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On: 04 January 2015, At: 08:13
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered
Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41
Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Royal United Services Institution. Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rusi19>

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Published online: 11 Sep 2009.

To cite this article: Captain F. N. Maude late R.E. (1894) The Rise, Decay, and Revival of the Prussian Cavalry, Royal United Services Institution. Journal, 38:191, 20-40, DOI: [10.1080/03071849409416967](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071849409416967)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071849409416967>

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THE RISE, DECAY, AND REVIVAL OF THE PRUSSIAN CAVALRY.

By Captain F. N. MAUDE, late R.E.

THE principal cause which, to my mind, leads to the extraordinary confusion of thought that exists in the domain of tactics, not only in England, but elsewhere, is that we attach a constant value to names denoting things which, in their nature, are essentially variable. This is especially the case in all discussions as to the relative power of cavalry and infantry. The cavalry enthusiast sees in his mind's eye perfectly-trained and fresh squadrons bearing down in extended gallop, with well-closed files, over level ground, on exhausted, demoralized infantry; or, more often does not reason at all, but picks up from some text-book instances in which cavalry have been successful, never stops to inquire the cause of their success, but jumps to the conclusion that if they only ride home they will always be equally fortunate. The infantry enthusiast, on the other side, views matters in an exactly contrary direction. To him, the squares or lines await the onset of the blown and disordered cavalry in perfect coolness, and a couple of volleys suffice to empty every saddle; and if he is a Briton he points with pride to the bearing of our troops at Waterloo, or to that exceptionally daring advance with the bayonet of the 5th Fusiliers at El Boden and its successful result, forgetting to inquire what kind of cavalry it really was which we there encountered.

The truth really lies between the two extremes; but as a means of testing the value of the historical occurrences on either side we are sadly in want of information from whence to gather an approximation to the actual conditions under which the two arms really met; and further we require to know, as a means towards securing the tactical efficiency we desire, what causes actually have led from time to time to the success or failure, more especially of the cavalry arm.

As a rule such information is most difficult to acquire. I have been utterly unable to find any reliable record of the evolution of our own cavalry, for our regimental histories, though brim full of personal incident and adventure, never give a page to these really essential matters, and French military history is equally deficient; even Marbot tells us very little about them; all alike forget to mention what the standard of efficiency really was, or how it was judged, and failing these points of support it is impossible to construct an estimate.

Only in Prussia can one obtain the desired information, and even here there are gaps in the history very imperfectly closed.

What one has always wanted to know is how it came about that, whereas in the Seven Years' War Prussian cavalry broke almost all they rode at, 50 years later the cavalry of the same nation failed nearly invariably against the same infantry weapon; and again why, after the comparatively trivial results achieved by the German horse in 1870, 22 years afterwards, and in spite of the immense improvement in the mechanical perfection of the weapons which has since taken place, the leaders of cavalry opinion in that country claim that they will revive the glories of Ziethen and Seydlitz in the coming war.

The key to these questions will, I hope, be found in the following lines. The evidence is by no means as perfect as I could wish, but I trust it may suffice to set other minds working at the same problem.

The state of the Prussian cavalry at the commencement of the first Silesian War may be gathered from the new official history of that campaign published in Berlin last year. It was far from perfect, and did not particularly distinguish itself. At the beginning of the Seven Years' War it had much improved; younger and more talented leaders were rapidly coming to the front; but throughout the whole campaign it constantly suffered from the evils of new formations, and its ranks had to be flooded by recruits and remounts to make up for the heavy drain, the necessary result of the war; still even under these conditions it achieved unequalled successes. No nation can boast of a more startling victory than Rossbach, achieved in half an hour by Seydlitz and his 33 squadrons over 50,000 French and allies; and the claim of the cavalry cannot be disputed, for the Prussian infantry brought only seven battalions into action, of which two expended between 12 and 15 rounds and the remainder but a couple of rounds apiece; and the artillery—18 guns—only fired for a few minutes. Zorndorf, which would have been a Prussian defeat but for the cavalry, and Hohenfriedberg, with the celebrated exploit of the Baireuth Dragoons—six squadrons strong, who brought in 69 stands of colours besides guns and prisoners—these are too well known to require further mention.

What principally concerns us is what happened to this arm after the war, during the 50 years which elapsed between the victory of Rossbach and the catastrophe of Jena.

At the conclusion of peace its efficiency rose rapidly. Though reductions were made, these were chiefly effected by drafting out the worst horses and men.

Very few of the original rank and file can have survived the campaigns—that is to say, have failed to achieve promotion—so that the cavalry must then have been an ideal force—all the privates in the prime of youth and strength, all or nearly so with two or three years' war experience, and the whole led by officers who had won their rank before the enemy with the greatest cavalry General the world has ever known as their inspector.

I have repeatedly seen it asserted in German works, and can well

believe it, that during the following nine years the Prussian cavalry reached their absolute zenith, and that the arm has never really been seen on any battlefield in such perfection as they had then attained.

Now begins the decadence; and it appears to me that its history throws a strong side light on many difficulties with which of late we have ourselves had to contend.

Since with men in the prime of life the death rate was necessarily low, very few recruits were accepted, and these were handed over to a drill-sergeant per squadron. It was not worth an officer's while to go out and see half a dozen men drill.

Young officers, as they joined, drilled with the recruits, as ours do still, till dismissed, but then ceased to have any particular incentive to further study. What influence could they exert, or what could they teach the war-worn veterans before whom they were privileged to ride? They were mere children by their sides and probably felt it. All amongst us who joined in the old long-service days must remember a feeling of the same kind. Then, out of our own experience, we also know that the vast majority of men who have acquired their own knowledge by practical action very generally forget the difficulties they encountered when they first started. By practice they grew insensibly out of the stage of complete ignorance without even noticing their own progress. Now that they have knowledge they forget there was a time when they had none, and cannot put themselves in the position of the young officer who has no longer, in a state of peace, their opportunities. Everything to them seems so much a matter of common sense that they cannot conceive the necessity of teaching their juniors how to post a piquet or conduct a patrol. A young officer growing up with long-service soldiers does not appreciate the difficulties either, for they carry out all minor duties by tradition and custom, excellent as long as the real war-experienced men remain.

