



CAVALRY TO THE FRONT

Colonel T. discusses the activity of Red Army horsemen when the weather curtails the use of mechanized equipment. The superiority of the Cossack and the Kalmyk. The Russian cavalry tradition.

THE dispatches of the last week or so have disclosed that Soviet cavalry has been in action both on the Moscow front and in the Crimea. It is very possible and even probable that cavalry will be destined to play an ever-increasing role in the winter conditions of the Eastern Front. The first pertinent question, therefore, is the quantitative and qualitative relationship between the German and the Soviet cavalries.

At the beginning of this war the German army had only two and one-half divisions of cavalry. This dearth of mounted troops was explained partly by lack of horses (a flimsy excuse), and partly by the overwhelming "mechanical trend" in the Wehrmacht. At present it is more than probable that the number of German cavalry divisions has been increased but they certainly do not even approach the Red Army's thirty-five or forty cavalry divisions. Even assuming that a goodly number is stationed in the Far East, we can safely say that about twenty-five Red cavalry divisions are at the disposal of the High Com-

mand on the Eastern Front. The ratio between German and Soviet cavalry (in numbers) is probably at least one to three.

There is no way of knowing about the latest organizational changes in a Soviet cavalry division, but we can get an approximate idea of these divisions from the Soviet Cavalry Manual of 1933. This is the structure the manual gives for a cavalry division:

Cavalry Regiments—4 (20 squadrons and 4 batteries of small guns).

Artillery Regiments—1 (6 batteries of field guns).

Mechanized units (*divizionnes*, which means units larger than squadrons, but smaller than regiments)—1 (3 squadrons).

Signal *divizionne*—1 (2 squadrons).

Squadrons of Engineers—1.

Machine guns on carriages drawn by 4 horses (*tachankas*)—48.

All this, with various auxiliary units, consists of 3,701 men, 3,533 horses, and forty-two fighting machines (tanks and armored cars).

It can be seen then that the Red Army

probably has about 100,000 horsemen in readiness on the Soviet-German front. This mounted army is backed by light tanks, armored cars, and all kinds of light and medium artillery; it is saturated with a huge number of automatic weapons. Every eight men in a cavalry squadron are equipped with a light machine gun or a grenade thrower.

NOW, as to the respective qualities of German and Soviet cavalry. The experience of the first world war showed that the Russian cavalry was superior to the German. The German horsemen seldom could withstand (and seldom accepted) the shock of a Russian cavalry charge. The German cavalry seldom undertook daring maneuvers of its own. It usually preferred to act in close proximity to its infantry, "holding on to the infantry's skirts," while the Russians often operated scores of miles ahead of any infantry support. (A notable exception was the so-called Sventziany breakthrough, when the success of General von Garnier's cavalry corps

in effecting a deep breakthrough can be credited to the unbelievable ineptitude of two czarist cavalry commanders, Generals Kaznakov and Tiulin. They simply ran away from battle, although they had very able troops at their disposal in Kaznakov's First Guards Cavalry Division.)

It may be said that the inherent "dash" of the Russian cavalry is in great part due to tradition. Many Russians and other peoples inhabiting the USSR have for generations been herdsmen of the plains. They are natural horsemen, practically born in the saddle.

Germany, however, lacks the expanse necessary for evolving a nation of horsemen. Good as the German horse show teams may be, the horsemen were and remain "Sunday riders." On the other hand, the Cossack, the Kalmyk, the Kirghiz, and many other (especially eastern) nationalities of the Soviet Union are "fulltime riders" with generations of experience behind them. The Russian Civil War, which included large cavalry operations, greatly added to the experience of the Red Army in that respect and helped build a modern cavalry on an old traditional base.

The above comparison between the German and the Russian cavalries is borne out, for instance, by the following excerpt from a German officer's book:

"... In about three-quarters of an hour Cossacks appeared, reconnoitering carefully, taking advantage of every fold of the ground. I must admit that I clearly saw how much our cavalry could learn from these sons of the steppes. Three squadrons of them had already accumulated when I opened fire. In less than three minutes they had vanished behind some kind of cover which I could not even see..." (Von Poseck, *The German Cavalry in Lithuania and Kurland in 1915*, page 97.)

The question now arises as to whether cavalry can still be used in modern war, and whether or not it will be used to advantage in winter conditions. As long as the motor, which particularly displaced the horse, cannot consume things that are found almost everywhere (such as grass and water), as long as the motor and the thing it propels remain comparatively noisy, and as long as mechanical engines of war cannot pass where a horse can—wars will create situations where cavalry can be highly useful. Generally speaking, cavalry will appear on the scene when mechanical equipment for one reason or another cannot be supplied with fuel and when conditions of terrain (woods, ravines, mountain trails, etc.) and footing (mud, slush, etc.) make it impossible or too difficult for such equipment to move.

