

THE EVOLUTION OF INFANTRY

AND

CAVALRY TACTICS.

(A Historical Sketch).

BY

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LIST OF BOOKS CONSULTED IN THE PREPARATION
OF THIS THESIS.

- "Armies of To-Day" -- Merritt -- and others.
"Cavalry in Modern War". -- Trench.
" Cavalry: Its History and Tactics" -- Nolan.
"Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United
States.
"Letters on Cavalry" -- Hohenlohe - Ingelfingen (Fr).
~~"Letters on Infantry"~~ -- " "
"New Tactics of Infantry" -- Von Scherff.
"The Nation in Arms" -- Von der Goltz.
"Organization and Tactics" -- Wagner.
"Military Science" -- Pettit.

INTRODUCTION.

I have sought to gather historical matter here that will be a brief review to the student of Military History. It is an interesting subject to trace the evolution of Military Tactics. If armies were always composed of men with the same temperaments, using the same equipments, having the same degree of discipline, and animated by the same impulses and the battles fought on the same field it would always be much the same story. But every war has had its surprises and has brought forth something ~~un~~ unforeseen.

Our military lessons must be sought in history of wars and to be a successful Tactician an officer must master military history. The tactical deductions are gathered from past wars to illustrate our evolution and no attempt has been made to bring forward any new theories.

A good understanding of tactics of an army is impossible without knowledge of its history and it is largely historical with which I deal. This is, then of course largely a compilation.

INFANTRY.

The strength of an army is in its infantry. Of all losses in battle it has been estimated that more than seventy five per cent are inflicted by fire from this arm.

On account of the weapons used by the Ancients, the tactical lessons from their wars are of but little value. The formations of Alexander the Great were typical of that era. He massed his infantry into a great phalanx. With this tide of humanity he moved all things before.

During the Middle Ages, Military Science sank, with other branches of human knowledge, to the lowest level. Infantry was a mere mob armed with spears, bows, knives or short swords and clubs. The deeds of the English Archers at Crec'y and Agincourt, the victory of the Swiss over the flower of Austrian chivalry restored the dignity of infantry to the degree of respectability.

The introduction of the musket marks the real birth of infantry. We find that there have of necessity, been radical changes in tactical formations with the improvement of fire arms. No longer could the solid squares of heavy columns be used and retain their fighting power. As the range and penetration of fire was slight as well as slow we find that pikemen were necessary to support the musket fire supplementing the shock of receiving the charge.

Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, caused a reorganization of tactics by having lighter pikes and improving the musket with the introduction of cartridges and the addition of the wheellock or flint in place of the slow match. He also introduced a new formation by reducing the lines or ranks to six.

During the wars of Louis XIV we have the invention of the bayonet which takes the place of the pike. The six ranks are reduced to four and the mobility of the armies are increased by the organization of battalions, regiments, brigades and divisions. Infantry is now being increased and the cavalry arm is decreased. The time from Gustavus Adolphus to Frederick the Great tactics remain about the same. Fredrick brought mobility and fire action to a perfection that startled the world. The ranks were reduced to three, and the rapidity of fire was six shots per minute for a man. He divided the army into two wings of two lines each for battle, camp, or march. His great battles were won by a flank movement, -- wheeling into line and following up the effective fire with repeated bayonet charges.

We can now turn our attention to the American Revolution for the next great advance of tactical formations.

At the time of the war for Independence we had few men who were drilled and disciplined enough to make up a line of battle. But fortunately we had many men who were skilled in the art of forest warfare with the Indians. These men were brave, and skillful rifle shots, and our American commanders threw them forward to attack the enemy, annoy and delay his advance. When no longer able to check the advance they would, hastily with-draw uncovering the Continental troops upon whom the brunt of battle always fell. During the latter part of the war skirmishing was a regular element in our tactics. The French troops serving in our country carried this idea home with them and it became a feature of their wars that followed.

The Napoleonic Wars again made a change in tactics. The skirmish line is used and is known as the perpendicular system -- the heavy columns of battalions are covered by the advancing line of skirmishers.

Up till the beginning of the War of Secession the formations used by the American army were taken from imperfect translation of French and Prussian tactics.

The war of the Rebellion is another turning point in the history of infantry tactics. Perhaps all the features of our modern tactics had their prototypes, developed during this great struggle.

The attack by rushes was first used at the Battle of Fort Donelson, February 18th, 1862. On this same field successive lines were also developed and put into use. The formation of French's division at Fredricksburg may be taken as the typical formation for the attack used during the war. The wooded country which made up the greatest part of the theater of operation and the improved rifles with which the troops were being armed with caused the development and employment of skirmishing to a degree theretofore unknown to the world. Sherman's army habitually fought in strong skirmish lines, using all variations of the ground for cover from the enemy's fire.

