FIRE AND THE SWORD

The British Army and The Arme Blanche Controversy
1871-1921

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ABSTRACT

FIRE AND THE SWORD: THE BRITISH ARMY AND THE ARME BLANCHE CONTROVERSY 1871-1921

The controversy was over the role of Cavalry in future war. The generally held view is that the arme blanche charge was obviously obsolete, and that Cavalrymen clung to it for social and sentimental reasons; British military leaders of the First World War are therefore condemned for their belief in Cavalry. This thesis questions that view. It offers a case-study of the effects of political, economic, strategic and social factors on the debate: the link between operational and social military history; and the use made by the Army itself of history in forming tactical doctrines.

After the major wars from 1861 to 1871 a movement for reform of tactics and training emerged in the Cavalry, questioning the value of the arme blanche. Reformers outside the Cavalry pursued a conflicting policy, based mainly on the belief that the Cavalry could not reform itself, and that an alternative force, the 'Mounted Infantry' should be created. Before the end of the century the internal reformers gained dominance in the Cavalry, but failed to project this to the rest of the Army or the public. Their doctrine combined dismounted action with limited use of the arme blanche, leading to
their being classed with the reactionaries by external reformers.

The crisis of the controversy came in the Second Boer War (1899-1902) in which the Cavalry's apparent failure resulted from the dogmatic application of the non-Cavalry reformers' theories by the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts. After the war Cavalry reformers united briefly with the reactionaries to defeat Roberts' version of 'reform' and continued their own programme after his retirement. The First World War showed the correctness of including the *arme blanche* in their doctrines.
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This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration. It is also under 80,000 words in length.

I wish to thank the following institutions for making their services available to me during my research: Cambridge University Library; the Bodleian Library; the British Library; the National Library of Scotland; the Ministry of Defence (War Office) Central Library; the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies; the Imperial War Museum; the National Army Museum; the Public Record Office; the Trustees of the Churchill Archive Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge; the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London; the Home Headquarters of the XVth/XIXth The King's Royal Hussars; and in particular the Wolseley Librarian at Hove Area Library for letting me consult the letters of Lord Wolseley to his brother, General George Wolseley, before these had been catalogued.

I also wish to thank the following individuals: Dr Philip Towle and Dr Richard Holmes for giving me permission to cite from their own dissertations; Professor D E D Beales; Dr Hew Strachan; Brigadier Shelford Bidwell; Susan Coker of the Sherburton Pony Stud, Dartmoor; Phil Barker of the Wargames Research Group; Sylvia Smither for typing the final draft of this dissertation; and my parents
for putting up with it all. My greatest thanks must, of course, go to my supervisor, Correlli Barnett.

A major source for this dissertation has been the military journals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In many cases the piece cited has been not an article but the transcript of a lecture, an editorial comment, a book review, or similar type of printed work; in most cases the piece is untitled or anonymous; and in nearly all cases the journal of publication is of greater significance than the name of the author. There is no provision for this type of printed evidence in the History Faculty's approved style for annotating evidence, and it has therefore been necessary to invent a method of annotation. In footnotes, the full title of each piece, along with the name or pseudonym of the author, is given. If the piece is untitled a descriptive phrase such as 'Note' or 'Editorial Comment' has been used. This is followed in all cases by the fullest possible reference to the relevant page or pages, in the style of the journal cited, along with the name of the journal in abbreviated form. The explanation for these abbreviations is given in the bibliography. In order to avoid the confusion of two conflicting systems, all articles from these journals have been treated in the same manner.

To avoid glaring anachronisms, units of currency and measurement have been left in the form in which they appeared at the time, usually the old British system. A note on conversion is provided immediately before the
bibliography.

The arme blanche controversy was an emotional, as well as a technical affair. Drama, tragedy and farce are all part of war, and it cannot be understood without them. The occasional dramatic passages in this dissertation are as essential to it as the statistical tables it also contains.
**DEFINITIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arme Blanche</td>
<td>The steel weapons of the Cavalry intended for use on horseback, usually the sword and lance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsemen</td>
<td>A general term for all types of soldiers who ride horses, regardless of their weapons or tactical doctrines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>Soldiers of a professional army who ride horses, and who are capable of reconnaissance, outpost duties, attack and defence on foot with a firearm and the mounted charge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>Cavalry who have achieved a degree of competence in all their four main functions such that it has ceased in practice to matter which, in theory, they regard as their primary duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounted infantrymen</td>
<td>Soldiers who are trained exclusively to fight on foot, but who are mounted, not necessarily on horses, as a temporary expedient entirely for transport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounted Infantry</td>
<td>Soldiers of a professional army who fight exclusively on foot, but who have horses and are theoretically capable of mounted reconnaissance and outpost duties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounted riflemen</td>
<td>Mounted troops of an irregular nature, able to reconnoitre and do outpost duties, who may carry the <em>arme blanche</em> but usually fight dismounted and regard their firearm as their principal weapon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounted Rifles</td>
<td>Soldiers of a professional army who ride horses, and are trained for reconnaissance, outpost duties, and attack or defence on foot with a firearm. They may carry the <em>arme blanche</em>, but are not trained for the charge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These definitions, although closely adhered to, are not
absolute. Although generally in favour by the end of the period under consideration, they were not in any sense official. In war, such distinctions tended to break down altogether.
It has also to be said that with a few exceptions, when an invention is first introduced, its advantages over established traditions are not always very obvious. The first European field guns were certainly not conspicuous for their efficiency. The attitude of the Turks towards early field artillery, as the attitude of the Venetians towards the early galleons, cannot be simply discarded as a piece of human stupidity. At their first appearance, innovations are less valuable for their actual advantage than for their potential of future developments and this second quality is always very difficult to assess.

- Carlo M Cipolla, *Guns and Sails in the Early Phase of European Expansion*

'Cavalry have always been vulnerable to infantry attack and throughout history have been a grossly overestimated and overwritten arm.'

- Brigadier Shelford Bidwell, *Modern Warfare*
INTRODUCTION

GUILTY AS CHARGED

"Consider your verdict," the King said to the jury. "Not yet, not yet!" the Rabbit hastily interrupted. "There's a great deal to come before that!"
- Lewis Carrol, *Alice in Wonderland*

'The trouble with a university education is that it makes you see both sides to any question!'
- Professor Michael Howard

In 1864 Captain C C Chesney, Professor of Military History at the Staff College, wrote of the use by both sides in the American Civil War of horsemen who fought on foot as well as on horseback that 'Improvements in the organisation of armies have caused this arm of the service to disappear. Yet of such are the American cavalry on both sides chiefly composed - specially in the West, where they carry neither sword nor lance.' For Chesney saw these men as 'dragoons', an anachronism which had vanished from European armies in the eighteenth century, and proof of the primitive nature of the American armies. However, when in 1867 Major-General Sir Henry Havelock wrote his book *Three Main Military Questions of the Day*, he considered these to be conscription, the defence of India, and 'Cavalry as affected by breech-

2. Quoted in discussion after Trythall and Bond, 'The Fuller-Liddell Hart Lecture', p 28, JRUSI, vol 124, no 1
loading arms'. He emphatically declared that 'increased precision, and notably and especially the rapid fire of breechloaders, have, once and for ever, set aside the sway that the lance and sabre formerly held', and called for these 'dragoons' in large numbers. Contradicting this, Colonel Clery's *Minor Tactics*, the standard subaltern's text book of 1875, stated:

> The force of cavalry lies in the combined action of man and horse. This is represented in its fullest form by the shock of collision with the enemy. Hence, although cavalry is armed with fire and hand-to-hand weapons, the latter remains always the principal, the former being the accessory.

In contradiction to them both, Garnet Wolseley, then Commander-in-Chief in Ireland, told a group of his officers in 1891:

> I certainly do not believe that you can get a good cavalry soldier to be a good infantry soldier at the same time... My idea is that he is intended to fight on horseback. If you intend to make him fight on foot, well, you will make him into a very bad mongrel, to a bad dragoon.

Reviewing the whole debate at the end of the century, the then Professor of Military History at the Staff College, Colonel G F R Henderson wrote:

> In what manner the cavalry of the twentieth

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2. ibid, p 36: Havelock's original is in capital letters.
4. Quoted in Hutton, *Five Lectures on Mounted Infantry*, Lecture 5, p 26
century will differ from the hussars and cuirassiers of the nineteenth is undoubtedly, from a military point of view, one of the most interesting and momentous questions of the day. 1

This was the arme blanche controversy. From the end of the Franco-Prussian War to the end of the First World War it formed a major topic of debate both inside and outside the British Army. Apart from its perennial value as a chestnut for junior officers studying minor tactics, it involved, before it was over, two Kings, several members of Parliament, and nearly all the high commanders of the First World War; and produced literally hundreds of books and articles, including some best sellers. If only its scale, the amount of time and energy it consumed, is considered, it was clearly of the first importance to the British Army of the period.

The term l'arme blanche is, of course, French, an idiom meaning, roughly, 'cold steel'. It is also ambiguous. Although usually applied to the steel weapons of the Cavalry, the lance and the sabre, it could also be used as a synonym for Cavalry itself. Both facts are appropriate. Throughout the debate the British theorists were influenced, even dominated, by continental practice; while at the same time their arguments were plagued with ambiguity, and disagreement was often only a matter of the misuse of words. Although chiefly about

1. Henderson, The Science of War, p 51
what role Cavalry might play in the future, the debate began and ended with the question whether Cavalry had a future at all.

Any controversy which occupied so many people, including some of the best military brains of the time, for more than fifty years seems unlikely, even with hindsight, to have an easy solution. The clarity and simplicity needed for such sureness is seldom present in the confusion of war. At basis, the controversy was a problem in minor tactics. It questioned what the Cavalry's response would be to the major increase in the destructiveness of firepower which occurred during the last half of the nineteenth century. Was the mounted charge with the arme blanche still valid, and if so what importance should it have? Also, what importance had the Cavalry's own firearms, scarcely inferior to those of the Infantry?

From 1871 to 1914 there was no major war against which to test any hypothesis. Most of the techniques of analysing tactics and psychology required even to approach the problem were not developed until the Second World War; even as a tactical problem the arme blanche controversy could be complex and confusing. But the debate did not exist in a vacuum. It was affected by considerations of cost and defence strategy, the social composition of the Army, the

1. See Marshall, *Men Against Fire*

realities of British military strength, and a formidable series of personality clashes. It is therefore remarkable that, virtually without exception, modern historians have found the issue straightforward. They condemn the defenders of the *arme blanche* as fools, and praise the advocates of the firearm as prophets; the debate is seen as nothing more complex than reform challenging reaction.

Except to historians, it no longer matters who, if anyone, found the correct solution to the problem of the *arme blanche*. What people think about it matters very much indeed. One of the most important functions of historical research is the examination of popular myths of the past, which can be potent political weapons. But the trail from a discovery, a research paper, a scholarly book, through to the school textbook or the ordinary man is tortuous, and can take decades. Military history is unique in that its link with popular culture is direct and immediate. Learned books on warfare reach best-seller lists; there are many plays, films and television programmes on military matters; wargaming is a rapidly expanding adult hobby, as well as the recreation of most children. In addition to academic military historians, two other broad groups satisfy the public demand for military history: popular writers who are at least concerned to produce books which are as entertaining as accurate, and professional officers, often writing with first-hand knowledge of the event. No other form of history has the same
popular appeal.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the increased academic respectability which has come to military studies in the last two decades, the main themes of academic military works are strategy as an aspect of politics, and military life as a mirror of society. Little attention is given to operational warfare. Even so, the belief that Cavalry were, in operational terms, obsolete, permeates such works. One writer on strategy states that Douglas Haig's pronouncement while Director of Staff Duties in 1909:

> Cavalry, of itself, cannot produce [a] state of moral and physical decadence in the enemy in a general engagement... It must, therefore, keep close to the other arms who attack the infantry and prepare the way for the decisive action of the cavalry

shows 'an ominous faith in the effectiveness of cavalry attack', and 'served to cement into strategic thought an outmoded doctrine'. Such judgements affect any assessment of the strategic plans themselves, and of men like Haig who developed them. But they are understandable, since even those academic historians who write on operational matters take the uselessness of Cavalry and the arme blanche for granted. One eminent historian wrote of the American Civil War:

> Here was a valuable lesson for the European armies. Horsemen could still be used to telling

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1. Quoted in Gooch, *The Plans of War*, p 117
effect as long as it was realised that their prime asset was their mobility on the battlefield and that it was no longer possible physically to pit rider and steel against modern weaponry. ¹

Another, more eminent still, wrote of the French Cavalry of 1870:

All that their courage had done was to prove that there was no place for cavalry on a battlefield dominated by breechloading rifles. ... On this battlefield, as henceforth on all others in western Europe, the only choice before horsed cavalry lay between idleness and suicide. ²

A third sees as one of the lessons of the Second Boer War:

As shock troops, cavalry no longer had any place on a modern battlefield, though when employed as mounted infantry they still had immense potential value in any theatre of operations where there was plenty of room for manoeuvre. ³

Yet another has concluded that:

Haig and French convinced themselves 'that only the old knee to knee cavalry charge with lance or sword would decide wars of the future'; it would take the machine gun and the trench of the first World War to prove conclusively that they had placed their bets on the wrong type of horse. ⁴

Finally, writing a little later, the second eminent historian declared that in 1914 'in western Europe a few weeks were enough to make it clear, to all except some of their own commanders, that heavy cavalry was now an ex-

¹. Ellis, Cavalry: a History of Mounted Warfare, p 146
². Howard, The Franco-Prussian War, pp 115, 119
⁴. Luvaas, The Military Legacy of the Civil War, p 199.

No source is given for the quotation. It is neither French nor Haig.
pensive anachronism'.

It can be seen that, while there is an overwhelming consensus that Cavalry and the *arme blanche* were obsolete, there is some confusion as to when in the years between 1861 and 1914 this became so obvious. Nevertheless, popular writers have taken up the theme with enthusiasm and even wit:

The *arme blanche*, with its arch-apostles French and Haig, was to bedevil cavalry operations throughout the 1914-18 war.2

The charge of von Bredow's dragoons at Mars-la-Tour in 1870, and the death-or-glory (both, in fact) ride of the Marquis de Gallifet's Chasseurs d'Afrique at Floing in the same year were considered more perfect examples for cavalry to follow than the less showy but more effective lessons given by Sheridan and Stuart on the wrong side of the Atlantic.3

In the expeditionary force [of 1914] it seemed that there were nearly as many regiments of horse as foot. In troop and squadron strength they trotted about the autumn countryside, pennants fluttering from the tips of their lances.4

Naturally, professional soldiers have taken the same line.

