DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY ART, UNITED STATES ARTILLERY SCHOOL.

ESSAY.

Assuming the Present Defenseless Condition of the Sea-Board of the United States, what Military Policy and action should obtain in the event of a Sudden Declaration of War by a Foreign Power.

—BY—

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Assuming the Present Defenseless Condition of the Sea-Board of the United States, what Military Policy and Action should obtain in the Event of a Sudden Declaration of War by a Foreign Power.

The policy of the United States on the question of the national defense has for many years been remarkable.

Suppose the great city of New York were to have neglected to build a single steam fire engine, but to have intrusted the safety of its many millions of property from fire, to a few very old hand engines, manned by a small though well trained squad of paid firemen, justifying its economical course by the argument that: —

1st. The people are so careful and intelligent that fire is not likely to occur, and would be extinguished in its incipiency if it were to break out anywhere.

2nd. If, however, a conflagration should be produced by a long state of drougth assisted by a high wind, the Mayor would have no trouble in ordering any number of steam fire engines built, as good as any city has and could get any number of volunteer firemen to man them.

Would not such a course be analogous to our trusting our national safety against foreign war to: —

1st. Our isolation and the peace-loving character of our people and,

2nd. Our wealth of resources, material and personnel, and our ingenuity?

In deciding on "what military policy and action should obtain in the event of a sudden declaration of war by a foreign power" in our present condition, there is not much literature to draw upon.

What *should be done*, while there is still time to *prepare*, has received the attention of many writers, professional and lay, and the annual recommendations of the "Board of Engineers for Fortifications," approved by the Chief of Engineers, the same from year to year, constitute a small library; and I might

cite them as authority for saying that nothing could save us, were any powerful maritime nation to attack us.

In discussing this subject it will be well to ascertain in what way and to what extent "our sea board" is "defenseless." On this subject the Board of Engineers says: —

"In the event of war with a maritime nation, if we had no well digested system of fortifications ready for use, the cruisers and war vessels of the enemy could run into our harbor, and, without landing, could either destroy the property along our shores or else lay our cities under contribution."

As to our isolation, it might be expressed mathematically by the *square root of a negative quantity.*

"There are foreign military and naval depots and arsenals in close proximity and the arrival of armed vessels will follow in a few days or hours the declaration of war."

"Thirty six hours' steaming could bring them from Halifax; six hours could bring them from Havanna; and ninety-six hours from Victoria, Vancouver's Island, could bring them in front of San Francisco, the navy yard at Mare Island, and the arsenal at Benicia."

"There might be very little time for prepartion, to meet the assaults of these fast running, seagoing, armored ships, ships clad with six to twenty-four inches of iron armor, carrying rifled guns from 9 inches to 17 inches bore. With even a single vessel of the kind in one of our harbors it would be of no avail to collect troops in the city or town threatened."

"Suppose, with our railroad facilities, we could concentrate 100,000 men in 24 hours at the point threatened, of what use would they be against the armored ship?" They might, in a night, throw up temporary earthworks, and hastily mount, on improvised platforms, a few light guns, such as 32 and 42 pounders and even 100-pdr. rifles, by almost superhuman efforts; but if their projectiles disturbed the rest of any one on the armored ship, she would simply move beyond their range, and, with her 800 to 2000 pounders, peirce the earthworks through and through, dismount the guns, and explode the magazines on shore.

The neglect of suitable preparation cost France many millions of treasure, a portion of her territory, and a great humiliation and "the disasters of the first three months of a war under the present condition of our defenses might cost the nation tenfold the expenditure that would be needed to thoroughly protect our sea coast against attack."

A powerful enemy may wage war against us: —

"1st. By attacking our commerce and navigation upon the ocean. As,

however, no military preparation on the shore can avert this danger and the means of meeting it are purely naval, these means do not now fall under consideration."

"2nd. By assailing one or more of the important points of the coast with a large military and naval force, with a view to immediate damage, or more or less protracted occupation."

"3rd. By suddenly appearing with a large squadron of vessels before our principal commercial cities, laying them under contribution, and burning, or carrying off the shipping, and by making powerful attacks upon our navy yards in order to destroy those establishments."

"4th. By attacks on smaller towns and establishments of the coast with small squadrons or single vessels, or with privateers, capturing or destroying the shipping therein, and levying contributions, and by like means intercepting the interior commerce within the bays, sounds, and estuaries of the coast; these lesser enterprises being often conducted under the countenance and support of considerable fleets."

Our means of defense are :—

1st. 1177 officers and 25,000 men, Regular Army,

2nd. 87,000 organized militia or state troops,

3rd. A small navy of excellent officers and men and very inferior ships.