But there comes a time when medals are conspicuously absent in the front rank, and tradition has been degraded into rule of thumb. War seems very distant and the inspection very near. The more ambitions and practical an officer is under such circumstances, the more certainly will he devote his time and energy to the practice of movements which will tell in the latter. If then the inspecting General is wanting in activity and knowledge, the doom of any arm, but more particularly of the cavalry, is sealed.

And there is yet another rock on which long-service soldiers are apt to split. Troops once thoroughly trained and disciplined, men and officers fail to perceive any object in the constant repetition of movements long since familiar to them. A couple of parades a week are ample to keep the men in form, and more only makes them sulky. Thus the element of laziness creeps in, becomes in due course traditional, and ultimately proves the hardest bad habit of all to eradicate.

War inevitably tends to decentralization and to habits of self-reliance in the junior officers; peace as inevitably to the reverse.

Since with old drilled soldiers, who practically work themselves, there is very little for captains and subalterns to do, they take as

much leave as possible, and the command of the whole becomes centralized in the colonel and sergeant-major.

All these factors tended to the disintegration of the Prussian horse, and there were yet others more peculiar to them at work.

Owing to the heavy losses of the campaigns, all who survived, men and officers alike, came out much about the same age, and, as a consequence, they all grew old together.

Now, as a fact that I can vouch for, from personal observation, the Prussian, and, indeed, the German, ages much more rapidly than the Englishman, particularly in the higher classes. Very few Germans indeed, even nowadays, maintain their figures and activity over 40.

When, therefore, Seydlitz died, and the junior captains averaged some 20 years' service, there being no longer the example and pressure of an exceptional man at the head, the elderly gentlemen who commanded regiments and squadrons found it easier and much less exhausting to judge the efficiency of their commands in the *manège* or by watching an occasional charge from a flank than by riding in front of their men in the open field; and as Marwitz, on whose journal this article is principally based, very rightly points out, this was the beginning of the end. In the old days charges were judged from the front; the men prided themselves on riding boot to boot; his own regiment, the Gens d'Armes, went even further, and their particular swagger was to ride knee behind knee. Accurate dressing was thereby rendered out of the question. The charge was, as already stated, judged from the front, and if that was closed and unbroken everything was well. But, when judging from the flank came in, the correct alignment began to be considered the main thing, and this could only be attained by allowing the ranks to open when the gallop sounded; and so it came to pass that the descendants and survivors of the old Frederician cavalry, attacking at the gallop, were ridden through and dispersed by French cuirassiers, who moved only at the "trot," but "closed up."

In addition came the troubles introduced as a consequence of the absolute necessity for economy.

Marwitz's description of his own regiment, the Gens d'Armes, with whom he served for 13 years, will sufficiently illustrate this point.

"Our strength was 10 troops (companies they were then called), each company consisting of 66 privates, without counting N.C.O.'s, of whom half were on furlough, and were only called up for the drill season, which lasted from the 16th March to the 23rd May, nine weeks in all.

"Out of these nine weeks, only three were allotted to riding in the school, and each man rode for an hour a day, or 18 hours in all."

It must be admitted that 18 hours is not too much for a man who, for the rest of the year, was engaged at his trade in the fields, or in the workshops. (I must add that Marwitz is here defending the old regiments from spending too much time and attention on equitation only, instead of on more "practical" work.)

"Then for three weeks to the time of the 'special review,' the regiment went out to drill on alternate days, so that the man again mounted his horse nine times.

"After the 'special review,' a number of the men were again sent on furlough, only enough remaining to enable us to go out to drill with 24 files per troop, and these few men mounted their horses nine times in all.

"In the autumn we had another three weeks' drill, but only with 20 files per company, and no individual riding at all. Hence it follows that, at the outside, no furlough man had more than 18 hours' riding drill, and only mounted his horse for drill in the ranks 27 times, and no one who knows what the difficulties of the business are will contend that this is too much time to bestow on such an all-important matter.

"But it may be asked, How was it with the remaining 33 duty men, surely they must have been perfect centaurs? Unfortunately from these we must deduct the recruits and 'freiwächters' (men struck off all duties, and allowed to work at their trades in the town). There were 10 of the latter allowed by regulation, and as a body they rode worse than the furlough men, for they only turned out when the regiment paraded at its full strength, and never went to riding drill at all.

"Of recruits there would be an average of eight annually, and since two years is the least time in which it is possible to make a horseman, there were at a time 16 men undergoing their training; so that of the 33 only seven remained from whom one could with reason expect that they should ride perfectly.

"Of horses, each troop had 75, and received every year eight remounts. As the latter joined very young, they could not be put in the ranks under three or four years: 24 must therefore be subtracted from the available strength. But, amongst the horses dismissed by the riding master, there are always some which, owing to defective shape, weakness, or trifling unsoundness, can never be regarded as capable of perfect training. Take these at a seventh of the whole, and we must deduct another 10. Finally, a certain number had to be set apart for the recruits, and these it was impossible to train perfectly, for they passed from the hands of one recruit to another, and as every recruit had to ride daily, we must deduct *two* for each, or in all 16 horses (I am following Marwitz exactly), so that for the whole troop there were necessarily 66 part trained, and could only be nine thoroughly trained horses.

"Is this overdriving the art, when by no possibility could there be more than seven trained horsemen out of 66, and only nine thoroughly broken horses out of 75, when this art is the one mainspring of efficiency of the whole?

"The outcry simply arose from the fact that, when anyone saw a selected detachment ride in the school, he was astonished at the performances, and easily came to the false conclusion that the whole regiment had attained the same degree of skill"—a point, by the way enthusiasts for Agricultural Hall displays would do well to

note. As long as the efficiency of a given regiment is all that a competent Inspector-General says it should be, there is no ground for complaint, for the best regiment will turn out the best riders; but when, as sometimes happens, the whole routine of an underhorsed regiment is sacrificed in order to make a show before the public, even with the laudable desire to obtain recruits, it is time for a critic to step in and show the injury actually being inflicted on the Service.

Under the conditions above indicated, the Prussian cavalry degenerated fast. The King knew all about it, but when Seydlitz had gone he had no one to help him, and, overwhelmed by the stress of work he had voluntarily taken on himself, he could only now and again find time to give them an occasional scolding. One of these, delivered at Potsdam, Marwitz has preserved word for word, and, as it explains a very great deal, I give it *in extenso*.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am entirely dissatisfied with the cavalry; the regiments are completely out of hand; there is no accuracy, no order. The men ride like tailors; I beg that this may not occur again, and that each of you will pay more attention to his duty, more particularly to the horsemanship.

