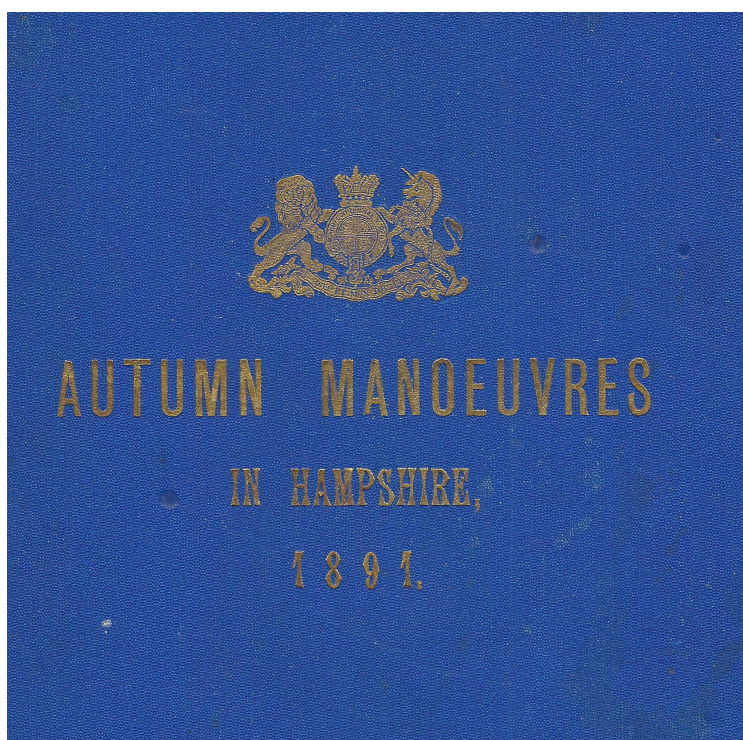


Autumn Manoeuvres, 1891

These are extracts from a printed report, given to the History Group archive by Mrs Jenny Toomey of Froxfield, written by the Adjutant General of Aldershot Camp in 1891, describing manoeuvres of two Army Divisions in the parish of East Meon – certainly the largest deployment of troops in the area since 12,000 troops marched through the village on their way to the Battle of Cheriton, and probably larger than that ... The full report is in the Library, T10, with the principal pages in a PDF on the archive website, www.eastmeonhistory.org.uk.



Bookplate "Cortachy Castle". (*Angus, Scotland – owned by the Ogilvies, whose clan also owns Airlie Castle*). Handwritten dedication: to (*illegible, first name?*) Earl of Airlie from Evelyn Wood (*see later – Lieutenant General*).

Ex Libris

Headed: Report of the Manoeuvres in Hampshire in September 1891.
List of Contents.

Printed at the Divisional Printing Office Head-Quarters Aldershot Camp.

p3.

Adjutant-General. "In order to facilitate arrangements for a repetition of Autumn Manoeuvres, I commence my report by detailing the numerous preliminary steps ... to obtain the use of the land."

During autumn 1890, examined ground between Basingstoke and Alresford, but abandoned idea owing to a scarcity of water and number of woods.

Surveyed ground lying between Wolverton to the North, and Oakley and Whitchurch on the South. Request granted by landowners (Earl of Carnarvon) and farming tenants on the North site. However “after several visits to the ground and personal interviews with the shooting tenants, I found it impossible to overcome their objections.”

Examined vicinity of Petersfield (shortage of water), tract between Stockbridge and Winchester (interests of shooting tenants prevented our arrangements being completed). “Manoeuvres without an Act of Parliament are not possible where the sporting rights are leased to persons residing out of the district.”

Eventually, the ground about Petersfield was selected ...

Some difficulty was experienced throughout the Manoeuvres owing to our finding it impossible to obtain a representative committee of occupiers, although we received great assistance from Mr Bonham Carter, Major Woods, Captain Le Roy Lewis and others. All our propositions, however, were accepted in a cordial spirit by owners and occupiers.

Several communications were received towards the end of August, pointing out that owing to the unusually inclement weather, harvest operations had been materially delayed, and suggesting that the Manoeuvres should be put off to a later date. (Put off to 10th Sept, 10 days later than usual.)¹

Divisions

The ‘Aldershot’ Division was divided for the purposes of the exercise of the Manoeuvres into the 1st and 2nd Divisions, each of which was, in turn, encamped in Soberton and East Meon, see later.

