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To cite this article: Captain Hare R.E., D.A.Q.M.G. (1883) A Prussian Criticism on the Austrian Cavalry Manœuvres of 1883, Royal United Services Institution. Journal, 27:122, 847-850, DOI: [10.1080/03071848309425439](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071848309425439)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071848309425439>

Published online: 11 Sep 2009.

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A PRUSSIAN CRITICISM ON THE AUSTRIAN CAVALRY MANŒUVRES OF 1883.

(From the "Vedette" of the 14th October, 1883. Translated by Captain HARE, R.E., D.A.Q.M.G.)

It may be interesting to our readers to hear the remarks of the Special Correspondent of the "Kölnische Zeitung" on our manœuvres at Brück on the Leitha; he says:

At the first of the two manœuvre exercises held on the 25th September, the Cavalry Division was ordered to advance against a skeleton or marked Division of similar strength placed between Pachfurt and Neudorf, and this movement was interesting inasmuch as a great many ditches had to be crossed, some being what might be called rather ugly. They were, it is true, hardly of such a character as to stop the general advance, but still it might have been reasonably expected that a good many riders would have come to grief, especially when, towards the end of the movement, the ditches would have had to be negotiated at a pretty stiff pace. I rode over the ground before the movement, and afterwards saw the Division clear the obstacles. Contrary to all my expectations, not a single horse came down, which speaks wonders for the good riding of the Austrian cavalry. Nor was there any checking or rushing to be seen, nor indeed any confusion whatever, and any one not being quite close would never have noticed the existence of so many obstacles. As regards the general arrangement of the attack, which took place as usual in successive lines (*Treffen*), the only facts worth noticing are the formation used was that much preferred in the Austrian Service, that is, the double column (very like the Prussian column on the two centre squadrons, or the *Kolonne aus der Mitte*), and the successive lines kept their time and distance perfectly. One regiment did a thing which is rarely done at manœuvres, or, indeed, at any other time, that is, it caught a skeleton regiment of the marked Division, which was attempting to form up as a third line behind the first two, so quickly and suddenly that it had no time to show front. The attack, in fact, fell partly on the head and partly on the flank of the column on the move, and in real war would have practically destroyed it. The regiment that performed this feat managed to get close up to the enemy behind the spur of a hill, and then waiting for an opportunity, when he was in the most unfavourable position for defence, charged home with dash and determination.

There are few opportunities at manœuvres against a skeleton enemy for bold surprises, but this, as a fact, was one.

As regards the artillery advance, which was faultless, as it always is in the Austrian Service, fire was opened at the enormous range of 2,400 mètres, and the guns were generally kept at this range throughout the whole movement. Only quite at the end was a battery ordered to close with the enemy, but before its action could be properly appreciated, the exercise came to an end.

The second exercise which then followed necessitated a fresh formation and a totally different system of fighting. The Cavalry Division was supposed to be on the right flank of an army corps engaged with the enemy, and had received the order to attack the left flank of the enemy's infantry. This was the first time during this year's manœuvres that cavalry was employed against infantry, and when we think for a moment how often in real war

cavalry must reckon on having to deal with infantry, though perhaps not to attack it at all times and places, the idea of introducing the infantry element into the exercise must certainly be considered a happy one. If Cavalry Divisions are to be "independent," that is to say, are to be equal to undertaking wide sweeping movements, it must never be forgotten that they are sure to fall in with infantry. Of course, if they come across large masses of infantry they can do little or nothing, and their further advance is either stopped altogether or they must adopt some other plan of gaining the object in view. But if the opposing infantry is weak, cavalry must be prepared, with the help of artillery, to crush the resistance offered, either by charging home sword in hand or by dismounting and fighting on foot; and the latter system of fighting appears to be little practised in the Austrian cavalry. Perhaps they are wrong. The fact that cavalry Divisions must constantly in war come across infantry in small bodies would appear to point to the desirability of attaching a battalion of infantry (and what is the particular use of *Jägers*?) to each Division of cavalry, which might, by the direction of the Officer commanding the latter, be used now in one place and now in another, but always so that its whereabouts were unknown to the enemy. Infantry might often have thus been employed at Brück, as there happened to be a battalion in the camp there. But, as a fact, it was only employed once, and then to represent a skeleton enemy, the battalion being taken to represent two whole regiments. Any speculations as to what might be considered success or failure at manœuvres such as these with a skeleton enemy—unless, indeed, the case be quite a special one, as in the first exercise—cannot be otherwise than extremely vague. On the other hand, one point was very remarkable, and that was the cavalry appeared to come up so fresh, in spite of the previous calls that had been made on it, that it certainly had a very fair chance of success. The exercise, which must have taken a good deal out of horse and man, came to a close immediately after these attacks, and it certainly left a most favourable impression, both on account of the excellent riding of the men as well as on the hard condition of the horses.

