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THE LESSONS OF THE DECADE.

BY A VOLUNTEER CAVALRYMAN.

(From the United States Army and Navy Journal.)

CAMP DISEASES—WINTER CAMPS.

In stationary camps and barracks the plague of soldiers is chronic dysentery. Especially among green troops from comfortable homes this pest rages with violence. Campaigning generally cures it. In this matter the doctor is powerless. All the efforts of medical science fail to cure chronic dysentery when it has once taken hold among new troops. Medicine is useless. Change of scene and diet will effect a cure in a week, but no doctor can help the sufferers. I may be able, however, to throw some light on this subject from my own experience. On two occasions before going into active service I was attacked with this distressing and prostrating malady. The first time it was owing simply to constant wet feet, mounting guard in wet weather, and doing all sorts of open-air duty with dilapidated boots. A new pair, purchased, for at the time we could draw none, cured this. The second time, at Perryville, Maryland, I suffered, in common with the regiment, on account of bad water. The spread of the disease was marvellous. On this occasion it was a matter of observation to me, quite unfeeling, that there was but one class of men in camp unaffected by dysentery, namely, the "old bummers," or men addicted to strong drink, openly and secretly. Whatever else ailed them, dysentery or diarrhoea never did. Acting on this hint, I determined to test it by experiment in my own person. When the regiment moved to Washington I slipped out of camp, running the guard, and deliberately went to work to get drunk, with some others. The effect was magical. Three days' pretty free drinking seemed to effect a complete change in my constitution, and I never suffered from dysentery afterwards. This is the only case in which I can conscientiously recommend the use of spirits in the army. On every other occasion, without exception, I never saw it do anything but unmitigated harm. It transforms many a good man at other times into a fiend; and as for officers, I feel no hesitation in saying that nine-tenths of the disasters in our civil war were owing to drunkenness among officers.

In the management of winter camps our army in the field had no reason to fear comparison with any European army. In our second year's winter quarters on the upper Rappahannock and Rapidan, the majority of our regiments lived in a state of comfort unequalled in European services. But inasmuch as the experience of the past is useless in future, unless the officers happen to be men who engaged therein, and as the probable composition of our future cavalry will be as mixed as in the first years of the civil war, a few words may not be amiss.

In our densely wooded countries, the easiest and best way to make comfortable winter quarters is to erect log huts, roofing them with pieces of shelter tent. The walls are chinked with clay, the chimneys thickly plastered inside with the same material, and the camp is finished. Inasmuch as our winters are fearfully muddy, the streets should be corduroyed in all cases, which renders a camp much pleasanter. If there are plenty of young pines and spruce about, a camp can be made exceedingly pretty and picturesque with rustic work of all kinds. Our infantry regiments frequently decorated their winter camps with wonderful taste in this manner, making rustic bridges over every ditch, and running neat fences around the camp.

But cavalry soldiers have little time for this. The great requisite for a winter camp and one that cannot be too strongly insisted on and pointed out, is a good stable. In winter camps it is often too much the custom to house the men first and let the horses go uncared for. The exact reverse ought to be the case. The first care of a cavalry colonel on going into his winter quarters ought to be to see to his stables being put up and corduroyed. The men can make themselves comfortable in one night by pitching tents as in the summer, ditching carefully and corduroying their tent floors. A single day suffices for this. But every hour a cavalry horse stands in the mud, which is inseparable from winter stables, he deteriorates. The second day ought to be occupied in all cases with hauling logs to floor the stables. If the weather is fine, do it the first. The men will make themselves comfortable in any event. The poor horses cannot help themselves.

The stables should be floored the first thing, and a ditch at least three feet deep dug round it.

Dry quarters will save your horses from the scratches. In the spring they will be fat and in good condition, and able to stand a march. After flooring and draining the stables, which can be done in one or two

days if the work is systematized and not left to the men, a roof should be put up, of straw if it can be got—if not, of brush, with a steep slope. It may not be quite watertight, but it is better than the open air. A screen of brush should be put up to the northwest to secure the horses from that cutting wind, and the stable is complete. After this you need only tell the men to make themselves comfortable, and you may be sure they will do it in short order. But if you let them put up their own quarters first, it is ten chances to one that the poor horses will have to stand out all the winter.

In our thickly wooded country there is positively no excuse whatever for a cavalry colonel letting his horses stand out in the winter. The difference between one who does and one who does not is best illustrated by an incident within my own knowledge. In the winter of 1864-65, the brigade of Gen. Devin, to which I was attached, was quartered at Lovettsville near Harper's Ferry, Virginia. One of the regiments, the First New York Dragoons, was commanded by a first-class cavalry officer. Another, the Sixth New York Cavalry, possessed for its commander a recently promoted and very youthful lieutenant-colonel, as brave as a lion, but ignorant of horse flesh beyond riding decently. The dragoon officer in one week from his arrival had stables, with good straw roofs overhead, for all his horses. The other built good quarters for his men, and left his horses almost unsheltered, entirely uncovered.

The two regiments were about equal in strength. In the ensuing mud campaign the dragoon horses suffered little or nothing; the Sixth New York horses went to the devil. At the battle of Five Forks, in April, the Sixth New York Cavalry could only muster forty-five mounted men for action. The New York Dragoons in the same action brought up one hundred and sixty-seven horses, exclusive of officers' chargers. Volunteers could not be more instructive on the point in question.

Winter quarters shall be looked upon as the preparation places for next spring's campaign. The horses must be nursed and fattened up, the men kept at drill to preserve their efficiency. Battalion drills once in two days, individual instruction in fencing, and pistol shooting on the alternate days, are the best. The change keeps the men in good humor; too much battalion drill disgusts them.

In pistol-shooting, two shots a day, at a target, under the instructor's eye, are better than the whole six on one day in volley-firing. Volley-firing ought to be practised only in action, and the exactitude of its