

Ten Weeks in the German Cavalry

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EDITOR'S NOTE.—This article is of particular interest because it recites the personal experiences of Mr. Wagner as a recruit in the German army. When he reached Germany he was caught in the maelstrom of military fervor and volunteered in the cavalry, but after ten weeks' training met with an accident in which his arm was so severely injured that he was discharged.

"THINK forward, look forward and ride forward," were the first words of our captain when he inspected the new volunteers of the Mounted Rifle and Lancer Regiment. These words constitute the motto of the German cavalry. After explaining to us that our duties were to begin the next morning at 4:45 he left us in the hands of a severe old corporal with great mustaches and hard-looking eyes. After studying him I thought, "With this guy there is no joking."

"All upstairs, second floor—march!" came the command and in a long line we disappeared up the stairs, our corporal following behind. "Get out of your civilian clothes," he shouted. "I will get you some which will make you like look men." We did not dare reply and all started to take off our stylish winter coats. Neither did we dare to laugh, although his manner of giving orders amused us very much. As we soon learned, he was simply using the so-called "military tone." A veteran of many years came along the corridor, smilingly distributing a lot of uniforms. I was the first to get one and it was very old. When I remarked to the corporal that there were holes in it, he replied, "Well, you will have plenty of time after supper to clean and sew it."

That evening we were assigned to our beds, which we had to arrange for ourselves. In each room were ten men, and a veteran of the Landsturm slept with us and was the "old man" whom we had to obey as long as we were in the room. At 9 o'clock we had to be in bed, except for one man who waited up until the patrolling officer called, to whom he reported the number of men assigned to the room and whether or not all were present.

At 4:45 a. m. a bugle call awoke us and in a moment we were out of bed and dressing with the greatest celerity. We had not yet put our beds in order when the second call summoned us to the stables. We ran out of the room, hungry and unwashed, into the cool darkness of the morning. The stable doors were thrown open and a rush of warm air and the smell of horses greeted us. The corporal, his mustaches not yet dressed, assigned the volunteers to their several duties. Another and a younger corporal I discovered was to be my immediate superior. He assigned my horse to me and instructed me to take care of the animal. As I started with brush and currycomb, he cried, "Clean the stable first." I had always seen this duty performed with the aid of a fork and started to look for one, but the corporal shouted angrily, "What have you hands for? Stir up and go ahead." Little by little I removed the litter from the horse's stall, but, oh, my poor hands! When the task was completed to the satisfaction of the corporal, who stood smilingly by, I had to put dry straw in the stall and thoroughly groom the horse. I then provided the animal with water and hay.

During the rest of the hour I got better acquainted with my new corporal, who recommended me to take special care of my horse. The rider, he instructed me, must do everything to become good friends with his horse. A true cavalryman without love for his mount is unthinkable. Roughness with a horse is very severely punished in the army.

At 6 o'clock we were allowed to go to our rooms where we had 45 minutes in which to wash and take our breakfast, consisting of coffee and bread. At 6:45 theoretical instructions began, conducted by our lieutenant, who had been on duty in south East Africa and who was very mild in comparison with many others of our superiors. He first explained to us how we were to conduct ourselves as soldiers of the Kaiser, and then took up the subjects of fighting, shooting, etc. The time that we spent under his instruction was always full of interest. At 8 o'clock we were again at the stables where we saddled our horses and went to the riding arena, which was about 100 metres wide and 300 metres long. Many of us had never before been on the back of a horse and when the command "get up" sounded, some found it very difficult to obey. At last we were up and the details of correct sitting and holding the reins were carefully explained. Then one after another, with six feet between us, we started to ride in circles. I was placed at the head, having had some experience in riding, particularly when accompanying Huerta's army in Mexico, but I still had much to learn before becoming a classical German cavalryman. After 90 minutes we were released. That is we were allowed to go to the stables and clean the horses, saddlery, etc., for an hour and a half.

At noon we dined. The menu was not very elaborate, and it is needless to say there was no French maitre d'hotel to prepare it, but each with spoon, fork, knife and a metal pan, we were ordered in two great lines, each squadron by itself, and thus marched to the kitchen where beans and beef were issued. In 30 minutes the whole regiment was provided with dinner, for the eating of which 45 minutes were allowed. We never ate with a better appetite

than on this day and we got more food than we wanted. After dinner we marched to the stables to provide our horses with water and hay. Oats, which were given to our animals twice a day, were issued by a special detail. Two to 3 p. m. was allotted for recreation, most of the time being devoted to a thorough wash and cleaning up and to the taking of a cup of coffee.

At 3 o'clock we were started on exercises with the lance, which has been called the "queen of weapons." Ours were 3.2 metres in length. Gymnastic exercises and marching kept us busy until 5 o'clock, when we again had 30

felt like men who had been reborn.

In general, the treatment we received was very satisfactory and none of us had any reason to complain about the severity of the non-commissioned officers or about our older comrades who were distributed among us to instruct us as much as possible.

Saturday in the barracks is the great day for a thorough clean up of casernes and stables and the polishing of every bit of metal equipment. Sundays we were free for the day except that a section of every company was sent to church under the command of a corporal. During the first period of training, recruits are allowed to go to town only when accompanied by a corporal.