In such a contingency the cavalry may resume its role of a maneuvering shock force, a role which was usurped by the moto-mechanized branch of the service. Nowadays cavalry will resume this function under vastly changed conditions because it has been endowed with special weapons that give it a high degree of fire power which it lacked twenty-five years ago. Then a cavalry regiment had only ordinary rifles, pistols, and a

few machine guns. A Soviet cavalry division has carriage-mounted machine guns which can fire in motion (to the flanks and rear), a great assortment of light machine guns and grenade throwers, and also field-, anti-tank-, and anti-aircraft artillery.

CAVALRY, of course, retains its shock power not only because of the horse's speed and the combined mass of rider and horse, but also because of the moral effect which a wave of galloping, shouting, slashing horsemen produces upon men who, because they are on foot, are considerably less fast, less "tall," and less "heavy" than the onrushing centaurs. (Here we compare the foot soldier with the "unit" consisting of man and horse.)

The principal functions of cavalry are to: (1) screen and reconnoiter; (2) raid the enemy rear and communications; and (3) pursue a beaten and retreating enemy. During the coming winter Soviet cavalry will most probably engage in the second category of activity, i.e., raid the enemy rear, mostly in conjunction with guerrilla action. In order to raid the enemy rear one naturally has to break through the enemy front first. This is possible either where the front is not continuous or where the terrain is such that it is difficult to cover the entire line with observers either from the ground or from the air.

Mountains and forests offer an excellent opportunity for such action. But will cavalry action in mountains and forests be possible in winter? The answer is based on the past record of the cavalry.

Here are a few examples taken at random. During the Sarakamysh operation on the Turkish front in December 1914, the Siberian Cossack Brigade marched seventy miles in thirty hours in fairly deep snow, and captured Ardahan to cap the march. During the Erzerum operation (winter 1915-16) the Russian cavalry operated in the mountains when the snow was over three feet deep and the tem-

perature as low as forty degrees below zero (F). In March 1921, the Eighteenth Red Cavalry Division, pursuing the Georgian Menshevik troops who had retreated to Batum, forced the Godher Pass (between Ahalt-sykh and Batum) which had been considered impassable heretofore between November and May. This is how it was done: the felt capes (*burkhas*) of the entire division were collected and laid out on the trail like a carpet. Over this carpet the horses were led. After the mounted units had passed, the snow was so well trampled that field artillery could follow. Another example: at the end of 1919 Budenny's Cavalry Corps attacked and defeated two White Cavalry Corps at Kastornaya during a terrific snowstorm.

Thus we see that history shows us that cavalry action on a large scale is possible both in winter and in the mountains. Knowing that the masses of Soviet cavalry are there, waiting for an opportunity to strike when the German moto-mechanized divisions are immobilized and the German rear has been "thinned out," we may expect an increase in cavalry action during the coming months. The forest-covered northern and central sectors of the front, the Ukrainian sector, cut up by numerous and deep ravines, and, finally, the mountains of certain parts of the extreme southern sector, will afford Soviet cavalry good opportunity to carry out deep raids in the enemy rear.

Of course, should a large-scale German retreat begin, cavalry opportunities will be still greater. Furthermore, with winter communications making fuel supply more and more difficult, another advantage of the cavalry over mechanized forces will come more and more to the fore: a hungry horse will continue to walk and run for a long time on its own reserve of internal energy, but not a piston stroke will come from a tank after the last drop of fuel has been consumed.

COLONEL T.



THE QUIET MAN

words by Mark Hess

(To Earl

Slow-Strong

Up from the Kan-sas plains, came he, Where,

(not strict rhythm - follow singer)

Ped. * Ped. * smile

tall John Brown, fought slav-er-y And he fights too for a land that's free A

qui-et man a qui-et man His voice is low but his words are strong And a

mil-lion work-ers march a-long with the qui-et man from Kan-sas He

dreamed a dream of a fruit-ful land the

gov-ern-ment ruled by the peo-ple's hand A

read his books with this sing-le thought And the

qui-et man from Kansas.

Up from the Kansas plains came he,
Where tall John Brown fought slavery,
And he fights too, for a land that's free—
A quiet man, a quiet man.
His voice is low, but his words are strong
And a million workers march along
With the quiet man from Kansas.

He dreamed a dream of a fruit-
The kind that Thomas Jefferson
With government ruled by the p
The quiet man, the quiet man.
He read his books with this sing
And the works of Marx and Leni
The quiet man from Kansas.