Sir Brian Horrocks has written that 'It seems quite incredible that the lance, which was proved to be obsolete as

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1. Howard, War in European History, p 104
2. James, Lord Roberts, p 442
3. Smithers, The Man Who Disobeyed, p 92. Von Bredow's charge was made by one regiment of cuirassiers and one of lancers.
4. Clark, The Donkeys, p 15. By Clark's own calculations there were 17 Cavalry regiments in the line that day and 42 Infantry battalions. The full BEF was 18 Cavalry regiments and 78 Infantry battalions. A Cavalry regiment was about 600 men, and an Infantry battalion about 1,000; and the proportion of Cavalry to Infantry in the full force was less than one to eleven. Only four of the Cavalry regiments were Lancers. The carrying of the pennon in war had been abandoned in 1899.
a weapon of war in 1645, was still being carried by the troopers in lancer regiments in 1923. Major-General Sixsmith has seconded the view of Captain Liddell Hart that Haig 'was handicapped by being a cavalryman', and Brigadier Peter Young also feels that 'as a Cavalryman' Haig 'was perhaps somewhat slow to grasp the tactical factors on the Western Front'. More sympathetically, but not less critically, Lieutenant-Colonel R.L.V. ffrench Blake has summarised the indictment against the Cavalry:

The argument was, at heart, between those at one extreme who visualised cavalry as mounted infantry and at the other by those who preferred shock action with the arme blanche. Within these two main divisions lay other, more subtle, causes, each championed by its exponent - rifle or carbine - lance or sword - cutting or thrusting. Far too much time and thought was expended upon these details, and upon matters of dress, rather than upon a clear policy of the correct role of cavalry. When such a policy did appear, the cavalry seldom carried it out in practice, preferring at the slightest opportunity to charge at the gallop, regardless of consequences.

These are serious charges. It is asserted that for a long (if undefined) period the British Cavalry clung to an obsolete tactical doctrine, out of stupidity and blind conservatism, in the face of official opposition and a mounting body of evidence. These shortcomings are held to have affected the Cavalrymen who commanded in the First

1. Horrocks, introduction to ffrench Blake, The 17th/21st Lancers, p 7
2. Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century, p 161
4. ffrench Blake, The 17th/21st Lancers, p 79
World War. So widespread is this belief, often couched in tones of deepest sarcasm, that Haig's most sympathetic biographer has sought to deny the charge (there is no other way of putting it) that he was a Cavalryman.¹ In popular usage, the term 'cavalryman' has become a symbol of foolishness, arrogance, and lack of vision.

As the basis of these charges a solid body of evidence, in the form of studies of the arme blanche controversy, might be expected. In fact only two such studies have been published. One, a twenty-five page survey of British Cavalry doctrine from 1870 to 1914, concluded that the most progressive thinkers on the matter had not been senior officers, and therefore that their opinions had been ignored.² The second, even shorter, and concerned only with the period 1902 to 1914, expressed the opinion that the Cavalry 'entered the First World War as wedded to shock tactics as it had been in 1899'.³ Both begged the fundamental question in assuming that the champions of the arme blanche were in error, and attributed opposition to their views to the familiar motives, stupidity and emotional conservatism.

While it is rare to find such a consensus among historians, this in itself should be grounds for

¹. Dixon, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence, pp 115-19; Terraine, Haig: The Educated Soldier, p 21
³. Spiers, 'The British Cavalry 1902-14', pp 71-9
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1. Dixon, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence, pp 115-19; Terraine, Haig: The Educated Soldier, p 21
suspicion; and the almost total neglect of operational history - of what actually happened in war - in making this assessment is clearly a serious error in method. It would be justified in one case only: that, as has been generally assumed, the obsolescence of the arme blanche was so blatantly obvious as to require no further comment. This is possible; but there are many things obvious to the layman and not in fact so, as that the earth is flat and the sun goes round it. It also produces a paradox: senior Cavalry officers of the time, who studied the problem closely, kept a belief in the arme blanche; modern historians, who have given the problem considerably less study, cannot share this belief. This thesis investigates the controversy, examining the charges made against the British Cavalry. It also explains how this paradox came into being.
CHAPTER ONE

THE USES OF CAVALRY IN WAR

'It is a question open to consideration, whether the days of cavalry, constituted as at present, are not numbered.'
- Major Edwards, R.E., 'A National Army', 1870

'To say that the day of cavalry on the field of battle is past, is merely another way of saying that the knowledge of how to use it is wanting.'
- Major Home, R.E., 'Precis of Modern Tactics', 1871

In 1861 the United Service Magazine reviewed a recent book by Baron d'Azémar, Colonel of the French 6th Lancers. The Baron put the hypothetical case of 500 Cavalry charging two Infantry battalions, each 1,000 strong, from a distance of 1,000 metres. By French regulations, the Cavalry would take four minutes to trot 700 metres, gallop 200 metres and charge the last 100 metres. In this time 2,000 rifles would fire at least 24,000 bullets. If only one shot in forty-eight were effective, the Cavalry would be annihilated. The Baron could only protest that in actual practice such things did not happen. This difference between the mathematical and historical approaches to the study of war was summarised thirty years later.

1. Edwards, 'A National Army', pp 19-20
2. Quoted in Some Notes on Cavalry Tactics, Organisation and Training by a Cavalry Officer, hereafter, Notes... by a Cavalry Officer; p vi
3. 'The Future of Cavalry', USM 1861, Pt II, pp 569-75. Equally, any Cavalry charging four times their number of steady Infantry might expect annihilation in any period of history.
later by Colonel Henderson:

Theory is of two kinds. First there is speculative theory, which in default of great campaigns fought with modern matériel, endeavours, from a study of ballistics, of new inventions, of results on the ranges, of the incidents of manoeuvres and field days, to forecast the fighting of the future. Second, there is theory based on the actual experiences of war; theory which does not neglect to consider the modifications which new arms and appliances may produce, but puts in the fore-ground the conditions which ruled the last great battles between civilised armies... for it is only by studying the records of the past that we may acquire a true idea of what we may face in the future. How, where death reigns supreme, human nature is affected; to what extent training, discipline and habit may be relied upon to counteract the instincts of self-preservation; how leading is to be carried on amid the excitement, the losses and the din of battle, are questions of paramount importance, and no mere effort of imagination will help to solve them. If we would learn what men can do, and what they cannot do, under the stress of fire, we must turn to history.1

The opponents of the arme blanche turned instead to science. They applied the results of the Musketry School at Hythe, or of Woolwich Arsenal, directly to the field of battle. A Hythe experiment was cited to Federal troops in the American Civil War in which an Enfield .577 muzzle-loading rifle scored 58 per cent hits between 820 and 550 yards on a target representing 700 men in column.2 Henry Brackenbury (a member of the 'Wolseley Ring') told the RUSI that 'at 3,000 yards range seven artillery [nine-pound rifled cannon] shots out of ten would hit a battalion column, at 1,000 yards ten out of ten in a quarter of the space.'

1. Henderson, The Battle of Woerth, introduction (no pagination)
2. Roemer, Cavalry, Its History, Management and Uses in War, p 110
He produced a Hythe table showing the Snider rifle scoring 59 per cent hits on a battalion in line at 800 yards and 96 per cent at 200 yards. (He was, however, aware that this did not represent the reality of battle.) Another officer flatly declared that no troops in battle would be safe from the Enfield rifle up to half a mile. Over two decades, the Enfield was replaced by the Snider, then the Martini-Henry .45 breechloader, with (according to tests) a mean deviation of just 21 inches at 1,000 yards, which could fire twenty-five rounds a minute. One enthusiast wrote that 'If an infantry regiment reserve their fire till advancing cavalry are within 500 yards and aim always low, they may pour in a storm of bullets numbering at least thirty per man', a rate of fire not achieved even on ranges. But even this rate was to be exceeded by machine-guns, about which there was much speculation. A Gatling gun under test in 1872 managed 400 rounds in 54 seconds at a target 12 by 24 feet at 1,300 yards, of which 200 were hits. The new rifles were also thought of as 'effective at 1,000 yards'.

Defenders of the arme blanche retorted that

1. Brackenbury, 'The Tactics of the Three Arms as Modified to Meet the Requirements of the Present Day', JRUSI, vol 17, p 620
3. 'The Newly Proposed Service Arm, or, the Martini-Henry Rifle', USM 1869, Pt II, p 106
5. 'The Dragoon, his Horse and their Training'. USM 1864, Pt III, pp 329-42, especially p 330
in practice such results had no meaning. One Cavalryman remembered the Snider as inaccurate above 400 yards.\(^1\) Another thought Martini-Henry fire above 6-700 yards unaimed.\(^2\) This had little to do with the weapon - it is simply the maximum range at which the unaided human eye can see to shoot. Hythe itself in 1904 gave the upper limit of aimed fire with the S.M.L.E. Mark II rifle as 600 yards, despite its maximum range of 2,400 yards.\(^3\) Equally, in battle conditions, maximum rate of fire was neither achievable nor even desirable. Some American Civil War commanders even preferred the muzzle-loading rifle to the breechloader, since by forcing the man to pause between shots it encouraged steady firing.\(^4\) A British observer of the Austro-Prussian war thought that, in practice, the breechloader fired only three shots to the muzzle-loader's two,\(^5\) and an anonymous 'Cavalry Officer', writing in 1878, that Infantry lying down with breechloaders fired at the same rate, three rounds a minute, as when standing with muzzle-loaders.\(^6\) Wolseley's dictum, 'fire low, fire slow'\(^7\)

2. *Notes... by a Cavalry Officer*, p 9
5. Hozier, *The Seven Weeks War*, vol I, p 221
6. *Notes... by a Cavalry Officer*, p 37
7. Quoted in Lehman, *All Sir Garnet*, p 185
has stood the test of time. Five aimed rounds a minute is the normal rate of fire in battle with modern semi-automatic rifles, and since 1939 an estimated 96 per cent of Infantry engagements have been fought between men at less than 400 yards.¹

All rifle bullets rise slightly on leaving the barrel until gravity pulls them down in a curve. For the Martini-Henry this rise was eight feet at five hundred yards: to hit a Cavalryman's head at this range, aim had to be taken at his horse's feet.² Any error in estimating the constantly changing range and speed of charging Cavalry would send the bullet too high, or into the ground in front of the horse. This range-judging could be affected by wind resistance, optical illusion, any slight flaw in gun or ammunition, and, finally, the excitement or fear of battle.³

It was common in war for inexperienced or shaken troops to fire into the air.⁴ Major-General Michael Smith, a Cavalry officer, wrote in 1865 that 'in practice, the result of improvements like the present is often found to fall far short of the anticipations founded on theoretical reasoning'.⁵ Three years later, the Assistant Superintendent at Woolwich agreed that such 'scientific' arguments failed to allow for

¹ Hobart, Jane's Infantry Weapons - 1975, pp 19-20
² 'The Newly Proposed Service Arm, or, the Martini-Henry Rifle', USM 1869, pt II, p 106
³ Roemer, Cavalry, its History, Management and Uses in War, pp 120-9
⁴ Hozier, The Seven Weeks War, vol 1, p 226; Holmes, 'The Road to Sedan', p 378
⁵ Smith, Drill and Manoeuvres of Cavalry, p xviii
psychology, battlefield conditions or the friction of war. In fact, they were hopelessly crude. Had they wished to, defenders of the arme blanche might have reconstructed 'models' of historical charges showing that, in practice, Infantry might score less than 10 per cent hits on Cavalry at eighty paces. But they preferred history: nearly every book and lecture on the controversy of the time began with a detailed account of Cavalry from the earliest days. Major-General Smith saw nothing odd in opening a chapter on 'Modern Tactics' with Xenophon and Alexander the Great. Neither statistical methods of predicting the likely effect of firepower, nor detailed records of minor tactical engagements, the standard tools of modern military analysis, were available to these men. They divided into 'scientists' who argued what must happen, and 'historians' concerned only with what had happened. Before the American Civil War provided fresh historical data, the 'scientists' had it all their own way. British theorists believed that 'for the future battles will be chiefly decided by artillery', and that Cavalry would be 'rendered utterly useless

1. Majendie, 'Military Breechloading Small-Arms', JRUSI, vol 11, p 205
2. See Appendix One
3. Smith, Modern Tactics of the Three Arms, p 1
4. For examples of these techniques see: Bidwell, Modern Warfare, pp 67-9; Moran, The Anatomy of Courage; Ashworth, Trench Warfare 1914-1918: the Live and Let Live System; Dixon, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence; Richardson, Fighting Spirit; Marshall, Men Against Fire; Keegan, The Face of Battle
5. 'Cavalry Tactics and the New Armament', USM 1860, pt III, p 192
by the all-devouring rifle'. 1 Indeed, it was thought 'very little short of high treason' 2 to hold other views.

In all three major wars of the decade from 1861 onwards, on which subsequent theories of the arme blanche were based, this belief among senior officers handicapped the Cavalry. According to Philip Sheridan (later commander of the Federal Cavalry Corps) the Federal Commander-in-Chief, Winfield Scott, predicted 'that the contest would be settled by artillery and thereafter refus[ed] the services of regiment after regiment of mounted men'. 3 The 40,000 Federals who lost First Bull Run had only seven companies of Cavalry with them when the American Civil War's first battle was fought. 4 In the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, until the crucial battle of Königgrätz, both First and Second Prussian Armies marched their Cavalry behind their Infantry divisions, and on the evening before the battle had identified only four of the eight Austrian Corps opposing them. The Austrians also held three of their five Cavalry divisions in reserve, for use in the charge rather than patrolling, and the attack

1. Steinmetz, 'Musketry Instruction for the Cavalry Carbine and Pistol', JRUSI, vol 5, p 466
2. Editorial, USM 1860, pt I, p 18
3. Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, vol I, p 355. Strictly and constitutionally speaking, President Lincoln, and not Scott, held the post of Commander-in-Chief, but Scott exercised its function in war.
4. Denison, Modern Cavalry, p 19; Chesney, A Military View of the Recent Campaigns in Virginia and Maryland, hereafter, A Military View..., vol I, p 17
against their right flank which decided the battle took them by complete surprise. At the start of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1 the French Cavalry also marched behind their Infantry and did little scouting. All three wars proved the need for mounted troops with the new mass Armies. With such great forces, to obtain information on the enemy's position, to deny him the same information, and to manoeuvre in any way became major skills of warfare. Intelligence and mobility were badly needed to use the mass to the greatest effect. Reconnaissance, strategic penetration and therefore the ability to fight unsupported by other arms became essential duties for horsemen. The tactics these men would need, in advance of or on the flanks of their own Army, encountering hostile Cavalry, or even Infantry and Artillery, brought the arme blanche debate to prominence.

