

Historian's Corner



- Part 3 -

DOTMLPF ARTILLERY INSIGHTS FROM THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR: ORGANIZATION

An eight-part series by Dr. John Grenier, the FA Branch Historian

The “O”—of course—is for organization in the DOTMLPF model. The federal and the confederate artillery arms struggled to find the best organizations for their guns, personnel and logistics networks. A wide-spread, pre-war Field Artillery (FA) organization to build upon was almost non-existent. Prior to the American Civil War (ACW), the Army could afford to field only four six-battery regiments of FA. Each battery consisted of six guns divided among three two-gun sections. It parceled out, or dispersed if you will, both batteries and sections to the Infantry companies that garrisoned remote forts and stockades, which made most FA units “self-contained” and unfamiliar with working in coordination with other artillery units.

The pre-war preference and practice of dispersal (versus concentration) of FA remained the norm throughout the first two years of the war. The Army of the Potomac (AoP), for example, dispersed its limited FA assets among Infantry regiments, with one battery per regiment; it sometimes held a battery in reserve at the division level. There was no concept of a divisional artillery (DIVARTY, which did not appear until 1941) to command and control (C2) as well as deconflict the division’s fires from its multiple regiments’ batteries, nor was there anything that resembled a corps artillery, despite the corps proving itself time and time again as the war’s decisive unit of maneuver. Most importantly, and damagingly for FA efficiency and effectiveness, dispersion vested Infantry commanders with the authority and responsibility to C2—and to organize, train and equip (OTE) before they ever went into battle—their attached FA batteries.

The federals took far too long to recognize the inherent flaws in that system. As late as September 1862—eighteen months into the war—the United States government ordered that states continue to call their artillery into service by batteries and attach them to the states’ Infantry regiments. The mistaken assumption remained that an Infantry regiment’s staff could perform all the functions of an artillery regiment’s staff, and the latter were “essentially of no use in wartime.” So much, then, for the concept that artillerymen are best suited to command and OTE artillerymen. This changed by 1863 with the formation of FA brigades in the federal armies, but those brigades focused solely on what we know as administrative control (ADCON), and Infantry commanders retained operational control (OPCON) and tactical control (TACON) of the batteries. The AoP, at least, recognized that Redlegs knew how best to address the FA’s needs in terms of matériel. Once in service, though, there was no mechanism in place to bring together the less experienced (and in many cases less capable) state FA batteries with the federal batteries. Of the 460 nominally federal batteries (indeed, the war-time growth in the artillery arms was extraordinary) that served during the war, 163 served in federal regiments and 297 served in independent batteries. The two streams did not cross: integration and

interoperability of the different “components” of the FA branch clearly were not concerns of ACW-era fire supporters to the extent that they are today.

Both the federals and confederates experimented with different FA organizational mixes and structures. William Barry, of the Barry Board, recommended to General George B. McClellan, commander of the AoP from July 1862 to November 1862, that he field three guns (vice one) per regiment (as alluded to earlier, there was a massive influx of Redlegs into the Federal Army which gave Barry and McClellan numbers with which to work) until his troops gained seasoning as effective infantrymen. Although McClellan supposedly was the great organizer of the AoP, he manifested little understanding of how best to organize his FA batteries, and he preferred a 1:1,000 gun-to-Soldier ratio. General Braxton Bragg thought Major General Earl Van Dorn’s Confederate Army of the West that fought at Pea Ridge, Arkansas in March 1862 possessed too many FA pieces at 94 guns for 16,000 troops per gun (or approximately a 1:170 ratio). Bragg noted “No treasury could stand such expenditures,” and more significantly, the “excess” of artillery “would effectually destroy the efficiency of any force to be this encumbered by the most unwieldy of arms.” Captains Career Course students at Fort Sill, Oklahoma will soon conduct staff rides at Pea Ridge, so they will be able to make their own assessments of Bragg’s policy as they walk the battlefield and ponder how they might have employed their cannons.

Barry moved to the Western Theater for the 1863 campaign, and he became General William T. Sherman’s Chief of Artillery. He convinced Sherman to field three guns per regiment; for the 1864 Atlanta campaign, Sherman changed the ratio to a bit less than two guns per 1,000 Soldiers, primarily to increase his army’s speed on the march. Even though concentration of FA was becoming the norm by 1863, it still could not produce overwhelming battlefield effects because of technical limitations (see next week’s article). Most of the positive changes in FA organization occurred on ad hoc bases, and they were the results of visionary (we need only compare Sherman’s reputation to McClellan’s or Bragg’s) commanders’ willingness to question their pre-war prejudices (from the Latin, *prae* [before] and *iudicium* [judgement]). In short, leaders’ prejudices—or “mental short cuts”—while thinking through the problems before them set up FA’s ineffectiveness in the war. If we take any lesson from Redlegs’ experiences in the ACW, then let it be that we must fight hide-bound thinking and willful ignorance at every opportunity. We do not all have to be visionaries like Lee or Sherman, but none of us should purposefully position ourselves as blocks in the road to development and innovation.

To be continued...

