THE STRATEGICAL EMPLOYMENT OF CAVALRY.

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THE following reflections upon the strategical action of cavalry were suggested by a lecture on this subject, which was delivered at the Royal United Service Institution on the 24th April;¹ it is hoped that they may prove of interest to students of war who are interested in the higher leading of cavalry.

The introduction to the lecture contained a definition of the rôle of the cavalry in that period prior to the meeting of the two main armies. Their most important mission was described as being that of *reconnaissance* by force and by stealth.

This leads one to consider the different cases of distribution of cavalry in the service of *couverture*, before the commencement of war; for example: (a) in the case where the adverse groups of armies would be quite close, as in a war between France and Germany, or (b) where the adverse groups of armies would be distant from each other as in the case of war between, say, Germany and Russia, or Austria and Italy. In the former case, (a), the cavalry would probably be divided into two parts, one covering the most dangerous flank of the group of armies, while the other would be with the group of armies and destined to take part in the decisive battle.

We also hold that it is more than probable that a war in Europe will not be ended in the first great decisive battle, but that the war will continue, not, perhaps, on the gigantic scale of battle such as the opening scene of war between France and Germany would present, but on a scale, say, of Bonaparte's wars in 1796 and 1800. We see no sense in the oft heard opinion, "Oh, the war will be finished in the first great battle." No nation is vanquished till it admits itself conquered; had France continued the struggle in 1871 she would at least have had Lorraine to-day. The cavalry will play a great rôle in the second stage of a war.

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¹ "The Strategical Action of Cavalry," by Brig.-General H. de Lisle, C.B., D.S.O. It appeared to the writer, who was present at the lecture, that the points admitting of divergence of opinion were too numerous and weighty to have been dealt with verbally in a satisfactory manner, in the short period available for discussion on conclusion of the lecture.—C.V.F.T.

On page 788 of the June number of this JOURNAL we read that:—

“Before committing his forces to any definite plan, the Commander-in-Chief will require reliable information of the enemy's dispositions, his places of concentration, the direction of march of his forces, and the nature of the country between the two armies; for this information he trusts to the commander of his independent cavalry.”

This passage was understood by some speakers who took part in the discussion as implying that the Commander-in-Chief would wait for the cavalry General to send him full information on the above headings. Now it is generally allowed that *strategic* offensive, when it is a case of war between Powers sensibly equal, alone leads to victory; it is not only advantageous, but it is indispensable. The strategist (Commander-in-Chief), who, directly he has concentrated his masses (principle of economy of force), deliberately moves forward in the general direction of the bulk of the hostile forces in the field, and against that point of the enemy (*i.e.*, against one of his flanks or his centre), which strategic reasons indicate as being his weakest point, will act with his mass, and will have, therefore, the greatest chance of success, given, of course, that he has a general knowledge of the whereabouts of the enemy, indicated in peace time by the presence of railways and detrainning platforms, intelligence department, etc., including, of course, those new agents of reconnaissance and assistants to the strategic cavalry, *viz.*, aeroplanes.

THE LESSONS OF THE MANCHURIAN WAR.

The war in Manchuria provides numerous examples to illustrate this interesting subject. General Kuropatkin, whose character as an over-cautious and hesitating General now stands revealed by official documents, considered that he could not advance and deliver battle until he was accurately informed as to the enemy's strength and positions. Now, this is precisely the information which, in these days, one is not going to get in a precise manner; the German cavalry did not get it in 1870; nor did Kuropatkin get it in 1904; he remained inactive, and was beaten in consequence.

The strategical lessons of the war in Manchuria show that the Commander-in-Chief *cannot* wait for accurate information to reach him, because he is never going to get this accurate information; that is all done in *peace time*, as mentioned above. As soon as he has formed his plans, and concentrated every available man to fight, on the principle of economy of force, detaching the minimum necessary, he must move forward straight on his objective, which is the bulk of the enemy's forces in the field. It does not matter if the enemy concentrates a few hours or a day before him; he is not going to let the enemy impose his will on him.

Another point to consider is that of the cavalry duel, the great battle between the opposing cavalry bodies, with which it is often said that the period of reconnaissance will end.

