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THE LESSONS OF THE DECADE.

BY A VOLUNTEER CAVALRYMAN.

(From the United States Army and Navy Journal.)

FOREST PICKETING—CROSSING RIVERS.

I have thus far treated of pickets on ordinary ground interspersed with small patches of woods and open fields. This is the general character of the more thickly settled States. In Canada, however, as in the Southern States, there exist very extensive woods full of tangled underbrush, in which pickets oftentimes have to be thrown out.

In this species of country, more than any other, surprises must be guarded against. mounted vedettes are almost useless in such places. An enemy can approach perfectly unseen to within a hundred yards of the picket line, and the sense of hearing is all that can be relied on. A wooden-headed martinet putting out mounted vedettes in such a place invite their capture and his own surprise. Dismounted men are the only means of successfully picketing such a place. A regiment sent on picket in a dense forest must be treated as a dismounted skirmish line. Its horses must all be left with the picket reserve, who will see them fed by the stable guard. Around this picket reserve, a strong breastwork must be thrown, a thing easily done in our dense pine woods.

Every picket post must be fortified in the same way, and its front obstructed by fallen trees, etc. The line of vedettes must be also thoroughly protected. A very few trees felled in a line, the underbrush cut down behind them and thrown in front, will delay an approaching enemy. A path should be cut out behind each vedette by which he can retreat on the picket post if attacked; and a second path should run along the picket line behind the obstacles, to be patrolled on.

Treated in this way, a camp in a forest can be made perfectly impregnable in a very short time. The approaches are very easily obstructed, and that done a quarter of a mile is a sufficient distance for the line of vedettes in woods. An enemy can be detained in forests for at least six times as long as in open ground. But the approaches must be obstructed in order to make such a line safe.

To throw out a perfect picket line in a dense forest requires daylight. The whole regiment must be dismounted in the place chosen for the picket reserve. Pioneers and all must be sent forward to the vedette line and put to felling trees. As a hundred and twelve axes are available, this line ought to be cleared in short order, the trees felled in a straight line about fifty feet apart or less if necessary, the underbrush behind thrown over, and the paths cut. Between the paths the underbrush should be left and further entangled by the cuttings from these paths.

The vedette line once established, the individual posts are left to fortify themselves, while the rest go back to the reserve.

The principles of forest picketing are modifications of ordinary picketing. The roads must be patrolled as far as possible. As so many men are not needed for vedettes more are left for patrols. Forest patrols should go out a mile at least. To prevent surprise and capture by lurking parties of the enemy, they should be about twenty strong and mounted. At every hundred yards a man should be left to watch the woods. By this means a chain is formed sufficient to warn the patrol of any parties threatening its rear or flank. No one can stir in a wood without being heard. If the road vedette hears a movement, he should ride into the bushes to examine into the cause, finger on trigger. A shot will be the signal for the patrol to gallop back, strengthening as it goes.

Patrols adopting this precaution are safe from surprise. The long line of vedettes becomes a living telegraph, as in the case of the "advance." Silent signals can be arranged, in case the night is not too dark, and intelligence communicated from front to rear with marvellous rapidity.

An enemy in a forest must come by the roads. To advance and attack, he will spread out either flank, but will not deploy outside of a mile off. The morning patrols are certain to run into him if he is coming.

Reserves and posts ought to be midway between roads, and their form of breastwork ought to be a redan or lunette—in other words, wedge shaped, the sides fronting the roads diagonally. This will be perpendicular to the direction of the probable attack from a skirmish line enfilading the road.

Paths from the picket posts to the reserves must be cut, to enable the former to fall back. They should be zigzag, to perplex the enemy and detain him under fire.

Thus we have noticed the most important modification of American outpost duty, forest picketing; and the only thing left to notice in raiding is the way to cross rivers.

Any cavalry general worthy of the name ought to be able to cross without pontoons any river in America not navigable for ships. A river like the Hudson or James, the Ohio or Mississippi, may be allowed to stop him, if he cannot seize boats enough; but an ordinary river not over a hundred yards broad ought to be crossed without difficulty, without poontoons. A pontoon train is a luxury, very pleasant to have, but a fearful nuisance to guard.

All horses can swim. They ought to be sent across in that way. The men who can swim should go with them. The only difficulty is to keep the ammunition dry. This can be arranged very easily in this manner: All army waggons and carts ought to be capable of being turned into boats at a moment's notice. The common Conestoga waggon looks just like a pontoon. Make it water-tight and high-sided, and the whole difficulty is solved. On arriving at a river the waggons are unloaded, lifted off the axles, and there is a large boat in each. Baggage waggons, if large and capacious, and lightly loaded as they should be, will float without unloading. Ammunition boxes can be unloaded in three minutes by a string of men from the ammunition train.

The soldiers fasten enough lassos together to make a line across the stream. A volunteer swims across with his horse, unarmed, or with a sabre only, and covered by the rest if the enemy are on the other bank. A flying bridge is instanly formed with an empty waggon, in which five or six men cross, armed, and leading their horses, pulled by the first man who crossed. The instant they are across they mount and attack the enemy. A second line should be sent across in the boat by which they came, and a second flying bridge crosses while the first is coming back. In this way enough men can be supplied, covered by artillery and sharpshooters, to force a river, in presence of an enemy not too formidable in numbers.

If the crossing is unopposed, it can be made much faster. Fifty or a hundred men can cross at a time by throwing arms and ammunition into the boat while they are towed along side. The ammunition chests go over a quarter of a load at a time. The artillery caissons are unloaded and their contents ferried over in like manner. The guns and caissons are dragged across the bottom of the river. Their prolonges are fastened together and made into a long line to reach to the other side of the river. This is manned by a sufficient number of men, and the whole, gun, limber, and all, whisked over the bottom in a minute. The prolonges of a battery are ample to cross any ordinary river in this manner, and cavalry guns, cais-