

Warriors and the Wheel

By Stephen Golder



War is very old—as old as the human race. The bicycle, the tricycle, the motorcycle, the automobile, the tank are all new and the conjunction of the old and the new—war and the wheel—presents a very curious study.

The formation in Vancouver of what I believe to be the first military volunteer cycle corps in the Dominion in 1915, stirred up cycling matters to a very great extent and brought together a number of enthusiastic Old Country riders. This band of enthusiasts drilled night after night and took outdoor training, spins on Sundays, for many months. Then Vancouver was asked to supply men for active service overseas and gradually the corps dwindled away, all its men fit and qualified for overseas work “joined up.” As fast as the men were fit they were called for and left for the East for preliminary training before being sent overseas. Many of them have made the supreme sacrifice but a few, very few, are still alive and looking forward to return home.

“In this war,” says one of the gallant cyclists from Vancouver, who has been in the thick of the fighting, “hundreds, even thousands of men have been killed without setting

eyes on those troops opposed to them; it is a war of machines—of automatic death dealers.”

In the fighting lines undoubtedly this is generally true, but it must not be forgotten that there were continually happening “affairs of outposts,” miniature battles between scouting parties and rival bands of cavalry or infantry which had become detached from their regiments. In these affrays all the conditions and circumstances of former warfare were reproduced and the old ardor of conflict was revived.

The soldier cyclist of each side have had a great share in these incidental affairs. Their work was full of adventure and peril, their exploits more stirring than any fiction has hitherto anticipated. When they have joined issue with the enemy it has generally been at close quarters under conditions which have insured “a short fight and a merry one.” If there be any of the old glamor and romance left in modern warfare, the cycling scouts had more than their share of it.

Now the war is over, the tales our cyclists warriors have to tell will be amongst the most inspiring in the annals of this stupendous conflict. The reasons for the success of the soldier-cyclist are not far to seek. In the first place it must be realized that his mount, unlike that of the cavalryman, is silent in progress. This gave him an enormous advantage over his noisy foe, whose horse betrays his presence even when galloping over grass land. In short, the cyclist can hear and not be heard. He can approach speedily and noiselessly, and without warning can attack the enemy who, all unconscious of his presence, often falls an easy prey.

But silence is by no means the cyclist's sole advantage. He has a good turn of speed, which is a factor useful alike in attack or retreat. A cyclist in warfare is really a mounted infantryman, and generally speaking, he is superior in point of speed to the heavily accoutred cavalryman, while, of course, the ordinary infantryman is snail-like by comparison. Should his attack fail for the time being or receive an unexpected check, the cyclist can easily beat a retreat, and by a circuitous route come upon his foe again at another point where, perhaps, he is least expected.

The cyclist can “cut and come again.”