

This article was downloaded by: [Carnegie Mellon University]

On: 13 January 2015, At: 04:21

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>

### The British Cavalry: Some Suggestions

Captain E. M. J. Molyneux D.S.O. <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Captain E. M. J. Molyneux, D.S.O.

Published online: 11 Sep 2009.

To cite this article: Captain E. M. J. Molyneux D.S.O. (1904) The British Cavalry: Some Suggestions, Royal United Services Institution. Journal, 48:320, 1164-1171, DOI: [10.1080/03071840409418618](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071840409418618)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071840409418618>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# THE BRITISH CAVALRY: SOME SUGGESTIONS.

*By Captain E. M. J. MOLYNEUX, D.S.O.,  
12th Cavalry (Indian Army).*

---

TWO main defects are generally admitted to exist in the present system under which officers are supplied to regiments of British cavalry, viz.:—

1. The most is not at present made of the opportunities for the development of the unrivalled material available, so as to produce the best practical results.

2. The field of selection for the supply of officers to the British cavalry is unduly narrowed by the considerable private income which officers, accepting commissions in that service, require to meet the many and varied calls upon their purses, the prospect of such expenditure causing many, who would otherwise make excellent officers, to shrink from the pecuniary obligations involved. The cavalry has thus to be content, in some instances, to take young men as officers who have little or nothing to qualify them for such a career beyond the command of a considerable income, and who obtain their commissions owing to the lack of other candidates, in spite of the fact that they are not, either intellectually or physically, the men whom the military authorities are desirous of seeing join that arm of the Service.

The dearth of candidates for cavalry commissions of late years is well known to the authorities and to the public. There are certain cheery optimists who would have us believe that we are all the time really getting the best men available, on the ground that the man who has passed highest in an examination is not necessarily the man required, as a strong physique, a liking for horses and everything pertaining to them, nerve, eyesight, capacity for command, and other most essential qualifications for the cavalry officer are not and cannot be tested in the examination hall. A little further on I propose a system by which some of these qualifications should be to a certain extent insured before the candidate is posted to a regiment. Meanwhile, it is only necessary to point out that a service, to enter which there is little competition, from whatever cause it may arise, is not on the way to secure as good men as it would, did a healthy competition exist.

The connection between the two defects in question is too obvious to require demonstration. I will not delay the reader by going over ground so often covered already, but will proceed to the discussion of certain specific proposals.

## I.

I would suggest, in the first place, the establishment of a special Training School for cavalry officers, to which all cadets gazetted to the cavalry should be sent straight from Sandhurst, where they would undergo a twelve months' special course of instruction before joining their regiments, their commissions bearing the date they were

gazetted from Sandhurst, so as not to place them at any disadvantage as compared with officers of line regiments leaving the college at the same time.

Revolutionary as such a project may appear at first sight, it is one which already prevails, and works in a most satisfactory manner, in the officering of the Royal Engineers. The cadets at Woolwich, whether destined for artillery or engineers, are all educated together in the different subjects in which it is advisable that they should have training in common. Then, when the young gunner goes off to join his battery, the sapper is sent to Chatham to undergo another year's course in order to acquire proficiency in his own particular technical subjects. Similarly, at Sandhurst, cavalry and infantry cadets are trained together, much of their training being of course applicable to either service, such as topography, tactics, military history, law, organisation, riding, gymnastics, and musketry. The reason that the system pursued with Royal Engineers has never been applied to the cavalry is probably that it has never been admitted by the public—except in time of war—that the cavalry is, or rather should be, a highly specialised arm, whose functions in time of war are certainly not less important, and hardly require less training for their proper performance, than those of the sapper.

In times gone by a cavalry commission was looked upon as affording a pleasant occupation for a young man of wealth and leisure, carrying with it the right to wear many various and becoming uniforms when engaged in duties not too exacting in peace, and in which a much larger amount of free time was ensured than would be possible for a man anxious to succeed in any other profession. Force of conservatism causes the general public to expect the cavalry officer to be a leisured and gilded ornament of society until the outbreak of war, when it becomes exceedingly wroth with him if it finds there is any one of his many duties in which he is not a proficient. Now, the performance of cavalry duties in the field cannot be ensured by any amount of theoretical study. It would be just as reasonable to expect a man to go to the wickets and make a score after he had carefully studied the works of Grace, Ranjitsinghji, Fry, or other distinguished cricketers, as to expect the cavalry officer to be able at once to fulfil all his field duties without plenty of training and practice in the field. No mere reading will make a good cavalry officer, any more than a good cricketer can be made by reading up a book on the subject of cricket, although in both cases theoretical study of good models is of value.

