

# On Her Majesty's Service

WASC 1809

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Report of enquiry  
into consolidation  
of Civil Admin  
Depts./Board of  
Ordinance policy  
1837



Mr McLAREN  
TA/Hd/RARDE (WA)  
Powdermill Lane,  
Waltham Abbey,  
Essex EN9 1AX

**Royal Ordnance  
Ammunition Division**

Blackburn  
Lancashire  
BB1 2LE  
England  
Telephone 0254 55131  
Telex 63121

X4314

9 February 89


Dear Mr McLaren,

You will find enclosed photocopy extracts from a Parliamentary Commissioners report dated 1837.

I have marked the paragraphs that you may find of interest, these relate to production quantities, purchase of material and Ordnance Board policy for Waltham Abbey in 1833.

The comments on the future of Waltham Abbey are particularly ironical considering your present circumstances.

Yours sincerely



S.H.DEAN.

QUALITY SUPERVISOR.

**REPORT**

OF

**THE COMMISSIONERS**

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO THE

PRACTICABILITY AND EXPEDIENCY OF CONSOLIDATING  
THE DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS

CONNECTED WITH THE

**CIVIL ADMINISTRATION**

OF

**THE ARMY.**

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Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty.

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FOR HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

## No. 7.

*Sir Augustus Fraser.**Sir Augustus Fraser* was called in, and examined as follows:—13<sup>th</sup> Dec 1833

What is the office you hold at present?—I am at present Director of the Laboratory.

You have been a long time in the Artillery?—Upwards of forty years.

You were in the Peninsula as commanding officer of the Royal Horse Artillery?—

Yes.

With respect to any orders or directions respecting the Laboratory, do you apply to the Master-General, or to the Board of Ordnance?—Very frequently to the one: and frequently to the other. Perhaps I had better explain the duties of my office: I have the charge of all the gunpowder, ammunition, and combustible stores of the empire; therefore, in the common routine of duty, returns are sent, and references are made to me from every part of the world, and of course it is my duty frequently to correspond both with the Master-General and with the Board of Ordnance; more generally in return to references made to me by them, but many things originate with myself.

Are the orders you receive generally directions given by the Board as a Civil Board, or are your duties usually under the military authority of the Master-General?—More usually civil; all from the Board of course are civil; but those from the Master-General are in his situation as a civil officer.

In what respect, if any, do you consider that your duties as Director of the Laboratory make you responsible as a military officer?—Not at all.

Is it consistent with your knowledge that, as the Board of Ordnance is now conducted, the reports or matters connected with the civil duties go to the Board, and those relating to military matters to the Master-General?—Usually, but they are so intermingled, frequently, that it is not easy to decide what is purely a civil, and what is purely a military subject. The subjects are frequently so blended that they partake of the character of both.

Has an Artillery officer any charge of the Ordnance stores at Woolwich or elsewhere, or are they in the care and custody of the Storekeeper who is the public accountant for them?—That is subdivided into two parts, which I believe are general to the whole service. All those guns with a limited proportion of stores that are mounted upon batteries, and that are immediately ready for defence or offence, are in the charge of the Artillery officers. All those that are in depôt are under the charge of the Storekeeper.

You preside over all the officers employed in the Laboratory, but you have no charge of the stores after they are manufactured in the Laboratory?—No; the present arrangement is, that when stores are manufactured they are given over to the Storekeeper to be issued; but in the particular circumstance of some of them being more combustible than others, I retain them in places that are thought to be more safe than if in the Storekeeper's charge, but they pass through the Storekeeper's book.

You are no accountant in any way?—Not personally, but one of the officers of my department has charge of the stores, and is an accountant to the Board.

Does not the Director General of Artillery regulate the quantities of stores to be placed in the different garrisons, and check the demands for them by officers commanding Troops or Batteries of Artillery?—Yes: the Director General is the general professional head upon that subject.

Have the Officers of Artillery any responsibility (in matters of account) in regard to Ordnance stores, beyond what relates to such as are drawn from the Storekeeper, under sanction of the Director General, and placed at their disposal, as the equipment or means of efficiency of the Troop, Brigade, or Battery, which they are appointed to command?—The Artillery Officer has the charge, in a Foreign Garrison, of all the guns that are mounted upon the works, with the carriages, and a limited proportion of the ammunition; the Storekeeper having the remainder in depôt.

Is the responsibility which attaches to such stores at all similar to what a Naval Officer is subject to for the stores he draws, for his ship, from the Ordnance, and an account of which he renders to the Ordnance, although he is under the orders of the Admiralty?—Yes: in some degree.

Is not an officer in command of a Regiment of the Line responsible to the Secretary at War, for the equipment of his Battalion, although under the Commander in Chief, in the same way that an Officer of the Artillery would be responsible for his Materiel to the new Board, with this difference only, that the equipment of a Battery of Artillery consists of a greater variety of articles, though their value may not, perhaps, be always greater?—What we call a Field Battery of Artillery, is merely a few field pieces, but where an Artillery Officer is responsible to a considerable extent is where he has charge of the Artillery of a Fortress, or of that of a District of Country such as Canada, and the Cape of Good Hope, or in Ceylon; and in those cases the Artillery Officer, if he is removed or comes home, has no means of turning over, by personal inspection, his charge to his successor, nor would it be prudent to incur the expense of his going perhaps a couple of hundred miles to do so: but his charge is regularly transferred to his successor, who becomes accountable for it to the Board.

