

THE ROLE OF CAVALRY IN WARFARE

General Sir Evelyn Wood

1895

The announcement of each improvement in firearms since the days of "Brown Bess," has been accompanied with the confident assertion by many infantry soldiers, based mainly on results of rifle-range practices, that the days of cavalry have passed away. It is probable, however, that these Soldier-prophets have either never seen Cavalry properly led, or never studied closely what that Arm of the Service has achieved. We find all the great Continental Powers are increasing the number of their mounted troops, while the most successful "Nation in Arms," believing thoroughly in the use of shock tactics, has adopted the lance, not only for "Medium," but also for "Light" Cavalry, and, as I think unwisely, for Hussars, who are too short to wield a lance effectively. Although three years ago Russia, to the astonishment of military students, decided to turn great numbers of its Cavalry into Mounted Infantry, it appears that this decision has already been abandoned. Moreover though the Great Powers have every reason to economise, yet since the war of 1870-71 they have continued to add cavalry to their armies, and to train it with still greater care. Now, as cavalry takes three times as long to train, and is three times more costly to maintain than infantry, it is obvious that on the Continent, at least, it is not believed that "the age of chivalry has passed away at last."

My main reasons for believing in the Continental views rather than in those of some of my comrades are:

Firstly—Because the conditions under which rifle practice is executed in peace and war differ so materially as to furnish but unreliable data on which to base deductions of any value. On the Rifle ranges, soldiers practise with every advantage that health, good-living, fair weather, and light equipment can give. They never fire when fatigued, since Commanding Officers object to their men being marched more than about four miles to a range. And they never shoot in unfavourable weather, for fear of their losing the monetary prizes which are granted for proficiency in these exercises. Nevertheless, on service, Infantry may often be called on to withstand Cavalry, when exhausted by long marches, want of food, and while encumbered by equipment which must militate against good shooting.

Secondly—Though weapons are improved yearly, the human heart remains the same. Discipline enhances its military value, but then thorough discipline cannot be acquired in a few months, and with the immense growth of armies, the time the infantry soldier is kept under training has been so reduced that it is possible this, or the coming generation, may see a repetition of glorious cavalry achievements such as astonished the world eighty years ago.

General Sir Evelyn Wood. *Cavalry in the Waterloo Campaign*. (London: 1895).