An infantry division usually consisted of Division Staff, two (and sometimes three) Infantry brigades, a brigade division of Royal Artillery consisting of 18 guns in three batteries, each battery having six x 15 pounder guns and an ammunition column, one squadron of cavalry, one company of Royal Engineers, one company of ASC and a field hospital.

In 1900 the strength of an infantry division was around 11,000 men, 1,780 horses, 8 machine guns and 280 wagons. The combat strength was 7,040 rifles, 150 armed engineers and 134 swords and lances carried by the cavalry. The report suggests there were at least 6 Infantry battalions involved in the Manoeuvres so at least 6000 therefore, probably 11,000....²

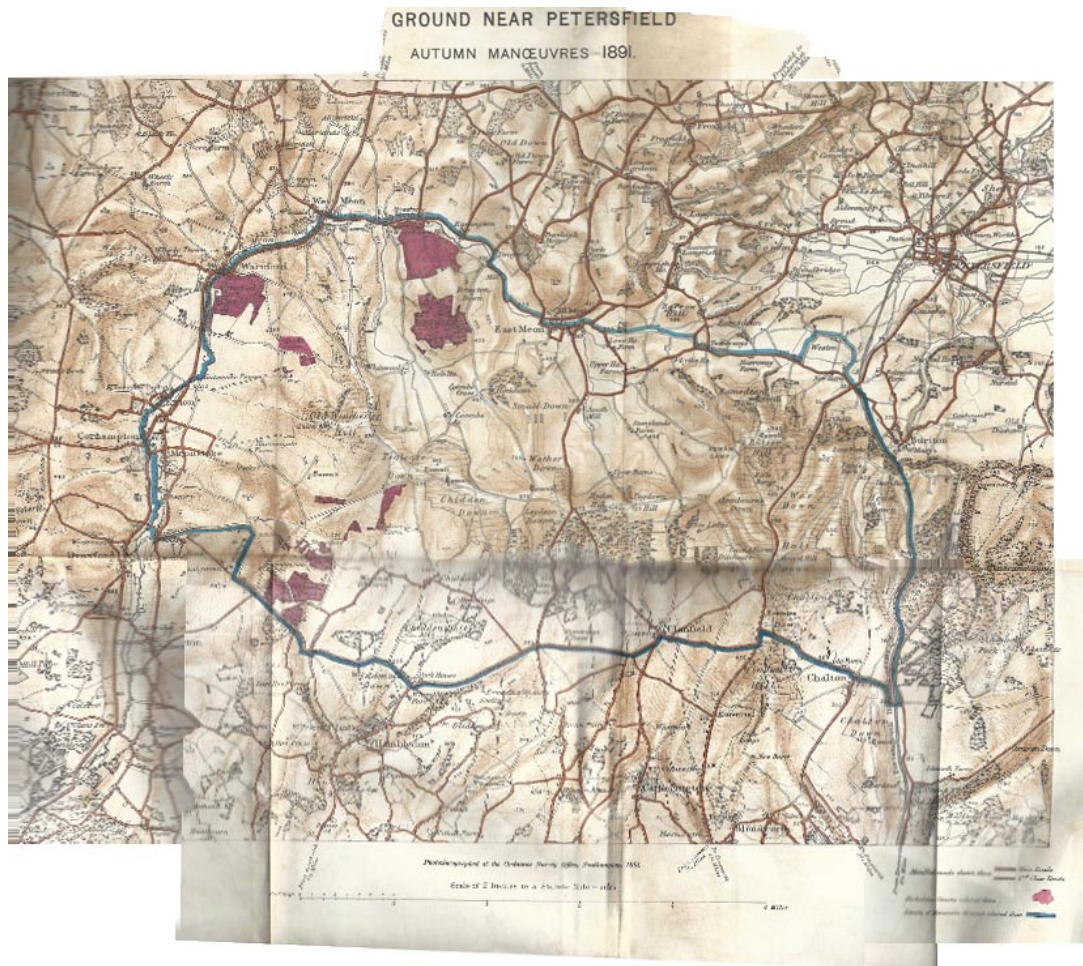
Each of the two Divisions may have been of this size, comprising a much larger ‘Aldershot Division.