Now, from what has been said in the first page of this article, it will be seen that this great preliminary cavalry battle which, in the opinion of many military writers, is a useless sacrifice of men and animals—resulting perhaps in the complete disorganization and exhaustion of both parties—has little chance of coming off, and that the cavalry would be much more profitably employed in assisting in the great *decisive* battle, which must be fought out by the infantry and artillery, and which is, perhaps, to decide the fate of the campaign.

The Lecturer referred to the large amount of intemperate matter which has been written on the subject of cavalry in recent years, and pointed to the fact that even eminent military writers of the various great Powers have raised doubts as to the possibility of great cavalry successes in future wars. In this connection it is interesting to note that, since Napoleon gave us those examples of how to use cavalry in battle, in the great charges launched by him (Austerlitz, Jena, Eylau, Friedland, Essling, Wagram, Borodino), the rôle of cavalry in great battles has gradually got smaller and smaller (examples 1866, 1870); in the latter wars the action of cavalry on the battlefield was attended with good results when they were employed in small fractions (such as Von Bredow's brigade at Rezonville), and it was unsuccessful when they were used in masses (as by Gallifet at Sedan, or by Bonnemain at Froeschwiller). Towards the end of the 19th century we find a host of writers decrying cavalry action, and the chorus is renewed with vehemence at the commencement of the 20th century, when all jumped to hasty conclusions during the campaign in Manchuria, and loudly proclaimed that cavalry was a failure, before they were in possession of *official documents*.

Now that we have these official documents we discover that the Japanese had few cavalry, and in consequence were not able to put the indecisive victories of Liao Yang and Mukden to good account.¹

It also appears that the Japanese have deeply regretted their want of cavalry, and intend, as the result of their experience of the latest war, to raise the strength of that arm to eight divisions. To us the most interesting lesson of the war as regards cavalry work is to find the Japanese cavalry supplementing its numerical inferiority by means of infantry support

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¹ It must not be forgotten that the primary cause of the indecisive nature of the victories of Liao Yang and the Sha Ho, was the fact that the Japanese had violated the principle of *economy of force* by detaching 150,000 men to take Port Arthur, that fortress being a secondary objective, whereas, on the principle of economy of force, the mass of the Japanese was required to destroy the bulk of the Russian forces in the field.

(mixed detachments), during the Liao Yang manœuvre, and executing its mission (*viz.*, to cover the left flank of the group of armies) very skilfully. The employment, in this way, of mixed detachments,¹ acting as support, *points d'appui*, to strategic cavalry is the plan of the late General Langlois, the eminent strategist, and it is advocated by many of the leading French Generals of to-day.

It is generally allowed by the leading military experts in France to-day that a large strategic (or general) advanced guard to a group of armies, having a front of some 42 miles or more, is nothing more or less than a positive danger (especially when it is placed under the General commanding the strategic cavalry), for it is a violation of the principle of economy of force;² it involves a serious dissemination of force, and it may be overwhelmed before aid can arrive, or it may force the Commander-in-Chief to fight at a time and place against his intentions. On the Russian side, we find that the cavalry, although numerous, gave mediocre results, generally speaking. But, we ask, did General Kuropatkin give his cavalry a proper chance, when he disseminated it in small parties over the zone of operations, thus violating that principle of economy of force, which has never been violated in history without disaster?³

It was only the premature surrender of Stoessel at Port Arthur which released the Japanese Third Army (Nogi) and enabled it to reach the bulk of the Japanese forces in time to take part in the battle of Mukden. General Mishchenko, with his cavalry performing the service of *couverture*, gave accurate information regarding the disembarkation and movements of the Japanese armies; but we find General Kuropatkin allowing no initiative whatever to his General in command of the army of *couverture*, and interfering to such an extent as to render action impossible.

To sum up, the war in Manchuria has in no way proved the failure of cavalry; it has simply shown that this arm can only give great results when it is well employed.

¹ The true rôle of cyclist infantry is here indicated.

² The experience of former wars proves on the contrary that in order to be properly informed, the commander of an army should correspond directly with each of the divisions of cavalry which are scouting his front and flanks. To let all information pass through the commander of a great corps of cavalry before coming to the Commander-in-Chief of a group of armies is to introduce a middle man, and so lose time. Moreover, there is the possibility of the Commander-in-Chief seeing his commander of cavalry giving orders contrary to his intentions. Take the example of 1805, when the Russians changed the direction of their march, passed the river and uncovered Vienna. What direction to operate in and what was to be done could only be settled by the Commander-in-Chief; Napoleon's reproaches to Murat on that occasion are interesting reading.

