



The Volunteer Review

AND MILITARY AND NAVAL GAZETTE.

A Journal Devoted to the Interests of the Military and Naval Forces of the Dominion of Canada

VOL. V.

OTTAWA, CANADA, MONDAY, JUNE 5, 1871.

No. 23.

VOLUNTEER CAVALRY.—No. XII.

THE LESSONS OF THE DECADE.

BY A VOLUNTEER CAVALRYMAN.

(From the United States Army and Navy Journal)

BAGGAGE AND TRAINS.

IN the matter of baggage and trains there is much room for improvement in our cavalry service. At present there is no distinction between a cavalry and infantry train. One moves as slowly as the other. There are just three things which are loaded in cavalry trains, viz., food, ammunition, and baggage. The provision and forage part of the train should not be taken on raids. Great bulk and weight are necessary, and such cannot be moved rapidly.

Ammunition must be carried. So must a small quantity of baggage, but the less of this the better.

The problem becomes, then, to carry the ammunition and baggage in the smallest space and safest and most expeditious manner. Ammunition has very frequently been carried on pack mules. The plan has the advantage of requiring no wheeled vehicles, and so of being independent of bad roads. But the disadvantages of the plan outweigh its conveniences. It takes an immense number of animals, which have to be fed, and makes a long and tedious train. Since cavalry must always be accompanied by artillery, wherever a gun can go a waggon should follow. One ammunition waggon, with six mules, will carry as much as twenty-four pack mules, besides distressing the animals less. At all halts, a mule in harness rests; a pack mule has no rest till going into camp.

Waggons, then, even for raids, if of any length, being settled on, the question arises, how small can a train be made, to carry enough ammunition for a cavalry corps?

Taking a corps of cavalry at its full strength, viz., three divisions, each of three brigades of four regiments, of which the average regimental strength is about four hundred present for duty, the total service strength of such a corps is about fourteen thousand men. In a severe battle the men being under proper control of their officers, and the latter not ammunition wasters, the consumption ought never to reach over forty rounds per man. This ratio can be

adhered to with advantage, and leave them more formidable in reality than the prodigals. Three full battles ought to be allowed for on a raid, the ammunition to be carried in waggons, the men retaining eighty rounds besides. You can thus fight five pitched battles, if necessary, before returning to the army. At 120 rounds per man, it will thus be necessary to carry about 1,700,000 rounds of ammunition in the waggons, or about seventeen waggon loads, the full corps ammunition train for a raid. The artillery should have a single ammunition waggon for each battery, at the rate of a battery to a brigade, making nine more, or twenty-six in all.

Ammunition being provided for, the baggage remains to be considered. It is a very difficult matter to deal with this, unless corps and division headquarters set the example of economy. In several raids and expeditions I have seen the attempt made to cut down the baggage, beginning with regiments. Staff officers from division headquarters would come down the line of march and pitch on the pack mules of company officers, turning them loose, throwing off the packs, and in some instances confiscating the mules for division headquarters. Now, as long as corps and division headquarters are encumbered with a host of useless hangers on, as at present, so long will the regimental baggage be bulky.

In army administration, as in civil life, law is not always nor often justice. In too many instances it is rank injustice. If a general wishes his baggage train reduced, he must set the example himself. If he carries a dozen tents and office furniture for a host of useless aides-de-camp, and takes six waggons for corps headquarters, four apiece for division, and two for each brigade he will have a total of thirty-six waggons of lumber, which will not do the force he commands any good whatever. The evil will be sure to spread down, and the baggage train become a terrible nuisance, every regiment having its own tail, till the whole of the pack train extends for a mile and a half.

To check this state of things, the most stringent orders are issued. Staff officers are sent to enforce the orders, and to reduce the regimental trains to the minimum. Heartburnings and animosities enough arise out of this baggage business to breed a mutiny, almost. If all staff officers were gentlemen such a duty, even in that case, would be very disagreeable to perform to both parties. But since a very small proportion of our staff officers during the late war could be said to belong to that category it generally happened that they made their orders a pretext for making themselves as

oppressive and insolent as possible to regimental officers.

The whole secret of the cumbrous baggage trains of modern armies lies in one word, luxury. The private soldier in the ranks during the war, I can testify from experience, lived in perfect comfort. Without piling a load on his horse, he managed to find a good bed, a good fire, a good supper, and a feed for his animal. An officer, if allowed by custom, might do the same. But officers are not allowed by custom to do anything for themselves. They must wait for the pack train, when their servants come up, to make them comfortable. To men who have risen from the ranks the contrast is unpleasant. The higher the grade of the officer, the greater his luxury and imagined wants. A general thinks it absolutely necessary to his comfort to have two walled tents, an iron bedstead, mattresses, sheets, blankets, a silver dinner service, and an army of retainers. Every little staff officer likewise finds it necessary to have a tent and at least two servants, one for his horses, one for himself.

The adjutant, inspector, quartermaster, commissary, surgeon, and ordnance officer are all too proud to work. They have clerks detailed to do their work, while they strut about in useless idleness, imagining that they are conferring a great benefit on the service by sometimes signing their names. Some of these gentlemen may resent the description, but I have seen the inside of too many headquarters not to be confident of its general truth. A good staff officer in the field is invaluable, and principally because the article is so scarce.

Now all the excesses of a baggage train may be avoided if the general begins the reform. If he will confine himself to a single A tent during campaigns, and compel the different staff departments to do their necessary desk work together in a single hospital tent, the same officers may well sleep in the office at nights. There are just six necessary officers on a staff, the adjutant, quartermaster, commissary, surgeon, ordnance officer, and inspector. In most cases the aides-de-camp are mere honorary gentlemen, appointed from favoritism of some kind, and most profoundly in their own way and every one else's, as low as brigade headquarters at all events. Two hospital tents ought to contain without difficulty the whole of a corps staff, with a general's A tent opening into them. The headquarters will not be near as imposing as they are at present, but the staff would be more under the general's eye, and work harder. If the detailing of clerks was abolished the work would be better done. A staff position might not