CIVIL WAR ARTILLERY TERMS

"Light is not opposite of heavy"

FOOT ARTILLERY: Official but seldom used term for what commonly was called "Heavy" artillery. Foot batteries generally manned coastal or river fortifications mounting large, immobile guns like Rodmans or the larger Parrotts. During the war, many Union "heavies" served in the defenses of Washington. Some foot batteries were equipped with medium-sized pieces known as "siege" guns; 30-pdr Parrott, for example. These were mounted on heavy, but relatively mobile, siege carriages which allowed them to follow in the wake of the army and be emplaced in temporary positions whenever the troops were likely to remain in one place for a while. While these heavies were used in the field they were called siege artillery, not field artillery. The expression, "foot artillery", also has been used colloquially to mean artillerymen armed and serving as infantry.

FIELD ARTILLERY: Official term for those batteries assigned to operate in the field with either infantry or cavalry; commonly, but incorrectly, called "Light" artillery. Standard field pieces included the Model 1841 6 and 12-pdrs, 10-pdr Parrot Rifles, 3-in Ordnance Rifles, and the "Model 1857 light 12-pdr gun-howitzer" or "Napoleon". The Field Artillery was itself subdivided into two functional groups called MOUNTED and HORSE artillery. Again, a given unit could be assigned to either.

MOUNTED ARTILLERY: Official and extremely confusing term for those field batteries assigned to operate with infantry. It was and is confusing because "Mounted" artillery was NOT mounted. The drivers, of course, rode and the rest of the men occasionally would "mount" the limbers whenever speed was required. But generally, like the infantrymen with whom they worked, the "mounted" artillerymen walked. This sometimes results in the added confusion of having them referred to as "foot" artillery. This somewhat strange usage originated with the structure of the artillery as of 1838. Before that date, the men of an artillery company were divided into distinct groups of drivers and cannoneers. These men wore different uniforms, received different rates of pay, and were not cross-trained in each other's duties. Drivers, moreover, doubled as cavalry and were considered "mounted" troops, while cannoneers doubled as infantry and were considered "foot" soldiers. In 1838, however, these distinctions were eliminated. No longer was there a separate class of drivers who rode while the cannoneers walked. Henceforth, the men were cross trained and each would ride whenever assigned to be a driver. Thus, all of the men occasionally were "mounted." This branch of the artillery kept the "Mounted" designation simply to distinguish itself from the "Foot" artillery. Less frequently, but more accurately, the term 'Harnessed" artillery also was used to identify the "Mounted" artillerymen.

HORSE ARTILLERY: Official term for those field batteries assigned to work with cavalry. In order to keep up with the troopers, each horse artilleryman rode his own horse, a practice devised by Frederick the Great in the mid-18th century and formally adopted by the U.S. Army shortly before the Mexican War. Thus, the "horse" artillery was mounted and the "mounted" artillery was not, leading to frequent but understandable confusion of the terms. Today, when someone refers to "mounted" artillery, it is a safe bet that he means "horse" artillery.

In the Army of the Potomac, for example, the number of horse artillery batteries (often called simply "horse batteries") varied during the war but never exceeded twelve. These were organized into formal "Horse Artillery Brigades", similar in some ways to the Confederate "battalions," and assigned to the cavalry as needed. Except for short periods of service by the *6th New York Independent Battery* and the 9th Michigan Battery, the Horse Artillery Brigades consisted exclusively of regulars. All other field batteries were "mounted" artillery.

A further distinction between horse batteries and their mounted counterparts was in the use of side arms. As a general rule, mounted artillerymen carried neither pistol nor saber, while horse artillerymen almost always carried revolvers and frequently, sabers as well (though, of course, they did not wear the sabers while working their guns). Moreover, horse artillerymen often were cross-trained as cavalry (many of them, in fact, being transfers from the cavalry) and those men not actually serving the guns might be out on the flanks as battery supports to free up the troopers for other duties.

LIGHT ARTILLERY: In artillery, "light" is not the opposite of "heavy". "Foot" equals "Heavy" but "Field" does not equal "Light", even though "light artillery" is almost universally used as a synonym for "field artillery." Historically and technically, the term is more limited and means only "horse artillery."

Numerous Union and Confederate batteries had the word "Light" in their names. But unless they were formally assigned to and regularly operated with cavalry, each cannoneer being individually mounted, they were not light batteries regardless of that they called themselves.

"Light", in this context, has nothing to do with the size or weight of the guns used, but refers only to speed. With the cannoneers individually mounted, a battery could travel much faster - was, so to speak, lighter on its feet - than when the men had to walk or hang precariously from a limber. In short, "light" artillery is "horse" artillery.

In the Federal service, light batteries, it is true, were usually equipped with the relatively lightweight (800 lbs) Ordnance Rifles to make it easier for them to keep up with the cavalry (for the same reason their limber chests did not carry as many rounds as the chests of a mounted Ordnance Rifle battery). Several light batteries, however, were armed with the much heavier (1200 lbs) Napoleons. For these units, speed and mobility were achieved through the use of 8-horse, rather than the normal 6-horse, teams. Mounted Napoleon batteries naturally used the standard-sized team.

FLYING ARTILLERY: Occasionally used during the Civil War, this unofficial and rather romantic term was popularized during the Mexican War and also means "light" or "horse" artillery. It is a reference to the comparatively high maneuvering speeds of these batteries and was used admiringly, much as we might comment on the speed of a runner by saying, "He can really fly!". Like the term "light," however, it sometimes is misapplied to field artillery in general.