

### Cavalry Crossing Rivers.

"They manage these things better in France," is what we are constantly being told on many points, not excepting bomb explosions. Its constant repetition is apt to lead us insensibly into believing in the truth of the assertion. In this way, perhaps, it has come to be supposed that in many of its practices—apart from considerations of physique or efficiency, etc.—the French army is in advance of our own. One among them has lately been especially impressed upon us, namely, the practice of crossing of rivers by cavalry. We are told that we are behind the times in this important detail of cavalry work, and that on the other hand the French cavalry have devoted of late much time and money in elaborating a good system suitable to all the probable eventualities of war. An account of the ultimate practice as carried out by the 12th Cavalry Brigade should therefore be of interest to all cavalry officers. This appeared in the *Revue de Cavalerie*, and was fully illustrated with maps and photographs. Briefly it states as follows: The Southern Cavalry Division, in pursuing the Northern, arrives on the banks of the Cher, and finds the bridges over that river have been destroyed by the enemy in his retreat. General Grandin, commanding the Southern Cavalry, on learning that the Northern force is retiring after having destroyed the bridges over the Cher, proposes to occupy as soon as possible the various crossing places and to repair bridges sufficiently to enable his troops to cross. The advanced guard of the 12th Brigade is sent on to endeavor to gain the other bank in order to cover its main body in its repairing of the bridge of Bléné, which has been but partially destroyed.

To carry out this scheme the 12th Brigade assembles at 6.30 a.m. The squadrons of the 21st Chasseurs are sent on ahead to reconnoitre the river in the neighborhood of Bléné, and to endeavor to effect a crossing. A suitable place is found at Colommiers, and the pioneers of the 21st Chasseurs proceed at once to collect material to form a means of crossing. (The materials which in war time would of course be requisitioned from the inhabitants were, on this occasion, hired and paid for out of the funds allowed to regiments annually for the practice of crossing rivers.) At 7 a.m. an officer's patrol of the Northern force discovers the preparations of the

Southerners, and two squadrons of the Northern Chasseurs are speedily summoned to the spot to prevent, or at any rate to delay, the crossing. At 7.30 the Northern Cavalry opens fire on the head of the main body of the 12th Brigade, which now makes its appearance advancing on the river. But the fire of the Southerners rapidly reinforced, soon became too strong for the Southern rearguard—especially when the Southern Artillery arrives on the scene and comes into action. The Northerners are thus obliged to retire, and the Southern advanced guard proceed with all rapidity to construct a light raft bridge. Two hours only are occupied in its construction. The regulation waterproof corn-sacks—stuffed with straw, and securely tied up at the mouth—are bound onto ladders by means of forage cords. The ladders themselves are lashed on to each other end to end: when about twenty yards of such bridge has been made a similar piece is constructed. Both are then turned over so that the buoyant sacks are underneath, and the two lengths of ladders are placed parallel to each other and lashed in that position by cross planks, in which way a fairly wide and stable roadway is gained. The bridge is then launched in such a way that the current carries it in'o position; that is to say, it is put into the water parallel to the bank, the down-stream end is then moored to the bank, while the other (up stream) is pushed out into the stream with a rope attached to it, which enables it to be moored when the current has carried it around to its place. Remaining sections of the bridge are similarly put together on the bank, launched and moored on to the end of the section already in position. By 10 o'clock, in the present instance, the bridge is completed 83 metres in length—the last few feet of it being formed by a boat, in place of sacks and ladders, of which there was not a sufficiency.

Directly the bridge is declared ready the men of the 2nd Squadron, carrying their kits, pass over on foot, and then returning, proceed to walk back again leading their horses, which swim across alongside the bridge. The advance party having in this way managed to make its way across, was then able to drive back the last parties of the enemy's rear guard, and so to cover the crossing of the main body. We are further informed that the general commanding was present during the whole of the experiment, and, in expressing his satisfaction at the result, warmly complimented the colonel and officers of the 21st Chasseurs on the rapidity and smartness with which the

work was carried out. It would seem from this that the general was easily satisfied, and held different ideas on the meaning of the term rapidity to those which obtain at any rate in England.

The above quoted account shows that, exclusive of the time occupied in the preliminary collection of material, possibly an hour or more, two hours were occupied in putting the bridge together and placing it in position. After which it would take a regiment at least two hours to cross over, each man having to make two trips, one when carrying his kit over, and the second when leading his horse. By this system too long a time would relapse (something near three hours) after the commencement of operations before any men would be available with their horses on the far bank to cover the crossing of the remainder against onslaughts of the enemy. And, after the regiment had crossed over, the bridge would have to be taken to pieces again, instead of being available for use by supporting troops or in the event of a retreat, because it contains the men's forage sacks and forage nets, which would be required in the event of another river being met with possibly a few miles further on. In this way the crossing would occupy from first to last between five to six hours. So that altogether, we cannot unreservedly endorse the general's eulogy of the rapidity, nor of the practical utility, of the operation as carried out on this occasion—especially if it be compared with what an English regiment, even in its backward state of training, would do were the same river to be crossed by it.

Acting on the usual system practiced (annually where water is available) the regiment would have utilized the boat to take across four men with their kits, towing their four horses astern. In this way, within five minutes of their arrival at the river bank, these four men, with their horses and kits, would have been landed on the opposite side, and in three minutes more they would have been on their way to carry out duties as mounted vedettes or patrols to the front. And four more mounted men would be arriving every five minutes to reinforce them. If two boats were available in place of one the rate would be doubled, every five minutes would see eight men and horses landed. If no boats were available a few rafts could be made in far less time than a bridge with similar materials, but in smaller quantity, namely, a few waterproof corn sacks, with a gate and planks lashed onto them with head or heel ropes, etc. In this way the rate of crossing would be very materially increased. But with one boat alone the river in question would have been crossed by an English cavalry regiment in a little under two hours (it has been done in 25 minutes per squadron) from the time of the halting on the bank to that of marching off as a regiment, with its equipment complete, on the other.—*Army and Navy Gazette*.