The proposal to put cavalry officers through a special course of training before joining would have the following advantages, amongst others:—

Those unsuited to the cavalry service would be weeded out before joining their regiments, to the great benefit, not only of the cavalry, but of their own pockets or the pockets of their parents or guardians, as it is proposed that only those should be allowed to join regiments who were found thoroughly fitted for it in every way at the end of a year at the Special Cavalry School; nor should any of them be required to purchase uniforms, horses, or outfit until after leaving the school. I will return later to the question of the course proposed. Under the present system the number of resignations of their commissions by young cavalry officers—all of whom have spent not less than £350 or £400, and often much more, upon uniforms, horses, and

general outfit—has amounted at times to almost a national scandal, and has been largely responsible for parents and guardians of moderate means refusing to entertain the idea of the cavalry as a career for their sons or wards, no matter how desirous of a cavalry commission might be the candidate for whom they were responsible. For those who leave the cavalry service after a very short experience of it are by no means only those whose means are insufficient to support the expenses involved; there are many who are constitutionally unfitted for it, but do not discover the fact until after they have actually joined. At the end of a year at the Cavalry School one of two things must happen: either the candidate is found to be unsuited for the cavalry, and is transferred accordingly to the line without loss of time, money, or self-respect, or else takes his place in a regiment, adequately equipped, in all but experience, for the duties of a cavalry officer, instead of joining with far less knowledge of horses and cavalry work generally than the troopers under his command, as is far too often the case at present, since on joining his regiment he has everything connected with cavalry still to learn. For a considerable period after joining he is usually not much use, since he knows nothing of his work, and much might be taught him at a Cavalry School which he now is left to acquire slowly and in a haphazard way. The most powerful incentive to effort—that of competition—is usually wholly wanting in a regiment, whereas it should be very powerful in a school in which all the students vied with one another to leave with the best record of professional acquirements. Although the more senior officers, under whom the newly-joined subaltern is placed to learn his work, will help him to learn it, they have a good deal else to do, and are not professional instructors with a thorough plan for teaching their subalterns systematically. In a Cavalry School the course would be systematic, and more uniformity of knowledge gained by all, to the great advantage of the Service. The great inconvenience of having to detach young officers to go through veterinary and other courses after joining would also be reduced to a minimum.

The Special Cavalry School would have to be in the vicinity of Aldershot or some other large military garrison where mounted troops are quartered in considerable numbers, for the twofold reason that the students would require a large veterinary hospital for the practical study of that very important subject, and because they would profit by being allowed to take part, as officers' patrols, etc., on field days. A course of one year should be sufficient to ground them in their professional duties and to weed out the inefficient. The latter might make good officers in other branches. The cadets would require little uniform in addition to their Sandhurst kit; stout riding breeches, gaiters, and shooting boots should be almost sufficient. The school should accommodate 35 or 40 only, not more than 15 or 20 subalterns being required half-yearly for cavalry. A horse would be required for each cadet and for the instructional staff, and some grooms—soldiers or ex-soldiers. A commandant (a most carefully-selected cavalry officer of ability and experience), an assistant commandant or adjutant, riding master, and a thoroughly reliable and practical professor of veterinary science would also be required, and such professors as may be necessary to ensure the students keeping up the study of topography, tactics, etc., might with advantage be cavalry officers of active habits, so that their services might be utilised as umpires and instructors for purely cavalry work in the field. If every student

were also required to study one European language—French, German, or Russian, as preferred—it would add to the utility of the course.