"But I know how things go on. The captains think only of making money out of their squadrons, and the lieutenants how to get most leave. You think I am not up to your dodges, but I know all, and will recapitulate them. To-morrow, when you start on your march back to your garrisons, before you are 10 miles away, the squadron commander will ask his sergeant-major whether any of the men live in the vicinity, and the sergeant-major will reply, 'Yes, Sir, there are So-and-so and So-and-so who live quite close here, and would be glad to get furlough.' 'Very well, then,' the captain will say, 'we can save their pay. Send the names to me to-night, and they shall all have it.' And so it goes on every march. The subalterns get leave to visit their friends, and the captain arrives at his garrison with half the squadron mounted, leading the horses of the other half, like a band of disreputable Cossacks.

"Then, when the season for riding drill comes on, the captain sends for the sergeant-major and says, 'I have an appointment this morning at So-and-so; tell the 1st lieutenant to take the rides.' So the sergeant-major goes to the senior subaltern, and gives him the message, and the latter says, 'What! the captain will be away, then I am off hunting; tell the 2nd lieutenant to take the men.' And the 2nd lieutenant, who is probably still in bed, says, 'What! both of them away! then I will stay where I am; I was up till three this morning at a dance; tell the cornet I am ill, and he must take the rides.' Finally the cornet remarks, 'Look here, sergeant-major, what is the good of my standing out there in the cold; you know all about it much better than I do. You go and take them.' And so it goes on, and what must be the end of it all? What can I do with such cavalry before the enemy? I tell you I think so much of the importance of your arm, that I expect more from a lieutenant of cavalry than from a major of infantry. When I visit the outposts I expect every subaltern in charge of a piquet to be able to tell me exactly all

about the ground for five miles round, and be able to make an intelligible sketch of it." (Frederick's standard, by the way, was not very high, and some of his own topographical work, recently republished in facsimile, would certainly have entailed his failure in "C" and "D.") "If I send him on a patrol, he must be able to tell me exactly where, and how strong, the enemy is, and how best to get at him; what the roads are like, and whether I can move guns by them, &c.; and when the time for the charge arrives I expect you all to seize the opportunity, and not wait for orders, which always come too late.

"You see how high an opinion I hold of your service. Now go; attend to your duties better; and don't let me have to speak like this again."

Nothing could show more graphically how far the Prussian horse had fallen. Still, they preserved a few of their traditions. One instance—that of his first appearance on parade—Marwitz quotes; it took place about the same time, when he was still riding as a recruit in the ranks. He had been given a great raw-boned animal, with no mouth to speak of, and when the charge sounded he broke the ranks, and tore past the colonel into space. "For this I should have deserved the 'fuchtel' (corporal punishment with the flat of the sword), but in consideration of my youth, and the obvious physical impossibility of holding the horse (he was then a very little fellow, about 15 years of age), I escaped with a reprimand."

This at least shows that knowledge of horsemanship was still traditional in the service, for it implies that the art of acquiring complete control over the horse existed somewhere; otherwise breaking the ranks would have become too common to notice, and impossible to punish, for when in a whole regiment no man can show another how to hold a horse, punishment cannot be justly awarded to an individual who fails to do so. I remember seeing a certain hussar regiment, on inspection in the Long Valley, break up and squander when charging, with at least half the men out of the ranks. The event was specially impressed on me, since these disbanded warriors tore through our own intervals, we (the R.E. troops) being drawn up for inspection also on Clay Cart Hill. Even the formidable obstacle of Scrogg's Bottom could not check their impetuosity, and we saw many riderless horses emerge from it on the other side. Three men were picked up with broken legs, to the best of my recollection.

To return to the story. The causes of the failure of the Prussian cavalry in 1806 were principally these:—The distribution of the cavalry in small bodies to the infantry divisions; the want of uniformity in training, which prevented the few larger bodies that were retained together from delivering a proper charge; and want of dash and pluck in a great majority of the old long-service peace-trained soldiers. Though individual squadrons behaved magnificently, there can be little doubt that as a body they funk'd the French, and they funk'd not because they were individually less brave, but because as a consequence of the long-service evils above pointed out, they had, as a rule, no real confidence in their leaders.

The efforts made during the ensuing years to create some kind of

cavalry fitted to cope with the French are of the greatest interest, for here we can see whence many of the false ideas on cavalry and cavalry training had their origin.

Owing to the appalling losses in men and horses suffered by the French as the wars continued, the efficiency of their cavalry rapidly fell, till, in individual instances, hastily-raised Landwehr squadrons obtained local successes.

Yet the moment it came to united action of larger bodies the failure was complete, as at Ligny. Blücher was so disgusted with their performances on that day that he wrote a very severe despatch, which was felt by one commander of an irregular corps to reflect on the personal courage of his regiment, and he called the old Field-Marshal out. It hardly needs to be said that the challenge was declined, but the whole event caused considerable stir, and Marwitz took up his pen to defend the action of the Field-Marshal by showing that the failure was by no means due to want of courage, but to the fact that owing to the gradual extinction by age of the old Seydlitz scholars, the elements of cavalry efficiency and training had been forgotten.

His pamphlet is one of the most suggestive and able to be found in the whole range of cavalry literature, and, as it raises many points which are of direct application to our existing system, it will not be out of place to *précis* it at considerable length. His first question is: "What are the elements which make an efficient cavalry?" and his second, "Were these elements in existence in the Prussian horse of that day?"

"These elements are partly moral, partly physical, in principle; they are analogous to those which constitute the strength of a good infantry, but their application is infinitely more complicated because they depend on the co-operation of two living organisms—the rider and the horse. The moral elements are personal courage in the individual and *esprit de corps* vivifying the whole mass.

"The physical ones are soundness and condition combined with 'horsemanship' in the ultimate unit—the horse and his rider—and mobility and precision in all fixed movements in the whole body.

"The words of Blücher's report have been taken by the other arms to imply a deficiency of personal courage in the individuals of the cavalry, but this view is untenable, because the recruits of the mounted arm come from the same class as those of the infantry, whose courage nobody questions, and all were equally imbued with the same love of country and the same desire for revenge. It is ridiculous therefore to assume that all the brave men joined the infantry whilst all the cowards elected for the cavalry. The reason for our failure must lie deeper than this, and we will return to it when we have dealt with the other points.

