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THE LESSONS OF THE DECADE.

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(From the United States Army and Navy Journal.)

REAR GUARDS—RAIDS—PIONEERS.

In retreats, when forced back, the order of battle, with covering skirmish lines, dismounted and mounted, alternating to check the pursuit, has been described in the first chapter. It is simply a retrogade battle, with every point stubbornly disputed.

In a retreat in the face of the enemy, who merely follows in a corps of observation, the regular advanced party is transferred to the rear and exercises the same duties on inverse principles. They retire slowly, halting to fight dismounted if pressed, taking every advantage of ground, and ought to be supported by the mounted skirmish line and a battery. By holding on in this manner they can often detain the enemy half a day, while the rest of the corps goes on at its leisure. A single brigade in this manner can easily cover a whole corps; but its commander must keep his eyes well open, and the division general ought to be with him with plenty of scouts. In returning from a successful raid this is particularly necessary, and on such occasions it will often be found requisite to guard both front and rear with the brigade advanced parties, as that is the time usually selected by the enemy to intercept the raiders with heavy forces of infantry.

As raiding is the operation by which cavalry can be made most strategetically important during a campaign, so it is also the most difficult operation to conduct with undeviating success, and by which to effect results commensurate in importance with the losses in horseflesh forced marches, and in men and animals in the attempt to rejoin the army.

The close of a raid is its point of greatest danger. By celerity and secrecy the general may manage to escape the enemy and make his march outwardly. He may even cut his railroad, burn the depot he is after, and play the devil with the enemy's communications and supplies; but if he cannot rejoin the army in safety, all his work may be thrown away. If he has to cut his way through, the losses in men and horses will more than counterbalance the gains of the raid.

On his return then it behooves a cavalry general to be even more wary and watchful than when he set out on his raid. His scouts must be on the alert, night and day, to find out where the enemy is and what forces are on the road to intercept him. He must keep his command well in hand, his columns as short and broad as the ground will admit, feeling his way with the far-reaching advance scouts and flankers. He should endeavor to accumulate three days' grain from his foraging parties to last his men through the final three days, when foraging will be no longer prudent or even possible. When the position of the enemy is ascertained, if his force is too heavy to be cut to pieces, he must be deceived as to the direction of the march; and during the night the other flank must be passed.

It is impossible to give wooden rules for the guidance of a raiding general. Briefly, he must be ever vigilant and fertile in stratagems, always ready to back out of a scrape without loss, and as ready to fight his way if he sees a good chance. General Sheridan was, of all others, the most entirely successful raider of the civil war. He did immense damage to the enemy on every occasion, and always managed to get back in perfect safety. His losses in horseflesh from hard marching were exceedingly heavy, but the desolate nature of the country through which he raided was principally to blame for this. Skinned and scraped by the passage of two armies, hither and thither, for three long years, the land could not furnish a single ear of corn in many places. In these parts of Virginia hitherto untouched we fared sumptuously.

As a contrast in results to this model general's raids, the expeditions of Stoneman in 1863 and 1864, of Kilpatrick in December, 1863, of Wilson and Kautz on the left flank of Grant's army in 1864, are fruitful lessons. Stoneman's first raid before Chancellorville killed several hundred horses, cost an immense sum in lost equipments, and accomplished almost nothing. Transferred to the Southwest with Sherman, he was compelled to surrender with his whole force while on another raid. Kilpatrick's Richmond raid cost us the loss of Colonel Dahlgren and the annihilation of his column, and accomplished as little as Stoneman's. Wilson and Kautz were so roughly handled on their return to the army, after a raid otherwise successful, that they lost all their guns, and their commands only escaped by scattering and coming in individually, as luck brought them, while more than half were captured. The difference between the commanders in question and Sheridan lay in one word, vigilance. Sheridan was never suprised when present with his army. He always knew where the enemy was, and preferred to surprise him. The other generals suffered all their losses from want of vigilance.

A cavalry general on a raid must always be awake, or at least he must take as little sleep as nature will submit. He must surround himself with pickets that will stretch for miles, and keep his corps encamped in as small a space as possible. Woods are best for this purpose, on many accouts. They hide the number of troops, furnish fuel for fires, and hitching posts for horses. They are easily defensible in case of a surprise or attack, and by pushing out the pickets to the edge of the open ground the grand requirements of a perfect camp ground are fulfilled, viz., wood, water, and security. Water is almost invariably to be found in or near the woods, from their very nature. Security against attack is gained by felling a few trees on the flanks of the camp to entangle an enemy. Breastworks can be improvised in half an hour among woods. In the summer, by taking the precaution to encamp early, and put out fires after dark, a whole corps of cavalry can be buried in the woods without giving a sign of its presence.

On raids, as at all other times, a pioneer corps will be found very essential to the protection of a cavalry corps. Whether for taking down fences, throwing up breastworks, or making bridges, their services are invaluable. The practice during the war was to detail two men from each company in a regiment, each carrying an axe or spade, making twenty-four pioneers to each regiment, with a sergeant to command them. The cavalry corps would thus have a total of four hundred and sixty-eight pioneers, an ample force if used together to do anything requisite in mending roads, removing obstacles, or making bridges. If these pioneers follow brigade headquarters habitually, they will be found much more available than if left with their regiments. At night their only duties should be to pitch the headquarter and regimental mess-tents, and they should be excused from picket duty.

With regard to the axes for the men to use in campaigning, etc., I am convinced that their issue and carriage would pay in the end. If the squad system is adopted, of sections of four to eat and sleep together, the system being enforced, number four of each set can carry an axe in a sling. It to be clearly understood that such axe belongs to the squad, and is to be carried in turn by each member. This allowance will be found to be ample, and will save much distress when circumstances compel the encampment in the open fields. One axe is