European Cavalry who charged with the arme blanche were the product of a distinct cultural and geographical area. The sword had been the weapon of the social elite for centuries, and the comparatively undulating, open lands of Western Europe gave space for the massed charge while providing enough cover to shield

1. Von Wright and Hozier, The Campaigns of 1866 in Germany, pp 163, 216; Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 54
2. Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 70
3. Rawley, The American Civil War: An English View, pp 44, 80, 97; Duke, A History of Morgan's Cavalry, p 182; see also Luvaas, The Military Legacy of the Civil War
Cavalry from hostile Artillery. Neither of these conditions existed in America. The Cavalry of the United States (two 'Dragoon' regiments, one of 'Mounted Rifles', and three of Cavalry, all with the same tactics) had evolved in fighting a guerrilla war with Indian tribes. Like the Indians, they fought on foot or charged mounted as required, preferring pistols and carbines to the sabre. Their mounted drill was, compared with European Cavalry, poor, and British officers in 1862 and 1863 found the riding standards of Federal troopers comical. The main theatre of war, in Virginia, was by European standards heavy ground, hilly, sparsely populated, with large virgin forests. This was scarcely ideal for the charge. The Western Theatre, far larger, saw considerable variation in terrain, but even there, so Colonel Duke of the Confederate Cavalry wrote:

The nature of the ground on which we generally fought, covered with dense woods or crossed with high fences, and the impossibility of devoting sufficient time to the training of the horses, rendered the employment of large bodies of mounted men to any good purpose very difficult.

British observers attributed the small use made of the arme blanche in the war to the closed country, the increased fire power of rifles and cannon, and the horsemen's

1. Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry, pp 160-1
2. Rawley, The American Civil War: an English View, p 44; Freemantle, Three Months in the Southern States, p 308
3. Chesney, A Military View..., vol I, p 8
4. Duke, A History of Morgan's Cavalry, p 175
lack of training. But commanders on both sides insisted that the terrain, rather than fire power or inefficiency, was chiefly to blame for their failure to charge, and pointed to the many occasions on which successful charges had been made. At Shiloh in April 1862 the Confederate J.H. Morgan, who later pioneered new dismounted tactics for his horsemen, routed some of Sherman's Infantry by a mounted charge with fire support, despite the ground being 'miry and covered with fallen timber'. Morgan's men were part of Bragg's Army, whose Inspector-General of Cavalry, an English soldier-of-fortune, encouraged orthodox European tactics. According to Duke, 'If permitted to form, discipline and drill such a brigade of regular cavalry after his own fashion, he would have made gaps in many lines of battle, or have got his "blackguards well peppered" in trying.' The existing traditions of the American Army, the familiarity of most westerners with firearms, and the lack of training meant, however, that the pistol, shotgun, carbine and even rifle were preferred to the sword.

But this did not mean abandoning the charge. The Confederate guerrillas of Colonels Mosby and Gilmor, in the Shenandoah valley in 1863 and 1864, carried only pistols (and the occasional sabre) rather than carbines, charging

1. Fletcher, History of the American War, vol II, p 439
mounted from ambush. ¹ On a larger scale, the two leading Cavalrymen of the war, J.E.B. Stuart and Philip Sheridan, both favoured the mounted charge. One of Stuart's staff remembered:

Stuart was forced, by the necessities of the struggle, the nature of the country, and the all-work he had to perform, to depend upon sharp-shooting. But he preferred pure cavalry fighting. He fought [i.e. employed] his dismounted skirmishers with skill and obstinacy... But it was in the legitimate sphere of cavalry work that he was greatest. ²

Another, the German mercenary Heros von Borcke, described Brandy Station, where in August 1863 Federal Cavalry held their own for the first time against Confederates, as 'a genuine Cavalry fight, with sabres crossing and single combats - incidents that very rarely occur in modern warfare.'³ Sheridan claimed that prior to his taking command of the Cavalry Corps in April 1864:

From the beginning of the war the enemy had shown more wisdom respecting his cavalry than we. Instead of wasting its strength by a policy of disintegration he, at an early day, had organised his mounted force into compact masses...I also gave [his commander] my main idea as to what the cavalry ought to do, the main purport of which was that it ought to be kept concentrated to fight the enemy's cavalry.⁴

To this end he deliberately fought the battle of Yellow

¹. Gilmor, Four Years in the Saddle, p 145; Mosby, The Memoirs of Colonel John S. Mosby, p 152
². Cooke, Wearing of the Gray, p 33
⁴. Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, vol I, p 354
Tavern in the following month as a mounted action, with complete success. When in August 1864 his force was moved to the Shenendoah valley he fought, again deliberately, mounted in open country to dominate the Confederates. The victory was so complete that Sheridan's pessimistic opponent, Jubal Early, advised that his Cavalry was so badly demoralised that it should be disbanded. Sheridan's use of dismounted Cavalry in a blocking position at Five Forks to trap Lee's Army in the last days of the war became a classic of such tactics, and he was certainly not a blind arme blanche enthusiast; but he believed the fastest way to achieve Cavalry superiority, with all the advantages it implied in reconnaissance, protection and manoeuvre, was the arme blanche charge.

Sheridan began the war as an Infantry Lieutenant, spent six months in the commissariat of an Army Department, and went on to command a regiment, then a brigade, of volunteer Cavalry; in September 1862 he was transferred to first a brigade, then a division of Infantry; when he took command of the Cavalry Corps only one of his three divisional commanders had spent most of his career in the Cavalry. The American Army, with its flexibility and guerrilla traditions, absorbed a hybrid between Infantry and Cavalry, troops who fought readily mounted and dis-

2. ibid, vol I, p 453
3. ibid, vol I, pp 121, 124, 126, 144, 153, 183, 189, 352
mounted, without much difficulty. But British observers had no word to describe such troops. The term 'dragoon' (referring to seventeenth century mounted infantrymen) enjoyed a brief vogue, but clashed in meaning with the existing Dragoon regiments of Cavalry, and the common use of the word as a synonym for Cavalryman. Most commentators called the Americans 'light horse' (which was closest to the truth), 'mounted riflemen' or 'mounted infantrymen'. This led to endless confusion. Both sides in the war occasionally mounted rifle-carrying Infantry for transport purposes, in addition to their carbine-armed Cavalry. Further, the Federals had a few regiments with the title 'Mounted Infantry' or 'Mounted Rifles', who spurned both the description and uniform of the Cavalry, but nonetheless carried, and used, the sabre. The British Army's reaction to this was an attempt to rigidly define as Infantry or Cavalry horsemen who were neither. In 1874 a British Artilleryman summarised the problem:

I venture to suggest that there is too general a tendency to regard the subject from one of two opposite points of view...those of the cavalry and infantry officer; the first is prone to look too exclusively at the mounted portion of a soldier's duty; to suggest, in fact, that the cavalry soldier if somewhat more carefully instructed in dismounted skirmishing, will, without any important alterations to arms or equipment, fulfill all the requirements of the case; the last is apt to fall into the even more fatal error of assuming that, so long as the horse is to be regarded as a roadster, not a

1. Chesney, A Military View..., vol I, p 52; Starr, The Union Cavalry in the Civil War, p 59
charger, but little skill in horsemanship need be expected from a mounted rifleman...
The first or Cavalry system must infallibly fall to the ground from the same causes which have converted the dragoon of former days into the horseman pure and simple of today. The second, or Infantry system would, I believe, equally fail, but from far different causes, which may be summed up in those two pregnant syllables, 'sore backs'.

The whole question of sore backs for horses, horse care and supply in the war, received far less attention than the arme blanche. Yet even in 'horse country' poor feeding and horsemastership radically affected the war's outcome. When Major-General Pope took command of the Federal Army of Virginia in June 1862 he found his five thousand Cavalry 'badly mounted and armed, and in a poor condition for service'. At the battle of Chantilly in September there were not five horses in a company fit to trot. Between May and October 1863 the 12,000 Cavalry of the Army of the Potomac required over 35,000 horses. Not until the middle of the war did Federal horsemen begin to practise the elementary horsemastership the Confederates took for granted. Duke believed that while the Federals improved over three years, the chief reason for their success after 1863 in the Western Theatre was that Confederate Cavalry were expected to find their own equipment and forage, and

1. 'Mounted Riflemen', USM 1874, pt I, p 331
2. Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry, pp 247-8
3. Chesney, A Military View..., vol II, p 108
could not keep their horses in good condition as a result.\(^1\)

In Virginia, Confederates at first brought their own horses, trained to jump fences and obstacles of the battlefields; but these were irreplaceable. On the ride to Gettysburg, one of Stuart's staff remembered gathering fresh horses:

> These, as I saw them pass in great numbers were large, sleek and apparently excellent. I was not long, however, in discovering that they were worthless as riding-horses, one of the thin, wiry, rawboned Virginia horses, half the weight of one of these Conestogas, would wear out a dozen.\(^2\)

By mid-1863 even some of Stuart's staff were without horses due to death and 'exhaustion', often a euphemism for starvation.\(^3\)

Such was the evidence available to British military theorists by 1870 (with the exception of Sheridan's memoirs, published 1888). Allowing for the shortcomings of American reporting, and the prejudice of British observers, it was clear that, even in close country, large numbers of horsemen, of some kind, were needed. The Army of the Potomac was more than 10 per cent Cavalry by the war's end, while in the Western Theatre in 1863 Bragg had 24,000 cavalry to 45,000 Infantry.

Theorists pointed out that the most telling defeats of the war, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, fell on Armies

\(^1\) Duke, *A History of Morgan's Cavalry*, p 396  
\(^3\) Freemantle, *Three Months in the Southern States*, p 278
without horsemen to scout for them.\(^1\) Captain Chesney at the Staff College felt too much reliance on firearms produced timidity in Cavalry. He described Brandy Station as a series of skirmishes 'of the undecided character prevalent wherever cavalry take to using their firearms', and attributed the lack of a clear victory to 'the practice of cavalry on either side, in avoiding any attempt to take their place in the line of battle, or even to keep near enough to influence its results'. Proof seemed to come from Gettysburg, where one Army was ready to fight with no Cavalry at all, and the other made no effective use of a massive Cavalry superiority.\(^2\) In the Western Theatre Confederates told British observers the same story. They did not form square since 'the country did not admit of cavalry charges, even if the Yankee cavalry had stomach to attempt it'.\(^3\) Other British observers criticised the lack of aggression shown by Cavalry on both sides.\(^4\) This was often due to inexperience. On the Federal side alone 227 new mounted regiments were created during the war.\(^5\) The

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2. Chesney, A Military View...; vol II, pp 17, 104
3. Freemantle, Three Months in the Southern States, p 157
4. ibid, p 291; 'The Battle of Gettysburg and the Campaign in Pennsylvania', Blackwoods, vol 94, p 367; 'A Visit to the Cities and Camps of the Confederate States, 1863-4', Blackwoods, vol 97, p 28
5. Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry, pp 327-337
mounted rifleman did not need the long and difficult training for an arme blanche charge, and there was a strong temptation for commanders (always short of troops) to employ badly trained Cavalry as mounted riflemen. Such partially-trained troops were in practice only a liability until they gained battlefield experience. At this date, no-one thought of fully trained Mounted Rifles: firearm tactics and poor training went together.

The Austro-Prussian war, fought with Cavalry more familiar to the British, promised more lessons. The Prussian Armies in the main theatre of war had both more Cavalry than their Austrian opponents and a higher proportion of Cavalry to Infantry (11.8 per cent compared with 8 per cent) but on neither side was it fully employed. The Cavalry Corps with the Prussian First Army was kept concentrated, and unused, until the day of Königgrätz, when it was, virtually by accident, split in two. Little use was found for Cavalry in the heavily wooded Elbe basin; while after Königgrätz, when the Prussian Cavalry led the march into Austria, the Austrian commander sent his Cavalry by rail to cover Vienna, leaving the rest of his Army to follow on foot. As a result, to the Prussians' surprise, their supply trains, railways and telegraphs went unmolested. Despite their breechloading Dreyse rifles (the

1. Hozier, The Seven Weeks War, Vol I, pp 122, 133
2. Von Wright and Hozier, The Campaigns of 1866 in Germany, p 205
3. ibid, p 301; Hozier, The Seven Weeks War, vol I, p 207
other combatants carried muzzle-loaders) the Prussians
still formed square to receive Cavalry, and at the war’s
opening there were a number of occasions on which the
Cavalry of both sides broke squares.1 At the battle of
Gitschin in July, however, the Prussian 2/2nd Infantry
Regiment improvised a new tactic:

As the ground offered no shelter whatsoever
the battalion lay down, and its leading ranks,
and skirmishers that were thrown out on both
flanks, returned the enemy’s fire with great
coolness. A charge of cavalry, coming from
Ober-Lochow, was repulsed at a distance of
200 paces.2

The practice of receiving Cavalry by a firing line, based
on confidence in the Dreyse rifle, spread rapidly. But its
success depended also on the reputation of the Dreyse, which
caused the Austrians to avoid charges which would otherwise
have succeeded. At Königgrätz a charge, in regimental
column, by an entire Cavalry Division against a mixed
force of four Prussian companies sheered off after taking
fewer than two hundred casualties. The Prussians fired at
200 yards, scoring about one hit for every six rounds fired,
instead of their theoretical range of 600 yards.3 The
badly-fitting gas seal on the Dreyse’s breech led to
soldiers firing from the hip for safety, and made it

1. Wood, Achievements of Cavalry, pp 143–91; Von Wright and
Hozier, The Campaigns of 1866 in Germany, pp 54, 89;
Hozier, The Seven Weeks War, vol II, p 16
2. Von Wright and Hozier, The Campaigns of 1866 in Germany,
p 140
3. ibid, p 225
inaccurate at long ranges.\textsuperscript{1} Far from producing a hail of fire, the Prussian Infantry averaged just one shot per man for the campaign, few firing more than sixty, almost none more than ninety rounds.\textsuperscript{2} British commentators concluded that if Cavalry were told they could never charge breech-loaders, they would never try, even on occasions when it was possible. The reluctance to attack Infantry contrasted oddly with the successful Cavalry charges made against guns in the campaign.\textsuperscript{3}

In Cavalry against Cavalry actions, the Austrian tactic of shooting down a charge with mounted carbine or pistol fire failed completely.\textsuperscript{4} In contrast, at Königgrätz the value of the arme blanche charge was clearly shown. The Austrian commander, having held his Cavalry inactive most of the day, sacrificed it to cover his Army's retreat when the battle was lost, ordering it to charge the Prussian centre. The advancing Prussian Infantry, who had lost formation as they pursued, were thrown back, and the Prussian Cavalry joined in a complex series of mêlées of which the Prussian General Staff commented:

\begin{quote}
The resolution of [the Austrian Cavalry commanders] and the meritorious bravery of their
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1} Majendie, 'Military Breechloading Small Arms', JRUSI, vol 12, p 196
\textsuperscript{2} Hozier, The Seven Weeks War, Vol I, p 343
\textsuperscript{3} Von Wright and Hozier, The Campaigns of 1866 in Germany, p 339
\textsuperscript{4} ibid, pp 77, 95. This tactic was tried at Trautenau and Czerwenahaora.
\end{flushleft}
troops, very materially assisted the retreat of the Infantry and Artillery of the Austrian centre.

