteries as required.

If these Brigade Ammunition Columns existed in peace time officers of the artillery and of the directing staff would learn by practice on peace manœuvres to keep roads and approaches clear, and not to block the movement of other troops. It would be instructive to ascertain by trial how close to the front of a position ammunition columns would be allowed in intersected country, as, for example, in the eastern counties. By this practice artillery officers would learn the difficulties of other troops and appreciate the arduous duties which at present devolve upon officers engaged on Transport Services.

As regards *personnel* the extra expense would not be great; only one subaltern and a sergeant would be required for each section formed from a battery on the higher establishments, sufficient N.C.O.'s, men, and horses, to form the requisite nucleus already existing.

If for manœuvres a comparatively senior officer were required, a captain could be spared from one of the training brigades. As this same captain would command the ammunition column on mobilization, it would be a great advantage for him to gain some practice in the handling of his command.

In the absence of this captain the Adjutant of the brigade could be made responsible for mobilization equipment of the

ammunition column, while peace equipment would be in the charge of each battery.

There is probably some sufficient reason why Brigade Ammunition Columns exist only on paper, but if it is only one of expense the suggested organization might overcome the difficulty.

ESTABLISHMENT OF BRIGADE AMMUNITION COLUMN.

Peace.		War.		—
Present.	Proposed.	Present.	Proposed.	
	3	3	4	Officers
	3	7	10	S. Sergts., Sergts.
	80	142	220	N.C.O's. & men.
	86	152	234	Total.
	—	1	1	Bicycle.
	—	7	7	S.A.A. Carts
	1	1	1	Water ,,
Non-Existent.	1	—	1	Wagons: G.S. for Cooks
	18	18	36	,, Amn. with Limbers
	—	3	3	,, G.S. for S.A.A.
	—	1	1	,, G.S. for Stores.
	1	—	1	,, Telephone.
				Train.
	1	2	3	,, G.S.