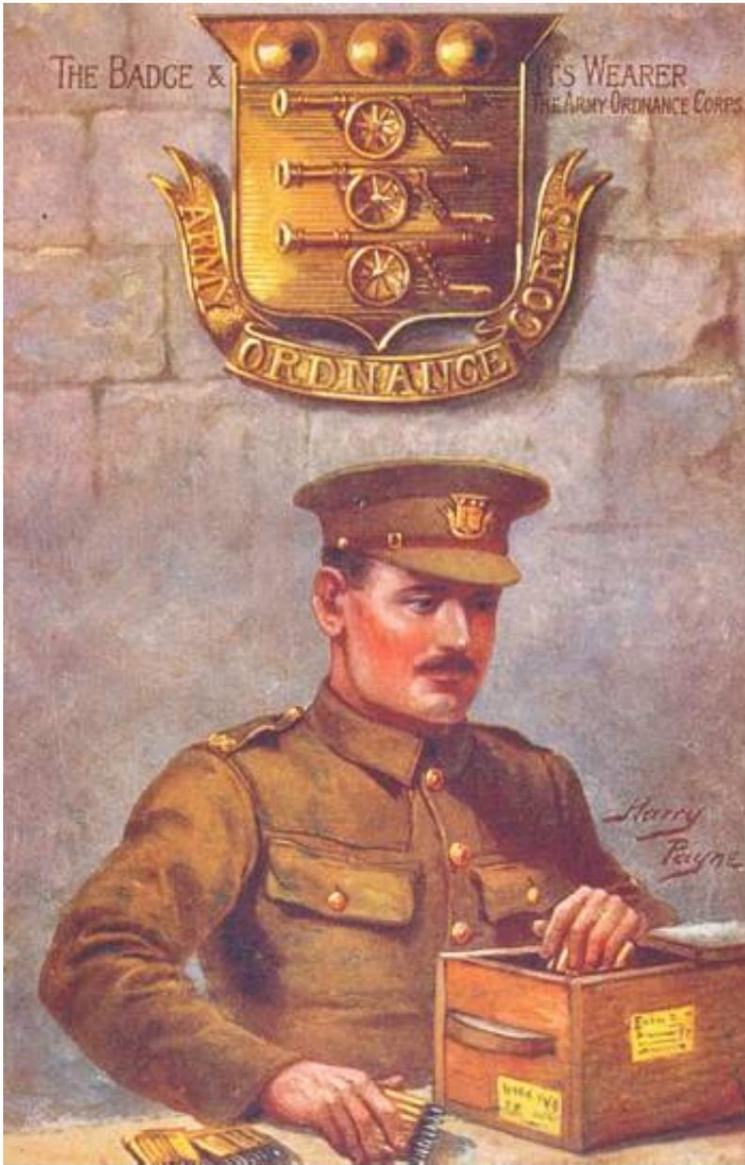


Army Ordnance Corps

Introduction

An interesting postcard which I have just added to my collection gave me occasion to read up on the history of the Army Ordnance Corps, which may not be among the best known, but without whose work not much warfare would be possible.

The postcard



The Army Ordnance Corps, ca. 1914.

Drawn by Harry Payne.

Postcard from Series II of *"Regimental badges and their Wearer"*, No. 8491, published by Raphael Tuck & Sons "Oilette", issued during the First World War.

The following corps history is printed on the back of the card:

"The work of the ordnance of the Army was originally done by civilians until comparatively recent times, when a corps of artificers was formed under the title of "The Ordnance Store Corps". This title was afterwards altered to the present one and is now known as the Army Ordnance Corps. The badge is

adopted from the old ordnance badge of the Duke of Marlborough's days. This badge is still in existence on the walls of the Tower of London. The duty of the corps is to look after the supply of munitions and stores for the Army."

Series 8491 includes the following cards, all with corps/regimental insignia and a figure in khaki uniform:

- Royal Army Medical Corps
- Army Ordnance Corps
- Army Service Corps Royal
- Flying Corps Seaforth
- Highlanders

Army Ordnance Corps

The corps can be seen as a parallel to the Danish Army's Technical Corps 1) (HTK), which [in](#) 1962 became the Army's Material Command (HMAK).

In England, some of the earliest records of a *Clerk to the Ordnance date* from 1418, while the later Army Ordnance Corps arose in 1881 i.a. on the basis of the experiences from the Crimean War (1854-1856). The corps' task was to provide and maintain all items of equipment, weapons and ammunition that the army needed - in both war and peace. In connection with this, items stored in the army's mobilization depots were included.

The officers of the corps, all drawn from other regiments and corps, were attached to The Army Ordnance Department (created in 1875), while NCOs and enlisted men were enlisted in the Army Ordnance Corps.

The corps had non-combatant status, a situation that lasted until approx. 1940.

Glimpses of the corps' work during the First World War



Army Ordnance Corps - Manufacture of boots, 1915.

From Source 4.

The Expeditionary Corps, which was sent to France in August 1914, included eight companies from the Army Ordnance Corps, designated the *1st - 8th Ordnance Company*.

The need for the supply items for which the corps was responsible exceeded in every respect all imaginings that had been made in peacetime, including not least the need for ammunition.

A very large number of civilians were therefore involved in the manufacturing work, including a large number of women who participated in the manufacture of ammunition.



Army Ordnance Corps - Depot with pontoon wagons and wooden wagons, 1915.
From Source 3.