On the other hand, the want of Cavalry was principally felt on the right flank of the Austrian Army, which was so immediately menaced by the advance of the Prussian VI Corps, and where the nature of the ground was particularly favourable for the action of large bodies of this arm.¹

At the end of the battle:

The Cavalry combat...had only delayed the general advance for a short time. The course of this action, however, and the obstinate mêlées, in which the regiments had been involved and mingled together, precluded all possibility of General Hann's Division following immediately in pursuit of the enemy as one compact body of Cavalry, and to have advanced otherwise than in perfect order would have been to no avail.²

Chesney complained that the Prussians did not give the Austrian Cavalry sufficient credit. They had disrupted the advance in a way that dismounted fire could never have achieved.³

There was virtually no dismounted fighting by Cavalry in the war. But the need for reconnaissance, and the speed of the Prussian advance, meant that their Heavy Cavalry, Cuirassiers and Uhlans, formed advance guards and scouted like the Light Cavalry, despite having no carbine. A British officer with the Prussians saw that in minor actions success in the charge usually went to the

1. Von Wright and Hozier, *The Campaigns of 1866 in Germany*, p 284
2. ibid, p 288
heavier Cavalry, regardless of their weapon. This was a major paradox. The charge needed big men on big horses; reconnaissance needed light men on small, hardy horses. Yet if Cavalry were to play its new independent role, it must be equally proficient in both. Only if there were a tactic to overcome the charge would the problem disappear; the needs of the charge, fit strong horses, and the need to use those horses in scouting, pulled in opposite directions. In the first week of war a Prussian Hussar regiment averaged nearly fifty miles a day for three days without ill-effects. On the fifth day of the campaign a Cavalry brigade trotted 7,000 paces over stony and hilly ground without difficulty to come into action. Eight campaigning days later, the strain on horses produced by such efforts was so severe that to provide 700 horses for a pursuit, the best from four regiments had to be taken. By the Armistice, two weeks later, the Prussian advance had been noticeably slowed by horse exhaustion, lack of forage, and sore backs.

In the Franco-Prussian War, for the first time, the Prussians used independent Cavalry Divisions (although their Heavy Cavalry still had no carbine). The French Cavalry, all but the Cuirassiers, carried the Chassepôt carbine, which far outranged its Prussian equivalent, but they held only a limited doctrine of dismounted

1. Hozier, The Seven Weeks War, Vol I, p 241
2. ibid, Vol I, p 205; Vol II, pp 86, 310
facing. The French also neglected scouting. The Prussian Prince Kraft zu Hohnelohe-Ingelfingen (who commanded an Infantry Division in the war, and whose writings had considerable circulation in Britain) wrote that 'it never happened that a French Cavalry Division was sent far in front of the Army for the purpose of reconnoitring'. A French veteran agreed that on one occasion 'we never sent out a single scout or vedette, but were content to follow the main roads and simply accomplish the march'. The Prussian Cavalry was for all practical purposes unopposed when scouting: their 4th Cavalry Division lost only six killed and four wounded up to Sedan. Of 65,160 German casualties in the war, only 6 were killed and 218 wounded with swords, lances and clubbed rifles.

In retrospect, the severest French critics condemned 'the folly of our old notions that the sole use of Cavalry is to charge'. French charges were made without orders, without clear objectives, without reconnoitring the ground, over impossible ground, in column rather than line, and sometimes as a form of deliberate

1. Bonie, The French Cavalry in 1870, With its Tactical Results, pp 37, 54, 60, lists a few dismounted actions.
2. Kraft, Letters on Cavalry, p 95
3. Bonie, The French Cavalry in 1870, With its Tactical Results, p 33
4. Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 70; Childers, German Influence on British Cavalry, p 6
5. Bonie, The French Cavalry in 1870, With its Tactical Results, p 80
suicide. At Wörth two Cuirassier brigades charged over ground covered with hop poles. At Beaumont another Cuirassier regiment charged over boggy ground broken by a deep ditch. At Sedan the dying General Margueritte launched his brigade against Prussian batteries on high ground in little more than defiance. In contrast, when the Prussian General von Steinmetz ordered a Cavalry charge at Gravelot against French Infantry behind a high stone wall, he was (according to Philip Sheridan, an eyewitness) severely reprimanded. Several Prussian charges of regimental strength, with definite objectives, over reconnoitred ground, in line, aiming for a flank, were successful. A charge of two Prussian regiments produced the most dramatic incident of the war. Seven hundred and fifty Cuirassiers and Lancers of von Bredow's 12th Brigade charged against the centre batteries of Bazaine's Army at Mars-la-Tour in a desperate attempt to gain time for the Prussian III Corps while the rest of the Army arrived.


2. Bonie, The French Cavalry in 1870, With its Tactical Results, p 23

3. ibid, p 79

4. Howard, The Franco-Prussian War, p 215

5. Sheridan, Personal Memoirs, vol II, p 373

Under flanking fire for most of the way, they galloped 1,800 yards into massed guns with Infantry and Cavalry support. There was much argument over how much fire they received; six German batteries drew some of the French Artillery, while four French batteries were changing over and appear not to have fired at all. Regardless, the impact of the charge, on Bazaine or his men, was such that the French did not advance for two hours. The rest of the Prussians arrived to cut them off from Paris, which led directly to the surrender at Metz; all this from a charge of less than six squadrons.¹ Even at the time, opinion differed widely on the 'deaf ride' at Mars-la-Tour: some theorists called it 'useless, objectless and resultless';² others 'the boldest charge of the war'.³ At the end of the century Evelyn Wood of the 'Wolseley Ring' summed up:

Contradictory deductions have been made from von Bredow's charge by partisan writers, one side claiming that the two cavalry divisions, if properly handled, might have wrecked all Canrobert's Corps, while others urge that the heavy loss of the 12th Brigade [about 54 per cent] proves the folly of thus employing horsemen.⁴

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¹ There are numerous accounts of this charge in the literature of the arme blanche controversy. Almost every writer on Cavalry after 1870 had something to say about it, and many contradictory assertions were made about exactly what happened, especially the range at which the Prussian Cavalry came under fire from the French batteries and the amount of fire they received. For the clearest and most balanced view in English, see Wood, Achievements of Cavalry, pp 205-38.

² Kraft, Letters on Cavalry, p 25; Bonie, The French Cavalry in 1870, With its Tactical Results, p 47

³ Denison, A History of Cavalry, p 408

⁴ Wood, Achievements of Cavalry, p 238
In the British Army the charge was cited repeatedly not as the 'norm' but as the exception: a proof of what Cavalry might achieve if prepared to risk the casualties.¹

Interest in the arme blanche, rather than wider considerations of the organisation or strategic employment of Cavalry, dominated debate on the arm's future after the war. Cuirassiers, heavily laden and with no carbine, were generally thought obsolete, although there was some evidence that their cuirasses were bullet-resistant.² Prussian Cavalry fighting Franc-Tireurs late in the war were themselves seriously handicapped by the lack of a good firearm. Some carried captured Chassepot rifles, others had to be escorted by Infantry, at walking pace.³

'It shows an entire misapprehension of the nature of Cavalry', concluded Prince Kraft, 'to require that they shall be self-sufficient and entirely independent. To think so is a mere Utopian fantasy.'⁴ The Germans felt their conscript system allowed insufficient time for complete training of Cavalry to fight on foot as well as on horseback in three years' service. Cavalry Divisions were

¹ Howard, The Franco-Prussian War, p 157 suggests that this was perhaps the last successful Cavalry charge in western Europe, and that it was to be cited by historians for the next forty years as the norm.

² Bonie, The French Cavalry in 1870, With its Tactical Results, p 26; Hozier, 'The Employment of Cavalry in War', JRUSI vol 16, pp 173-4

³ Chenevix-Trench, 'Progress in Developing the Capabilities of Cavalry', JRUSI vol 21, p 998

⁴ Kraft, Letters on Cavalry, p 244
instead reorganised to include one Jäger Infantry battalion for fire support. This belief led, in 1870, to Sheridan's annoyance, to the Cavalry Divisions screening the Army, rather than raiding deep into France. But in so small a theatre of war, the information from patrols twenty-five miles ahead of the Infantry was of greater value than a distant raid. Moreover the rapid collapse of the French forces meant that, although the Prussian Armies used up a million horses in eight months, the inevitable deterioration in horse fitness did not affect the campaign, despite a large number of sore-backed horses in the Cavalry.

From the evidence of these three wars, and such as they judged significant from earlier conflicts, British theorists tried to build a doctrine of the relation between firearms and the arme blanche. The evidence, although massive, was often vague in precise detail. Before the end of the next decade improvements in firearms would cast doubts on the value of many conclusions. But it was a vast improvement on theory without data. 'It might be supposed,' wrote one Cavalryman, 'that a Cavalry attack'
such as at Mars-la-Tour, 'would be attended with fearful loss, but such in reality is not the case'. \(^1\) 'It is no longer necessary,' another asserted, 'to listen to vague theories as to the future of cavalry,' for 'the circumstances under which it can or cannot be used are now fully determined.' \(^2\) There was an understandable smugness from believers in the *arme blanche* that, in the face of the 'scientific' arguments, it had not proved obsolete at all. \(^3\)

Having been once bitten, Cavalrymen had in future a degree of immunity to such arguments. The more historically erudite pointed to similar declarations of the obsolescence of Cavalry in the eighteenth century, before its revival under Seydlitz. \(^4\) Most became highly sceptical of 'scientific' ideas without historical examples to support them.

The anonymous *'Cavalry Officer'* wrote in 1878:

> It has been frequently denied that cavalry can [exercise a decisive effect on the field of battle] and too often this dictum is acquiesced in by cavalry officers themselves, who accepting without examination what is termed 'the logic of facts', are content to see their arm relegated to what is, however we may seek to deny it, a position of inferiority. \(^5\)

Another officer, writing in 1882 of Mounted Infantry, sneered 'that 'The idea is considered "advanced" and

\(^1\) Spencer, *'The German Cavalry'*', USM 1873, pt I, p 220
\(^2\) *'Our Cavalry System'*', USM 1871, pt III, p569
\(^3\) For examples of this see *'The Cavalry of the Future'*, USM 1871, pt I, p 219, and *'The Future Tactics of Cavalry'* USM 1872, pt III, p 70
\(^4\) Russell, *'Cavalry'*', JRUSI vol 20, pp 180-1, 186-7
\(^5\) Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, p 76
"scientific", and these, to the wisdom which directs our military affairs, are quite sufficient recommendations.¹ This attitude could be, and was, mistaken for thoughtless conservatism or stupidity. In fact, 'sentiment' played very little part in the controversy's beginnings. Few Cavalrymen were directly concerned with the threat to the arme blanche, and many of its defenders were not Cavalry officers. Unfortunately, early opponents of the arme blanche were openly hostile to the Cavalry, often confusing the deficiencies of the British Cavalry regiments with those of the arme blanche in order to condemn both. Major-General Havelock, in particular, sought to pre-empt criticism of his theories by writing that he expected it 'from all but the more enlightened, reflecting and observant of the cavalry officers of the old school',² while laughing at 'the British lancer with his flag and pole'.³ In 1875 a writer on Cavalry manoeuvres took up the theme. 'Many cavalry officers are inclined to think that the sabreur must give way to the mounted rifleman', he wrote, 'and, if so, no sentiment arising from ancient services should prevent the changes it may be required to introduce.'⁴

1. 'Notes of an Egyptian Campaigner', Blackwoods, vol 132, p 809
2. Havelock, Three Main Military Questions of the Day, p 38
3. ibid
4. 'Lessons from the Recent Summer Manoeuvres', Blackwoods, vol 18, p 377
The Regiment was the primary focus of loyalty in the British Army, particularly so in the Cavalry; and as the RUSI was warned, 'No healthy reform can be introduced from without, before the necessity for it has been recognised from within'.

This treatment of the anti-arme blanche view as the Emperor's New Clothes, branding all who believed in the sword as fools, therefore produced only increased hostility from Cavalrymen proud of their regiments.