The special cavalry subjects should include, amongst others, the following:—

1. Veterinary science, both theoretical and practical. South Africa showed us how immensely important a matter it is, and also that it is an unexpectedly weak point. Opportunities for thorough study of it are not adequate later on in the cavalry officer's service, when tactics and administration take up most of his attention, not that I wish to minimise the importance of devoting the greatest attention to subjects which deal with fighting pure and simple, for fighting is the ultimate *raison d'être* of every soldier. The soldier, however, has to devote the greater part of his life not to fighting, but to the preparation for it; and that, in the case of the cavalryman, consists to a great extent in the care and training of horses. He may be in action on ten or twenty days in the course of his military life; days, it is true, of such immense importance that no pains should be spared to ensure his being able to acquit himself well on these occasions by careful peace training. But he will certainly have the health, training, and possibly also the selection of a large number of Government horses entrusted to him during some twenty-five or thirty years. In peace this duty is important; but in war the importance—as we found to our own most heavy cost in South Africa—of a thorough knowledge of horse management and veterinary science is so great that it is no exaggeration to say that, for the cavalry officer, horse management is hardly secondary even to knowledge of strategy and tactics. Given two opposing cavalry forces, equally numerous, well mounted, and well led, there can be no doubt but that the force, which knows how to keep its horses alive and fit, will have an immense advantage over that in which the effective strength is lowered by death and disease due to imperfect care and knowledge, ill-fitting saddlery, over-weighting, or improper use of food.

Even the effective horses will then be inferior in pace and endurance, from their condition being unequal to those to which they are opposed. Hitherto we have been too much content to leave veterinary knowledge to the veterinary surgeon—a system which may be made to work fairly well in peace, but which must inevitably prove most unsatisfactory and wasteful in war.

The veterinary department is necessarily a small one; during a great war not only are the cavalry scattered over a large area, out of reach of veterinary care, but the establishment of horses is so swollen that the veterinary department would be hard put to it to look after them all, even if there were nothing else to be done with the horses but to dispose them in the most convenient arrangement for superintendence. What a difference it would have made in South Africa if every cavalry officer had had a good working veterinary knowledge, which he had disseminated as far as possible amongst those under him; and if every retired cavalry officer who then came forward had sufficient knowledge to have been put in charge of a horse dépôt and been competent to treat all ordinary cases, and set the overworked veterinary staff free to look after complex cases and the general supervision of animals and stores of medicines, instruments, forage, etc. The fact that we lost some 200,000 or 300,000 animals in South Africa did not lose us the campaign, though it did undoubtedly protract it unduly and hampered our every movement,

besides adding millions to the bill; but it might well have lost us the campaign against a Power more evenly matched with us. Loss of draught and riding animals to an army means loss of mobility and striking power, which are indispensable to the winning of battles. Without it an army is like a fleet without coal. In the next war we may not have time to ransack the ends of the earth for animals to replace those which our own ignorance has sacrificed. So I conclude that we might find it an economy in the long run to attach a veterinary professor to our Cavalry School, and to insist on every student being as well up in that subject as it is possible to make him in a single year. The examinations should mostly be practical, not done in the study.

2. Closely allied to the above is the whole question of stable management, shoeing, feeding, fitting of saddlery, ageing of horses, etc. Every officer on joining should know how to shoe a horse, pare his hoofs, etc. Some may object that it is not the business of a cavalry officer to be a veterinary surgeon, a groom, or a shoeing-smith. Neither is it the business of any man to be above his work. Just as we pass the young engineer for a year or two through the workshops, and the doctor through the hospitals, so, too, do we require to give the cavalry officer a thorough insight into the work for which he will be responsible, though his work may eventually consist in supervision rather than execution.

3. Equitation should, of course, form part of the course. It might include tent-pegging and lime-cutting for the more advanced.

4. Reconnaissance and the detached duties of cavalry. The students should parade mounted for this at least once a week, carrying feeds and rations on service scale for a whole day's continuous work in the open, the work for first term students consisting at first in the mere drill and formation employed on officers' or reconnoitring patrols, or acting as part of a cavalry screen, the instructor carefully following all the movements, so that the students may be encouraged to adapt their formations to circumstances, and make them sufficiently flexible to take the maximum advantage of natural features, and use their intelligence in so working as to expose themselves the least possible to risk of discovery or capture. Later on, as they obtain the confidence which comes from practice, they may be manœuvred against one another as two parties or patrols, the work including the dispositions if attacked, rapid and accurate transmission of intelligence, and reports and sketches. The same student should not always be the leader of the patrol, or draughtsman, and the exercises to be varied in scope and idea, as well as progressive in nature. On return from this field-day, each cadet should be required to take his saddlery to pieces and clean it, and put it together again, after having groomed his horse, at any rate during his first term. Such "drudgery" might keep some men from joining the cavalry; but not, I think, those who would make the best officers.