"Old casemated works, designed long before the introduction of the 800 to 2000 pounder rifled guns into modern warfare ; their walls pierced for guns long since out of date ; without iron armor or shields, and but partially armed with the old ordnance ; with old earthworks some of them built in the last century ; with new ones for modern guns and mortars but partially built and rapidly being destroyed by the elements by reason of their incompletion ; with gun batteries without guns and mortar batteries without mortars ; with no carriages whatever for barbette guns of large size except such as require the cannoneers to load from the tops of the parapets, from which they can be picked off in detail by the enemy's sharpshooters ; with an excellent defensive torpedo system, but partially carried into effect; with but a very small number of our works prepared with the torpedo casemates and galleries necessary for securing the electrical apparatus from the enemies fire, and for conducting the electrical wires to the torpedo lines which must be laid when the day of trial comes, and with less than 200 engineer soldiers educated for torpedo and other engineer service," though 780 would be required for the 30 channels that would need to be defended thoroughly.

What the Board of Engineers propose as necessary for our defense is here pertinent :—

"Fortifications must command from the shores exterior to our harbors all the waters from which the enemy can reach our cities and navy-yards with his shot and shell; the harbor mouths and all the narrow passes within them, must also be occupied, and if nature has not afforded all the positions deemed requisite, others must, if practicable, be formed artificially. Fortifications should succeed each other along the channels of approach and in our harbors, so that the enemy may nowhere find shelter from our fire while lying within our harbors, should he succeed in passing the outer lines of works. The harbor mouths and channels must be obstructed by lines of electrical torpedoes for holding the enemy's vessels under fire of the fortifications, previously constructed and stored in the latter, and laid, on the advent of war in systems, the plans of which have been carefully elaborated in time of peace, by studies of the local charts and tidal currents, each harbor having its own system recorded in this department. The wires, for conducting the current from the electric apparatus on shore, must at the same time be laid securely in subterranean galleries carried out to deep water, and the electric machines themselves—the hearts of the torpedo system—must be placed in chambers within the fortifications, hidden from the enemy, and secured beyond all peradventure from his direct and curved fire. The galleries and chambers must be covered with heavy masonry arches and great masses of earth, and the former, to be efficient, must be indurated, and the latter compacte l by time. The torpedo lines must be served by officers selected from the Engineers and the Artillery, assisted by detachments from the Torpedo Corps of of intelligent and skilled engineer soldier, and both officers and men must be thoroughly instructed in the theory and practice of electricity and torpedo obstructions; for they must know how to render the torpedoes instantly harmless for our own vessels, or active against an enemy's."

"Heavy mortars must be placed in large numbers to command all those positions where an enemy is likely to anchor within their range, either for the purpose of tampering with, or destroying our torpedo lines, or shelling our cities and public depots of military and naval supplies. The efficiency of mortar batteries against shipping is acknowledged by all military engineers; it is fully appreciated by the navies of all nations, and they are comparatively inexpensive."

"Our guns and mortars most be capable of peircing the sides of his iron clads and of breaking in his decks, and they must be mounted in numbers sufficient to make it impossible for any of his fast running war steamers to get past our works." (See Note 1, appendix).

It would no doubt be very annoying to build turrets, barbette, and mortar batteries, &c. after war is declared, and the enemy at hand.

Our situation is very like that of an easy-going man who was taken to task for not mending his leaky roof by a friend who had taken shelter in his house during a rain storm. "You wouldn't have me get out there in the rain and repair it, would you?" he replied. "When it doesn't rain the roof doesn't leak."

In peace we need no fortifications, and in war it might be too dangerous to build them.

As a fair sample of the twaddle that has contributed to our present want of preparation, a leading Chicago newspaper[2] recently said :—

"The fellows that sneer at 'our little army' and our 'old hulk of a Navy' forget that there are 50.000.000 of people behind them. Uncle Sam can move that old flag from the top of the national capitol, or from some peak on the Rocky Mountains, and sound a bugle call, and ships would fall in line, and 1.500.000 men would answer 'Ready'."

The chairman of the house sub-committe on fortifications is reported[3] to have said only January 25th 1886, that he did not think "a large appropriations for fortifications necessary."

"The country was in no danger ; the moral force of fifty million people was a strong defense. It was not fortifications we needed now ; it was guns. There was no use for a fort without ordnance. We could prevent any hostile vessel or fleet from entering any of our rivers ; we had guns that could sink a vessel at a thousand yards. No fleet could get up the Potomac to take Washington. The only thing, he said, was that they might stand outside the harbor and shell New York, or Boston, or Philadelphia, but the danger of this he thought was greatly exaggerated, ('shelling dont amount to anything'." He thinks the shelling of Vera Cruz showed *that*, and that the Mexicans got frightened, but Americans would never have given up the city.

I cannot do better here than give an account of the latest naval attack upon works such as ours.

On July 11th. 1882, the british fleet bombarded Alexandria, Egypt.