The most striking feature of tactical development during this war was the use of hasty intrenchments. If we remember our history of the Revolution we for the first time read of field fortifications. Bunker Hill was fortified on the night before battle. All through the American Wars our troops have been in the habit of intrenching their position. But it was

during the Civil War that we developed the art of "hasty intrenchments." Hasty intrenchments are the result of the ingenuity of the American Volunteer who always puts into practice what he has been taught by experience. Armies camping in the vicinity of the enemy always proceeded to intrench their camps. The skirmishers even scraped up a hasty shelter in a few moments with nothing but a tin cup and a bayonet.

The European Wars that followed but confirmed the tactical lessons that cost us so dear.

In conclusion I may say that trend has ever been for an increase in mobility and effectiveness of fire action. The heavy columns of the ancients gave way before the lighter lines Gustavus Adolphus only to be replaced by the formations of Fredrick the Great. These in turn were superseded by the French system and now the American skirmish line.

C A V A L R Y .

It would be a long story to trace the use of horsemen in warfare since the time of the Ancients. Alexander and Hannibal had bodies of horsemen organized in various ways and handled with different degrees of skill. During the Crusades and days of Chivalry the cavalry arm predominated. It was the arm of the higher classes. At the time of the Dark Ages cavalry was in the lead but its condition was miserable. The knights or men-at-arms were literally cased in iron. The horses were covered with a weight of armor which reduced their mobility to a minimum. The arms used were the lance, sword, gagger and generally the battle-axe.

In trying to defend himself the cavalier encased his body in an armour weighing as much as two hundred pounds and was handicapped in trying to injure his foes in return. As a result of this armorment, the conflict between men-at-arms became almost bloodless. The only great danger lay in being unhorsed and unable to rise, trampled upon by the charge which was made at a slow trot.

The introduction of gun powder in warfare was at once felt by the cavalry. In vain were the attempts made to neutralize this new force by a heavy armour. The last resort was the adaption of fire arms for the use of horse men. The fire action was incomparably inferior to that of the rude, but already improving infantry. In 1515 Machiavelli declared that, -- "well organized infantry could hardly be beaten except by infantry." The invention of the pistol added to the power of the trooper through the tactics then in use show how far the mounted arm

fell short of their proper function.

The German cavalry was formed in deep bodies - generally seventeen ranks. There was no attempt at shock action. They rode up to close range of the enemy, the front rank discharging their pistols, wheeling to the flanks, uncovering the second rank, reforming in the rear. Each rank in turn firing and going to the rear to load. This worked till the French adopted the plan of charging with speed and as a result invariably overturned them.

Charles V. made a great change in the German cavalry by copying from the French. He organized squadrons of the size about equal to those in our army to-day, reducing the number of ranks to eight. At this period there was a peculiar intermingling of cavalry and infantry. At the battle of Coutras in 1587, the infantry is placed on the flanks with the cavalry in the center. The lance gradually disappeared and the armour of the cavalryman was lightened. Maurice had his cavalry provided with curass and helmets and armed with pistol and sword.

The Dutch cavalry would fire a volley and then draw swords charging the flanks. We first hear of Dragoons in about the year 1550. They were first mounted infantry using horses for transportation. Later they were trained to fight either mounted or on foot.

The reforms made in this era by Gustavus Adolphus were equal to those of his infantry. He reduced the number of ranks to three and divided cavalry into heavy and light. The light cavalry served without armour. He forbade caracoling and

directed his charges straight at the enemy. The action was only shock, the charge being made at a trot. Light cavalry was used but for the minor operations of war, leaving the heavy cavalry for work of battle.

The Wars of Louis XIV produced no material change in tactics or organization of the Artistic Arm, which decreased as Infantry was increased. Charles XII of Sweden abolished all armor, prohibited the use of fire-arms on horseback, armed his men with long swords and taught his cavalry to charge at full speed. When Fredrick the Great came upon the throne of Prussia, he found that cavalry was placing its reliance in mounted fire action and was only trained to charge at a slow trot. After the peace of Breslaw he carefully overhauled his army. Relying solely upon the charge he instructed his cavalry to charge in good order at full speed. It is said that over eight thousand horsemen could charge, boot to boot, for hundreds of yards, halt in imperfect order and immediately resume the charge. Fredrick's cavalry was formed in three ranks, but it was found that maneuvers were better executed as to procession and rapidity in but two ranks and the third rank was afterwards discontinued.

