SOJ-5(22)
On the Composition of the French Artillery Material.

By Captain de Reviers de Mauny of the French Artillery
Translated by FEB Laws (1897)

Since the second half of the 16th century the French artillery have only used guns firing shot at 4, 8, 12, 24 or 32-pdr.[330] The drawings of these guns, fixed for the first time in 1668, were modified by the order of the 7 October 1732 which only preserved the 5 first calibres.[331] Then, after the Seven Years War and after a series of comparative trials carried out by Gribeauval at Strasbourg in 1764, the War Minister decided (19 Dec. 1764) that the only guns which in future should accompany an army in the field should be 12-, 8- and 4-pdrs. and a few 6-*pouce* howitzers of a new construction. The other guns were reserved for sieges and for the armament of fortified places. Also tables of dimensions determined and made uniform for the whole Kingdom the mode of construction of gun and other carriages.

In 1774 it was ordered that the arsenals should contain always ready all that was necessary to form 8 field equipments and 3 complete siege equipments. This material was in existence in 1792 when war broke out; it was soon found to be insufficient and, notwithstanding the somewhat irregular activity which covered the national territory with factories, foundries and improvised arsenals, the French armies depended on prizes taken from the enemy as their principal resource. Thus the army which crossed the Alps in April 1796 only possessed 30 guns; a few months later it had nearly 1200, of which 600 were field pieces. Now the calibres used in foreign armies, other than the Spanish army, were 3-, 6- and 12-pdrs; the French 4- and 8-pdrs could not therefore utilise the ammunition found in conquered places. Also, peace concluded, a commission of artillery officers was ordered to study the improvements of which Gribeauval's material was susceptible. Under the energetic impulse of the First Consul and thanks to the activity of General Marmont, then President of the Artillery Committee, the work of this Commission ended in the adoption in AnXI (1803) of a much simplified material, the construction of which began forthwith. There were to be only 3 calibres, 6-, 12- and 24-pdrs; all the others were relegated to the service of the defence of places. The short and the long 24-pdr were allocated to siege work; the AnXI 24-pdr (5½-in.) howitzer, the 6- and 12-pdr guns should alone accompany armies in the field.

In consequence of circumstances, both complex and numerous, the new material was only partially sent on service during the campaigns in Austria, Prussia and Poland; it was only for the campaigns in Russia (1812) and in Germany (1813) that the Grand Army could be completely provided with the material of which the Emperor here speaks, and which was almost entirely lost. In 1814 they had to glean all that remained in the national stores: the 8-pdr and 4-pdr reappeared and were finally retained in the Service—chiefly for reasons of national economy.

[330] See SOJ-4
[331] He is referring to Valliere's rationalisation of having five calibres each of a single length.