The above is meant to outline the principal subjects only; it is not within the scope of a magazine article to follow the course more into detail.

## II.

The second part of our subject is far more delicate to handle. To check too costly a scale of living is difficult without undue interference, and sumptuary laws at all times have usually proved more vexatious than effective. And in the first place I would deprecate

the incessant rummaging in the uniform case, which is the delight of some well-meaning Army reformers, who think they can solve the whole question by ripping a bit of gold lace off an officer's waist-coat or giving him a different shaped collar. Every such change means usually the discarding of some article of uniform which would last a long time, and so is an additional initial expense—a severance with the past associations of the uniform—and exactly contrary to the intention of the promoter of the change. A further diminution of the attractions of the Service uniform has now been reduced to the minimum: a handsome full dress, a plain working dress, and a dinner dress. No useful purpose would be served by further changes in uniform.

The expenses of the cavalry officer seem to be capable of classification under two main heads: social expenses and expenses connected with sport. In regard to the first, it is neither desirable nor possible to prevent a rich man spending his money in any way he may please. Officers cannot be expected to submit to restrictions on their personal liberty which would be tolerated by no other body of men in a country where we are unaccustomed to such interference, and jealous of it. Something can, however, be done to reduce the obligatory social expenses to a uniform level throughout the British cavalry, by the system which regulates regimental expenses in the Indian cavalry. In the latter Service a system prevails, and works most satisfactorily, by which a regular sum (3 per cent. on pay and allowances) is deducted each month from each officer and put to the credit of the "Entertainment Fund." No officer can be called on for any contribution—ball, gymkhana, dinner, or anything else—beyond what is covered by the above deduction. If it is wished to give a dance, by all means let it be done, if there is the money in the fund; if not, then they must wait until it accumulates. Every man knows exactly where he is over his expenses; there is no check whatever on any man who wishes to spend money in his own name on social entertainments. He may have a dozen guests to dinner or give any entertainment himself; but he cannot ask anyone else to contribute towards it. I do not say that 3 per cent. would be a sufficient proportion to deduct from the pay of officers of the British cavalry, from whom so much is expected; but I do think that it should be on some fixed basis of the kind, so that it should be out of the power of regiments to live at a rate of expenditure ruinous to many of their officers, in an endeavour, possibly, to outshine others. There is no reason why the commanding officer should not be required to certify each month that to the best of his belief no expenditure had been called for from his officers, either directly or indirectly, beyond that sanctioned as above. He could sign it with all the other monthly certificates.

If hard condition, nerve, judgment, horsemanship, and activity of mind and body be desirable qualities in our cavalry officers, and if it be conceded that certain sports tend to encourage and develop such qualities, to an extent with which no system of parade riding can ever compete, then it follows that the utmost should be done to encourage officers to spend their spare time in hunting, polo, and similar pastimes, where they will not only amuse themselves, but also keep themselves fittest for the field duties of their profession. Fortunately for their country, many officers are to be found in our cavalry who ask nothing better than to be allowed to spend their

spare hours in this way, instead of swaggering through the streets and public places in a tight-fitting uniform, as one may see any day on the Continent, an example which some short-sighted critics would like to see followed by officers in our own Army. Were the expenses connected with such sports less prohibitive, there should be no difficulty in recruiting the commissioned ranks of the cavalry entirely from such excellent material.