Is not the Lieutenant Colonel of a Regiment of the Line responsible for the ammunition he receives?—Yes.

And in the same way is not an Officer of Artillery responsible for the equipment placed in his charge?—Yes: but with this difference, the officer of the Regiment marches away with

his equipment, but the Artillery Officer does not march away with any thing. The situations *Sir Augustus Fraser.* of the two officers do not assimilate; but there is no part of the Ordnance stores that some-<sup>1374</sup> body is not accountable for, and if there is a waste, or abuse of them, it must be found out. **DEC 1833**

When there has been an expenditure of Stores or Ammunition by an Officer of a Troop or Brigade of Artillery, does he not get them replaced by an application to the Storekeeper of the Ordnance, signed by the Commanding Officer of Artillery?—At home the application would be sent up by the Officer of Artillery in charge of the district to the Board of Ordnance: the Board would authorize it, and then it would be sent to be supplied. Probably I should have to make up the ammunition, and issue it to the Storekeeper; and then the Storekeeper would issue it to the station. Abroad there are certain rules for firing morning and evening guns, salutes, &c., and also for practice, the powder and stores expended in which would be accounted for in the ordinary routine of duty.

When horses are required for working at the Stores at Woolwich, are they not furnished on the requisition of the Storekeeper to the Officer Commanding, as a working party, and the men paid accordingly?—As a matter of general information I know that any number of horses, required for any particular work, would be furnished upon the Storekeeper making a demand.

Do you know in stations where there are no Ordnance Medical Officers who attends the sick of the artillery?—Generally some Civil Surgeon is employed, if there is no Army Surgeon to be had; but if there is an Army Surgeon, it would be his duty to furnish his assistance.

Do you know how the hospital stoppages are arranged in the Artillery?—Whatever would be the stoppage in the army, there would be an equal stoppage in the Artillery. I apprehend that the hospital would have a demand upon the Troop or Company of Artillery for so much, and then the Captain of the Troop would direct the Agent to transfer to the hospital whatever the amount might be.

Will you explain to the Commissioners what the respective officers are?—In a general way, we understand by the term respective officers, the Commanding Engineer, the Commanding Officer of Artillery, and the Storekeeper at each station. Those three form what are called the respective Officers, and most demands and requisitions require the signature of all the three. For example, there are certain proportions of ammunition and stores required to be called for in anticipation of next year: that demand so signed by the three officers would be sent to the Board of Ordnance. Probably it might be referred to me to know whether there was any error, in the Laboratory Stores, in the demand. Upon being sent back, and nothing appearing to be out of the usual form, it would then be ordered; but without the signature of these three officers, it would not be a valid demand.

Is it necessary, in your opinion, to continue the system, now in practice, of conducting the duties in Ireland or abroad by means of the respective Officers, or do you consider that a more simple and more economical arrangement could be made to do what they now do, and be, at the same time, equally efficient?—I think that where you have a person of ability that one man is better than three as a general principle; but with the general run of mankind it is safer to have three people who have different interests, and who are not likely to bend to each other, unless they see that it is for the general good.

Have you any return of the quantity of powder and cartridges now in store?—Yes; the quantity of gunpowder at home is regulated in this way. Some years ago an average was taken of a probable year of war consumption, and, upon taking the whole of the last war, 65,000 barrels of powder a year were assumed as a year's consumption. We are therefore bound to keep in store in England three years' war consumption over and above that we are bound to keep what is assumed as a probable peace year's consumption, which was taken at 12,000 barrels. We are therefore obliged first to have 195,000 and then the 12,000 added to it, making 207,000 barrels. Moreover we are obliged to keep saltpetre and sulphur enough to make an additional year of war expenditure, and one additional year of peace expenditure. We have at this moment at home about 1,000 barrels of excess of the number we ought to have; and we have abroad about 60,000 barrels. The proportion of musket-ball cartridges that we proposed some years ago to keep all over the world was about 60,000,000, which is nearly about the amount we have, but it varies from time to time.

Do you not, as a general principle, think that keeping a very large store is a bad thing?—Certainly. I would have scarcely any store of articles easily procurable, but a store of powder is indispensable.

Does it not prevent your giving to the army the benefit of any improvement that may take place?—Certainly. We are overloaded with stores now.

What amount of stores should you think necessary to keep to be prepared for the breaking out of a war?—I was one of a Committee at Woolwich, the other day, upon that subject, and we took this as our basis, that if we had at Woolwich guns and everything for forty field batteries; that is, for 240 field pieces, with all their attendant carriages, and also a complete equipment for 200 heavy guns as a battering train, it would be a reasonable proportion to keep in store; but having settled this as a kind of basis, we found that we had such an overplus as was astounding, inasmuch as it consisted of articles not saleable. Gun carriages, for example, are of no use in civil life, and we cannot do anything with them.