"*Esprit de corps* is a virtue which requires a 'body' in which to manifest itself. Where it exists it raises the courage of the individual through the confidence he feels in his comrades, and the dread of their ridicule should he prove himself unworthy. Honour and shame are more keenly felt by the mass than by the individual, and when, as in the last two years (1813-15), the desire to sacrifice oneself to

achieve the liberation of the Fatherland has inflamed every heart, it can by a judicious choice of means be made into an almost irresistible moral force. Were these judicious means adopted in our cavalry?

"The officers are the representatives of the men, the true pillars on which regimental tradition, which is almost synonymous with *esprit de corps*, rests. If it dies out among them it cannot live long among the lower ranks except in a perverted form, which in time may react most perniciously on the officers, giving rise to a spirit of exclusiveness and *regimental self-righteousness* which may cause most serious embarrassment to the army leaders by the friction it entails in the execution of orders.

"As a consequence, the members of a body of officers must be relatively numerous, so that the seed may take root in them and the public opinion of the majority be able to compel the obedience of individuals. In a body of from 10 to 20 members only, a healthy *esprit de corps* can scarcely exist."

I may here note that Marwitz never contemplated such overgrown bodies of officers as the R.A., R.E., or the Indian Staff Corps, though the two former have maintained their regimental traditions to some purpose. From 40 to 60 was the limit he had in mind, though the limit might be increased to, say, 100.

"The officers must belong for a considerable time to their regiments, so that they learn to look on the regiment as their home. For a corporate spirit is opposed to the promptings of selfishness, and if men live long enough together no personal consideration will induce a man to cut the ties which bind him to his brother officers. But, if you wish to destroy this collective spirit, then move your officers constantly about so that they never have time to form these ties. You may thus evolve men of ambition fit to be leaders, but you will have no regiments in the true sense of the word for them to lead.

"The observance of these rules is all the more essential with troops of new formation, such as ours have been during the recent wars; for when no time has been given for *esprit de corps* to form among the men, the officers become its sole supporters.

"With regard to the men, the same principles require strong regiments. Better fewer strong regiments formed by the expansion of weak cadres and inheriting the traditions of their names and colours, than many weak ones formed new from colonel to trumpeter.

"The number of officers in our cavalry regiments is too small—only 23, and that total is rarely maintained. They have been too frequently interchanged, and notably before the commencement of the last campaign whole regiments were denuded of their leaders, who were distributed throughout other ones.

"The regiments are in themselves too weak, and the formation of some more by taking a squadron from each and grouping every four of these squadrons to form a new regiment was a blunder of the worst kind at a time when we were almost in face of the enemy.

"Hence of all the elements that go to the formation of a true *esprit de corps* not one existed, nor in the nature of things could exist, in the Prussian cavalry when we last took the field.

"Of courage and zeal in the individuals there was as much as in any other body of troops, but of the habit of mind which can combine these qualities into a useful whole, and which alone renders the regiments and squadrons reliable tools in the hand of their leader, there was not, and could not be, a trace.

"Coming now to the physical qualifications, and taking first the soundness of man and horse—considered as an indissoluble unit—it is the case that the great majority of our horses were radically unsound. After 1812, when the few remaining suitable horses had either died in Russia or been ruined by overwork, we had to collect an enormous number of animals to reconstruct the cavalry, and there was not time enough for suitable selection even had horses existed in sufficient numbers. We had, in fact, to take what we could get—old riding horses, carriage horses, cart horses, whatever the French had left us. All these, whether already broken-down horses or young untrained ones, had to be mounted by recruits who could not be expected to, and certainly did not, understand how to save their mounts, by bringing the strain on the stronger and sounder limbs and muscles and saving the weaker ones. In two rapidly-conducted campaigns, including the last one in winter, the forehands of almost all the surviving horses were ruined. They became so hopelessly wooden in the forelegs that one can characterize the whole lot with absolute conviction as entirely unsuited for cavalry purposes. And during the few intervening months of peace we received only a very small percentage of remounts, and then were compelled to take the field in a most unsatisfactory condition as regards soundness.

"As to the usefulness of man and horse combined, the standard was an exceedingly low one, and for the following reasons:—Taken together, the usefulness of the unit (man and horse) depends on this, viz., that the man is able to take his horse at any desired pace in any direction, and over any ground; and under all conditions is able to use his weapons with effect against the enemy. The art by which these purposes are attained, and which on the one hand develops the strength of the rider, and on the other secures that the powers of the animal are made the most of by saving the weaker and working the stronger parts of his frame, is termed *horsemanship*.

"An unbroken horse, as long as he remains in that condition, is useless for the above purposes. A rider who does not know how to control the movements of his mount, to the extent needful to obtain the amount of control indicated as essential, is nothing more than an unfortunate surrendered to the uncontrolled impulses of a timid, yet dangerous, beast. Now during late years the art of horsemanship has become extinct in our cavalry. The horses are no longer under the control of their riders. When one wants them to gallop, they bolt; when they are required to stand still they turn about, because they do not understand what the pressure of the leg is intended to indicate. If one requires them to leave the ranks or to leave other horses, they decline to do so or run up against the others; in short, they obey their own untutored instincts instead of the will of their riders.

"The young soldier on such a brute is indeed in a pitiable state, for he has to submit to the animal's moods without knowing how to control them; compelled to do the best he can, as far as his strength permits, he jabs the poor brute in the mouth, sticks his spurs into him, and at length brings him into a state of desperation worse even than his own. For the *aids* he employs are almost always the wrong ones, and only encourage the horse to resist, not to yield himself. That such a man, entirely occupied with his horse, and being carried whither he knoweth not, is in no position to make use of his weapons, is self-evident. He is therefore useless as a cavalry soldier. But this, in the main, is the condition of our cavalry.

"I do not say that every rider is so helpless, for that is nearly impossible, and, if they were so, all hope of improvement would be at an end; but I insist that the above accurately represents the condition of the majority, and, though some regiments are better than others, yet, as a body, they are all more or less in the same boat.

"As an old and experienced cavalry soldier, I say that the art of horsemanship is so far lost that, in the whole army, there is hardly a single young officer left who understands how to train horse and rider from the beginning upwards. If we go on at the present rate, then, with the last of the old squadron leaders, the art will finally disappear from amongst us.

