Jean Baptiste de Vacquette de Gribeauval was born in Amiens on 15 September 1715 to a middle class Amiens lawyer [Passac (1816) 3]. In 1732 aged of 17, he entered the garrison Artillery School at La Fère where Bernard Forest de Belidor (1698-1761), famous for being the founder of the science of modern ballistics, taught him. The Royal Ordinance of 7 October 1732 introduced the M1732 Vallière System that reduced to 4-, 8-, 12-, 16- and 24-pdr guns. [Susane (1874) 168]

**Officer in the Corps-Royale de l’Artillerie**

On completing his education at La Fère in 1735, Gribeauval was commissioned into the officer only Corps-Royale de l’Artillerie as officier-pointeur [Hennebert (1896) 22]. The Corps-Royal de l’Artillerie was established in 1668 as an officer only “Inspectorate of Artillery”. It was very similar to the Board of Ordnance in Britain and was distinct to the Regiment Royal Artillerie which served the guns. [Picard (1906) 2] It was commanded by premier lieutenant general de l’artillerie. [Picard (1906) 11] This all-officer institution formed the basis of the provincial organisation of the artillery. The personnel were distributed among the 240 garrisons, arsenals and fortresses. Their tasks included an annual examination of fortresses in every province, surveillance of the naval armouries, the foundries, the factories and supplies in addition to the examination of the artillery schools and the fortress artillery. [Picard (1906) 8]

Each of thirteen Départements Généaux de l’Artillerie [provincial artillery department] was commanded by a lieutenant-général d’artillerie. In 1753, the Corps-Royal de l’Artillerie had 48 lieutenant-provinciaux, 61 commissaires-provinciaux, 70 commissaires-ordinaires, 69 commissaires-extraordinaires and 78 officiers-pointeurs. In wartime, these were employed with the field army to supervise the artillery train and in sieges. In 1755, the Corps-Royal de l’Artillerie merged with the Regiment Royal-Artillerie upon the death of their last Grand-Maître de l’Artillerie [Grand Master of Artillery], Duc du Maine. [Picard (1906) 11]

In 1740, the War of Austrian Succession started when France, Bavaria, Prussia and Saxony objected to the succession of the husband of Maria Theresa of Austria as the Holy Roman Emperor. Austria was allied to Britain and Russia.
On 15 April 1743, Gribeauval was promoted to commissaire-extraordinaire of the Corps-Royal de l'Artillerie. The newly promoted Gribeauval, first saw active service with the main army with the artillery and siege train in the German campaign. He was present at Dettingen (27 June 1743) where the French Army under Marshals under Noailles and De Grammont were defeated by the Anglo-Hanoverian-Austrian Army of George II. [Nardin (1982) 32] Between 1744 and 1747, he was in Flanders serving under Duc de Noailles and Marshal de Saxe at the sieges of Courtrai, Menin, Ypres, Furnes, Gand, Alost, Bruges, Audenarde, Ostend, Nieuport, Bergen-op-Zoom and Maastricht. His competence at these sieges was rewarded by being promoted to commissaire ordinaire in the Corps-Royal de l’Artillerie on 20 February 1747. [Naulet (2002) 128]

In 1747, Jean-Florent de Vallière [Senior] (1667-1759) retired from his post as Directeur General de l’Artillerie that he held since 1720 and was replaced by his son, Jean Florent de Vallière [Junior] (1717-76). The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (24 April 1748) ended the War of Austrian Succession. The status quo in Europe was restored.

**M1749 Gribeauval Garrison Carriage (Prototype)**

In September 1748, whilst in garrison duty in Cherbourg, he proposed the M1749 Garrison Carriage from a modified naval carriage but only one prototype was constructed. [Fave (1871) IV: 144-5, Dollaczek (1887) 335] This carriage was characterised by a medium sized solid trailing wheel on the fixed trail end and high carriage cheeks that were built-up in a series of steps. This carriage had the advantage of being able to fire over flat embrasures and so was less likely to be damaged by fire from enemy siege guns.

In April 1749, the prototype of the M1749 Gribeauval Garrison Gun was constructed and tested at Douai. Vallière (Director of the Artillery) was not impressed and so it was not adopted. [Naulet (2002) 129-130]

In 1751, the report by Comte de Thomassin revived interest in the Gribeauval Garrison carriage but it still was not put into production. [Naulet (2002) 130]
Captain of Miners

In 1752, he transferred from the Corps-Royal de l’Artillerie and was promoted to Capitaine [First Captain] in the Corps des Mineurs [Corps of Miners] which was attached to the Régiment Royal Artillerie from 1706 and officered by the artillery.

