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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
CHALMETTE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Preliminary Report On
Cannon and Carriages at Chalmette
1815

by

J. Fred Roush
Park Historian

Arabi, Louisiana
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This project was started for the purpose of finding in detail what the artillery along Jackson's line on January 8, 1815 was like, so that an accurate reconstruction could be undertaken. This artillery was in eight batteries. Batteries 1, 2, and 3 were on sites now under water,¹ and therefore not subjects for possible reconstruction. They are not considered in this preliminary study.

The only enumeration of the American artillery in this battle is that of Latour,² of which these are the pertinent parts:

"Battery No. 4, commanded by Lieutenant Crawley, of the navy and served by part of the crew of the Carolina, had a thirty-two pounder;....

"Battery No. 5, commanded by Colonel Perry and Lieutenant Ker of the artillery, had two six-pounders....

"Battery No. 6, commanded by General Garrigues Fleaujeac, and served by a detachment of the company of Francs under the immediate command of Lieutenant Bertel, had a brass twelve-pounder....

"Battery No. 7 had a long brass eighteen-pound culverine and a six-pounder, commanded by Lieutenant Spotts and Cheveau, and served by gunners of the United States artillery....

"The 8th battery had a small brass carronade which rendered very little service on account of the ill condition of its carriage..."

The reliability of these statements is questionable: (1) discrepancies exist between Latour's text and his map; (2) evidence from other sources does not always agree with the above; (3) one of Latour's statements seems improbable.

1. The Ricketts map shows all the battery positions, and there seems to be no reason for questioning this detail.

2. A. Lacarriere Latour, War in West Florida and Louisiana, 143.

The discrepancies between Latour's text and his map³ that concern this study are:

(1) On the map, Battery no. 6 consists of one 18-pounder and one four-pounder; in the book it consists of one 12-pounder only.

(2) On the map Battery no. 7 consists of one 12-pounder and one 4-pounder; but the book says one 18-pounder and one 6-pounder.

(3) On the map Battery no. 8 consists of one 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch howitzer; but the book says, "a small brass carronade."

Other sources on this battle say so little about the American artillery engaged in it that they are not of much help. Jackson did not write much about the artillery in his reports. His official life⁴ has a map showing gun positions on January 8, but neither the map nor the text have any details.

Considering Battery no. 6 first, the map in Reid & Eaton shows one gun at this position. Buell⁵, in quoting an interview with a participant long after the event, mentions "the long brass 12-pounder in Battery no. 6." Tatum implies that there was a 12-pounder and a 4-pounder in this battery.⁶

Reid & Eaton's map shows two guns in Battery No. 7. The statement in Tatum's Journal can be taken to mean that there was an 18-pounder in this battery, but does not exclude the possibility of other guns.⁷ Buell has the most tempting statement of any: "No 7 had an old Spanish 18-pounder and a 6-pounder."⁸

3. Plate VII of his Atlas.

4. Reid, John and Eaton, John Henry, The Life of Andrew Jackson, (Phila., 1816) map between pp. 358 + 359

5. Augustus C. Buell, The History of Andrew Jackson, II, 12.

6. J.C. Bassett, The Journal of Major Howell Tatum in Smith College Studies in History, VII, 125

7. loc. cit.

8. loc. cit.

Battery no. 8 is the most mysterious of all. Eaton wrote that "this battery was actively employed and successful in felling them to the ground."⁹ Tatum's statement that a howitzer in this position raked the enemy seems likely to be true in view of the heavy casualties suffered by the attackers.¹⁰ Buell quotes Butler that a 6-pounder was in this position.¹¹

Latour's statement that Battery no. 8 consisted of a carronade that was little used because of a bad carriage seems improbable on other grounds. A carronade was a cannon of short range for use on ships. Would a short-range gun have been placed by Jackson on a line where at least medium range was needed? If he had any choice, would he have kept one whose carriage was in poor condition when he was expecting an attack?

Other writers have usually followed Latour's text. Walker made an exception in the case of Battery No. 8, which he says was a howitzer.¹² Parton followed Latour's text all the way.¹³ Both of these talked to survivors of the battle. A more recent writer, an artillery officer himself, also copies Latour.¹⁴

9. Op. cit., 339 .

10. Loc. cit.

11. Op. cit. II, 13.

12. Alexander Walker, Jackson and New Orleans, 326

13. James Parton, Life of Andrew Jackson, II, 173.

14. Powell A. Casey, "Artillery in the Battle of New Orleans." The author was a major in the Washington artillery. His study is mainly about British weapons, because of the scarcity of American sources. Referring to the battle on the 28th, Casey cites the Journal of C. R. Forest, a British officer, as saying the Americans had a long 32 in the center and a 9 on their left. This is the only mention of an American 9-pounder I have seen.

In order to reconstruct this artillery, we need to know the makes and models as well as the sizes and places of the guns. Where did the defenders get them?