¹ Excerpt from National School Log, Aug 3rd 1891. ‘This is the second week of the Camp of Autumn Manoeuvres of Cavalry, which will take place about September,

² Notes by EMHG member David Hopkins

Maps

Although there were not many names in this sparsely occupied country, yet spots could generally be identified by the numbers indicating the contours. There were one or two minor errors, for example "Hockham" near East Meon is not known locally by that name. It would have been better if the difference between the 1st class and 2nd class roads could have been more clearly shown.



p4.

Assembly and Inspection of the Divisions

On 1st September two Infantry Division having been formed (with the exception of one Battalion of the Grenadier Guards coming from Ireland) and one Field Battery at Hilsea, they were inspected on 2nd by His Royal Highness the Commander-in Chief ...

Five-and-a-half Battalions had joined the command towards the end of August ...

Description of the Manoeuvre Ground and Camps

The ground over which we were permitted to work is bounded on the North by the road from East Meon to West Meon, on the West by the river Meon, on the South by the road from Brockbridge, North of Windmill Down, to Clanfield, and on the East by the South-Western Railway. Seven miles E/W by 5 miles N/S.

One dominant ridge, generally 400 feet above the river Meon, runs in a North-Westerly and South-Easterly direction, through three parts of the area to Tegdown where the ridge turns sharply to the North-East, its culminating point being nearly 600 feet higher than East Meon.... It was feared that this ridge might prove unfavourable to all tactical schemes, since scouts could look down from it to either camp, (*placed out of bounds until the exercises themselves*).

The Camp on the Eastern side of the ground should, for tactical reasons, have been placed near Buriton, but as the Meon River, which rises one mile South of East Meon is the only water supply available for the district, it was necessary to place the camp for one Division there, while the other Division was placed at Soberton.

The choice of camping ground at East Meon³ was further restricted to the left bank of the river, where there were a few meadows, the fields on the right bank being under cultivation, with crops in many cases still standing when the Manoeuvres were terminated.

... the Mounted Infantry was encamped in an arable field which, like those at East Meon, became a sea of mud after three days of rain.

The Head-Quarter Camp of the Umpire in Chief was placed at West Meon, nearly equidistant between the two Divisions. The principal Staff Officers lived in a private house which was hired at their own expense for the fortnight.

P5

Sanitation

For want of proper instructions beforehand the trenches in the screens were not properly placed and in consequence men urinated against the walls of the screens.

The March (to and fro between Aldershot and the Manoeuvre Ground)

Infantry

The number of men falling out varied in proportion to the care taken by the officers to ensure proper attention being paid to the fitting of boots and socks and the cleanliness of feet ...73 fell out in one battalion, only one in another.

³ Presumably this is on land belonging to South Farm (on their map, Fairfield Farm) and Lower Farm.

(Several men were later discovered to have continued on the march despite their feet being raw ...)

p6

Horse Artillery

... no test, as one battery carried no ammunition, and the other was supplied with lighter equipment.

Mounted Infantry.

... reflected great credit on the officer in command. 8 casualties.

Transport

Horses walk faster than men, and are kept constantly stopping and starting.

Remarks on the Conduct of the Operations

p7

Distinguishing Dress

On the second day of the Manoeuvres, owing to the heat of the sun, both opposing forces wore helmets, from which some confusion arose. I recommend a proposal made by Lieutenant General His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught, that we should assimilate our practice to that adopted in the German armies, by putting white cap covers on the head-dress of one side.

I recommended that the cocked hat be abolished for Manoeuvres ... Every Staff Officer when coming under fire removed his cocked hat and walked about bare-headed, because opposing troops were invariably directed to fire upon any officer with this too conspicuous head-dress.

Infantry

Worthy of consideration whether the limit of height of infantry officers' chargers should not be from 14-2 to 15-2 (currently 16 hands). Can be obtained at lower price, thrive on smaller allowance of forage, and easier to mount and dismount.

Artillery

In several instances batteries were pushed forward up lanes before it was ascertained that the exits from such were free from the enemy. The Artillery officers were not generally sufficiently supervised ... in many cases received orders such as "Take up the best position you can" or "Conform". On one occasion the Artillery of one Division took up its position within 500 yards of unbroken infantry.