Another fact, equally patent, is that in time of war the number of trained horses and ponies, as a reserve for our cavalry and mounted infantry, is lamentably deficient. Is there any way by which both the above deficiencies could be met: polo and hunting made cheaper for the cavalry officer, and a small reserve of the most excellent kind created for the mounted men? I think that there is a way, and that it could be made to work satisfactorily both to the officer and to Government. The latter, in time of war, has to buy up, at far over market value, animals of the quality of which it has no guarantee beyond the purchasing officer's inspection, and which are usually insufficiently trained to stand fire, and often unpractised in going across country. Government could, I think, form a useful little mounted infantry reserve of ponies, which would be available at a fixed price on the calling out of the reserves for service, if it would make it worth the while of cavalry officers to train and keep up such a reserve. Government already has such a system, which was of incalculable value in South Africa, by which the horses of the omnibus companies were retained at a small fee. Is not the officer equally deserving of encouragement to do this? More so, I think, if he can bring up an animal in the pink of condition for immediate service, trained to stand fire and go over jumps. I would therefore suggest that Government should issue feed, fodder, and bedding, with stabling, to ponies of the "Mounted Infantry Reserve," as it already issues supplies to the thousands of chargers and animals of all sorts in its employment. That would enable each cavalry officer to keep a couple of polo ponies free of charge, especially if he were allowed the services of an extra soldier groom, who would look after the ponies in addition to performing his own parade duties, being excused guards and fatigues while so employed. The ponies might be passed as fit for the Service when the officer had trained them, and they could stand fire and go over the regimental jumps. Some blank cartridge, fired at first at a distance, gradually nearer as the pony got used to it, finally close beside it, would be required, more or less of it, according to the temper of the animal. It might be further accustomed to fire by being made to stand close behind the firing line during the firing of the annual courses of musketry on the rifle range, as is done with all the troop horses in the Indian cavalry. A committee, consisting of three of the senior officers, might pass the ponies, when they would be duly registered in the Mounted Infantry Reserve, a register being kept regimentally for the purpose, like the existing register of officers' chargers. The Inspector-General of Cavalry and other inspecting officers might also inspect them. The ponies to be purchased either by individual officers for their own use, or under regimental arrangements, and to be available for polo and to be looked on in every way as the property of the officer who owned and had paid for them, but passing to Government at a fixed price the moment the reserves were called out for service. Cavalry officers would thus keep up a reserve, splendid in quality though



limited in numbers, for Government, whilst at the same time obtaining their polo for very little beyond the original outlay on a raw pony. Some regiments might have as many as 30 or 40 such ponies, others less, according to the amount of energy and sporting tastes of the officers, and a similar arrangement might possibly be made for keeping an extra hunter.

There is one important question, however, which would have to be solved before we can assume that the above scheme would be a success: The market value of a trained polo pony is, on an average—at least so far as tournament ponies are concerned—a good deal higher than anything that Government could reasonably be expected to pay for as mounted infantry chargers. In the first place, however, there is no question of officers being compelled to register their most valuable animals, nor indeed any of them; in the second place, the scheme outlined above might possibly have a marked effect in reducing the price of polo ponies of the second order, not quite up to tournament form, but quite good enough for practice and for regimental games. In the Indian cavalry, where regimental animals are regimental property, the farriers, 16 in number, are mounted on ponies of polo height, which in many regiments the C.O. allows to be played at polo. As the average price paid for such ponies is about £10, they cannot be expected to be up to first-class tournament form, though some turn out good enough for tournaments. In my own regiment, the team of native officers, which was for several years unbeaten in the Punjab Tournament, and included Heera Singh, well known by reputation to military polo players, was to a great extent mounted on farriers' ponies.

But even granted that a supply of tournament ponies could not be kept up in a regiment under the scheme suggested, there can be no doubt but that a supply of passably good ponies kept free of charge would enable many men to enjoy regimental polo who cannot now afford to do so, except in India or South Africa. After all, what we have to aim at is to distribute the advantage as widely as possible, rather than to cater for the chosen few who represent their regiments at an annual tournament. In polo as in cricket, football, or any other game, a high standard of excellence cannot be kept up without keen competition. If the competition be one of skill and horsemanship rather than of wealth, then it is on the right lines; and I fancy that the whole tendency of the scheme would be to give the advantage in tournaments to those who were good judges of horse-flesh and had the best idea how to train and condition raw animals, and were moreover willing to devote their spare time to doing so. In the case of young officers of the right sort, there is a good deal of spare physical energy left unexpended when their day's regimental work is over. It is better that such energy should find a healthy outlet in manly sport than be left to find an unhealthy one. The more our young cavalry officers play polo the better horsemen they become, and better horsemasters, better judges of horse-flesh, and stronger, tougher, harder men into the bargain.

This article lays no claim to finality, but rather aims at putting forward certain suggestions which the writer feels would be advantageous to the British cavalry, in which he served for some years. If it should ever lead to any of these ideas being taken up and put into practice, either as they stand or in some modified form, it will have fulfilled the aim of its author.