From the scarcity of references to artillery in the letters and reports of their leaders, it seems unlikely that the Americans brought much, if any, such guns with them to New Orleans. They do not seem to have been nearly so much worried about cannon and cannon balls as they were about such things as muskets and flints.¹⁵

There was probably a considerable quantity of ordnance in and near New Orleans at that time. Four 12-pounders, four 8-pounders, eight 4-pounder guns, and eight six-inch howitzers were acquired from the French as a result of the Louisiana Purchase.¹⁶ Nineteen guns were reported from Fort St. Charles in New Orleans in 1811, and six from the fort on Bayou St. John.¹⁷ General Wilkinson wrote to the Secretary of War that he had 30 brass pieces in a train of light artillery.¹⁸ In 1814, six 6-pounders, two 12-pounders, one 24, ^{for same} carriages and a howitzer carriage were shipped to New Orleans from Pittsburgh.¹⁹ It seems reasonable to assume that these rather

15. J.S. Bassett, Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, II passim. Tatum does not say whether the cannon taken from the Spaniards at Pensacola were brought to New Orleans. Journal, 34

16. W. E. Birkhimer, Historical Sketch of the ... Artillery, United States Army, 232.

17. American State Papers, Military Affairs, I, 311, no. 106

18. Birkhimer, op. cit., 195

19. ASP, Mil. Aff., II, 504

fragmentary reports do not list all of the available artillery - there must have been some on merchant vessels along the waterfront, for example - and that Jackson's engineers could choose. Even though it was needed in several places early in the campaign, by the Eighth of January, that most suitable could have been concentrated on the line.

The 32-pounder in Battery no. 4, the heaviest gun on the line and one of the heaviest used anywhere in the campaign, was probably a naval gun on a naval carriage.²⁰ It seems that most of the heavy guns were naval pieces and worked by navy or pirate crews.

It is likely that some, if not most, of the pieces along the remainder of the line to the left had Gribeauval carriages. The artillery received from the French had such equipment.²¹ It is possible that the few casualties suffered by Jackson's men may have been due in part to these carriages. One authority says:

"The artillery men are much less exposed, when defending a rampart, if Gribeauval's garrison carriage is used. It raises the gun in such a way as to fire over a parapet high enough to shelter the men, without making embrasures, or else such shallow ones as do not expose them." ²²

20. Casey, *op.cit.*, 10, refers to 32-pounders "drawn from the naval arsenal" but does not cite source. The Navy archives in New Orleans now do not go back to 1815.

21. Birkhimer, *op.cit.*, 232

22. H. Lallemand, *A Treatise on Artillery*.... 37. On page 38, this carriage is described. He also refers to plate 6, Fig. 38 of this work, but the plates are not available here.

The two six-pounders of Battery no. 5 were doubtless light field pieces. According to Tatum, they were brass guns.²³ They were the only American artillery in the night battle, and were moved to the river end of Jackson's line before being placed in the position they had on January 8.²⁴

It's a good guess that the 12-pounder in Battery no. 6 was a Gribeauval garrison gun. It was under a French commander and served by a French crew. A general as shrewd as Jackson would probably have put men with guns they were most familiar with and best able to handle.

That the principal gun in Battery no. 7 was an old Spanish 15-pounder is certainly possible; it may even be probable. Some of the guns in Fort St. Charles were 18-pounders.²⁵ This place had been Fort San Carlos in Spanish times, and if one of these cannon had been properly mounted and brought down the river, it would account for "the old Spanish culverin" mentioned by some writers. Such a gun with its picturesque mouldings would certainly add much to the pleasure of visitors to Chalmette National Historical Park.

23. Journal, 107, (Dec. 23)

24. All stories of the campaign agree on this.

25. Clement, "Truth is No Slander" most easily found as quoted in Clement and Landry, Plantation Life on the Mississippi, 112

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The other gun in Battery no. 7 might well have been one of the 4-pounders with Gribeauval carriages left by the French in New Orleans.

The most nearly satisfactory solution of the mystery of Battery no. 8 is that the gun there was one of the 6-inch howitzers with Gribeauval carriages also left by the French.²⁶

It would be invaluable if one of the old cannon now on display in and near New Orleans could be shown to have actually been on Jackson's line on January 8, 1815. We have measured and photographed a number of these, and sent the data to an ordnance expert for identification. In his opinion, some of them are old enough to have been used in the campaign. Documentary evidence of their location, now lacking, may come to light at any time.²⁷

26. Birkhimer, op. cit., 232. Referring to Butler's story, in Buell, an old man might well remember a 6-inch gun as a 6-pounder. This French artillery was one of the prizes Aaron Burr intended to seize (see Abernethy, Burr Conspiracy, 76) and it is likely that these guns with Gribeauval carriages were the best in that part of the world then, and an important reason for the defeat of the English.

27. Photographs and other data, and correspondence with Edwin N. Rich in Chalmette NHP files.

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