"A new view of the matter has crept in since the time when our cavalry first began to deteriorate, and perhaps the cause of its origin lies in this very deterioration. This view, namely, is, that horsemanship is unnecessary for cavalry; courage, the reins loose on the horse's neck, a sharp pair of spurs, these are the only necessary elements of success in the field; so alone can one count on the overthrow of the enemy.

"This idea at once stamps the school whence it arises as no cavalry soldier's. A man on a horse who cannot ride will only then succeed in driving his horse into the enemy's ranks, by letting go the reins and sticking in his spurs when the horse is either blind with terror, or so fresh, from over-feeding or standing in the stable, that he runs away from sheer light-heartedness. Under all other conditions, when wearied with the long marches necessary to meet the enemy, he never goes straight for him, but always tries to run away in an arc until his head is turned towards his last night's quarters.

"Whoever has ridden in a charge which the enemy attempted to face knows for certain that no single horse of itself ever desires to face the collision, but that rather they all pull up and try to turn away from it.

"If the charge is to succeed, then the rider must compel his horse to maintain the direction. The French try to prevent this inevitable tendency by closing the files so tight that the horses cannot turn round, and advancing so slowly (at a trot, sometimes even at a walk) that the line cannot open out.

"The opponents of horsemanship base their case on the fact that the French, whom they admit to be execrable horsemen, have never-

theless, on occasions, succeeded, ignoring that it was by this method that they did so, and from isolated occurrences have established a principle, without troubling themselves over such details. Strangely enough, though many people will admit their deficiencies in other arts, such as dancing, fencing, swimming, and so on, no one will ever allow that he cannot ride. He may go as far as to confess that he is not a school rider, but he gets out of that by saying that he considers school riding, *i.e.*, horsemanship, as of no account. He gets to the place he wants to somehow, and he does not fall off, and that seems to him sufficient. One's eyes tell one that he ought to fall off a dozen times a day, if he were not careful to avoid the risks which a cavalry man between his comrades has to take as they come, for it is evident his legs are in the wrong place to control his horse's movements, and he is entirely at the mercy of the animal. Many a horse has been rejected by him as vicious and untameable because it refused to stand still when its rider was applying aids to make it go on; and, after many disappointments, he has perhaps got together three or four animals gentle and long-suffering enough to allow him to do what he likes on their backs, and he is then satisfied. He can ride, not school-fashion perhaps, but he can ride.

"Such a man forgets that a cavalry soldier cannot choose his own mount, but must take what is given him, and can never avoid the opportunities of falling off that present themselves, but must at all times be ready to go where he is ordered on the horse provided for him.

"The horse is a living machine which the rider controls at his will; but, just as little as a machine can go of itself, but is at all times dependent on the knowledge of the man who employs it, so little also can a horse be managed by one who has not been taught how to do so.

"From the above it is clear that our cavalry has decayed for two reasons: first, because the horses were not trained, or had become broken-down past training by the service, and, secondly, because our men could not have ridden them, with the training they possessed, in any case.

"Next comes skill in field movements. Perhaps after what has been said above it may seem unnecessary to enlarge on this point, for how can a cavalry possess skill in combined movements when the individuals are in themselves useless? But it will throw additional light on the subject if we investigate a little the conditions which the field movements of a good cavalry ought to satisfy.

"These conditions, briefly stated, are mobility and vehemence in the charge.

"But the two conditions are in themselves contradictory. Mobility is most easily obtained with light men on small active horses, vehemence in the charge by men on powerful upstanding ones, and you cannot easily combine the two.

"If Nature had made all men of one weight and all horses of the same size, such a combination might be possible; but, since men and horses are not all cast each in the same mould, the best way out of the

difficulty is to sort them out in at least two, possibly three, different classes of cavalry—light, heavy, and medium—and give to each its special drill regulation, which should develop the pace and vehemence of the heavy branch to the utmost and the certainty and power of overcoming all obstacles in the light cavalry to its extreme limit.

"A cavalry neither vehement in shock nor rapid in its movements is practically useless; it would be better to spend the money they cost on infantry only. For the foot soldier is more independent; he has no horse to get hungry, sick, or lame; and, as long as his strength holds out, no obstacle is altogether insuperable to him; whereas external influences constantly impede the horseman. If, therefore, I sacrifice these two advantages of vehemence and mobility, and accustom my heavy cavalry to charge only at a trot or walk, as the French do, or my light horsemen to find an insuperable obstacle in every ditch and fence they meet with, I should do better without them altogether, preserving only a few mounted men to carry orders and perform a little perfunctory scouting.

"But how will it fare with me in a war with an enemy who possesses a numerous and determined cavalry, rapid and quick in manœuvre, and I meet him in an open country? History gives the answer—and it is not an encouraging one.

"Cavalry, therefore, is essential; and, if essential, then it follows that it must be trained to develop those powers in which it is superior to infantry to the highest limit possible: the light cavalry, especially, in rapidity of movement across country independently, the heavy, in pace and vehemence in the charge.

"Rapidity of movement is, however, not merely a question of reckless galloping about; such a course only ruins the horses by uselessly wasting their strength. The true art consists in handling the horse in such a manner as to save him as much as is consistent with the object to be attained, and next, in a drill which permits of a desired movement being executed in the least time and by the shortest line. The vehement charge, the special province of heavy cavalry, requires the fulfilment of two conditions, viz., pace and closed files; the latter with the special object of uniting, by the pressure inwards, the momentum of the individuals into that of the mass.

"Our cavalry is incapable of either form of action; it can neither get about, or charge boot to boot. Its drill regulations are modelled on those of the infantry. Common sense would indicate, with arms having such widely different methods of action, that the same forms of drill cannot possibly be common to both. Things have got to such a pass that a regiment of infantry now manœuvres faster than one of cavalry. Those who do not believe that our cavalry is now-a-days slow, because they adopt the French standard, should look back 26 years or so, and recall what our drill used to be when the traditions of Seydlitz's days were still with us.

"Our charges are ridden too loose. This dates from the time when, on the drill-ground, charges began to be judged from the flank instead of from the front. The criterion of good charging is now

held to be perfect dressing; but perfect dressing with properly closed files is only possible with perfectly trained men and horses, neither of which we at present possess. Since the inspectors would have it so, it has become the custom to open the files, so that now one may see even a cuirassier regiment charge with a horse's width between the files; and hence it has happened to us that we have been overthrown in the charge by the worst cavalry in the world, which possesses only the one qualification of sticking to one another, knee to knee, at a trot or walk."

