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A LONG-DISTANCE RIDE.

Translated from the "Invalide Russe" by Captain E. LAMBERT, R.H.A.

THE strength of the detachment was:—1 General Officer, 1 Colonel, 14 Officers, 1 trumpeter, 80 Cossacks, and 3 followers, with 3 transport animals (without wagons). They were ordered to march 100 versts (about 250 miles) in five days.

In order to make the ride more interesting and instructive, the country selected was Finland, differing widely from the steppes, the home of the Cossacks. As the population understand little Russian, and in some places none at all, the conditions of the ride approached more nearly in this respect those of active service.

The object aimed at was—having placed the Cossack and his horse under the conditions of very arduous campaign life (absence of transport wagons and very long marches), in the face of continual natural obstacles, woods and mountains in place of boundless steppes—to work out rules for the guidance of detachments and to test the endurance of horses and readiness of resource of the men; also by observing the Officers' chargers, to see how far the imported horse is suited for long marches. Five days beforehand, a non-commissioned officer and 4 Cossacks were sent out to reconnoitre the road. This non-commissioned officer marched 23 miles, to the village of Baylostrov, halted there for the night, and made enquiries from the inhabitants as to the road, and returned the next day by the sea-coast road through Sestroytz. He reported as follows: "The eastern road (the high road to Viborg) is paved with stone to the frontier, 35 miles from the capital, and the coast or western road is sandy throughout. The eastern road is completely free from the snow, but the western is covered with melting snow, especially in the woods and hollows. There are few villages, but at all the post-stations there are 'serais' capable of holding the whole detachment."

The day before starting, the Officers were furnished with routes notifying the halting places, and tables of phrases to be used in communicating with the inhabitants. The horses were in ordinary condition, not having been put into any training for the march.

The first march was to the village of Kivineb, 43½ miles from the barracks.

The detachment marched at 11 A.M., preceded by patrols with orders to avoid all possible obstacles. The Officers rode apart from the men 300 yards ahead, who marched by threes in full marching order under a Squadron Commander. The horses carried two days' rations for man and horse. The pace was alternate walk and trot of

a verst,¹ with a halt after every 8 or 10 miles, to adjust girths and loads. After each halt the men walked for a verst leading their horses.

A halt was made half way for an hour and a half, when the kits were removed, the horses fed with damped oats, and watered before starting again. Two versts from the end of the march, the men dismounted, loosened the girths, and led their horses in. On arrival, the horses were supplied with abundant hay and straw. The average pace of this march was 4 to 5 miles an hour, so that the halting place was reached about 9 p.m. At 11 p.m. the horses were watered and fed with oats, which they eat sparingly, preferring damped meadow hay.

On this march the thoroughbreds² showed more liveliness and go up to the last moment than the Cossack horses, but their soft stable-reared training showed itself at once when the weather changed during the night. As soon as a fine cold rain began to fall they became depressed and miserable, with staring coats, while the shaggy steppe ponies showed complete indifference.

The second day the march was resumed at 7 a.m., along an excellent road, in clear sunny weather, temperature 14° R. The 52 miles to Viborg were marched in ten hours, including a halt of two hours. On arrival, the horses were picketed in the manège of the artillery, and the men accommodated in barracks. The manège was still wet from the winter snow and rain, and, in spite of ample bedding, 75 per cent. of the horses did not lie down. Five troop horses could go no further, and were left at Viborg. The remainder were stale and weary on the next day's march to the waterfall at Imatra, 39½ miles, which were covered in nine and a-half hours. The slowness of this march was due, on the one hand, to the bad night's rest of the previous night, and, on the other, to the severe climb over the high Finland hills. On examining the horses it was found that the sandy and hilly road had worn the shoes of the forefeet very severely, in some cases the horn as well. Several horses had to be re-shod. Small brushes were noticed on the coronets, due to the fine sand sticking to the wet feet and rubbing away the skin, and in some cases these were beginning to fester. Many horses had brushed on the fetlock joints, which indicates the necessity for putting indiarubber brushing-rings on horses with close action behind when on active service, or, at any rate, of bandaging the hind fetlocks.

The return march from Imatra began at 7 a.m., as it was intended to pass through Viborg to Khoomel, 54 miles. The weather was unfavourable, fine cold rain changing to snow on the hills. The pace was a sharp trot, in order to arrive at the halting place by daylight. Viborg was reached at 5 p.m., when a delay of two hours was caused by the Officers of the garrison, who wished to entertain their comrades in arms. It was nearly 8 before Viborg was left behind. A thick fog covered everything. Dusk came on, and in the woods it was completely dark. It was necessary to turn from the path on to the

¹ Two-thirds of a mile.

² More correctly the stud-breds.—TRANS.

new coast road, but the inscriptions in Finnish on the mile-posts were unintelligible to the advanced Cossacks; the fixing of bits of paper written in pencil was a slow process, and useless in the dark, when even the posts themselves were hardly visible among the tree trunks, so orders were given that at every clearing huge arrows should be drawn on the sand to show the way. Even if it was too dark to see the road itself, it was not difficult, by the aid of a lantern, to find the mark, knowing beforehand where the patrols would have made it.

Thanks to this precaution, the detachment reached its halting place at 10.30 p.m. The remaining marches to Teryouk, 46½ miles in ten hours, and St. Petersburg, 38 miles, were made without any difficulty, the horses and men being by this time in thoroughly hard condition.

The detachment was met in St. Petersburg by the General Commanding the division, and ranked past him in single file. The gay, lively appearance of the men and horses, though they were a little fine drawn, left nothing to be desired. This ride, 264 miles in five days without a day's halt, across mountains, in unfavourable weather, was a severe strain on the powers of man and horse. Owing, however, to the careful attention paid to girths, numnahs, and loads, the horses had no sore backs. If after the day's march any lumps appeared on the backs they were immediately dressed with salt water, a simple, well-known remedy, which caused the lumps to disappear by the morning.

The experiences of this ride seem to point to the advisability of doing the march as rapidly as possible, so as to give longer rest to the horses. Shortening the halts no doubt tires the men more, but gives them the advantage of daylight to make themselves and their horses comfortable for the night.

In dry, sunny weather, such as prevailed for the second and sixth marches, it is a good thing to give the horses, every 8 or 10 miles, a few mouthfuls of water, or at any rate to sponge out their nostrils with a damp rag.

The Laktin Bay was crossed in a ferry boat. At first the horses were placed head to head across the boat, but this unaccustomed position disturbed them much, and they would not stand quiet; so the last sections were placed by threes, heads to the front, and in this position they took no notice of their surroundings, and were quite quiet.

Fourteen Officers took part in the ride, of whom half rode Anglo-Don and Anglo-Arab horses from the studs, the others steppe horses, and it must be said, in justice to the former, that they showed more energy and life than the latter. The steppe horses at the end of a march, though they went on and increased their pace without much urging, yet were dull and heavy on the bit.

The greater daintiness in the matter of forage, &c., of the stud-bred horses must not be counted against them, as it is easily explained by their being stable-reared, and, moreover, accustomed to the greater care and better food which Officers' horses always receive.