In attacking the lines moved forward simultaneously passing from a walk into a trot and when within two hundred yards of the enemy the gait was increased to a run, the men yelling to heighten the moral effect. Perfect as was the Prussian cavalry it was more than outclassed by the Austrian Light cavalry. The Austrians unable to cope with the Prussians in action, eluded them and far surpassed them in stratigical service.

Napoleon, the Master of the Art of War, made the most perfect perfect use of his cavalry. The decisive shock on the field of battle, the relentless pursuit of a defeated enemy, and the unflinching service of reconnoitering allowed his cavalry to rival the world. He combined it with other arms in the most satisfactory manner and used it successfully against the enemy's cavalry, infantry and artillery. Notwithstanding the use and reliance on shock action, Napoleon's cavalry was unable to charge at full speed after the manner of Frederick's. This was due to his constant wars and lack of opportunity of peace training. The uses of cavalry on the field of battle by Napoleon were varied and great. More than once the cavalry saved the day by turning defeat into victory. The charges of Napoleon's cavalry have been likened to an avalanche and they generally marked the decisive moment of the battle.

The American cavalry has a short but brilliant history. The mounted troops of the Continental Army were more or less of an irregular nature. The deeds of "Lightfoot" Harry Lee, Marion, and others have always been the admiration of the readers of history. There was little or no cavalry operations during the War of 1812 and it was not till the Mexican War that we had a chance for a comparison with another nation. In these cases the Americans far outclassed their rivals. At the beginning of the War of Secession our army contained but about four thousand mounted men, two regiments of dragoons, two of cavalry and one of mounted rifles.

The cavalry of the Civil War can be divided into regular partisan.

The regular cavalry consisted of troops which were trained and armed as dragoons and formed a part of large armies. The irregular cavalry was made up of mounted soldiers placing their reliance on fire action and were used mostly in detached sections. The best type of partisan cavalry is found in the forces commanded by Morgan and Forrest, men without previous experience and no military training whatever. Morgan's forces amounted to about four thousand men, armed with two Colt's revolvers and a muzzle loading Enfield rifle. They habitually fought on foot, leaving one fourth of the men to hold the horses. The first line fired, laid down while the second line passed through the interval and in turn would fire and lay down. Each line passing each other thus keeping up a steady fire. Forrest's company at one time aggregated nearly six thousand men. They were armed as Morgan's men with the addition of the saber which was seldom used. Forrest used practically the same tactics as did Morgan.

The cavalry raid seems to have had its first complete development in this war. Morgan and Forrest each conducted raids that are now historical. In Virginia, Mosby carried on war in true guerrilla style. His men were regularly enlisted but returned to their homes at the termination of active operations. The characteristic of this partisan cavalry was its extreme mobility and its habitual reliance on fire action.

The history of the Regular Cavalry shows that it could do all that was done by the Irregular and more too. In both the Union and Confederate armies the cavalry was all light. They were armed with a revolver, saber and carbine; a few had breech-

breech-loaders and the remainder the Enfield rifles.

General Stuart was the Star Cavalry leader of the South. Ignoring cavalry traditions of the old world he sought a means to an end, and originated a new method of tactics.

At the beginning of the war the Union cavalry received but little encouragement. Not till the battle of Beverly Ford, Virginia, June 9th, 1863, did the cavalry of the North manifest real efficiency. Here the many sided nature of American cavalry was illustrated. As the United States Cavalry improved more reliance was placed on the use of the saber. In the campaign of Sheridan the expert use of the carbine and saber as well as the tactical efficiency was superior to that of their opponents. Before the war was over this became true of all northern cavalry.

In the service of security and information it furnishes the best models for military students.

The deeds of our cavalry upon the western plains are fresh in the minds of the readers of military history. The great cavalry leaders as Custer, Chaffee, Henry, and others who had to deal with the red man, outlaws and Mexican robbers brought to perfection our extended order system.

The cavalry operation of the latter European Wars have but confirmed our American methods and in cases show the attempt to imitate us.

During the Spanish War we did very little cavalry operation, most of this arm serving dismounted. In Porto Rico and the Phillipines cavalry was used for scouting and reconitering and minor duties. In all cases has it shown the endurance and

high standard of discipline in the American Army.

The tactics used by the British forces in South Africa were similar to those used by all European armies. They are of German origin with a few variations. At last the English have adopted the American tactics and are able to make more of a showing. The lessons of this war are not yet complete and we will leave it.

The successful cavalry possesses the greatest power in producing the shock and the most effective use of weapons in the melee. Mounted fire action cannot be depended on for important results. Extra mobility is the essential characteristic and to be a dependant arm it must be able to deliver a fire action dismounted.

The modern idea of cavalry is that it must be able to "fight any place except at sea", and certainly no army can enter the list to-day "with a fair chance of success unless it has cavalry that can both ride and fight."