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THE LESSONS OF THE DECADE.

BY A VOLUNTEER CAVALRYMAN.

(From the United States Army and Navy Journal.)

EUROPEAN CAVALRY DEFECTS.

As a general thing, our cavalry generals, and particularly the regular cavalry officers, were very careful in the matter of horses, frequent dismounting, and comfortable camps. European cavalry in this respect are far behind our own. General Philip Kearney, when a subaltern officer of dragoons, was sent to Europe in 1840 to examine and report on European, particularly French, cavalry in campaign. He was fortunate enough to be attached, during an Algerian campaign, to the celebrated Chasseurs d'Afrique, at that time by far the best light cavalry in Europe. He published on his return a small pamphlet (the only copy of which now extant is in the possession of General J. Watts de Peyster, of New York City), describing his experiences. In this pamphlet he especially remarks upon the carelessness of the French cavalry in this very matter of horses, and on the length of time frequently allowed to elapse while the regiment stood waiting for orders to dismount.

The same care that a good infantry general should have for the comfort of his men, a cavalry general should have for his horses. A cavalry soldier will take care of himself under any circumstances, and grumble if neglected. But the poor horse cannot complain. He can only die if neglected. A cavalry general should remember this maxim, at all times and in all places. "Take care of your horses; the men will take care of themselves."

Camps should therefore be made in one of two places, deep grass fields near water, or woods. The latter are best on many accounts. The trees are handy to hitch to. A horse can pull up a stake in a meadow if he wants to. In a wood he cannot get away from his tree. His rider has not far to go for wood for his fire, and, not being tired out and dispirited by a bad camp, has heart to attend to his horse. Bad camps and comfortless nights disgust more men with campaigning than battles, and kill more horses than marching.

The experience of the First Cavalry division of the Army of the Potomac will illustrate this. When men are tired out and disheartened by a careless commander, their horses and themselves suffer alike. Camps

being good, marches brisk, and halts frequent, the first three days of a raid are pleasantly passed. Then the forage gives out, and it becomes necessary to "live on the country," unless supplies are at once forthcoming.

FORAGING PARTIES.

The question whether foraging is advisable for the subsistence of cavalry is not difficult. The answer undoubtedly is, that regular issues of grain are by far the best for the force. Foraging relaxes discipline and injures efficiency, encourages marauding, and pulls down horses by hard riding and heavy loading to a greater degree than is compensated for by the grain procured. But still the fact remains that for cavalry to be fully used to the best advantage it must make raids; and in long raids it is very often necessary to live on the country. Cavalry that sticks close to the army loses half its strength. It must be employed on distant expeditions to cut the enemy's line, to be worth its cost in strategic combinations. Technically, it should be used to turn the enemy's flanks, attack his rear, capture his batteries and waggons, and seize by swift movements the key of a position, thereafter to be stubbornly defended by dismounted men, till the infantry come up to relieve it.

For its full strategic effect cavalry is obliged to live on the country after the first three days.

Since foraging parties are necessities, then, it only remains that they should be systematized so as to attain two objects with the greatest facility, viz.

1. The obtaining of the largest quantity of food and grain, to be equally distributed to the regiments.
2. The infliction of the smallest amount of suffering on the farmers and women of the country.

As foraging parties are at present constituted they are full of defects. They are sent out too late, and the forage is not distributed properly. The march during the day may have been through a rich and fertile country, whereas in the evening the troops may have possibly entered a strip of sterile ground. Common sense would dictate the gathering of forage where it was plentiful; but common sense does not always govern military commanders. Where it does, it is called genius or sound strategy, and strategy is nothing but organized common sense.

Foraging parties are generally sent out near nightfall, and often have to ride miles before they find anything. In the case of large forces of cavalry several thousand

strong, the operation is particularly difficult, as the country is very soon skinned by the swarm of hungry troopers. But the worst feature of foraging is its waste and destruction. If the forage in a country were properly collected and distributed, there would be far less suffering on all sides. As it is, foraging parties run races for the nearest barns, pack all they can get on their horses, and the result is that one horse gormandizes where another starves, and the most rapacious marauder is best off.

Now all this might be avoided by a different system. In the first place, foraging ought not to be entrusted to any and every officer. The only person properly competent to take charge of it is the quartermaster of the cavalry corps. While on a raid the whole of the quartermaster's department of a body of cavalry generally indulges in a life of ease and dignity. The gentlemen belonging to it have nothing to do, and enjoy themselves amazingly. Most of them stay behind at the depots in charge of the waggon train, and are quite free from responsibility in the matter of food and forage.

The foraging parties are intrusted to officers in rotation from the different regiments, without experience in the issue of grain or food. This ought to be changed. The only proper people to attend to foraging parties are the officers of the Quartermaster's Department. They ought to be made to attend to it in the same manner as to regular issues, the corps quartermaster mapping out the ground for his division quartermasters, who in turn assign to each brigade its foraging ground.

All forage should be collected and issued by the brigade and regimental quartermasters proportionally and justly. This is a very difficult matter to enforce if the men carry forage on horses. They will manage to cheat their comrades out of a fair share when they rejoin the regiment. A far better way is to impress the wheeled vehicles of the country into the service and forbid the carriage of grain on horses. The quartermasters can then keep the grain much more easily under their own control, and six or seven times as much can be brought in for distribution, without any distress to the horses. For this purpose it is only necessary to supply every cavalryman in future with a stout lasso rope, to fasten to the surcingle we have urged instead of a girth. This surcingle should be made of heavy ox-hide leather, with a ring and strap fastening. To the ring should be knotted the rope.

This lasso harness is in universal use on the pampas of South America, and is won-