I have dwelt at length on this pamphlet of Marwitz's partly because it is one of the soundest works on cavalry questions with which I am acquainted, and can be applied to our own circumstances to an extent that each reader must decide for himself, partly also because his writings are the principal connecting link between the present and the past of the Prussian cavalry, and have since proved of almost inestimable value, freely admitted, in the regeneration of the arm during the past 70 years.

For yet darker days were at hand for the Prussian horse.

The same causes already detailed, which acted so injuriously on them after the Seven Years' War, were soon at work after Waterloo, and they worked all the more rapidly because, in the first place, the prestige of success was principally on the enemy's side, and, secondly, there was no Seydlitz, and no King, to keep the men and officers together.

In addition to the reaction which inevitably followed the long years of strain, there was the trouble that only a very few men indeed, such as Marwitz, had ever seen a really efficient cavalry, and, as he points out, the traditional methods of training man and horse were dead.

Blücher, though an ideal leader in action, was both too old and also, even when at his best, had never understood the reasons of his success. He could handle the finished weapon—none better—but he could not forge one to answer to his hands.

The then King's knowledge was limited to the number of buttons on his cavalry men's different orders of dress—no small feat of memory, considering their diversity; and, to crown all, the offices of Inspector-Generals of Cavalry had lapsed.

Till the appointment of Prince Frederick Charles, in the winter of 1866-67, the efficiency of the Prussian cavalry was judged by infantry Generals, for the most part, and only that was needed to complete its ruin. For N.C.O.'s, horses, and officers all grew old together; the men under the three years' service system of course were constantly changing (this, together with the fact that the Prussian troop or squadron leader's commission renders him personally responsible for the efficiency of his command, proved ultimately the salvation of the whole); and the stagnation of promotion became such, that instances are on record of father and son both serving in the same squadron as lieutenants, and, as far as age goes, many a regiment might have been commanded by a great-grandfather as colonel, grandfathers as squadron leaders, fathers as senior and sons as junior lieutenants, provided that the family was sufficiently prolific. Under such cir-

cumstances, it is needless to add, the tendency to judge charges from a flank and the efficiency of the squadron in the *manège* became exceedingly pronounced.

Now school horsemanship, though an indispensable part of the education of the cavalry soldier, is the veriest pitfall for the elderly and lethargic squadron leader that can be created, more especially if the squadron leader himself has never been taught to ride.

Thanks to the docility and intelligence of the horses, such wonderful results can be obtained, given sufficient time, even by a fundamentally vicious system; that the man who has never himself been trained to understand the actual requirements of field service, and is now too old to learn, habitually mistakes the form for the spirit, and is satisfied by results which, though they may do well enough for the musical ride standard, are worse than useless for the field.

Von Rosenberg, now Inspector-General of Cavalry, wrote, some years ago, a short pamphlet on cavalry equitation, which has since proved the starting point of the new regeneration, in which he quotes a characteristic utterance of an authority (von Elpons) on the system of equitation in vogue between 1825 to 1845, which exactly stamps the tendency of the day. I give it with Rosenberg's remarks: "Many of von Elpons's pupils had complained to him how difficult it is to understand the Prussian riding regulations," and to this he replies, "This expression, often uttered with sad resignation, always filled me with a certain secret satisfaction." "Obviously," says Rosenberg, "he was of opinion that the object of instruction was not to impart light and leading, but to disseminate darkness and obscurity, a view characteristic of a certain school of instruction in military sciences in all times. Conscious of their own ignorance, their efforts have always been to avoid being found out, and with this object they have adopted the policy of the common cuttle-fish, who exudes ink to delude his pursuers. These we shall have always with us."

As a fact, the old Prussian riding regulations were by no means difficult to understand by men trained in the right spirit to appreciate them. The difficulty only began when the inspecting officers demanded results from their application which they were never intended to supply.

It was in vain that General von Wrangel, and the two or three others who thought with him, endeavoured to keep alive a true standard of efficiency; they were not backed up by their sovereign, and the average inspecting officer, being too frequently an infantryman, was more easily pleased by circus tricks than by true horsemanship.

Now it was very much easier for the old gentlemen who then filled the rank of squadron leader to potter about the riding school on foot than to spend five hours every day in the saddle handling their commands at speed; they were therefore only too happy to meet the inspecting officer's wishes half way. Thus it came about that, about the middle of the forties, the squadron leader who could take his squadron past the saluting base at the slowest possible canter without breaking, and all horses leading with the same leg, was looked on as

the best, and since long rapid movements and the charge were the worst possible preparation for the purpose, they were seldom, if ever, practised. "It tended to get the horses out of hand," it was said, and I have heard the same remark in certain of our own cavalry regiments, not more than 15 years ago.

As a further consequence of this state of things, the stable management adapted itself to the same end. Fat horses, not condition, being the criterion of efficiency, the stables were kept over-heated, ill-ventilated, and the corn administered without reference to the work done. The latter has happened nearer home within my knowledge, and the result was the same in both cases, viz., that the art of deriving the best possible value out of the corn ration in relation to the work to be done became practically a lost one.

Those who would form an idea of the contrast between the Prussian cavalry about the middle of the century and at the present time should compare von Wrangel's requirements, given in Kaehler's "*Geschichte der Preussischen Reiterei*," which were considered far in excess of possibilities in the army at that time, and those laid down in Prince Hohenlohe's "*Letters on Cavalry*," about 1884, which, high as they then appeared, have since been considerably surpassed.

1847 marks about the lowest level they ever touched. The Schleswig-Holstein War and the Baden Rebellion, which broke out the following year, infused fresh life into the arm, and it was now that the advantages of the squadron system began to show themselves. Amongst the young officers coming forward were von Schmidt, von Rosenberg, von Krossigk, and, indeed, all the men who of late years have made the arm what it is.

Being men thoroughly imbued with the true cavalry spirit, they individually revolted against the cult of the fat horse and circus rider, and claiming, as far as possible, the free hand their commissions accorded them, they independently set to work to elaborate a system better suited to their practical requirements.