Even before the American Civil War there was a school of thought, represented by a small minority in the British Cavalry, which argued that Light Cavalry for scouting should completely replace heavier riders. After hearing of Sherman's campaign in Georgia the Duke of Cambridge, Commander-in-Chief of the Army observed:

Whereas it was considered in past years that cavalry should be of a very heavy calibre, they ought now to be made as light as possible. Probably the day of heavy cavalry has somewhat passed by...[but] heavy cavalry at a critical moment may be very useful and necessary.

This represented for the time a conservative view. In contrast, a visiting American General told the RUSI in 1867 that 'it is scarcely conceivable that cavalry will ever again charge infantry in order'. With so much argument

1. Stovell-Jones, 'The Present Condition of Our Cavalry', JRUSI vol 6, p 426
2. Baker, The British Cavalry, p 31; see also Nolan, Cavalry, Its History and Tactics
3. Quoted in the discussion after Chesney, 'Sherman's Campaign in Georgia', JRUSI vol 9, p 220
about the charge, more than one writer felt compelled to stress that the charge of more than a regiment had always been a rare event, and that no Cavalry charge against steady Infantry had, by definition, ever succeeded.¹ Some theorists argued that Cavalry must be held beyond Artillery range (about 3,500 yards) for safety. 'Cavalry can no longer manoeuvre on the field of battle,' wrote one, 'it must be there without allowing itself to be seen, and appear only when it is to act.'² Prince Kraft pointed out that this restriction of Cavalry to the second line³ meant that it would take nearly twenty minutes to reach a point where immediate action was required. He and other writers argued that small bodies of Cavalry should be concealed by the ground, in depressions or behind obstacles, close to the enemy.⁴ Von Bredow had managed to conceal his brigade in this manner until within 1,500 yards of the French line,⁵ but, as had been predicted before 1870,⁶ his horses had been tired and blown before contact. One British theorist

¹ Kraft, Letters on Cavalry, p 89; Bonie, The French Cavalry in 1870, With its Tactical Results, p 59; Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 122. This became a standard point in the controversy.
² 'Tactics on the Battle-field', USM 1875, pt II, p 374
³ Stovell-Jones, 'The Present Condition of our Cavalry', JRUSI vol 6, p 424
⁴ Kraft, Letters on Cavalry, pp 71-6; Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, pp 27-47
⁵ 'The Charge of Bredow's Brigade', CJ vol 5, no 20, p 462
⁶ Steinmetz, 'The Past and Future of Cavalry', USM 1865, pt II, p 468. Lieutenant Steinmetz was British, an Infantry Officer.
complained:

No cavalry officer who knows his business... will pretend that it requires 1,000 paces or a quarter of that distance to put horses to their speed, or that they can keep it up for anything like that, and therefore this doctrine of long charges is in this respect a mere fallacy.¹

For others, history supplied the answer: both Frederick the Great and Marshal de Saxe had demanded charges of 2,000 paces from their Cavalry.² The German Cavalry regulations of 1875 called for a gallop of 2,000 metres at 375 metres a minute.³ Such a charge would leave a mass of Cavalry exposed to fire for five minutes; British theorists doubted the feasibility of such 'chimerical action of great masses'.⁴ This left only the possibility of a squadron or regiment concealed close to the enemy line.

Clery's Minor Tactics considered:

Modern warfare has reduced the role of cavalry on a battlefield to very insignificant proportions. It has ceased to be used in great masses, or rather the attempts to use it in this manner have as yet scarcely produced satisfactory results. Employed in small bodies it can seldom produce effects other than temporary and indecisive.⁵

Added to this, the problem of how large the Cavalry force charging should be, was an even greater problem: the

¹. 'Military Studies, No 3, Cavalry', USM 1863, pt III, p 17
². Frederick, quoted in Von Schmidt, Instructions for the Training, Employment and Leading of Cavalry, p 11; de Saxe, quoted in Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, p 94
³. 'Tactics on the Battle-field', USM 1875, pt II, p 375
⁴. ibid, p 371
⁵. Clery, Minor Tactics, p 145
timing of the charge. As Prince Kraft wrote:

The greater the range of firearms, the less chance have the cavalry in the pursuit of judging the condition of the enemy, since by reason of this the two combatants will remain very far apart, and thus it becomes most difficult to obtain any idea as to the situation of the enemy army.¹

Another theorist, this time British, also observed: 'Considering the long range of rifles now in use, it is clear that if cavalry charges it must give up all idea of a retreat', and that 'victory or death must henceforth be the motto of the cavalry'.²

Six hundred yards or so not only limited a rifleman's eyesight but also that of a Cavalryman, looking for something far less obvious than a simple target: symptoms that the enemy were unsteady. This was the greatest paradox of the arme blanche controversy. A Cavalry charge could only succeed under certain rare conditions, notoriously difficult to judge. But the Cavalry must be committed to the charge, and to heavy casualties if it failed, when its leaders were too far from the enemy to know absolutely if these conditions prevailed, on the basis of a decision taken in an instant, at a gallop of fifteen miles an hour. But at the same time, to abandon the charge as a tactic seemed a sure way to produce poor Cavalry at a time when more, and better, Cavalry were

¹ Kraft, Letters on Cavalry, p 90
² 'The Future of Cavalry', USM 1860, pt III, p 46
required in war.

The charge, both in close order against enemy Cavalry and in a looser order against Infantry and Artillery, was a highly specialised tactic, requiring years to learn properly and needing strong horses. Regiments that scouted might reasonably expect to lose over a quarter of their horses from exhaustion before battle was joined.¹ This was the origin of the old division between Light and Heavy Cavalry. But, as the 'Cavalry Officer' pointed out:

Certainly, if the duties of cavalry are in future to be confined to scouting and outpost work, and the collection of intelligence, infinitely important as they are, the days of cavalry proper would be numbered, as such duties may as well or better be performed by mounted infantry on the American model - a far cheaper arm, and one that can be turned to a variety of uses.²

Through a general misunderstanding of the nature of American Civil War horsemen, the idea came to be widely accepted that mounted riflemen were Infantry, not Cavalry. The logical conclusion from this was that they should be formed by the Infantry in the British Army, and that the fate of the Cavalry should be tied to the arme blanche: should one prove obsolete, so should the other. This mistake was shared by a number of Cavalry theorists, who claimed that 'the Americans had no real cavalry',³ and that therefore

¹. Steinmetz, 'The Past and Future of Cavalry', USM 1865, pt II, p 467
². Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, p 1
³. Thomson, in introduction to Bonie, The French Cavalry in 1870, With its Tactical Results, p vii; see also Notes... by a Cavalry Officer, p 113
their experience was irrelevant to European war. A major consequence of this was to rob the Cavalry of their status of experts in the controversy. One Cavalryman, claiming this status, had written that 'Just as an Englishman can know but little of the German "Lanzknechts" or the Swiss "Reiters" so no more can an infantry soldier write about... the uses of cavalry in war.' However, if mounted riflemen were not Cavalry, this clearly gave Infantrymen as much right to their views as Cavalry, or even more.

Apart from Havelock, 'an infantryman of infantrymen', the principal advocate of Mounted Rifles at the time was Colonel George Denison, who in two books in 1868 and 1877 argued the need for Heavy Cavalry for the charge, and 'dragoons or mounted riflemen' for scouting, armed with carbines, revolvers and a sword carried on the saddle for the few occasion it might be needed. Denison, commanding the Governor-General of Canada's bodyguard, based most of his arguments on his view of the American Civil War. He claimed all American horsemen as 'mounted riflemen', (including Mosby and Gilmor's men, who carried only sabres and pistols, and Sheridan's troopers, most of whom carried carbines) arguing that in some respects

1. 'A History of Cavalry', USM 1877, pt III, p 16; see also 'Practical Essays upon Cavalry, II - Dismounted Dragoons', USM 1876, pt II, p 231
2. 'Practical Essays on Cavalry, II - Dismounted Dragoons', USM 1876, pt II, p 232
3. Denison, Modern Cavalry, especially pp 10, 30-48, and Denison, A History of Cavalry, pp 415-22
4. Denison, Modern Cavalry, pp 22-3, 29
these troops were superior to Cavalry as the British understood them. The main advantage of such troops, according to Denison, was that they could be improvised. The lack of training, which had seemed such a liability at the time, was offered as a benefit, since 'the same time is not required to create the same skill in the use of the rifle [as the sword] and under any circumstances it is not as important'. Denison favoured the revolver over the sword, but admitted that it was a feature of American, not European, society. Most British theorists thought it too inaccurate and dangerous. The lance in Europe was believed to have a great morale effect but made dismounting difficult and needed a very experienced user. The main concern of most Cavalrymen was to avoid clutter. 'The idea', wrote one, 'of giving a lance, sabre, carbine and pistol to one man, one of whose hands is occupied in guiding his horse, is so perfectly astounding as to be scarcely credible.' The German Cavalry, before the end of the

1. Denison, A History of Cavalry, p 394; see also Denison's opinion of Sheridan 'as poor an officer for the popular reputation he had as ever lived, except perhaps General Grant', Denison, Modern Cavalry, p 107
2. Denison, Modern Cavalry, pp 13-14
3. ibid, pp 31-40; Baker, 'Organisation and Employment of Cavalry', JRUSI vol 17, pp 375-97; 'The Dragoon, His Horse and His Training', USM 1864, pt III, p333. In Modern Cavalry, pp 23-32, Denison cites the achievements of Colonel Gilmor as typical of the effects of mounted pistol fire. Gilmor, however, describes himself as one of the best pistol shots in the Army. See Gilmor, Four Years in the Saddle, p 7
4. Nolan, Cavalry: its History and Tactics, p 126; Baker, The British Cavalry, p 43; Denison, Modern Cavalry, p 39
5. 'Military Studies, No 3, Cavalry', USM 1863, pt III, p 20
century, tried to compromise on the arme blanche problem by doing just that.

Denison wanted the Regular Cavalry armed with swords, pistols, perhaps lances, but no carbines. His idea was that they should be taught only the arme blanche charge, 'and the moral effect of this training would have a wonderful influence, not only on themselves, but on the enemy'.¹ He believed that providing no obstacles intervened, Cavalry so trained would always succeed,² apparently even against steady Infantry. This placed far greater faith in the morale effect of the arme blanche than most Cavalrymen were prepared to show. Further, these ideas put Denison in alliance with the prevailing view in the British Cavalry that fire action was, for them, a waste of ammunition.³ One retired lancer argued in 1870 that:

Teach a mounted soldier to depend on his rifle or rifled carbine, to be an accurate shot, and without he should be a man of ten thousand, he will ride his horse no more for you, to pull up and 'pot' will always be his game...train your cavalry to be marksmen, and they will cease to be cavalry...I hope that the National colour, scarlet, may always be retained...if your troops be in the open, you do not want them hid.⁴

This last point took the debate far outside the realm of minor tactics. If Cavalry were only to charge, for which

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¹. Denison, Modern Cavalry, p 73
². ibid, p 163
³. Smith, Drill and Manoeuvres of Cavalry, p 269
⁴. 'Thoughts on Cavalry by an Officer Lately in the Cavalry', USM 1870, pt I, p 476. The author later identifies himself in correspondence as Roger D. Upton, late Captain, 9th Lancers.
morale of the highest order was vital, they could be big men on heavy horses, colourfully dressed and trained like fanatics. But all this depended on another, larger, force assuming the scouting role. Believers in Mounted Rifles and in charging Cavalry agreed that a hybrid that could fight as well dismounted as mounted was ridiculous. 'It is a sheer impossibility for good cavalry soldiers to be good infantry men,' declared one of the former. 'There can be no advantageous amalgamation', stressed one of the latter, 'between horse and foot soldiers, for they are as unmixable as oil and water.' Evelyn Wood, a rare transfer from Cavalry to Light Infantry, suggested in 1873 that while he did not believe in the hybrid, the difficulties involved in training 'mounted riflemen' might be too great. He suggested employing Infantry in 'irish jaunting cars' to be as fast and manoeuvrable as Horse Artillery. But again this idea depended on the conversion of existing Infantry, or the expansion of the Army to accommodate a new force.

Against this alliance, there was another small minority in the British Cavalry who believed in dismounting a proportion of a regiment for fire support, while keeping the arme blanche as the main weapon. The wars between 1861 and 1871 gave a great boost to this view, particularly among Cavalrymen who saw the only possible future

1. 'The Future of Cavalry', USM 1861, pt II, p 571
2. 'Practical Essays on Cavalry, II - Dismounted Dragoons', USM 1876, pt II, p 359
3. Wood, 'Mounted Riflemen', Lecture to RUSI on 4 March 1873
for their arm in some response to the new problems of firepower. In 1873 one Lieutenant wrote that 'the horse, the sword and the carbine are all three the weapons for cavalry, and any two of them are incomplete without the third'. ¹ The 'Cavalry Officer' agreed. 'Let it be granted then,' he wrote, 'that the use of firearms by cavalry is not normal, but exceptional, it must in turn be allowed that the occasions on which they may be resorted to are numerous, and in their way neglected.' ² From its beginning there were three main views of the arme blanche controversy. Traditionalist Cavalrymen clung to the charge alone, believing their men could not be taught dismounted fighting. Other Cavalrymen sought to introduce a 'hybrid' horseman willing to fight on foot or charge as appropriate. While reformers outside the Regular Cavalry dismissed any possibility of its ever learning dismounted tactics, displaying at times as great a belief in the arme blanche as the most reactionary Cavalryman, and argued for an entirely new force to fill the role of scouts in the Army.

In the absence of further evidence, once these main positions had been stated, there was little to

1. Nolan, Cavalry: its History and Tactics, p 272; Baker, The British Cavalry, p 60; Thomson, in introduction to Bonie, The French Cavalry in 1870: With its Tactical Results, p vii
2. Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, p 114
do but repeat them ad nauseam. As early as 1863 the United Service Magazine received complaints about this repetition; and in 1872 and again in 1874 writers observed that a controversy first begun 'six years ago' was no nearer a solution. As each fresh generation of Lieutenants and Captains discovered the controversy there was a cycle of enthusiasm, contradiction and boredom in the military journals. But although the major problems of the controversy had all been stated by 1879, it remained a minority interest until the next decade. Henry Brackenbury saw nothing unusual in ending a talk in 1873 'although my lecture is on the tactics of the three arms, I do not propose to speak of cavalry'. The 'Cavalry Officer' claimed that tacticians, absorbed in the problems of the Infantry and Artillery, had ignored the Cavalry altogether. In 1880 Captain Chenevix-Trench complained to the RUSI of the neglect of the Cavalry's firearm and of its continuously increasing value in war:

We may not like the idea, we may resent it as being opposed to our prejudices, traditions and ideas; we may ignore it theoretically in our regulations or only faintly acknowledge it, but

2. Brackenbury, 'The Tactics of the Three Arms as Modified to Meet the Requirements of the Present Day', JRUSI vol 17, p 630
3. Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, pp 45-6
in spite of that, the signs of it are everywhere apparent.  

