



# 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. VI.

OTTAWA, (CANADA,) MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 1872.

No. 4.

### CORRESPONDENCE.

*The Editor does not hold himself responsible for individual expressions of opinion in communications addressed to the VOLUNTEER REVIEW.*

To the Editor of the VOLUNTEER REVIEW.

DEAR SIR:—Some three years ago I ventured to lay before your readers, illustrated by some quotations from Colonel Hamley, and (I think) other writers, a few remarks on the limits which, I dimly conceived, might be found to exist, to the effect on charging cavalry of "armes de précision."

Such authorities as I cited had written before the general adoption of breech-loaders, and, indeed no crucial test had as yet come under the notice of military observers.

Following, therefore, by the uncertain lights then available, deductions which yet bore a stamp of probability, the conclusions at which it was possible to arrive were still only speculative. But, even from an infantry point of view, they were such as to lead to a higher estimate of the efficacy of cavalry charges, than appears to be borne out by recent observations of no less weight than reliability.

It would seem that I have not been alone in this opinion, as will appear in the course of the following quotation from the *Canadian Monthly*, which is so interesting, and so direct to the point, that I feel assured of your permission to make such of your readers acquainted with it, as may not yet have met with it.

It is from an article from the pen of Lt. Col. G. T. Denison jr., on "the cavalry charges at Sedan. The autumn manoeuvres and the moral they convey." It is needless to say that Col. Denison is always more than readable when treating of the specialty in military organization on which his views are as sound as they are in many points original, and the extracts I make are not only instances of his tact in the selection of illustrations of his views, but evidence of the extensive means of information at his command, and one of great interest to infantry officers.

"An article (says Col. Denison,) in the *aturday Review* of 7th Oct. last, on "the

tactical lessons of the Autumn Campaign" is a good illustration of the theories held on this question of cavalry charges," it says:—

"We have learned that cavalry of every description is as necessary a component of an army as it ever was, but that it must be handled & organized in a new fashion. At present our cavalry leaders are but mere apprentices, and the glorious arm at their disposal was in the recent campaign rather an incumbrance to the army than otherwise. In the intervals between the battles, the light cavalry very imperfectly performed their duty as purveyors of intelligence, and on the day of battle, the chief object of every one appeared to be to get our squadrons out of the way, both of harm and of the other branches of the service. It is very evident that masses of cavalry will for the future be only used exceptionally, and that they must be kept in reserve until the decisive moment.

"By a sudden swoop on the flank, however, or even a direct attack, where from the nature of the ground, the enemy's fire cannot take effect until within 200 yards' distance, great things are still to be effected. In the concluding battle of our sham campaign we had a proof of this. A body of cavalry suddenly appeared on the brow of a hill, and dashed at the skirmishers of the 42nd Highlanders, who, startled at the apparition, hastily proceeded to form rallying squares, the dragoons were, however, upon them before they could complete the movement, and had the contest been a real one, would have sabred them to a man. The Highlanders have been blamed for forming squares. They ought, it is said, to have remained steady, and have trusted to the effect of their fire. Setting aside, however, the moral effect of the sudden appearance of a body of horsemen, charging down at full speed, the Highlanders could not, at the outside have fired more than twice, and that hurriedly, and, under any circumstances they would have been annihilated."

"The above is the most common theory on this subject. We will now quote an account of the French cavalry charges at Sedan, from a letter received by the writer of this article from a distinguished officer

who was with the Prussian army during the earlier battles of the war. This officer, who has himself seen much service, says."

"The question of cavalry charging infantry with breech-loaders is, I think, conclusively settled by this campaign. Whenever it has been tried—by the 8th and 9th French cuirassiers at Woerth, by the 7th Prussian cuirassiers at Vionville, on the 16th August, or by the two French Light Cavalry brigades on their extreme left at Sedan—the result has been the same—a fearful loss of life with no result whatever.

General Sheridan was an attentive eye witness of the four charges made by the French Light Cavalry at Sedan, and gave me a most minute account of them. I examined the ground most carefully only thirty hours after, while the dead men and horses all lay there, so that I formed a correct idea of it as if I had seen it. The first charge delivered by the 1st French Hussars, was made under the most favorable circumstances possible. They were very well handled. As the Prussian infantry skirmishers, in advance of the main body, came over the hill behind which they had been waiting, they were led round under cover of the brow till they got completely in rear of, and on the right flank of the skirmishers. They thus got within one hundred yards of them before they were seen, and then charged most gallantly, sweeping down the whole line. But, even under these advantageous circumstances, the charge had no result worth speaking of. The Germans ran into knots and opened fire; a very few who ran to the rear, say 25 or 30 were cut down, on the other hand the fire of these clumps and rallying squares completely destroyed the Hussars. The two rear squadrons wisely swerved off and regained the shelter of the hill. Those who went down the line were all killed, wounded, or driven down the Prussian side of the slope into a village, and there captured. It did not delay the advance of the Prussian infantry five minutes. The succeeding charges made by the 1st, 3rd and 4th regiments of Chasseurs d'Afrique and the 6th Chasseurs, came to nothing, though they were most gallantly and perseveringly made. The Prussians simply wait-