It was in the small garrisons, far from the madding crowd (of "brass hats" understood), that the foundations of the new structure were laid. The views of the reformers slowly spread through their regiments, and the more independent amongst their comrades instinctively copied their practice. But the progress was exceedingly slow, and but little had been gained when the Austrian War of 1866 broke out. Into the tactical shortcomings of the arm during this campaign I have no space to go—they are sufficiently apparent to those who read the official history between the lines—what saved them was the work of individual officers and squadrons who during the long years of peace had been striving to make their commands more fit for war, in spite of inspection ideals. The war, however, had the good result of attracting universal attention to the state of the arm, and initiating a better system.

This was marked by the appointment of Prince Frederick Charles as Inspector-General of Cavalry immediately on its termination. This at once changed the whole spirit of the inspections, and now came the opportunity the reformers had longed for.

During the next three years the progress was rapid, but the time was too short for really great and thorough changes.

Though after 1866 the majority of the officers had become imbued with the new spirit, and recognised the necessity for change in the existing method of training both man and horse, there were probably not 5 per cent. who knew by experience and with conviction what the new method ought to be; and since this experience and the precision with which the routine of training must work to secure good results cannot possibly be acquired under several years, the actual performances of 1870 fell far short of the ideal to which the spirit pointed.

It is not my intention or desire to write disparagingly of what the Prussians did in this war, and I willingly concede that the results were a surprise to the world, and relatively of a very high order; but I want to bring home to my readers that it is no good possessing, even in its highest form, the dash and daring of the true cavalry spirit unless one has also the perseverance and endurance to train one's command, whatever it may be, to serve as an efficient tool in one's hands.

It is an admirable characteristic in a young subaltern to volunteer for a 100 mile reconnaissance, and a grand resolution for a great leader to hurl 60 squadrons against the foe; but if the subaltern's horses and men have never been trained to cover a third of the distance, or the General's squadrons have never learnt to manœuvre together, the dashing spirit will only meet with disaster, and the resolution which in one case makes a man's name for life in the other establishes only his reputation for unbounded folly.

The mistake very generally made in other countries outside of Germany was the assumption that everything that happened in 1870 was the result of design, carefully prepared and thought out beforehand, that, in short, all was for the best in the best of worlds possible, and that the cavalry acted in each instance as it did because it was cavalry, i.e., a body of uniform excellence led by commanders of uniform skill, and not that any particular action was strictly conditioned at the moment, because a particular leader happened to be at the spot with a particular body of men whom, for the most part, he had trained himself.

But the Germans discriminated, and only took their best results as a criterion of merit. Their cavalry leaders were not in the least inflated by the relatively high average of their achievements, but admitted frankly that, though with the material as it was they had done well, they had done nothing to what might have been achieved had a higher standard of training and greater uniformity placed better weapons at the disposal of the excellent spirit undoubtedly displayed by all ranks.

Scarcely was the war over when they were at work again, and already by 1876 their cavalry manœuvres showed a great improvement. This was the time of von Schmidt's greatest activity. His inspections, even of a single squadron, lasted from morning till night. He would dismount man after man, and get up and show him how the thing ought to be done himself, and this not because he was not perfectly aware of the evils of interference with subordinates, but

because the actual method of training had as yet not reached more than, say, 10 to 15 per cent. of the squadrons, and both officers and men still required to be shown by example what was actually demanded of them. It was a death struggle between the old and the new schools, between the routine traditions handed down from von Elpons and his followers, and the practical methods of von Rosenberg, von Schmidt, and their scholars.

In spite, however, of almost superhuman efforts—von Schmidt fairly killed himself by over-work—progress was only slow. How slow, the following quotation from a work published in 1885 affords an indication:—

“Our riding education keeps our horses during the whole of the winter, viz., from October to April, in the riding school. Then follow the squadron training and regimental drills, also on level parade grounds. Only during the short period of detachment exercises and manœuvres, which last only four weeks, is it necessary for cavalry to ride straight over whatever comes first. Is it possible that the soldier will feel full confidence that his horse will carry him safely as long as he sits still and does not worry his mouth? Is it to be expected that he can keep his eyes fixed on his squadron leader and the enemy? Is it not much more likely that he will be anxiously looking down at every stone and cart rut on the ground, pulling at his horse's head, and thereby destroying the order of the formation? But how can a leader who has been brought up in this groove feel confidence in the ability of his men to follow him, when he knows that every potato field, every ridge and furrow, loosens their order?”

This extract is taken from Prince Hohenlohe's “Conversations about Cavalry,” a book that grew up out of his “Letters on Cavalry” previously referred to. In the preface to the former he gives the origin of the book, which was briefly stated as follows:—

His letters, though warmly received by the army in general, met with considerable dissent in the cavalry in particular; not because he praised them too little, but because he overrated their performances, making them out, they felt, so much better than they really were, that it was feared its tendency would be to relax their efforts towards perfection, not to encourage them.

An old friend of his, who throughout the book is designated as von S., and who my friends in Germany have always told me was none other than the Crown Prince, now King, of Saxony, came to him as spokesman of the arm, and submitted their views on the subject, from which resulted a series of conversations, which are embodied in the book, and of which, in passing, I would only say that it embodies almost every essential of the principles and methods of training horses and men in a manner and with a clearness hitherto unequalled in military literature, and of all the many books which ought to, but never, have been translated into English of late years, it occupies one of the first, if not the very first, place in order of merit.¹

The above quotation is an expression of opinion by von S. (founded

¹ A translation is now appearing in the “Journal of the United States Cavalry Association.”

on experience) on certain passages of the "Letters" published about 1883.

My own experience of the German cavalry, not Prussian even, in the same year certainly did not convey quite so pessimistic an impression to my own mind. Again and again I saw whole divisions sweep over cart ruts, field drains, and other minor obstacles without any of the anxious craning he refers to, and though I certainly did see a regiment of hussars charge infantry across 600 yards of open in column, when there was no conceivable necessity for their doing so, their performances seemed to me, fresh from studying our own cavalry brigades at Aldershot, under the late Colonel Percy Barrow's guidance, as just about all that could be demanded of such numbers and far more than could reasonably be expected from such short-service soldiers.

I have therefore always discounted von S.'s opinion, accepting it not as a statement as to how things actually were at the date of publication, but of what they had been some few years beforehand, but at any rate a good deal subsequent to the war.