To form anything like a real and general opinion of the fighting value of the Austrian cavalry, it must be considered under two distinct heads, viz., first, its strength or numbers and the material of which it is made, and, secondly, its training. Now, as regards numbers, the Austrian Army is even more than amply provided with cavalry. There are, it is true, only forty-one regiments of cavalry, but these consist of six squadrons each, all prepared to take the field in case of mobilization, whereas, it is well known, one of the five squadrons of a German cavalry regiment remains at home, to act as a dépôt, and consequently must not be reckoned on for war. The Austrian cavalry would, in fact, with its forty-one regiments, put as many squadrons in the field as 61½ German regiments, of which there are altogether only 93. And as, moreover, provision is made for rapidly establishing reserve formations, the Austrian cavalry hardly leaves anything to be desired as regards numbers. The supply of horses in Austria proper and Hungary, and especially in the latter, more than amply covers all home requirements; indeed, there is plenty of room for exportation to other countries, France and Italy, it is well known, being considerable purchasers in the Austro-Hungarian market. This fact alone shows that the Austro-Hungarian animal must be a desirable cavalry horse. A German and Austrian cavalry regiment, if put alongside each other, would, as a matter of fact, be about equally well mounted. As regards arms and equipment, the usual rule is followed, that is to say, dragoons and hussars have swords and carbines, and lancers lances and revolvers. In the latter, forty-eight men per squadron carry a carbine instead of the lance, a far better plan than encumbering the man with both, as is done in some countries. The Russian plan is somewhat similar, but is the same for all cavalry, the only difference being that the front rank carry lances and the rear rank carbines.

The Austrian lances, it may be noticed, are without lance-flags, a fashion that, at any rate, it would be undesirable to copy, as it looks anything but pretty. I am glad to say I cannot draw pictures of the Austrian cuirassiers; these have been long ago abolished in Austria, whereas we are still hanging back in Germany at this step. The Austrian cavalry soldier's uniform is simple, and, with the exception of the dragoon's huge helmet, neat enough; the red forage-cap is especially so and gives the man a smart appearance. The red overalls, worn tucked in in knee-boots, are strange to the German eye, but wear better than might be at first supposed from such a bad colour, though unprovided with any kind of leather strapping. The officers' uniform is similar to the soldiers'; the various blouse-like jackets worn off duty are, however, too plain, and prevent the rank being easily recognized, a circumstance that many Austrian Officers are quite ready to admit.

Coming now to the question of training, let us first deal with the Officers. The Austrian cavalry has long and glorious traditions, a matter of immediate importance to the Officers of any arm. Austrian cavalry Officers have always had the reputation of being excellent riders, and, as far as I was personally able to judge, they fully keep this reputation up. Both seat and hands are faultless, and the horses are seen at a glance to be thoroughly broken. The greatest attention is paid in Austria to the training of cavalry Officers, and it is certainly of a very exacting nature. Every young Officer must, before he is appointed to a regiment, have passed eight months at a brigade school, where he is simply trained, first as a rider, and next as a coming riding-master. These young gentlemen have, besides the usual school instruction, to ride from six to eight horses a day, and are not only, as with us Germans, encouraged to ride across country, steeplechases, &c., but are ordered and actually taken out to do so without being asked. In this the greatest attention is paid to jumping, and it is hardly necessary to add, the excellent jumping of the men, which is so remarkable, cannot be otherwise than due to the still more excellent jumping of the Officers. As with the Officers so with the men, seat and hands are all that can be desired, and a bad rider is a very rare sight indeed. The men have, both when mounted and dismounted, a light, smart, and soldier-like appearance. School-riding seems to be very well understood, for the horses are well-balanced and willing, and are ridden up to the bit without persuasion. I have not, curiously enough, seen a single refusing horse, a fact that must be only taken to show that there are fewer of such brutes in Austria than in other countries.

At the exercises above alluded to were to be seen the movements of large masses, and consequently the usual deployment for the charge of the brigade and Division. Without going into the details of the Austrian cavalry field exercise, it may perhaps be noticed that the Austrian cavalry pay particular attention to simplicity of formation, and, as far as possible, use the double column (a formation formerly used in Germany, the *Kolonne aus der Mitte*), placing sometimes two regiments and sometimes the two divisions of a regiment (three squadrons each) alongside each other. The *Zugkolonne* (or column of quarter-squadrons, is also frequently used, but the *Halbkolonne*, or column of half-squadrons, so much used in Germany, never. Where the Austrian cavalry differs so much from the German is in the pace; both canter and trot (the former about 60 mètres to the minute) are much slower in the Austrian than in the German service, and of course this in actual warfare means being longer under fire. On the other hand, the slower pace has the advantage of greater order and regularity, and such a thing as a horse half breaking away and getting out of hand at the charge is very rarely to be seen. The Austrian plan of a slower trot than the German may be a sound one; at any rate, even among German cavalry Officers opinions are certainly divided on the question. The trot is a pace that has to be kept up for a long time, and is never used for the actual charge, and should consequently, even when kept up for half-an-

hour or more without a check, not take it out of the horses. With the regulation trot of the German cavalry, horses soon show signs of sweating and distress. The looser riding of the Austrian cavalry has perhaps something to say to the pace being slower.

And now for a word on the system of cavalry manœuvres carried out at Brück. The first thing that strikes one is the great use made of a marked or skeleton enemy, and together with it the system of two manœuvres on the same day. This is generally considered in Austria as necessary for the training of the commanding Officers.

There is no question but that the general arrangements of the manœuvres were such as enabled both troops and Generals to learn a great deal; the mere looker-on can say that the Austrian cavalry showed a very high state of training in carrying them out, and is fully up to the mark of the cavalry of a great Military Power. To judge troops of different States according to some fixed pattern or standard is a matter of impossibility and should never be attempted. Faults on one point or another can always be found, but these, when compared perhaps with other conspicuous merits, are found to vanish. This is certainly the case with the Austrian cavalry, and to form a general opinion otherwise than a very favourable one of its value, would be difficult indeed.