Is it considered necessary to adhere to the rule which has been laid down of having three years' war supply and one year's peace supply of powder?—No. It was referred to me what I thought should be done upon that subject, and my opinion was, and is, that we ought to keep up the Powder Manufactory at Waltham Abbey, not with a view of making powder to



*Sir Augustus Fraser.*13<sup>th</sup> Dec 1833

increase our stock, but that we might not lose the art of making powder; and that we might not, in the event of war, depend upon the combination of half-a-dozen Powder-Merchants; but that, beyond this, we ought not to make powder; and I believe that opinion is acted upon. At present we are making about 1,000 barrels a year. The mode in which powder is procured is this. The Ordnance enter into a contract with the East India Company to send them saltpetre, all the saltpetre coming from India. In war the King's mills were never able to make more than about half the quantity required; the remainder was always made by Powder-Merchants, who received the saltpetre from the Government. They began with charging twenty-five shillings for the process, but they ended with charging fifty shillings a barrel; and therefore it is necessary to keep the matter in our own hands to a certain extent.

Have you ever sold any powder?—Yes. The Sardinian Government bought some a few years ago, and, perhaps, it would be still desirable to sell some; though, if we went to war, it would take 100,000 barrels to supply our Fleet.

Supposing the Artillery and Engineers were to be placed under the orders of the Commander of the Forces, and a new Board established for superintending all the Civil functions of the Board of Ordnance, are you of opinion that any inconvenience or difficulty would arise to the service from such an arrangement?—There are several points in which that subject must be viewed; one connected with the peculiar situation of the Artillery. I look upon the Artillery to be a neglected Service; and I know that it is so considered by the Officers themselves. I look upon it that no Corps that is solely advanced by seniority and death vacancies can come to perfection. Where you have men of ability, that ability is locked up; when they have no ability, they go on with the stream. The officers are all well educated, but to little purpose; and, assuredly, the state of the Artillery will force itself upon the country sooner or later. I have been forty years in the Artillery, and have got to be a Colonel; and I could go down a hundred men in the Regiment without coming to any man much younger than myself. It will be a broken down Corps unless something is done to remove from it those who are not eligible to be retained, and to advance those who are. I think this subject is one that requires to be much considered. When I was younger, I thought it would be a great thing to put the Regiment under the Commander-in-Chief. I am not so sure of it now. There is a fear that the Corps may become a secondary service. With respect to the Board of Ordnance, I apprehend that from the multiplicity of matters connected with the Ordnance some Board must always exist; whether constituted as the present Board is I do not know; but I think a great deal of the business of the present Board is done over and over again, which might be very much simplified. Matters are referred, and re-referred, and referred again, so that the waste of time and attention is very great; but it is an easier thing to see the faults of existing arrangements than to remedy them.

Do you think that if the Artillery and Engineers were placed under the command of a distinguished General Officer, who should command them in the same way that the Commander of the Forces does, that that would not be of some service to the Corps?—That comes round to something like the Master-General, under some other name, and I think it desirable.

Are the Officers of Artillery or Engineers appointed to command our garrisons, or districts in England or Ireland?—Very seldom.

In point of fact, has not there been at the Horse Guards a disinclination to permit an Officer of Artillery or Engineers to continue in the command of a district or garrison at home, to which he may have succeeded as senior officer, in consequence of the absence of the Officer of the Line?—Yes; generally speaking; but then, on the other hand, I think that very frequently Artillery Officers are not fit for it; from the stagnation of promotion men cease to take an active interest in the service.

Do you not conceive that there are many officers in the Artillery who would be perfectly efficient to act in Staff situations?—Certainly; upon this common principle, that out of 500 men there are men of every variety of intellect.

Are many of them upon the Staff?—No; it has been discouraged.

Do you think that the prohibition which has virtually taken place has been of benefit to the Service, or has done justice to the Officers of the Royal Artillery?—No. I am sure that a door might be opened to Artillery Officers to go into the Army with great advantage to the Service and to themselves.

Would it not be most desirable for the good of the Service that Officers of the Artillery and Engineers, who must all have received a very good education, should be eligible for the Army, after having served a certain time in one of the above-named corps?—Certainly.

Do you think any inconvenience would arise from separating the authorities over the Civil and Military branches of the service now conducted by the Ordnance. For instance, if the military command was transferred to the Commander-in-Chief, and the Civil part to a Civil Board, would any inconvenience arise from the necessity of orders emanating from two authorities?—No: not if that Civil Board were well arranged.

An Officer of Artillery being in charge of, and responsible for stores, of course would have to make his reports to both authorities, and no inconvenience would be found in his receiving orders with respect to his separate duties from separate authorities?—None. The orders from the Military Chief might entail the necessity of an expenditure of stores, which would follow as a matter of course, but that would be included in the spirit of the Order.

Supposing the Artillery and Engineers were to be placed under the orders of the Commander of the Forces, and a New Board established for superintending all the civil functions of the Board of Ordnance?—It would be very much the same thing as at present. I think it is rather a simplification of the duties of the Civil Board that is required, than any thing else, for the Board of Ordnance is in fact nothing but a Civil Board.