³ Examples: The Austrians in 1796, 1800, 1805, 1809, 1866; Napoleon in 1813 and 1815; the French in 1870; the Russians in 1904.

NAPOLEON'S CAVALRY.

We repeat, there is more to be learnt from the lessons of the latest campaign, viz., the war in Manchuria, than from the examples of Napoleon's method of using cavalry, both from a strategic and tactical point of view—for though the great fundamental principles of war laid down by Napoleon, the founder of modern strategy, do not change, still it cannot be denied that the methods of fighting are not the same in 1912 as they were a hundred years ago. Napoleon in battle held his cavalry in masses at a short distance from the enemy, say, at 600 or 700 yards, ready to charge on the first favourable opportunity; whereas to-day cavalry would have to await their opportunity concealed in folds of the ground, etc., far distant from the lines of hostile infantry; the open and rolling ground formerly sought by the cavalry general, has to-day become the cherished terrain of the infantry and artillery; cavalry is compelled to seek for the covered approaches, formerly dear to the rifleman, in order to be able to approach the hostile infantry, and even then it must risk annihilation before getting into a gallop. It is, in short, by *surprise* alone that cavalry can now succeed in modern battle, *i.e.*, it must surprise infantry before the latter is ready to receive the charge; and even this eventuality promises to be rare. The dangerous zone in Napoleon's time was 200 yards, whereas now we have 2,000 yards for rifle, and, say, 5,000 or 6,000 yards for field guns; moreover, magazine rifles have dispensed with all the complicated infantry formations of the past; commanders of units have only to close their elastic single rank formations in order to face the threatened point of attack, in any place they may happen to be. In short, the introduction of the small bore rifle has compelled infantry under fire to abandon the dense lines of Wellington at Vittoria and the massive columns of Macdonald at Wagram, and of Ney at Waterloo. As infantry and artillery have had to effect an entire change in their fighting tactics, we hold that cavalry also cannot be permitted to preserve the methods of Austerlitz and Wagram, *i.e.*, the tactics of the smooth bore cannon and the flint-lock musket.

Austerlitz, Eylau and Wagram are sometimes instanced as battles won by cavalry charges, but at Eylau the great charge of Murat, with his 80 squadrons of cavalry, was ordered by the Emperor to be delivered, in conjunction with Marshal Davout's turning movement, with a view to checking the advance of the Russians (who had assumed the offensive after the infantry attack delivered by Augereau's Army Corps had failed). Though Murat's charge practically destroyed the Russian centre, it was unable to do more owing to the difficulties of the ground; the turning movement of Marshal Davout with the Third Army Corps also came to a standstill. The Emperor had actually ordered a retirement in the night when the arrival of Ney's

Army Corps at nightfall to turn the Russian right, decided Benningsen to retreat. In short, we contend that Napoleon won at Wagram, Eylau and Friedland, as at Jena, Bautzen and Ligny, *not* by the shock action of his cavalry, but by using his favourite manœuvre (in strategy as in tactics), that is to say by delivering a *turning attack* with his secondary mass (*which was generally accompanied by the bulk of the cavalry*) against that wing and portion of the enemy's rear which was nearest the latter's natural line of retreat; and he combined with this movement his *main attack* with his *principal mass* against the same wing which was being turned by the secondary mass. The other wing of the enemy (farthest from his line of retreat) which was not turned, he contained by attacking and holding it with his minimum force, which under an independent commander, had to fight a combat of more or less defensive character, *i.e.*, a combat "*d'immobilisation et d'usure*" (example, Massena at Wagram). Napoleon won the above quoted great battles by using his great fundamental principles of economy of force, mass, rapidity and security in combination; the artillery might claim to have won Napoleon's victory at Eylau just as much as the cavalry. It was Davout's *turning movement in conjunction with Macdonald's advance with the principal mass* which won Wagram.

On page 792 we read :—

"We find him (Napoleon) following no doctrine or general theories, but he uses his cavalry for special purposes, giving very clearly defined instructions on each occasion. Not once did he send all his cavalry reserve on a vague mission of exploration. . . . In 1805 he sent it across the Rhine as a screen to deceive the enemy, and when the Grand Army executed its turning movement on Ulm, this cavalry, supported by two corps acted as flank guard."