Gribeauval’s visit to Prussia (1755)

In February 1754, Lt-Col Washington with a detachment of Virginia militia built Fort Necessity. After vigorous resistance, Fort Necessity capitulated to the French on 3 July and Washington was able to march out with the honours of war. This started the undeclared French-Indian War in North America that caused France to send more troops to Canada in 1755.

With the increasing signs of full scale war between Britain and France, Comte Marc-Pierre D’Argenson, the Secretary of State for War discovered that Frederick II of Prussia was about to adopt a new battalion gun. France had been allied with Prussia since 1741. [Nardin (1982) 38]

On 21 February 1755, D’Argenson wrote to Chevalier de la Touché (French Ambassador to Berlin) for details of the new Prussian ordnance. [Nardin (1982) 40-41] The questions included and were similar to those asked of the Austrian Artillery in March 1762 [See Smith (Dec 2010) 2(06)]

1. How many pieces per battalion?
2. What are the dimension, weight and calibre of the piece?
3. What is the number of men that serve the cannon?
4. How many draft horses are used for the pieces and the carriages?

Frederick II was reluctant to permit access to the information and only after a series of letters did he relent to permit a French officer to study the new cannon. [Nardin (1982) 41-42]

On 6 April 1755, Gribeauval who was still only a Captain in the Corps des Mineurs was chosen by Comte Marc-Pierre D’Argenson, the Secretary of State for War to study the new Dieskau M1754 3-pdr battalion gun. En route he was expected to study the condition of the border and fortresses that he travelled through to Berlin. [Passac (1816) 6] On 20 May 1755, Gribeauval arrived in Berlin with the 4,000 Livre provided by D’Argenson and a letter of introduction to the French Ambassador. On 29 May, he was given full access to the battalion gun. [Nardin (1982) 43-44]

On 9 June, Gribeauval returned to Paris with the model that had previously been requested. [Nardin (1982) 46] Gribeauval wrote an official report that he liked the manœuvrevability but observed that it lacked sufficient hitting power. He also gave the following details of the 3-pdr that he examined.

“…The 3-pdr battalion gun firing a 2½ livre (c1.4kg) ball had a conical chamber for the gunpowder charge

… It was much shorter, lighter and more mobile than the French M1740 4-pdr «Canon a la Suédoise»

…. The Prussian 3-pdr could be fired 2-3 times per minute and was pulled by three horses [in single draft]

…. Two pieces were attached to each 665 man battalion and were served by 9 gunners and 7 men detached from the battalion. An artillery lieutenant commanded the pieces from four battalions.”

On 1 November 1755, the Duc du Maine died and the post of Grand Maitre de l’Artillerie who commanded the Corps-Royal de l’Artillerie was abolished. This gave the opportunity to merge this with the Régiment Royal-Artillerie.

On 8 December 8 1755, Louis XV instructed the formation of Corps-Royal de l’Artillerie et du Génie by merging the technical services of the artillery, miners, artificers and engineers. The new directeur de corps de l’artillerie et génie was who was Jean Florent de Vallière [Junior] (1717-76). [Picard (1906) 11-12]:–

- Régiment Royal-Artillerie [Soucy, Bourqueseelden, La Motte, de Chabrié & Ménonville Bns],
- Mineur companies [Boule, Douville, Châteaufer, Gribeauval and Rouyer Coys],
- Ouvrier companies [Thomassin, Guille, Saint-Vallier, Boileau & La Mortière Coys],
- The officers of the Corps-Royal de l’Artillerie
- The Corps des Ingénieurs [Corps of Engineers].

Gribeauval was still a commander of a Mineurs company but now part of the Corps-Royal de l’Artillerie et du Génie.

**Gribeauval objects to Battalion Guns (1757)**

The Royal Ordinance dated 20 January 1757, introduced one 4-pdr «Canon a la Suédoise» to each French infantry battalion and another Royal Ordinance dated 26 February added an additional M1757 1-pdr Rostaing gun. [Susane (1874) 179] The latter were soon returned to the arsenals.