This port is defended by a large number of forts, redoubts, and of towers commanding the passes, the entrance of the passes and even the open sea ; but the greater part of these works being poorly armed were incapable of serious opposition to the English ships.

An article in the "Revue d' Artillerie[4]" says, that" besides a few 10 inch 18 ton, and 9 inch 12 ton Armstrong guns, the only guns capable of piercing the armor of the English ships, and a few rifled guns of lower calibre, the

greater part of the guns were cast iron smooth bores, the projectiles of which had neither range nor accuracy, and still less power of penetration."

Fort Marabout, one of the most important, was armed with four heavy guns, two 10″ 18 ton and two 9″ 12 ton; thirty 32 pounder smooth bores and five mortars. Fort Mex, an earthwork, had 31 pieces, 4 of heavy calibre.

In these, and the works ranging along the old harbor, were mounted 56 guns of various calibres.

On the other side of the old harbor was Fort Phare, built of masonry and armed with one 10″ 18 ton, four 9″ 12 ton, and about twenty 64 pounder smooth bores. There were also numerous batteries along the shore, abutting against the Ras-el-tin palace, designed for 17 guns of large calibre.

Then there was the 8 inch Armstrong gun on a Moncrieff carriage at the old hospital, and Fort Ada (masonry) of at least one 10″ 18 ton Armstrong.

Fort Napoleon, sweeping a considerable portion of the inner harbor, had one 10″ 18 ton gun.

The Garrison was placed at from 7000 to 8000 men, only 700 of whom were artillery men.

Here we see a state of affairs very similar to our own, namely, masonry forts and earthworks, poorly armed and garrisoned, so close to the city that it might have been shelled by the fleet at such range as to subject the ships to little danger from the shore batteries.

But the works had five 10″ 18 ton, six 9″ 12 ton and one 8″ guns, all superior to any we have at our most important harbor.

The English fleet consisted of 8 iron clads and five gun boats; the armament was 4—16″ 80 ton, 4— 12″ 25 ton, 6—11″ 25 ton, 38—10″ 18 ton, 22—9″ 12 ton, 12—8″ 9 ton and 2—6½″ 7 ton,—a total of 86 rifled guns of eight inch calibre or greater.

A few 10″ 18 ton Armstrong guns only, out of the entire armament of the Egyptians, had sufficient power to penetrate the armor of the English ships with the exception, however, of that of the *Inflexible*.

The bombardment lasted eight hours from the ships. The Forts, firing but a few hours, were in turn silenced by the concentration of the fire from several ships or gun boats.

Though difficult to give a correct account of the effects produced by the English projectiles upon the defensive works, they were all roughly handled; and the batteries at Fort Mex, and the works at Ras-el-tin were reduced to a condition of the utmost confusion, many guns being dismounted and one turned completely over.

The gun on the Moncrieff carriage, though worked long within sight of the ships, remained uninjured.

Several ships were hit, but the *Suberb* only had her armor pierced, which happened twice. The gun boats were not hurt, thanks to their small size.

It is sure that as large a number of vessels as the above would be sent against us, were we to have war with England, and they might combine in assaulting some one of our harbors, or act singly, or in smaller groups, at several.

To show what dismay and confusion would probably arise at the War Department in case of sudden foreign war, I will detail a few measures that were adopted in March 1862, when the civil war had been going on over a year, and we had 600.000 men in active service[5].

On March 9th. 1862, the Secretary of War sent the following dispatch to the governors of New York, Massachusetts, and Maine. "The opinion of the naval commanders here is, that the Merrimac will not venture to sea, but they advise that immediate preparations be made to guard against the dangers to our ports by large timber rafts, protected by batteries. They regard timber rafts, guarded by batteries, as the best protection for temporary purposes.

General Totten says do not neglect the batteries."

This sounds like the old French cry of *sauve qui peut.*

Th same day General McClellan telegraphed the commanding officers of Fort Delaware; Fort Mifflin; New York Harbor, New York; Newport R. I.; Fort Trumbull, New London; Boston Harbor; and Portland Maine:—

"The Rebel iron-clad Merrimac has destroyed two of our frigates near Fort Monroe and finally retired to Craney Island. She may succeed in passing the batteries and go to sea. It is necessary that you at once place your post in the best possible condition for defense, and do your best to stop her should she endeavor to run by. Anything that can be effected in the way of temporary batteries should be done at once."

The same date the Assistant Secretary of War sent the following:—

"War Department, March 9th, 1862.

Henry B. Renwick, Esq.,

21 Fifth Avenue, corner 9th. Street, New York.

The Merrimac, an armor-clad vessel belonging to the rebels, issued from Norfolk yesterday, and captured several of the United States blockading vessels, and threatens to sweep our whole flotilla from Chesapeake Bay. Under these circumstances it is of the last importance to capture or destroy the Merrimac, and the whole wealth and power of the United States will be at