The problems of a new system of mounted close-order drill, and as to whether a charge should be delivered in one rank or two, occupied at least as much interest in the Cavalry regiments.  

In fact the vast majority of officers were content to ignore the arme blanche controversy and all other tactical problems. Major-General Smith defended this attitude:

Military works, in a technical form, meet with little favour in England. To the unmilitary reader they must of course be altogether devoid of interest; and although our officers, in the intervals of the time devoted to field sports and other amusements, find quite sufficient opportunities to make themselves master of the details and duties of their profession, still, they naturally expect that their duties should be ready to hand, and consider that the responsibility of determining whether such drill is suited to the times or not rests elsewhere, and that they are only called upon to acquire it theoretically and practically as it exists - and this is quite reasonable, it would be absurd to suppose that an officer should be expected to analyse and study the elements of the tactics of that branch of the service to which he belongs.  

Before the First World War, the only books commonly read by

1. Chenevix-Trench, 'Progress in Developing the Capabilities of Cavalry', JRUSI vol 21, p 998
2. A 'non-pivot' system of drill whereby the Cavalry regiment did not pivot around one troop when turning was introduced in the 1860s. At the same time there was some argument that the charge should be delivered by a regiment in a single line of horsemen, the 'rank entire' rather than two ranks as remained the case. See for example: Nolan, Cavalry: its History and Tactics, Appendix; Smith, Drill and Manoeuvres of Cavalry; 'Volunteer Cavalry Movements', Blackwoods, Vol 87, pp 371-80
3. Smith, Modern Tactics of the Three Arms, pp iii-iv
most subalterns were the numerous revisions of Clery's *Minor Tactics* and Hamley's *Operations of War*. Unfortunately, in the early 1870s they disagreed, the former advocating the hybrid Cavalryman, the latter the separation into charging Cavalry and Mounted Rifles. ¹ On such confused, and confusing, views the next generation of Cavalrymen was raised.

The theorists of the *arme blanche* were not even of great interest to each other. Chesney thought Smith's book widely read,² but Denison had not read it, and a year after publication his own first book was un-reviewed.³ Denison himself thought the only works of value on Cavalry in English to be Captain Nolan's work, from before the Crimean War, and an even earlier paraphrase of Count von Bismarck, a Prussian Cavalry officer of the 1820s.⁴ British theorists were undoubtedly heavily influenced by first French and then German writers on the *arme blanche*, as representing allegedly the best military system in Europe, although both countries' writers laid far more stress on the *arme blanche* than the British Cavalry re-

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³. 'Characteristics and Organisation of Modern Cavalry', *USM* 1869, pt III, p 337

⁴. Denison, *Modern Cavalry*, p xv
formers. But such influence seldom extended to pure emulation. It was common practice for subalterns, unable to get their own ideas into print, to insert them as footnotes or asides to a translation or review of a foreign military author, without necessarily sharing his views.

In contrast, after the initial great enquiry, the theorists of the 1870s lost interest in America as a source of ideas on Cavalry. This was, however, at least reciprocated. Federal Colonel Brackett wrote in his own book on the war, intended in part for European readers:

The English, as a general thing, are most wretched riders, and it is no wonder that they are almost universally whipped whenever they go into battle...Poor Nolan himself lost his life while charging at Balaklava, where the English horse was entirely cut to pieces by the Russians.

The semi-official account of the Russo-Turkish War of

1. The most extreme statement of the traditional view of the arme blanche can be found in Ardant du Picq, Battle Studies, p 179. 'Cavalry always has the same doctrine: Charge!' However, when the United Service Magazine reviewed in 1877 a new book by Colonel Bonie, which suggested that Cavalry must be equally proficient on foot as mounted, the reviewer drew on prevailing doctrine in France to condemn it. See Knollys, 'The Fighting of Cavalry on Foot', USM 1877, pt III, pp 403-10


3. Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry, p 164. See also Chevenix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 166; 'History of the American Civil War', USM 1871, pt III, pp 22-8
1877-8 by a Lieutenant in the American Army commented on Cavalry:

The employment of large bodies of cavalry on the field of battle belongs to the order of 'shock tactics' whose day is wholly past. There has been but one instance of it in the last twenty years, viz. at the battle of Gravelotte [Mars-la-Tour] where, under very peculiar circumstances, the Prussians sacrificed a division [sic] of cavalry in order to obtain a result which could be gained in no other way, the infantry not yet having arrived on the field. The true use of cavalry in modern warfare was developed in our civil war, viz. in scouting and reconnaissance, in independent raids against lines of communication and supply, in following up a retreat, and in doing its fighting always on foot. Since 1865 there has been nothing new on the subject.1

Compared to this mixture of error and pomposity the honest self-criticism of the French and Germans had much to attract British writers.

The theories voiced in the 1860s and 1870s bore very little relation to British foreign policy or strategic needs and expectations. It was not especially intended they should. Havelock wanted his 'dragoons' for the defence of India, not European war.2 Denison wrote his first book thinking of the defence of Canada against the Americans,3 and his second as a winning entry in a competition held by the Czar of Russia.4 Unfortunately, the Russo-Turkish War, the nearest thing to a fair trial

1. Greene, The Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey 1877-8, p 453
3. Denison, Modern Cavalry, pp xviii-xx
4. Denison, A History of Cavalry, author's dedication to the Czar
Denison's Mounted Rifle theories ever got, produced little action by horsemen, and most British writers thought the Russians, like the Americans, unadventurous Cavalrymen.¹

At the same time the blithe assumption that a new force of Mounted Rifles could be created in the Army bore no resemblance to a reality of Cavalry regiments that were in themselves badly understrength. In 1871 about 13,000 soldiers, or one in every eleven in the Army, were Cavalrymen,² whereas a field army was, by the theories of the day, required to be at least one-sixth Cavalry.³ There were no Cavalry reserves, no remount depot, barely one trained troop horse for every two men, and a total Army reserve of fewer than 15,000 horses for all purposes, while the horse population of the country was declining at more than 7,000 a year.⁴ In practice few regiments could field more than three hundred men and horses, and officers said openly the Cavalry was unfit for war.⁵ It was asking much of these weak regiments to dismount a third or more of their men for

¹. Knollys, 'What We Have Learned from the War', USM 1878, pt I, p 142. See also Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 66 and Greene, The Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey, 1877-8, p 183
². See Tables, Part One, Tables 1 and 2
⁴. See Tables, Part One, Table 3, also 'Horses and Horsemen for the British Army', USM 1872, pt I, p 370, and 'The Horse Supply', USM 1873, pt III, p 88
⁵. Baker, 'Organisation and Employment of Cavalry', JRUSI vol 17, pp 375-97; 'Colonel Baker on Cavalry Organisation', USM 1873, pt II, p 76; Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, p 252; Thomson, in introduction to Bonie, The French Cavalry in 1870, With its Tactical Results, p v
fire support for a charge. ¹ Many theorists argued that this support should come instead from close-supporting Horse Artillery, or machine-guns. ² With their own expensive regiments (costing about £25,000 a year each) so ludicrously weak Cavalrymen looked with incredulity at the suggestion of a new mounted force. 'Every sixpence which the country will consent to spend on our cavalry', declared one angry Major in 1876, 'should be devoted to increasing the strength of our skeleton regiments.'³ This weakness made a mockery of any discussion on tactics. In 1876 when an eight Army Corps organisation was proposed, one writer observed:

There being only 21 regiments of cavalry at home, while 24 are required for the eight brigades of the active army, besides one retained for special duties in London and three attached to Infantry divisions in Ireland... the cavalry of the 6th and 8th Corps is composed entirely of yeomanry.⁴

The Yeomanry, or volunteer Cavalry, were even weaker than the Line Regiments.

In 1871 there were 15,773 Yeomen on the muster rolls, a number which dropped by more than a thousand

¹. Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, p143
². Ibid, pp 107-11; Smith, Drill and Manoeuvres of Cavalry, p 250; 'Combined Action of Horse Artillery and Cavalry', USM 1863, pt I, pp 354-60; 'Some Remarks on Cavalry Skirmishing and How that Arm Acts When Attached to Artillery', USM 1866, pt I, pp 431-6
³. Russel, 'Cavalry', JRUSI vol 20, p 189. See also Steinmetz, 'The Past and Future of Cavalry', USM 1865, pt II, p 160
⁴. 'The First Steps in Army Reform', Blackwoods, vol 119, p 105
over the decade. In 1878, when a check of those reporting to muster was made, only 10,508 actually showed up. Their training period was just eight days a year, and in 1860, 1861, and again in 1880 they were not mustered as an economy measure. The thirty-nine regiments, based on a county structure, had nine different types of organisation, and a minimum strength of two hundred men to a regiment was not fixed (even in theory) until 1875. Their theoretical role, in addition to acting as an internal police force (which was increasingly unnecessary) and as a 'constitutional force' in opposition to the Army, (which was anachronistic) was to assist defence against invasion; but they were not obliged to serve outside their own regional areas. In 1861 a suggestion that they might be replaced by mounted units of Rifle Volunteers prompted the United Service Magazine to point out that there were only 500 such mounted Volunteers in the country, while the founder of the Volunteers remained opposed to their being used

1. See Tables, Part One, Table 8
2. See Tables, Part One, Table 9
3. 'C.G.E.', 'Yeomanry Cavalry', p 23
4. 'Yeomanry Cavalry', USM 1860, pt II, p 26; see also Tables, Part One, Table 9
5. Goodenough and Dalton, The Army Book for the British Empire, p 375
8. 'Yeomanry Cavalry', USM 1860, pt II, p 376
mounted, fearing they would (as the 'historians' predicted) turn themselves into Cavalry. 1 This process was already visible in one unit of Mounted Rifle Volunteers in 1873. 2 The Yeomanry were therefore the obvious candidates for conversion from the charge (which they spent insufficient time training to learn properly) to the role of Mounted Rifles, and this was suggested in a number of pamphlets and articles. In 1871 Cambridge himself mentioned the idea to the Secretary of State for War, but took no positive action to achieve it. 3

The largest Cavalry formation recognised by British regulations was a brigade, and even these were not created permanently until 1871-2. 4 There were few chances to practice the tactical evolutions with which the arme blanche controversy was chiefly concerned. 5 Both Aldershot and Cannock Chase were too small for real Cavalry manoeuvres, and Major Percy Barrow of the 19th Hussars remembered the Curragh Camp in Ireland as the first place he

1. Acklom, 'Mounted Riflemen', USM 1873, p 376
2. Wood, 'Mounted Riflemen', Lecture to RUSI on 4 March 1873, p 22
5. 'Thoughts on Cavalry', USM 1870, pt III, p 37
had seen a brigade with space to deploy. Nevertheless, Blackwood's Magazine congratulated the Cavalry on the 1872 manoeuvres, and in 1875 singled out the Duke of Cambridge for his encouragement of scouting rather than charges with the arme blanche. Percy Barrow's diary told a different story:

Consulted with Colonel Baillie and Pearce... as to a Cavalry fight for tea next day - the ground is so bad all round here, and the Duke was so keen upon a Cavalry fight that it was necessary to cook up something for his edification.

The 'Cavalry fight' meant a massed charge, brigade against brigade, pulling up just short of actual contact. In training it had many of the characteristics of a ritual, and other ranks called manoeuvres 'ladies' days' for this reason. It was in addition a powerful emotional experience. One Cavalryman felt there was 'nothing on earth to equal it', and even the future Earl of Dundonald, a firm opponent of the arme blanche, agreed with this. The tight, knee-to-knee manoeuvre was also the supreme visual

1. Bond, 'Doctrine and Training in the British Cavalry 1870-1914' in Howard, ed., The Theory and Practice of War, p 102; Barrow, Diary entry for July 1877 (a summary without precise dates) 6009-14 Barrow
2. 'Our Autumn Manoeuvres', Blackwoods, vol 112, p 636
3. 'Lessons from the Recent Summer Manoeuvres', Blackwoods, vol 118, p 371
4. Barrow, Diary entry for 14 July 1875, 6009-14 Barrow
5. Compton, A King's Hussar, p 56
6. Younghusband, A Soldier's Memories in Peace and War, p 64
7. Dundonald, My Army Life, p 11
expression of regimental solidarity and professional competence, where the slightest error in positioning or pace showed as a glaring mistake. Its importance to regimental morale can hardly be exaggerated.

Regiments were of eight troops, each commanded by a Captain or Major. An attempt to combine these into four squadrons in 1869-70, as in other countries, failed through the British error in not adopting the underlying principle of making squadrons virtually autonomous within the regiment, and by 1873 the system was defunct.¹

The individual level of men and officers in these troops was not outstanding. A private in the 14th Hussars in 1863 was surprised to find his Troop Serjeant-Major and fourteen members of his hut were all illiterate.² William Robertson, the future Field Marshal, found barrack room life at the time equally primitive.³ Lord Dundonald and Evelyn Wood, both Cavalry subalterns, found officers ignorant and over-obsessed with ritual.⁴ It was to such regiments that

1. Thomson, introduction to Bonie, *The French Cavalry in 1870 With its Tactical Results*, p v; Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, pp 206, 251
2. Compton, *A King's Hussar*, pp 30-33
3. Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshal*, pp 3-5
4. Wood, *From Midshipman to Field Marshal*, vol I, pp 112-3; Dundonald, *My Army Life*, pp 5-7. With the exception of Troop Serjeant-Major Mole, the subject of Compton's book, these men all became highly successful senior officers, and were inclined to contrast the shortcomings of their predecessors with their own achievements. Similarly, the generation of senior officers who fought the Second World War were inclined to disparage their predecessors, who included Wood, Dundonald and Robertson. Their accounts therefore merit caution, but are generally reliable.
the *arme blanche* controversy came, and the reformers within the Cavalry were conscious that far more than its tactics needed reform; generally there is justice in Henderson's view that for the Cavalry the years between 1854 and 1878 represent 'the climax of incompetency'. The controversy was to have a major part to play in changing this.

