

Cavalry Tactics.

(United Service Gazette.)

Sir Beauchamp Walker, we feel convinced, represented the views of our most practical soldiers when he stated, during the discussion after Lieut.-Colonel White's lecture on range-finding, at the United Service Institution, that in his opinion no man ought to be given the command of a cavalry regiment who was not a rider to hounds, and, moreover, a good one too. Quick decision, cool courage and presence of mind are qualities which must be developed to a high degree in anyone who aspires to take a line of his own in Leicestershire or handle a regiment on the battlefield. Our cavalry quarters are no longer what they were as regards hunting, unfortunately, and the recent unpleasantness at Colchester even suggests a period when officers will not be able to put in a regular appearance at the covert side at all; but, should these evil days come upon us, there is still polo, drag-hunting, and steeplechasing to fall back upon, inadequate substitute as these sports will form. We need not, however, anticipate evils, and may still hope that the training of the hunting field will be open to the future leaders of our squadrons. We dwell in the age of theory, and so much importance is now attached to nice calculations and scientific rules that there is a considerable risk of the great fact being lost sight of that, after all, no matter what methods are in vogue, it is nerve and resolution which in the long run turns the scale. Victorious generals have repeatedly disregarded the prevailing and accepted formulas of the science of their age, and the great principles which decided the fates of empires have ever remained substantially the same. A good system of organization, steadfast resolution in the field, and a broad grasp of general principles, have ever carried the position, and ever will; while indecision or want of energy, however scientifically it may conduct its troops, will never lead them to victory. This is especially so in cavalry encounters, and the idiosyncrasy of the leader here particularly asserts itself. The Archduke Charles said of the French cavalry of his time that it was badly mounted, badly equipped, rode badly, and yet performed most brilliant achievements because it was handled well and thrown into the combat with decision and resolution. The swoop of horsemen must be rapid, sudden and opportune, or otherwise the best riders, magnificently mounted and admirably armed though they may be, will find themselves out-maneuvred, and able to make but small impression on the day's doings.

In 1870 the German cavalry, in spite of their careful training, made their power little felt, because they were handled with indecision and without dash. As the war went on experience taught them better tactics, and before its close they had added many laurels to their standard. The sacrifices a mistaken bravery entailed on them in the battle-fields round Metz pointed a moral which they did not fail to appreciate, and afterwards we no longer see them attacking unbroken infantry, but waiting till fire has done its share of the work, and the foe is shaken and demoralised, ere they advance against him. If towards the latter end of the war they did not accomplish as much as some have expected from them, it must be remembered that there was little cavalry then in the field against them, and less opportunity therefore for stirring feats of arms; while the losses the French Franc-tireurs inflicted on them perhaps made their leaders over careful of them, and brought about the fatal tendency to keep troops "in cotton wool." At this stage of the war there was a decided leaning towards utilising them in combination with infantry, and thus hampering their full movement and action, a most fatal error, and one which cannot be too much reprobated. It is condemned out of the mouth of one of the German cavalry leaders themselves—namely, Verdy du Vernois, who has written that "the cavalry which cannot emancipate itself from infantry is not worth the money it cost to keep up." It is to be hoped that the adoption of mounted infantry into our service may tend to prevent our troopers being ever thus tied down, and that there may be no excuse to claim them for any but their own proper work. The example set us in the recent German Imperial manoeuvres shows cavalry used, in spite of what may be expected from modern fire, in large masses on the battle field ready to be thrown suddenly into the scale as opportunities may occur, and kept intact and at hand for this purpose.

In front of the contending forces at the commencement of future campaigns it is expected that collisions on a large scale will take place between the squadrons of the opposing powers, and the results which ensue will seriously affect the course of future events. On such occasions there will still be an opening for the display of the peculiar and uncommon qualifications, physical and moral, of the born cavalry leader—the quick eye, the firm seat, the daring resolve, and swift decision which are but seldom found combined in one individual, and yet which are absolutely indispensable in any one who aspires to fame as a general of horse. It is to be regretted that in our service but few opportunities are given to our officers to practise and develop such gifts. Few men among them know what 5,000 or 6,000 cavalry look like on parade. Fewer still have ever attempted to handle even a third of such

a force, and none can be said to have had anything like sufficient practice in so doing. But if we are to be equal to taking effective part in hostilities on the Continent we must be possessed not of one, but of several men who are born cavalry soldiers, are enthusiastic in their professional views, and have had, at any rate, experience in peace time of perfecting themselves in the art of leading their men. It is to be regretted that one or two more camps of instruction cannot be annually formed in other places besides Aldershot, where perhaps yeomanry might be brigaded for a few days with regulars, and a respectable force of cavalry thus be placed at the disposal of our rising men. Above all, horse artillery and cavalry should always be found in combination, and an end put to the anomaly of batteries and regiments quartered in isolation from the troops they would be associated with on service. Horse artillery and cavalry mutually support and rely on one another in war, and should therefore in peace time live together, work together, and prepare together for the eventualities they will have to face together when called into the field.

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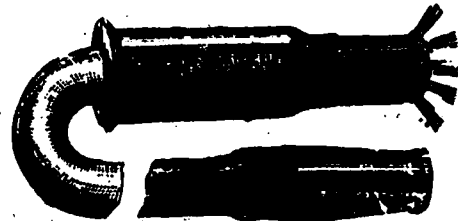
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