Generalizing from numerous conversations with German cavalry officers during the past three years, I am inclined to believe that the great move in advance did not commence in earnest till about 1884, at which time the bulk of the squadron leaders were men trained under the new system, and with the advantage of early war experience; but from this date it went forward with ever increasing velocity, as each old colonel, bred under the old *régime*, was removed and his place taken by a younger man.

The process of eliminating old traditional errors, more particularly in equitation continues, and although there is a tendency still in certain districts to coddle both men and horses during the winter months, it is rapidly disappearing, and I myself saw last winter the cavalry in the Brandenburg garrison go out for field movements with the thermometer some 8° below zero; so that in the main von S.'s criticism can no longer be held to apply.

As an instance, by no means the only one I could cite, let me give a case I saw in the manœuvres of 1891 in the Cassel-Erfurt district. The first encounter took place between the cavalries of the two armies in the vicinity of Mühlhausen on the 17th September. On this day the cavalry division of the XIth Corps issued from the mountainous district they had been marching through from Cassel and came in contact with the cavalry of the IVth Corps advancing from Erfurt. Close to the village of Seebach I came on a brigade of three regiments of the latter force. Just as I reached it the brigade moved off westward in a rendezvous formation, *i.e.*, with the three regiments abreast in line of squadron columns at close interval. From where I stood the ground fell away to the north and west in gentle undulations; there were no fences or hedges, but in the trough of each undulation lay generally a running stream a couple of feet wide, flowing between boggy banks, a few pollard willows indicating its course. Here and there slight outcrops of rock and some patches of low scrub offered further impediments to progress.

Northward lay the town of Mühlhausen, out of which a *chaussée*, bordered with the usual avenue of poplars, ran almost due west along the crest of a long gentle spur that came down from the distant mountains, and amongst the trees on the *chaussée* I could detect, by their white cap covers, the enemy's patrols.

The brigade moved off down the slope and across the first hollow at a steady trot, crossing the stream in the bottom without losing for a second its sharply-defined rectangular outline, every horse quiet and steady in its place, not a sign of that useless expenditure of force indicated by plunging restive horses, which the passage of the smallest obstacle usually entails. Then they brought up their left shoulder, and in the distance I saw a second brigade converging on them. Presently they came within supporting distance of one another, and both wheeled up till they fronted northward; their horse artillery battery galloped out on the inner flank, and its first round was answered by the enemy's guns in position along the *chaussée*.

The two brigades had meanwhile continued their advance towards the enemy at the same uniform pace, their outline as sharply defined as the edges of the squares on a chess board; but on hearing the first round they opened out to line of squadron columns at full interval, at the same time forming two lines in échelon, two-thirds of the whole strength in first line.

Descending into the hollow, they were, for a moment, hidden from the defenders' artillery, but beyond that they would be in the full sweep of his shrapnel. They crossed the brook in the bottom with perfect steadiness, and then, taking advantage of the cover the rise afforded them, sounded "Line to the front," and, the moment this was completed, "Gallop," and swept over the brow of the hill in a well closed-up line. For a moment, as they descended into the last hollow between them and the enemy, I lost sight of them; but presently they reappeared, dashing up the further slope at the fullest extended speed of their horses, but I noticed that the rear rank was no longer quite as well closed up as usual. The inner flank was almost on the road, it seemed to me, when suddenly the two nearest squadrons went "troops left," and the head of the column thus formed changed direction to the right, the rest of the first line, followed at a couple of hundred yards by the second one, dashed over the road ditches, and the whole disappeared behind the screen formed by the trees and into the valley beyond.

The countercharge, which was actually attempted, was masked from my view by the advancing lines, but less than a minute after the troops crossed the road I saw two regiments of white caps and their battery tearing up the slope beyond above the screen of the trees, and closely followed by three regiments of our own side. The Umpire Staff then appeared and put a stop to the proceedings, and I had time to examine the ground.

In the hollow in front of the *chaussée* I came on the cause of the unsteadiness in the rear rank referred to above. This was a broad drainage channel, about 12 ft. wide at top and 5 ft. deep, cut along the

bottom, with side slopes of 1 by 1, a sufficiently serious obstacle. The horses, by the marks of their hoofs, had mostly skated down the first 3 ft., and then jumped the remainder clear. Further on I found the reason for the break into column above alluded to. The road was here scarped out of the side of the hill, and there was a drop of about 13 ft. into it. They had seen it only just in time, and though going at speed were yet so perfectly in hand that they were able to wheel up sharp, and the tracks of the outermost horses were not more than a few feet from the edge. But down in the hollow beyond a still greater surprise awaited me, for here ran a stream of water 6 ft. broad, in a trench 40 ft. wide from cutting line to cutting line, and at least 12 ft. deep; a big "in and out" with running water where one would have wanted to take off. It would have scattered any ordinary hunting field, but a battery and five regiments in all had swept over it, without a single man down, at the fullest extended speed of their horses.

I have since measured the distances carefully, and checked and counter-checked the above account in conversations with several officers who took part in the event, notably the officer commanding the battery, and therefore can vouch for the accuracy of my statement, on which in England, at the time I first made it, considerable doubt was cast. It is only necessary here to add, in continuation of my argument, that none of the five regiments were among the half dozen reputed crack Prussian regiments, but were ordinary line cavalry, two of them Hessians, and that the distance from where the trot first sounded to where they halted was as nearly as possible 10,000 yds., the last 1,500 of which were covered in the charge and pursuit.

Since then I have witnessed many charges, one even in which 60 squadrons took part under one leader, and though in none was the ground quite as difficult as in the above instance, still it was far from being the level parade ground style to which von S., in his depreciatory remarks quoted above, refers.

Individual regiments gave proof of skill but little, if at all, inferior to this even in 1870; but the point to notice is that now all can be relied on to accomplish what then only crack squadrons could undertake.

One point on which all German cavalry officers are agreed is the enormous improvement in the horses during the last 20 years, but it is difficult to decide how much of this is due to better remounts supplied by the Government studs, and how much can be fairly attributed to more thorough stable management and a higher standard of condition. This much, however, is tolerably clear, that had the old cult of the "fat" horse still persisted, no results achieved in the breeding establishments would have been of any avail. The key-stone of German cavalry efficiency is undoubtedly the now universal appreciation of what is really signified by "condition," for without condition the drill necessary to obtain their perfect precision of manœuvre would only end in the breakdown of the material.