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THE LESSONS OF THE DECADE.

BY A VOLUNTEER CAVALRYMAN.

(From the United States Army and Navy Journal.)

SHOES—SADDLES—BRIDLES.

With regard to shoeing, one thing is to be said, and only one thing. As long as it is not made the rigid rule, never to be disregarded, for every man to carry a full set of spare shoes for his horses, with the complement of nails, in the pouches of his saddle, so long there will be constant trouble. General orders are always recommending it; but I never yet saw such an order fully obeyed. As to the form of shoes, I should decidedly recommend plain flat foreshoes for summer, with low heel corks on the hind shoes. These enable a horse to stop short with much more ease, if suddenly pulled up. In the winter both toe and heel corks on all the shoes should be used in slippery ice countries, such as Canada. In mud countries they are not necessary. But, as our next war of any magnitude will probably be in the north our horses will have to be roughed with toe and heel corks for winter campaigning.

Saddling is a different matter. On good saddling and packing depends all the efficiency of a cavalry force. Your men may be well armed, splendid swordsmen, and dead shots; their horses may start on the campaign full of life and vigor; but, if the saddling and packing are bad, sore backs will soon dismount all your cavalry, and render them useless.

During the Crimean war Captain George B. McClellan was sent to Europe to inspect and report on cavalry and infantry weapons, accoutrements, and organization. It is a significant fact that that excellent organizer could find nothing in all Europe, after due examination, worthy to compare, as a cavalry saddle, with our own Mexican or Texan tree.

The McClellan saddle, which is a modification thereof, is far better than any in use in Europe. This Mexican saddletree is the fruit of the experience of centuries. It is the offspring of the Turkish and Arab saddle, very slightly modified. It came into use among the people in whose country the horse took his rise, and it is, in all its modifications, a miracle of comfort and security to the rider. The only objection to it is its weight—a defect by no means remedied in the McClellan saddle.

There is far too much toggery on this saddle. The flaps, the sweat-leathers, the saddle-bags, are all useless dead weight. As for the saddle-bags, they are about as useless and foolish an appendage as I ever saw. Again and again have I seen them thrown away by men whose practical experience had taught them; and the whole reason is that they are too small to hold anything. Take them away and give two light simple canvas bags of twice or three times their size, and you give a man somewhere to put his food. The prime trouble with all military saddles is the want of room for provisions and forage, whereas that is all they ought to be made to carry.

A man wants no overcoat in summer campaigns. By universal consent it is thrown away before many days out, at the risk of wanting another. I never knew this to fail. All the weight a man carries besides rations and forage is himself and arms, one blanket, a piece of shelter tent or poncho, a shirt, drawers, and socks, a towel, comb, and piece of soap. The sleeping blanket and tent are put under the saddle by all old soldiers, and prevent sore backs instead of making them. But forage and food form the weight. As it stands, the men carry them the best way they know how. All the government gives them is one haversack. This ought to be changed. Two good sized canvas saddle-bags with a girth in connection, would hold eight or ten days' provisions with ease. The girth would keep them down to the horses' sides, and save horse and rider from the flapping of his present load. Moreover, a cavalry soldier on his first day's march would no longer resemble a trussed turkey, incapable of motion, and could mount and dismount as easily as he does now with "light saddles."

The bare McClellan tree is quite light and convenient. Its the leathern toggery that weighs it down. The same bare tree is immensely improved in appearance by a brass rim on pommel and cantle. This also preserves the edge of the cover from wearing out. A McClellan saddle always goes first at the edge of the cantle, and, once the rawhide cover is gone, the saddle soon racks to pieces. The Texan saddle, which strongly resembles the Mexican, would be better than the McClellan for troops. There are no buckles anywhere upon it. Instead of straps leathern thongs are used to tie things to pommel and cantle. The broad, flat horn in front is quite a convenience for many purposes, especially to go to sleep on in long night marches. The girth fastens with two rings and a long strap between, being secured by an easy slip-knot.

But the Mexican form of girth has one

disadvantage. Starting from a triangle of leather, which embraces pommel and cantle, it has a tendency to press on the ends of the saddle and produce sore back. If, instead of this, a surcingle were used, passing over the middle of the saddle, but fastening like the girth with the two rings, it would be far preferable. The ring fastening has this great advantage: you can girth any horse with it, no matter how he swells out. He cannot resist. Every turn of the strap through the rings doubles your strength like a pulley. The surcingle is far preferable to the girth as a mode of securing the saddle. It is so used by the Guachos all all over South America.

One thing about the McClellan saddle as issued is radically bad. It has no breast-strap, and it has a crupper. This ought to be reversed. It may do with mules who have no withers; but in nine horses out of ten, outside of Indian ponies, the fault lies the other way.

In active service the men universally threw away their cruppers in our war, and many who had slim bellied horses were forced to buy breast-straps, by hook or by crook. Many used their surcingles for the purpose, but had to give it up. A breast-strap to a cavalry horse is almost an indispensable necessity. In ascending hills his load is almost sure to slip back, and much botheration ensues. With a breast-strap the girth can be loosened and the horse much eased. Care must be taken to avoid losing the blankets in this case. More than fifty times I have seen the saddle blanket under a carelessly put on saddle slide slowly back, till it gently dropped over the croup, the rider being quite unconscious of his loss till warned of it by others. This is most apt to occur with bellied horses. The blanket should be secured to the saddle in such cases.

The stirrups of the McClellan saddle are good and bad. They have good points, but sadly need improvement. The intention of the hood is excellent. It is to keep the foot from slipping through the stirrup, as well as to protect it from bushes, etc. In practice a man is very apt to get his foot stuck fast between the stirrup and the hood, and to find it worse than the open one for that reason. This part of the objection is easily remedied. A broad strap of leather, nailed across the interval from the bottom of the stirrup to the bottom of the hood, at once removes all the inconvenience. It ought certainly to be done in future in all cases.

The second objection is more serious. It lies in the material of the stirrup-wood. Wood exposed to rain, wind and weather soon rots. Especially around rusty iron