This procedure was, in fact, the carrying out of his principle of security, which, in other words, was the retaining of his liberty of action and manœuvre by means of his cavalry supported by infantry; and the flank guards of his army came under the heading of the same principle. To-day a commander-in-chief of a group of armies will impose it in the same way by using strategic cavalry supported by *mixed* detachments. Throughout all his campaigns we find Napoleon faithful to the principle of security, and 1796 is perhaps the first illustration of this practice.

"All the great captains of antiquity, and those who later have marched worthily in their footsteps, have only done great deeds by conforming to the principles of the art of war . . . whatever may have been the audacity of their enterprise and the extent of their success they have only succeeded by conforming to those principles . . . one has attributed my greatest successes to luck, and imputed my reverses to my faults; but if I wrote my campaigns, one would be very astonished to see that in every case I exercised my faculties in conforming to the principles of war."—*Napoleon's conversation at St. Helena, 16th November, 1816.*

Napoleon's victories have been ascribed to the fact that his cavalry generals were all young men; but this fact applied to nearly all his generals, and was the natural outcome of 20 years of war from the time of the Revolution till Waterloo. Not one of his generals was over 49 in the 1815 campaign; his oldest general in that campaign was Grouchy, a cavalry general whose handling of the detachment on Napoleon's right flank left much to be desired. On the other hand, the gallant Blücher, another cavalry general, the most tenacious and bitter opponent Napoleon ever encountered, was over 70 when he led the cavalry charge to retrieve the day at Ligny and when, two days afterwards, he encouraged and urged on his Prussian infantry in their wonderful march to help Wellington at Waterloo.

Napoleon ...	46 years.	Vandamme...	44 years.
Davout ...	45 "	Rapp ...	43 "
Ney ...	46 "	Clausel ...	43 "
Grouchy ...	49 "	Suchet ...	43 "
Lobau ...	45 "	Pajol ...	43 "
Lamarque ...	45 "	Gerard ...	42 "
Kellerman ...	45 "	Drouet ...	41 "
Reille ...	44 "	Exelmans ...	40 "

The above is the age of Napoleon's commanders of army corps in the 1815 campaign; several of the divisional generals were under 40, and one brigadier, Labédoyère, was 29.

CAVALRY IN PURSUITS AND RAIDS.

The rôle of *cavalry in pursuit* is the most important that is played by that arm, especially so in the 20th century, when, as far as we have seen, the long duration of battles leaves the infantry of the victor or vanquished equally exhausted and incapable of movement. Cavalry is the only arm which can to-day be used in the pursuit; it is all very well for writers to attack generals for not pursuing after a victory, for not exploiting their success, for not having destroyed the beaten enemy. But it must be recognized by practical men that if the pursuit was not carried out it was because of the exhaustion of the troops.

Since the days of Napoleon we no longer hear of the head-long pursuits of cavalry with their swords in the enemy's backs and with such brilliant results (example, the pursuit of the French cavalry after Jena, where fortresses surrendered to a few dragoons).

Is not the reason to be found, in this century, in the enormous size of the groups of armies on each side? Will such great numbers, in case of defeat, break up and dissolve like the allies at Austerlitz or like the French at Waterloo? Will not a group of armies retire in much more deliberate fashion? Take the example of Liao Yang and Mukden. Did the German

cavalry pursue after Froeschwiller? Did it not remain inactive after Rezonville?

Again, in a war in the 20th century it would appear that one of the chief duties of cavalry in pursuit will be to prevent the beaten side from destroying the *railways*, and especially bridges, in their retreat. As an example of the modern form of pursuit of cavalry, we prefer to read of Sherman's exploit in the pursuit of Lee and Johnston, to reading Napoleon's wars, *i.e.*, if we want to get precise indications as to the rôle of cavalry in the pursuit of to-day.

There is no space here to touch on the rôle of cavalry in strategic raids; it would be an interesting point to discuss whether the using up of *fighting cavalry* for raiding work is not a violation of economy of force? However, it appears, we can accept it as a fact that during the past century the *tactical rôle of cavalry has diminished and its strategic rôle has greatly increased*; and we think it will be very shortly accepted throughout Europe, that—given the great strategic fronts of modern groups of armies, some 50, 60, 70 miles or more—the use of a large strategic advanced guard to a group of armies is a violation of the principle of economy of force, and that, on the contrary, the principle of strategic cavalry, using a chain of mixed detachments as a support, will be accepted.