Numerous depots sprang up in the hinterland wherever the English army was stationed.

Equipment and material items of all kinds were prepared here before they were handed over to the users.

There was also extensive recycling, which, in the words of Kilde 4 today, would please even the most recycling-oriented people.

Equipment and weapons belonging to the wounded and dead were collected from the battlefields, so that the objects - after cleaning and maintenance - could be handed over again.

In the early years of the war, the army's operations were greatly hampered by a shortage of artillery ammunition, as the stocks available were quickly used up.

On 9 June 1915, a special Ministry of Munitions [2\)](#) was established, which was given the task of systematizing the production of ammunition, including, not least, providing the extensive workforce needed to be able to produce the enormous quantities that were needed. The number of munitions factories grew from 4 at the beginning of the war to 298 at the end of the war.

As an ever-increasing proportion of the able-bodied male population served in the army and navy, the labor pool thus consisted of women who eagerly took up this new challenge.

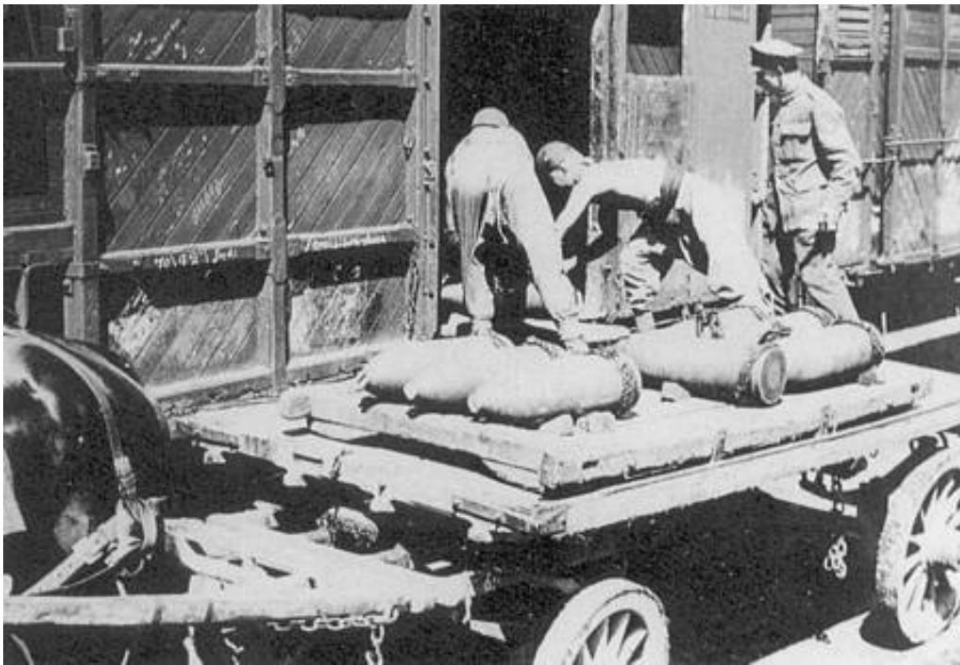


Women Munitions Workers, 1918.

From Source 4.

In their thousands, the women now worked in shifts of 8-12 hours in the many munitions factories. A workforce that consisted mainly of women also necessitated considerations e.g. for maternity leave and childcare, conditions that seem common today, but which were, if not unknown, then not common at the time.

Security was not equally high in all places, and explosions were not uncommon, resulting in deaths and injuries.



Ammunition transport in France, 1918.

From Source 4.

Also closer to the front, large groups of civilian workers were conscripted into service, e.g. large groups of Chinese.

Source 4 thus states that the two men with naked torsos are precisely Chinese workers.



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Preparation of artillery pamphlets prior to issue, 1917.

From Source 4.

At the front of the picture is an 8" howitzer, Mark 1-5. See, for example, my article [About the English 8-inch howitzer 1915-1940](#) for a more detailed description of this pamphlet.

Closing

The Army Ordnance Corps was in 1918 elevated to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, in recognition of the extensive service the Corps had rendered during the war.

Several restructurings of the British Army Supply Service followed in the following decades, most recently on 5 April 1993, when the Royal Army Ordnance Corps became part of the new Royal Logistics Corps, which also includes the former units Royal Corps of Transport, Royal Pioneer Corps, the Army Catering Corps and the postal and courier service, formerly under the Royal Engineers.

Sources

1. *For Queen and Country - The Career of Harry Payne, Military Artist 1858-1927* af Michael Cane, published by the author, Surrey 1977.
2. *ABC of the Army* by Captain J. Atkinson (editor), Gale & Polden, Aldershot, 1910.
3. *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1914* af James E. Edmonds, Macmillan & Co., London 1933.
4. *The Logistic Corps and its Predecessors* Tidsskriftet Regiment Nr. 23, august 1997.

The website [Glasgow Digital Library](#) contains a section - Red Clydeside - about the Scottish labor movement, including The Ministry of Munitions and the working conditions in the munitions factories are discussed.

Per Finsted

To note:

1) *Textbook for the Army's privates* described in 1950 as follows: "*The Army's Technical Corps consists of the army's weapons arsenal and the army's ammunition arsenal. The corps manufactures, in cooperation with civilian industry, the majority of the army's materiel, especially weapons and ammunition.*"

2) The royal decree that formed the legal basis is reproduced on the Gathering the Jewels website. The first Minister of Munitions became the later Secretary of War and Prime Minister, David Lloyd George (1863-1945).