LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CAVITATION
From: Brigadier A. MacLENNAN, O.B.E., M.B.

Sir—I would congratulate Major F. P. Thoresby, M.B., B.S., for his most excellent article on “Cavitation” in your April number of the Corps Journal which I read with great interest. I note that my brother—the late J. D. MacLennan—provided some of the background material for the article and I am prompted to provide some additional information—but on firearms and not anaerobes!

Firstly I would question the accuracy of Wilson’s statements (made in 1921) that the use of a patch in a rifle was originated by an American in the 1720’s and that this raised the muzzle velocity from 500 to 2000 feet per second. While nobody will dispute that it was in America—following the introduction by German immigrants in the early 1700’s of the jaeger type rifle—that the muzzle loading flintlock rifle reached its peak of development, this was achieved by reducing the calibre of the rifle, increasing the length of the barrel (to allow the slow burning powder to produce its maximum power) and by the use of a greased patch to facilitate loading. I have yet to be convinced that the greased patch was invented in America because the lubrication of rifle bullets by tallow or by a greased patch was in use in Europe from early times as the presence of butt-traps and boxes for patches in the stocks of 16th and 17th century rifles indicates. In the 1720’s the relatively poor quality black powder charges in use were incapable of producing a muzzle-velocity of 2000 feet per second—all the more so when in addition, one remembers the poor aerodynamic properties of the bullet (a round soft lead ball) and that the rifle barrels were of iron and incapable of standing up to repeated heavy charges. Only at the very end of the black powder era (in the 1880’s) did sporting rifles with very heavy charges of top-grade powder, steel barrels and conical bullets, get anywhere near a muzzle velocity of 2000 feet per second. My own guess is that in the 18th century the muzzle velocity of rifles would have been 1000-1200 feet per second with the lower figure as the commoner.

Secondly, it was the Lee-Metford which appeared in 1888 and not the Lee-Enfield Mk. I as stated. The substitution of cordite for black powder in the service cartridges in the 1890’s caused undue wear in the Metford barrels and in consequence they were replaced by Enfield barrels, the resulting weapon being known as the Lee-Enfield. Issues of the Lee-Enfield were first made in 1895.

Should Major Thoresby be interested I would be pleased to demonstrate the above points to him from my collection of military firearms which covers the period under discussion and includes three muzzle-loading rifles using patches and excellent examples of the Lee-Metford and Lee-Enfield rifles.

Inspector of Army Medical Services,

Ministry of Defence,
Landsdowne House,
Berkeley Square,

21st April, 1966.

JOHNSTON’S ROLL OF COMMISSIONED OFFICERS IN THE MEDICAL SERVICES OF THE BRITISH ARMY

From: Major-General R. E. BARNsLEY, C.B., M.C., late R.A.M.C. (Retd.)

Sir—The Ogilby Trust, which was formed to maintain regimental tradition and to help all army museums, has accumulated a large number of records relating to all regiments and corps of the Army. The Secretary is very anxious to acquire our “Johnston’s Roll of Commissioned Officers in the Medical Services of the British Army” published in 1917. If any retired officers or unit libraries have a copy of this book they are willing to dispose of I would be very grateful if they would let me know.

The Trust would of course be very willing to pay the market price.

R.A.M.C. Historical Museum,
Keogh Barracks,
Ash Vale,
Nr. Aldershot, Hants.


Mr. H. F. J. Barnett

Officers of the Corps met in the Royal Army Medical Corps Headquarter Mess on 27th April, 1966 to say farewell to Mr. H. F. J. Barnett, the Mess Steward, who is retiring. The Director General, making a presentation to Mr. and Mrs. Barnett on behalf of the officers, thanked Mr. Barnett for his service of nearly forty years to the Corps and Mrs. Barnett for her willing help in the Mess behind the scenes. We feel that many generations of the Corps would like us to add their thanks and to wish Mr. and Mrs. Barnett happiness and good health in the future.