Gribeauval objected to the re-introduction of these battalion guns as he considered battalion guns a misuse of artillery which had contributed to the humiliating defeat of Rossbach (5 Nov 1757). [Hennebert (1896) 30] Gribeauval had proposed that each pair of 4-pdr «Canon a la Suédoise» battalion guns should be combined into brigade batteries of 8 pieces and complained that the field artillery often did not arrive onto the battlefield in time. [Susane (1874) 179-180 translated by Digby Smith (Dec 2010) 2(06)] Mid-18th century French artillery suffered from severe internal rivalry as exemplified by the vicious disputes over battalion guns that lasted over half 80 years, glacially slow promotion and organisation that went through constant changes. This all contributed to poor morale among French Artillery officers. [Picard (1906) 6-22]

**Reference as:**

Stephen Summerfield (Dec 2010) “Part 2: Gribeauval in France before the Seven Years War (1715-57),” Smoothbore Ordnance Journal, 2 (02)
Appendix A: Biographies of Frenchmen

Director of the French Artillery 1720-76
Jean-Florent de Vallière (1667-1759) was born in Paris and became Artillery cadet (1685). Commissioned into the Corps-Royale de l’Artillerie as commissaire extraordinaire (1688) then commissaire ordinaire (1692) where he undertook the study of gunpowder and its effects. Transferred to the Corps des Mineurs in 1699 with rank of capitaine and was assigned to a number of sieges and battles in France and Italy. Promoted to Brigadier des armée du roi at the siege of Aire (1710). Marechal de Camp (1719), Directeur General de l’Artillerie (1720), member of the Académie des Sciences (1731). He introduced the M1732 Vallière System on 7 October 1732. Retired in 1747 and was replaced by his son. [Picard (1906) 6-7]

Joseph-Florent de Vallière [the Younger] (1717-76) was born in Paris. His first siege was Kehl (1733) then Philliburg (1734) during the War of Polish Succession. He accompanied his father 1743-46 at all the major battles (Dettingen and Fontenoy) and sieges (Namur). Volontaire (1733), brigadier (1744), colonel-inspecteur de royal-artillerie (1747), maréchal de camp (1747), lieutenant-général (1748). [Susane (1874) 422] In 1753, he carried the title of Directeur Général des Écoles, des Bataillons du Régiment Royal-Artillerie, des Manufactures d’Armes et des Forges [Director General of schools, Régiment Royal-Artillerie battalions, munitions factories and forges]. [Picard (1906) 11]. In 1755, he was directeur général de l’artillerie et du génie. [Picard (1906) 7 and Naulet (2002) 89-91]

French Marshals

Marshal Maurice de Saxe (1696-1750) was the illegitimate son of Elector Augustus II of Saxony and Countess Maria Aurora of Königsmarck. From the age of 12, he was with the army of Prince Eugene of Savoy at the sieges of Tournai and Mons and the battle of Malplaquet (1709). The next year, he served under the Peter the Great against the Swedes. At the age of 17 in 1713, he commanded his own regiment. After serving in a campaign against the Turks, he went to Paris to study mathematics and obtained a commission as maréchal de camp in 1720. In 1733, he served under Marshal Berwick and for a brilliant exploit at the siege of Philliburg, he was named Lieutenant General. In 1741, he took command of an army that invaded Austria and introduced the M1740 4-pdr «Canon a la Suédoise» and the M1741 1pdr Amusette influenced by his service against the Swedish Army. On 26 March 1743, he became a Marshal de France. At Fontenoy (1744), he severely defeated the Duke of Cumberland. In 1746, he became a naturalised French subject. As Maréchal général des camps et armées du roi from 12 January 1747, he had authority over all the French Armies.

French Prime Ministers

Louis XV (r1715 – 74): The finances of France were ruined by 54 of the previous 72 years at war under Louis XIV. The reign of Louis XV was dominated by the War against Spain (1718-20 and 1727-29), War of the Polish Succession (1733-38), War of Austrian Succession (1740-48) and the Seven Years War (1756-63). These increased the national debt he inherited from Louis XIV.

Regency of Philip II, Duke of Orléans for Louis XV (r1715-8)
Guillaume Dubois (1718-23)
Philippe II, Duc d’Orléans (1723)
Louis Henri, Duc de Bourbon (1723-6)
André-Hercule Cardinal de Fleury (1726-43)
Personal rule of Louis XV (1743-58)
Étienne François, Duc de Choiseul (1758-70)
Emmanuel Armand de Vignerot du Plessis de Richelieu, duc d'Aiguillon (1771-4)

French Secretary of State for War (1743-58)
Marc-Pierre de Voyer de Paulmy, Comte d'Argenson (1696-1764) was Secretary of State for War from 7 January 1743 until he was forced from office by the influence of Madame de Pompadour (1721-61) on 6 January 1757.

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