When we had learned to conduct ourselves as true soldiers of the German army, we were fitted out with new uniforms and permitted to go into town, but not until the sergeant had instructed us as to the minutest details of correct conduct and had inspected our uniforms to see that they fitted perfectly and were in absolute condition.

At the end of a month we felt that we were cavalrymen indeed, as we were dressed in our new uniforms and took the oath of fidelity to the Kaiser and the Fatherland. On this momentous

day we went first to church and on our return participated in a most impressive ceremony conducted by our captain. The oath was read by our lieutenant and we repeated it with our right hands resting on our sabers. That afternoon we were free from further duty and were allowed to go where we pleased. Our training continued with increased severity and in ten weeks we felt that we were fit to go to the front, but only a few of the best were drafted for this service. The training of a cavalryman is much more difficult than that of an infantryman, and it takes three months to fit the latter for duty in the fields. The most rigid exercises are in riding and shooting, although the fighting with the sabre and lance is almost equally important. In each company every class of society was represented and no distinctions were made between peasant and baron. Many volunteers are still asking to be enlisted in the cavalry, but at the present time only a few are accepted and they must be men of perfect physique. In

the German army are 110 cavalry regiments composed of 550 squadrons. The picturesque uniforms used in time of peace have all been replaced with the blue-gray service color, which is also worn by both the infantry and the artillery.

One duty of the cavalry is to reconnoiter, its ability to move rapidly ahead of the infantry and artillery enabling it to locate the enemy, ascertain his positions and strength and to report this information to the commanding general, who is thereby enabled to arrange his forces intelligently. The cavalry, therefore, has been called "the eyes of the army," a distinction that it now shares with the aviation corps. Mounted troops frequently act as a screen for the army, concealing the dispositions of its decisive arms and making difficult reconnoitering on the part of the enemy. In case of a retreat the cavalry is useful in rear-guard actions, and in the destruction of roads, bridges, telegraph lines and everything that might be of use to the pursuing enemy. In a victorious advance the cavalry leads the pursuit, harassing the enemy, cutting his rear guard to pieces.

The heaviest fighting that the cavalry is likely to experience comes in the direct attack, which, in this war, has not been much followed. The campaign in France has allowed the cavalry little opportunity for this kind of fighting, but it has had more activity in Russia, where it has been opposed by the Cossacks. It is said in the German army that while the Cossacks are expert horsemen they shun, as much as possible, contact in force with the German and Austrian cavalry.

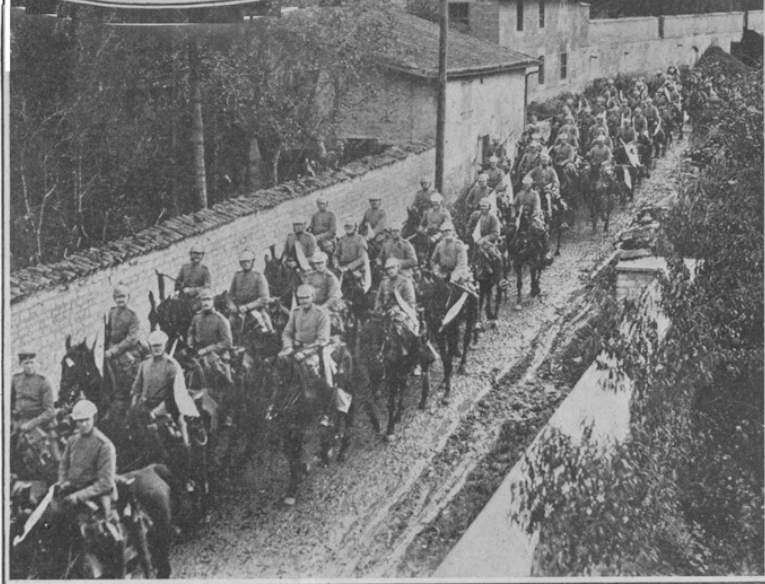


MR. WAGNER IN UNIFORM



GERMAN HUSSARS ON SCOUT DUTY

Germany's cavalry has been most serviceable in the eastern war area, where the conditions have favored this arm of the service.



DRAGOONS ON THE MARCH IN FRANCE

Note the difference in the head dress of these troops and that of the hussars shown above. All cavalry regiments now wear the blue-gray service uniform.

minutes of recreation, after which we returned to the stables to minister to our gallant steeds. It was 6:30 or 7 o'clock when these duties were completed. We were then given the mail that had come for us during the day and were released from further duties.

The first day was a hard one and as the most of us were not accustomed to this kind of work we were tired and sore, but we still had to clean our uniforms and to get everything ready for the next morning. Supper consisted of sausages and bread. Some of the volunteers, however, managed to eat their suppers in restaurants, while others received from home meat, eggs, butter, etc., which they succeeded in having prepared to their taste in the regimental kitchen. Those who fail to be not only in the casernes but in bed at 9 o'clock must expect severe punishment.

It was hard work getting up on the second morning. We were still tired and were unused to being awakened at 4:45. However, we had to stretch our aching limbs as best we could and enter upon a program which was the same as that of the day before, except that during the afternoon we were taken into the open field for a riding lesson. Thus the days followed one another with little variation. Each day our riding became better and our appearance, I trust, more soldierly. At least, our captain told us that this was the case, and after the first week we were permitted to take part in exercises with our older comrades. Our muscles became strengthened and our bodies hardened under the rigorous military training, so that within a few weeks we