On 12th September, officer commanding one of the opposing forces placed one battery of his Artillery on low ground, 210 feet under a steep hill, and when the force was driven back no instruction was apparently sent to assist the battery commander in regaining the line of defeat. In consequence he attempted to

ascend the hill with a gradient so steep that although three of the guns reached the summit yet the fourth stuck fast and all were so delayed that the enemy's Infantry arrived within 500 yards before half the hill was surmounted. Thus the battery must have been captured.

The Cordite blank cartridge being made up of 150 pieces of brown paper makes the ground very untidy ...

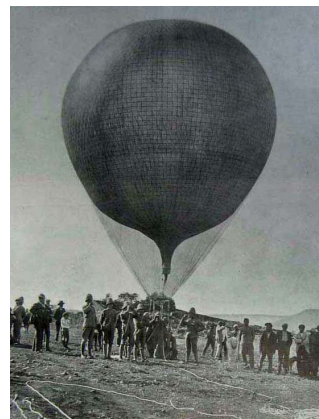
Cavalry

In one Division, the mistake was made of ordering a squadron leader not to fight on any account, and acting on these orders he allowed a company belonging to his force to be surrounded without an effort to extricate it. These orders I was obliged to cancel.

p8

Balloon Section

The country was not favourable for the use of balloons, and yet their utility is undoubted when one force stands on the defensive land, the experience gained fully repaid the cost of taking a balloon down with the troops. The force of the wind prevented its ascent on two occasions and on another day the operations were cut short by a dense fog.



Army balloon in use at Ladysmith 1900

p9

Signallers

One of the faults was that signals on both sides were read by the opponents, and this fault occurs during nearly every tactical day at Aldershot.

There follow, for each day of the Manoeuvres, a 'Narrative of and Remarks on an Exercise of the (1st, 2nd) Division on the XXth September', each broken down into 'General Idea' ... e.g. 'The commander of a Southern (Invading) Force, cannoned on the Wallington River between Southwick and Fareham, pushes a reconnaissance towards Ropley with the object of cutting the railway at that place. On the afternoon of the 9th September it has reached the neighbourhood of Soberton.'

Then each has a 'Special Idea... e.g. 'To Officer Commanding Flying Column, West Meon ... I learn the enemy near Fareham is making a move Northward. Reconnoitre tomorrow towards Soberton at 7.45 and if the enemy is encountered attack and drive him to the Southward.'

Then reports on the events which subsequently took place, in some detail, and Remarks ... e.g. "It appeared to the Umpires that sufficient attention was not paid to the directions of the Special Ideas. More careful examination of ground would have shown the Northern commander that an excellent Artillery position existed close to his point of assembly ... the same error was observable on the Southern side ... The formation on both sides was too extended for the force employed ... unnecessary crowding was in some instances observed in the ranks and officers were seen mounted under effective fire."

Appendix A

Pro-forma note:

16th April 1891.

Sir, I shall be extremely obliged if you will consent to receive a Staff Officer of the Aldershot Division for five minutes in order that he may explain my wishes relative to some Manoeuvres after harvest this year.

I forward herewith a copy of an agreement, based on one which answered very satisfactorily last year in Berkshire for, in the result, all the occupiers of land requested that I should myself assess the amount of damage, and in only two cases did I decline to do this and call in the aid of a professional valuer, as was at first intended to be done in every case.

For the present my request extends only to your sanction to my approaching the occupiers of your land to see whether they will consent to my working over it.

Yours faithfully
(signed) Evelyn Wood
Lieutenant General

Appendix B

Map (reproduced above)

Appendix C

PROGRAMME, AUTUMN MANOEUVRES 1891

There follow detailed notes on the exercises conducted by the two Divisions, from Thursday 10th September to Wednesday 23rd September. On the 16th September, the two Divisions swapped their bases (East Meon and Soberton).

These comprised permutations of the two Divisions (1st and 2nd) opposing each other, or their various brigades doing so within the Divisions.

General superintendence and direction of the manoeuvres to be under the direction of Lieutenant General Sir Evelyn Wood, V.C., G.C.B, G.C.M.G. 1st Division under command of Major-General C.M.Clarke C.B., the 2nd Division of Major-General Lord William Seymour.

Numerous regiments are mentioned including, Cavalry: 5th Dragoon Guards, 20th Hussars, Infantry: East Kent Regiment, Essex Regiment, Hampshire Yeomanry and Hampshire Regiment, Royal Artillery, &c &c, Army Service Corps, Military Police,, Medical Staff Corps &c.