Before tactics might be improved, there was one key area of reform on which all else depended. The primary cause of sore backs and horse exhaustion, and therefore the main obstacle to solving the *arme blanche* problem, was the crushing weight carried by Cavalry horses. Reasons of economy in the Army had meant the development of Light Cavalry heavy enough to charge, and Heavies prepared to scout. Whereas a pack horse might be expected to carry 220-300 pounds at a walk on a good road for twenty-four miles, a troop horse, of Light or Heavy Cavalry, carried over 300 pounds, and was expected to trot all day and charge when required. Most of this weight was unnecessary. Officers preferred tall men, and Dundonald recalled that until Colonel Marshall, his commanding officer in the 2nd Life Guards, lowered the maximum height, the

2. 'The Dragoon, His Horse and Their Training', USM 1864, pt III, p 331; Stovell-Jones, 'Present Condition of our Cavalry', JRUSI Vol 6, p 425; Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, p 212
3. 'Military Studies, No III, Cavalry', USM 1863, pt III, p 16
shortest man in his troop was over six feet tall. Recommended weights varied only from 151 pounds for the lightest Hussar to 160 pounds for a Dragoon. The balance in weight was made up to 300 pounds in uniform and weapons, saddle, tack, valises and extra equipment. In words that would be repeated through the century, one Cavalryman claimed that with all this weight, in war 'our present light cavalry would be rendered ineffective in a week'. But, as he also admitted, 'with every pack of hounds in England men of sixteen stones are to be seen superbly mounted on horses fully capable of carrying them, even through the exertions of a trying run'. If Cavalry were specially equipped for the charge, with heavy breeds of horse, there would be no problem, providing they did not scout. Conversely, in scouting every extra ounce was a handicap, and if lance, sword, helmet, cuirass or pistol could be proved useless, there was a good case for giving it up at once.

The same was equally true of the carbine, and more than once believers in the arme blanche suggested its abolition. There was a 'soldier's story', at least

2. Wolseley, *Soldier's Pocket Book*, p 14
3. ibid; Baker, *The British Cavalry*, p 94
5. See for example: *The British Cavalry and its Organisation*, USM 1862, pt I, pp 182, 534; Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, p 116, which suggested a few specialist riflemen in each squadron, and no firearm for the remainder; and *The Efficiency of British Cavalry*, USM 1868, pt III, p 95
symbolically true, that a Lancer regiment in the 1870s, receiving its first carbines, dumped them on the regimental midden.¹ Most other ranks, according to Robertson, found musketry 'a degradation and a bore',² and according to one Colonel most officers felt it 'a very great nuisance'.³ In 1879 the 13th Hussars had only 45 qualified marksmen out of 351 rank and file.⁴ A common view of musketry was expressed by one Cavalryman:

All officers who have served with cavalry in the field, will allow that the men are far too fond of applying to their carbine buckets and holsters, even when they know, or ought to do, that the arms they contain will scarcely hit a haystack, and there is surely some reason to dread that this tendency of the Dragoon to place too much reliance on his firearm will be increased by supplying him with a superior weapon of that kind.⁵

Less sympathetically, the Assistant Superintendent at Woolwich told the RUSI that most Cavalry officers believed 'the efficiency of the hussar or the dragoon would be best assured, by providing him with a sharp sword and a not too efficient fire-arm'.⁶ Two British Cavalry regiments were

1. This is sometimes stated as a proven fact. However, the earliest published reference to it is in 1912, in Rimington, Our Cavalry, p 17, who says it was generally known when he joined the Army. He was commissioned in the 6th Dragoons in 1881.
2. Robertson, From Private to Field Marshal, p 15
4. 'Results of Annual Course of Musketry, 1879-80', 7612-20 Dukes
5. Stovell-Jones, 'Present Condition of Our Cavalry', JRUSI vol 6, p 426; see also Notes...by a Cavalry Officer, pp 158-9
6. Majendie, 'Military Breech-loading Small Arms', JRUSI vol 12, p 192
in 1857 given the Sharps breechloading carbine, and in the
1860s there was a general issue of the Westley-Richards,
which fired six or seven rounds a minute with a theoretical
range of 800 yards, but a mean deviation of fifty-four
inches at 500 yards.¹ This was replaced in the next decade
by the Martini-Henry, a shorter version of the Infantry
rifle, which was slightly more accurate. But the 1869
Cavalry Drill Book envisaged dismounted action only when
moving through defiles and across bridges, and saw the
charge, 'made with the greatest velocity and regularity
possible', as the Cavalry's one real tactic.² Its successor
in 1876 was a considerable advance, giving official recog-
nition to dismounted action in many situations, although
it felt unable to lay down definite rules for its employ-
ment, and insisted that the charge remained the supreme
Cavalry action.³ There was no suggestion that the firearm
might dominate the arme blanche in importance, but there
was no military reason for believing that it should.

There was however a sense in which the arme
blanche, and indeed the Cavalry, were obsolete. Charging
Cavalry were the product of social and geographical con-
ditions which no longer existed in Western Europe. Its

¹ Majendie, 'Military Breech-loading Small Arms', JRUSI
vol 12, pp 199-200
² Regulations for the Instruction, Formation and Movements
of the Cavalry, 1869, especially pp 137-40, 162 (War
Office)
³ Regulations for the Instruction and Movements of Cavalry
1876, especially pp 142-7. A provisional version was
issued at Aldershot in 1874. (War Office)
countries were increasingly industrialised, and few recruits came to the Cavalry knowing how to ride, or to care for horses. The sword was no longer the weapon of the elite, 'no longer a weapon or an idea', as was written in 1881, 'we no longer fight with it, we no longer think with it, we no longer respect it.'\footnote{1} In 1874 the first patent on a barbed wire making machine was accepted; five years later 25,000 tons a year were being produced in America.\footnote{2} Used as a weapon against Cavalry, this, more than any other single factor, would end the \textit{arme blanche} charge. In 1876 the first four-stroke gas engine was patented, and ten years later the internal combustion engine.\footnote{3} This would provide an alternative to the horse, and unlike the horse it could be bullet-proofed. Europe, increasingly enclosed with canals, wire and the marks of industry, had few of the undulating plains where Cavalry could hide and charge left.\footnote{4} Not thirty miles from the fields of Waterloo, the British would next fight in Europe on the slagheaps of Mons. These factors, hard to detect or predict, scarcely impinging on military thought, were none the less crucial. From 1871 the Cavalry were living on borrowed time.

1. 'The Sword', \textit{Blackwoods}, vol 129, p 572
2. \textit{Encyclopaedia Britannica}, 1911 edition, entry under 'Barbed Wire'
4. Cipolla, \textit{The Emergence of Industrial Societies}, vol I, pp 7-75, 329-55
CHAPTER TWO

THE RINGS OF POWER

'When we see mounted infantry sent to the front and cavalry kept back, it seems time for cavalry officers to ask themselves what is the reason, and what is likely to be the result to their arm.'
- Henry Brackenbury (1884)

'Well come! is it professional to throw a regiment of cavalry on a battery of machine guns, with the dead certainty that if the guns go off not a horse or man will ever get to within fifty yards of the fire?'
- G.B. Shaw, Arms and the Man (1894)

Between 1861 and 1870 Colonel Garnet Wolseley served in Canada, briefly visiting both sides in the Eastern Theatre of the American Civil War. During the Fenian Invasion scare in Canada in 1865-6 he worked with the Governor-General's Bodyguard, the Mounted Rifle corps under George Denison, and was impressed by their patrol work. 'No similar number of regular Cavalry,' Wolseley recalled, 'could have done that duty as effectively.' In the first of the campaigns which would make his own reputation, the Red River Expedition of 1869, Wolseley himself experimented with mounting a few Infantry on horses, and was pleased with the result. He returned to Britain

1. Brackenbury in preface to Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p vi
2. Shaw, 'Arms and the Man', in Plays Pleasant, p 30
in 1871, to play an influential role in Cardwell's Army reforms, convinced of the correctness of Denison's views.

Crucial to these reforms was the abolition of the purchase of officers' commissions to open the career to a wider social group. This action did not, of course, remove from the Army officers who already held their ranks by purchase; the last claim for compensation by one such officer was well into the twentieth century. But it did remove one of the two main methods of gaining accelerated promotion; the other being the death of superiors and winning of a reputation in war. Purchase and war permitted officers who were rich (or had a patron) to reach high rank before they reached old age. The combination of purchase and war made the Duke of Wellington a Field Marshal at forty-six; Sir John Moore was only forty-eight when killed at Corunna. But even in peacetime, and despite stiff competition from Napoleonic veterans, the Earl of Lucan qualified as commander of the Cavalry Division, formed at the start of the Crimean War, aged fifty-four. Comparison with equivalent ranks in the French and German armies, very much larger than the British, is difficult. But under the stress of war in 1870 the French produced Corps commanders

2. Young, The British Army 1641-1970, p 191; Longford, Wellington, the Years of the Sword, pp 10, 144, 171, 323; Woodall, 'The Abolition of Purchase in the British Army', pp 676-84
averaging fifty-nine and the Prussians sixty-one years old, both through a system of seniority tempered by selection.¹

In the 1890s in the German Army the age of Corps commanders stretched to sixty-seven on average, with Division commanders averaging fifty-nine.² In the Indian Army, which practised strict seniority, Major-Generals under sixty-nine were rare. However, although a committee pointed out in 1876 that if nothing but strict seniority in future guided promotion in the British Army, the average age of Major-Generals would be sixty-four,³ still in 1895 Major-Generals averaged only fifty-seven years old, and Lieutenant-Generals, the approximate equivalent of Corps commanders (in fact including a number of staff officers) sixty years old.⁴ This was achieved by the last effects of purchase working through the system, and by an entirely unofficial means of accelerating promotion.

Promotion examinations, introduced for regimental officers in 1870, were dismissed by Wolseley as 'a farce'.⁵ Taking their lead from the Duke of Cambridge, a firm believer in seniority alone, most officers felt paper examination unnecessary or unfair and selection another

¹. Holmes, 'The Road to Sedan', p 98
². Swaine to Wolseley, n.d., 1890? Autograph Swaine 6, Wolseley
³. Quoted in Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, vol II, p 93
⁴. See Tables, Part Two, Tables 1-3
⁵. SSL 10/1 p xxxvi manuscript, Wolseley
word for jobbery.¹ Not until the end of the century, in Britain or India, was the Staff College course an aid to promotion;² while a Promotion Board, intended to select two-thirds of the Major-Generals, proved ineffective against Cambridge's opposition.³ Not until 1895, when Wolseley succeeded Cambridge as Commander-in-Chief, were confidential reports instituted on officers.⁴ Theoretically, seniority alone determined promotion.

Purchase had meant wealth and exclusivity, and it was the most exclusive, or 'smart', units of the Army which felt its abolition most; it had never existed in the Artillery or Engineers. 'Smartness' in this sense implied nothing about efficiency for war, but was closely connected with excellence at drill or display, particularly the Cavalry's peacetime demonstration of the charge. While in 1870 two-thirds of Infantry commissions were held by purchase, in the Cavalry it was ninety per cent, and in the Guards and Household virtually all commissions were

¹. Knollys, 'Promotion in the Army by Selection', USM 1881, pt I, p 364; Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, vol II, pp 64, 93; Charteris, Douglas Haig, p 21
². For evidence of this, see for example: The British Army, p 97; Smith-Do~en, Memories of Forty-Eight Ye a rs Service, p 72; Barrow, The Fire of Life, p 41; Young-husband, A Soldier's Memories in Peace and War, p 115; and for recent commentary on it see: Harries-Jenkins, The Army in Victorian Society, especially p 159, Bond, The Victorian Army and the Staff College, pp 144-8
³. Wolseley to George Wolseley, 15 June 1893, uncatalogued, Wolseley; Wolseley to Campbell-Bannerman, 9 February 1894, 41233 f 182 Campbell-Bannerman; The British Army, p 199
⁴. SSL 9/2 p ccxc, manuscript, Wolseley; Wolseley to Roberts, 4 September 1896, 7101-23-89, Roberts
held in this way.¹ The Cavalry sought to keep their ex-
clusivity by duplicating the effects of purchase. Where-
as in 1870 Cavalry subalterns needed a private income of 
around £300 a year, the cost of their social life, uniform 
and other aspects of display jumped so that well before 
the century's end £500 or £600 was needed.² The Household 
Brigade and smarter regiments required £1,000 a year. (For 
comparison, the Commander-in-Chief's salary was £4,000 a 
year.)³ Evelyn Wood, a Lieutenant-General at the time, 
turned down the honorary Colonelcy of the Royal Horse 
Guards in the 1890s because he could not afford the dress 
uniform.⁴ Unofficial purchase reappeared in such regi-
ments before the end of the century, whereby an officer 
was asked his 'terms', a cash transaction, to exchange into 

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1. Glover, 'The Purchase of Commissions', p 235; Cairnes, 
Social Life in the British Army, pp 35-46. 'Smartness' 
is not something that is easily quantified, but, in 
rough descending order, the smartest regiments in the 
Cavalry, apart from the Household Brigade, were the 
10th Hussars, 1st (Kings) Dragoon Guards, 9th Lancers, 
and 13th Hussars. Smart regiments in the Infantry were 
headed by the Guards and the two Rifle Regiments. 

