



The Volunteer Review

AND MILITARY AND NAVAL GAZETTE.

A Journal Devoted to the Interests of the Military and Naval Forces of the Dominion of Canada

VOL. V.

OTTAWA, CANADA, MONDAY, APRIL 17, 1871.

No. 16.

VOLUNTEER CAVALRY.—No. VI.

THE LESSONS OF THE DECADE.

BY A VOLUNTEER CAVALRYMAN.

(From the United States Army and Navy Journal.)

LOGISTICS—FOOD—FORAGE.

In the matter of food, nourishing enough to support the soldier, and light enough to enable him to carry several days' allowance there is much room for improvement in our service. The United States ration is plentiful, sometimes too liberal, but it fails in portability. Pork and hard tack, a pound and three-quarters a day, constitute our field ration, with a due proportion of coffee and sugar. It is very bulky and contains much waste matter. The best of it is the coffee and sugar. The allowance of these is sufficient, with a very little experience in their use; and a man can carry ten or twelve days of coffee rations without difficulty. But the practice in the Southern army, of issuing flour instead of bread, made their rations much more portable. As it is, eight days' rations of pork and hard tack is a very bulky mass, inconvenient to carry. Once or twice, when starting on raids, we had to load ourselves with that amount of food, to our great discomfort. Flour and other soft food makes much better rations than hard square biscuits, as regards portability.

In this respect as in the saving of ammunition, we may again take a lesson from the Prussian wars of this decade. They have introduced into warfare a new element in the ammunition business. So in logistics they have invented a sausage. Not an ordinary sausage, but one composed of pease meal and meat, chopped up together, and containing in itself all the constituents of a full ration. These sausages are the requisite size and weight to make a meal; and their nutritive qualities are wonderful in proportion to their weight. If not perfection, they are yet a move in the right direction. One great advantage of them is that they are easily made, and that by their means a great deal of food otherwise wasted may be utilized; for they absorb fat and lean, meal and flour. In fact, almost anything may be put into a sausage. A single chopping machine following an army corps, would be able to keep up a full supply of these rations; and for long expeditions the sausages are much better to pack and carry than hard tack and pork.

The quality of the meat, whether it be

beef, mutton, or pork, or whatever else, is a matter of indifference; as also whether pease meal, bean meal, corn meal, or flour, be the vehicle in which it is diffused. The economy seems to be in the prevention of all waste, the juices of the meat being absorbed by the flour. The sausage may be roasted, fried, or cut open and the contents poured into water, making a thick soup or porridge. In the summer time the meat must be salted or dried to enable it to keep. In the winter no such precaution is necessary.

This sausage has enabled the Prussian army to release from the duties of guarding communications many a man whose services were valuable at the front; and we cordially recommend it to our cavalry of the future, if our word may chance to be adjudged as of any value. Not that we desire to urge a mere wooden imitation of the German system. Imitation implies inferiority. But we submit that the combining of the two parts of the ration together is a good one, and tends to prevent waste and economise weight.

In regard to the carrying of rations, the experience of a single campaign is sufficient to decide one thing—that the haversack, as used in the United States Army, while very good perhaps for infantry, is a poor thing for cavalry. It is not nearly strong enough to stand the jolting of a trotting horse, and the shoulder-strap is continually giving way. Moreover, whatever the theory of the inventor and the War Department may be subject, practically you cannot get a cavalry soldier to wear it over his shoulder. He will tie it to his horse, where it dangles bumping and crashing, till the band gives way, and down comes the load.

But our ready-witted men soon learned to provide themselves in a better manner. They used to take the white inside bag of the haversack, and make it into a trio of long narrow bags, one for coffee, one for sugar, one for salt. The pork they wrapped up in a piece of old shelter tent, and strapped to the saddle-bow. The haversack, with the hard tack inside, was rolled up and strapped on the cantle above the grain bag, and the nose bag was utilized in the same manner. But, with the best management, the hard square biscuits were very ugly things to carry, and it is for that reason that flour or meal is so far preferable. But the coffee ration is the best part of the whole. No one who has not been through the hardships of real campaigning can hardly appreciate the comfort of a cup of coffee to a weary soldier after a hard day's tramp. Coffee and a quiet pipe have done more to comfort our men on long raids than any-

thing else; and if nothing else in the way of provisions is carried on wheels, a single waggon laden with coffee and sugar will be found to amply repay for the trouble of its guarding. Men can forage for anything except that.

In the matter of forage there is one thing to be said. In the United States cavalry there is no provision made by which the men can carry three days' grain. They did carry it repeatedly, but they had to provide the means themselves, and in a way far superior to the old fashioned forage bags of European cavalry.

The most invaluable piece of old shelter tent came into play here; and a long, narrow bag was sewed up, which just held thirty pounds of grain, and then resembled an immense sausage. This was strapped across the cantle of the saddle, exactly as the old valise the centre strap being drawn tight enough to clear the bag from the horse's back. By this method we carried three days' grain with comfort to man and horse, the load lightening every day, and the narrowness of the bag rendering it easily compressible into a tight, compact mass. Such a bag as this, made of stout canvas, would wear for years; and if a strip of leather or canvas were fastened down one side longitudinally, with intervals between it and the bag to pass the straps of the cantles through all danger of the load's slipping to one side or the other would be avoided.

CARE OF HORSES.

With regard to the question of forage there is one thing to be said. In campaigning in a country where Indian corn is the staple horse feed, it is poor economy to send out car loads of oats for cavalry horses. When a raid comes, the animals have to live off the country; and the change of food is apt to "heat the blood," vulgarly speaking. In the winter time, when there is much mud, it predisposes the horses to "scratches," or "grease heel," and when once that breaks out on a winter raid, the horse has to be abandoned.

The immense number of animals that were perforce left behind from this cause on Sheridan's last raid, in March, 1865, almost exceeds belief. The author himself started from Winchester on an excellent horse, with a second pretty fair animal, led in the pack train; but both broke down dead lame on the second day after passing Waynesboro, owing to the mud. While on the macadamized pike, up the valley, they went gallantly; but the mud brought the feet of both of them into such a fearful condition that they had to be left. And three-fourths of the lameness in these cases were due to the