2. 'Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider the Edu-
cation and Training of Officers in the Army' (Akers-
Douglas Committee) 1902 (War Office) Appendix 42, p 134, 
and Evidence of Lawley, q.8166; Cairnes, Social Life in 
the British Army, p xi; Robertson, From Private to Field 
Marshal, especially p 29; Hillcourt, Baden-Powell: The 
Two Lives of a Hero, p 40 

3. Ponsonby to Wolseley, 3 March 1884, Autograph Ponsonby 
6, Wolseley; Cairnes, Social Life in the British Army, 
p 35; Arthur, The Letters of Lord and Lady Wolseley, 
p 344 

4. French, A Life of Field Marshal Sir John French, First 
Earl of Ypres, hereafter A Life of...John French, First 
Earl of Ypres, p 40
another regiment. 1

In the Infantry, or in India where a private income of £100 sufficed, and it was even, just, possible to live on a Cavalry subaltern's pay, abolition of purchase was a genuine reform. 2 In the Cavalry at home it produced a quite different result: officers became volunteers, holding their positions by choice, paying for the privilege with no financial stake in the Army, and often leaving to take up the business interests which supplied their fortune. 3 Turnover of officers, and so promotion prospects for competent juniors, therefore appeared better than in any other branch. Consequently, while the standards of the Cavalry officers as a whole declined, its

1. Churchill, My Early Life, p 123 suggests that this practice was common enough for his own regiment, 4th Hussars, to be angry when it was flouted. Henry Wilson, serving in a Rifle regiment, was pleased and surprised to be allowed to exchange without terms in 1894. See Wilson Diary entry 23 August 1894, Wilson.

2. Robertson, From Private to Field Marshal, p 29; Hillcourt, Baden-Powell: The Two Lives of a Hero, p 40; Younghusband, Forty Years a Soldier, p 29; for an example of a poor Infantryman, see Harrington, Plumer of Messines, p 7

3. Horrocks in preface to ffrench Blake, The 17th/21st Lancers, p 8. The 17th, and later 17th/21st, Lancers have produced five Field Marshals since the early nineteenth century, which they claim as a record. See also: Gough, Soldiering On, pp 31-2 for expenses in a moderate regiment, the 16th Lancers. The two most significant examples of Cavalry officers leaving the Army for financial reasons are Colonel Charles à Court and Colonel Herbert Lawrence, both of whom left shortly after the Second Boer War on coming into an inheritance. A Court's inheritance required a name change to Charles à Court Repington, and he became the influential military correspondent of The Times. Lawrence rejoined the Army in 1914 and rose by 1918 to be a Lieutenant-General and Haig's Chief of Staff.
posts limited to men of considerable wealth who saw the Army as a temporary diversion, a group of quite outstanding and highly professional officers emerged from the Cavalry in the early years of the next century.¹

Immediately after the abolition of purchase, accelerated promotion could be obtained only through war. In the absence of a major conflict, service in colonial campaigns became of paramount importance to ambitious officers, dependent on the patronage of the General entrusted with each campaign. The most overt and successful example of this was Garnet Wolseley's 'Ring' which dominated British colonial wars in the 1870s and 1880s.² Its apparent membership was large, if completely unofficial, but mostly temporary, since as its reputation grew, membership of 'The Mutual Admiration Society' as it was dubbed³ could be a mixed blessing. As Wolseley himself acknowledged in 1884, its closest ties were of mutual self-interest.⁴ Wolseley became a Major-General at forty, and his most successful subordinate, Evelyn Wood, reached the

¹. See Western, Reminiscences of an Indian Cavalry Officer, p 137 and Chapters Three and Six below.
². For the activities and careers of Wolseley and his Ring, see in particular: Wolseley, The Story of a Soldier's Life (up to 1873); Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal; Lehmann, All Sir Garnet
³. This phrase appeared in The Times, the author apparently being William Howard Russell. See Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 20 January 1880, WP 9/1 Wolseley
⁴. Arthur, The Letters of Lord and Lady Wolseley, p 127
same rank at forty-three. Redvers Buller, another Ring member, succeeded Wolseley as Adjutant-General in 1890, aged fifty-one. Others did not survive this route to promotion. Herbert Stewart died of wounds in 1885, just before Wolseley could push his promotion from Captain to Major-General in six years.¹ George Pomeroy-Colley, having just achieved this rank, was killed at Majuba in 1881,² the first British General killed in action since Waterloo. The Ring was primarily a fighting organisation — Wood gave up the chance to command the Staff College in order to see more action³ — and its approach to war a mixture of expedients and efficiency. The exception in its membership was Henry Brackenbury, a staff officer rather than a field commander, who shortly after receiving promotion to Major-General in 1885 (aged forty-eight) largely through Wolseley's efforts, transferred to the Staff of the Indian Army.⁴

Colonial campaigns, though varied, possessed common features which made their validity as precedents for European war doubtful. The main problems were the supply and movement of a usually small European-style army in non-European climate and terrain. The enemy was invariably inferior in organisation and discipline, and even if

1. Arthur, The Letters of Lord and Lady Wolseley, p 159
2. Lehmann, The First Boer War, p 262
3. Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, vol I, p 294
4. Brackenbury to Wolseley, 13 August 1885, Autograph Brackenbury, Wolseley
equipped with the latest firearms lacked fire-control and an understanding of trajectory. Arab tribesmen in particular were notoriously bad shots.\(^1\) As the Official Handbook said, 'tactics favour the regular army while strategy favours the enemy - therefore the object is to fight, not to manoeuvre'.\(^2\) Tactics for Infantry were the advance in widely separated columns and the battle in shoulder-to-shoulder squares of battalions; and for Cavalry the close-order charge against irregular footsoldiers whose formations possessed intrinsically the unsteadiness required for a charge to succeed.

Although not in South Africa when the Zulu war began in January 1879, Wolseley had served there for three previous years, and Wood and Buller were still in Natal.\(^3\) According to Wolseley, there was insufficient grass in Zululand between August and May to feed the 7,600 horses and oxen which Lord Chelmsford's five columns, totalling 16,000 men, required for its invasion.\(^4\) Although the basis of Chelmsford's force was eight regular Infantry battalions, ...

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1. Younghusband, A Soldier's Memories in Peace and War, p 100; Smith-Dorien, Memories of Forty-Eight Years Service, pp 40-2. For evidence of the Zulu also as poor shots see Wolseley to Stanley, 18 July 1879, SA2 pp 26-35 Wolseley.
2. Callwell, Small Wars, Their Principle and Practice, especially p 72
3. For the general course of this war see Morris, The Washing of the Spears, from which the figures for Chelmsford's force, other than those which appear in Wolseley, are taken.
4. Wolseley to Stanley, 16 February 1879, CYP 1 pp 72-7 Wolseley; Morris, The Washing of the Spears, p 295
he had no regular Cavalry; Wolseley recommended that lancers especially would be useless in the war, and local mounted riflemen would suffice.¹ There were 1,000 of these men in Chelmsford's force. Those with previous service in the numerous bush wars, colonists and natural riders, were of very high quality, particularly Buller's Frontier Light Horse, riding at just 13½ stones.² A hundred were genuine Mounted Infantry, British regulars with horses, who Wood found alarmingly poor riders and horsemasters.³ Chelmsford's force was actually short of good scouts, and the absence of any scouting horsemen at all from the main column for several hours resulted in the just twenty minutes' warning of a Zulu attack which led to the disaster at Isandhlwana.⁴

After Isandhlwana, Wolseley was sent to take command, and Chelmsford received reinforcements, including a regular Cavalry brigade of two regiments, from Britain. Their commander, however, was put on Line of Communications duties and the regiments broken up to provide scouting

1. Wolseley to Stanley, 16 February 1879, CYP 1 pp 72-7 Wolseley. Minute No 52, NAT 1 pp 96-9 Wolseley
3. Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, vol I, p 318; vol II, p 24
4. Morris, The Washing of the Spears, pp 270-1, suggests seven hours from 3 a.m. to 10 a.m. It is not suggested that surprise was the sole cause of this disaster, but it was certainly a contributing factor. If Chelmsford had known the precise location of the main Zulu force on the evening before Isandhlwana, he would not have split his force.
patrols. Only one squadron, of the 17th Lancers, was present at the decisive battle of Ulundi, where it delivered a final charge against already shaken Zulu who did not stand. Thereafter the war's main object became the capture of the Zulu King Cetshwayo and the rounding up of small parties in the bush. To deal with these frightened men even the mounted riflemen took to carrying lances.

But the regular Cavalry horses, arriving unfit from a long sea voyage, had been given no time to acclimatise, but put to work carrying their usual twenty stones, while Chelmsford, unable to solve his supply problems, had in late May, two months after their arrival, cut their corn ration from ten to eight pounds, the balance to be made up by grazing. The full ration for peacetime training in Britain for these big horses was ten pounds of oats, twelve pounds of hay and eight pounds of straw, and even this was some-

1. Wolseley to Cambridge, 18 July 1879, SA2 pp 52-61, Wolseley. The brigade commander was Major-General Frederick Marshal, late reforming Colonel of the 2nd Life Guards, who had received praise for his use of scouting in manoeuvres. See above, Chapter One, pp 59, 61.

2. Morris, The Washing of the Spears, pp 270-1, the Zulu poor shooting and charging tactics made it possible for the Cavalry, waiting inside the British square, to see clearly when they became unsteady.

3. Callwell, Small Wars, Their Principles and Practice, p 223

4. Morris, The Washing of the Spears, pp 500-01, suggests that the Cavalry took 'several weeks' to recover from the voyage. However, he also states (p 497) that the Cavalry arrived shortly before the 9th of April, and first moved off up country on 17th April. This is borne out generally by the account of the war in Marter, who is weak on dates.

5. "A"833, 'Zulu War 1879 Veterinary Department General Report' (War Office)
times not enough. Wolseley, blaming Chelmsford, argued
that Indian corn, or 'mealies', could be obtained locally,
and there was enough grass at Ulundi (in April) to feed the
whole brigade. Even if this had been true, British horses,
normally manger fed, would not eat mealies, and grazing in
the presence of the enemy was dangerous. Many horses
died, and the rest were left so weak from starvation and
overwork that after three months only one regiment could be
horsed. Wolseley chose the smarter and heavier of the two
from an astonishing motive:

The 17th [Lancers] was the regiment I should
have preferred making use of; but as they had
had their turn, and as the poor 'Heavies' were
down on their luck, having a useless Colonel,
and never having seen a shot fired, I thought
it would be more in accordance with your Royal
Highness' wishes to let the King's Dragoon
Guards have their innings.

Such was Wolseley's opinion of the value of Cavalry.

Major Marter of the King's Dragoon Guards, seeing numerous
Mounted Infantry and mounted riflemen's patrols sent out

1. The British Army, p 237; Verner, The Military Life of
food seems excessive compared to that given to an
average riding horse in present times, but reflects both
the amount of work the horse was required to do, and the
weight it had to carry.

2. Wolseley to Cambridge, 28 September 1879, SA2 122-35
Wolseley. This of course contradicts his earlier state-
ment that there was insufficient grass in Zululand in
summer (August-May). Also, if any small area is inten-
sively grazed by a large number of animals, the grass
will not grow again for some time.

3. "A"833, 'Zulu War 1879 Veterinary Department General
Report' (War Office)

4. Wolseley to Cambridge, 28 September 1879, SA2 122-35
Wolseley
under members of Wolseley's staff while his own men were held in camp, believed:

The capture of the King being a 'plum' yet to be gained in the war, such credit as would be gained thereby was to be reserved, not for regimental soldiers who had borne the toil and hardships of the campaign with little chance of distinction, but for some member of that illustrious body the 'Mutual Admiration Society', recently arrived from England.¹

This, although unjust to Wolseley, who was impressed by Marter and recommended him for promotion,² shows the Cavalry's view of the threat posed by the Ring's use of Mounted Infantry. In the event, one of Marter's patrols caught Cetshwayo.

Wolseley stayed in South Africa until 1880, encountering the mysterious 'horse sickness', a lung disease endemic to the Transvaal, which killed horses in hours.³ Although foreseeing the likelihood of war with the Boers, he recommended that the Dragoon Guards be sent home in October 1880,⁴ and when the First Boer War did break out two months later, again neither he nor any British Cavalry regiment was in the country. The Boers, farmers and game-hunters, even more than the Natal colonists natural mounted

¹. Marter manuscript autobiography written in the third person, no pagination, 6408-87-12 Marter
². Wolseley to Cambridge, 29 January 1880, SA2 pp 229-32 Wolseley
³. War Office Report 116/Cape/35, 'Report on African Horse Sickness', Nunn, 27 October 1888 (British Library); Wolseley to Richard Wolseley, 14 October 1879, 163/v/20 Wolseley
⁴. Wolseley to Hicks Beach, 19 December 1879, SA1 pp 225-35 Wolseley
riflemen, developed their battle tactics from fighting Zulu and other tribes of charging foot warriors; defending a strong position by rifle fire, and prepared to ride away if defeat threatened. Wolseley, in an unconscious adoption of the view that morale derived from the *arme blanche*, attributed these tactics to lack of 'pluck'.¹ Pomeroy-Colley, left in command, believed that an *arme blanche* charge threatening their flank would cause the Boers to rout from their defences. There was some basis for this belief, later endorsed by the Official Handbook on colonial war.² One Boer, watching British Cavalry soon after the war, was heard to say that 'if you had only had four hundred men like that, with swords, who would gallop at us without caring if a few were shot, we should never have risen'.³ That was one opinion; Natal colonists felt instead that Mounted Rifles were of more value against the Boers.⁴ Regardless, having no Cavalry, Pomeroy-Colley improvised a charging force from retired Dragoons, the Army Service Corps and Infantry volunteers, all given horses. At the tiny battle of Laing's Nek seventy of these charged, to be narrowly repulsed with seventeen men and thirty-two horses killed and wounded.⁵ Even this

1. SSL 8/2 p colxii manuscript, Wolseley
2. Callwell, *Small Wars, Their Principles and Practice*, p 217
3. 'The Boers at Home: Jottings from the Transvaal', *Blackwoods*, vol 130, p 768
4. 'Bonne Esperance', 'Is Cavalry the Arm for South Africa ?', USM 1886, pt II, pp 311-17
improbable force had come close to success, and Pomeroy-Colley was convinced regular Cavalry would have won the battle. Again reinforcements were sent, including three Cavalry regiments. But in order to bring these up to war strength, nearly 550 men and horses each, other regiments had to be depleted. The Inniskilling Dragoons, for example, had to take 164 horses from four different regiments. Again there was, in the emergency, no attempt to acclimatise, and the horses refused the local food; Evelyn Wood, leading the reinforcements, was unimpressed by the Cavalry's scouting and horsemastership, but did recommend three weeks' acclimatisation for horses in South Africa in future. He took fifty Cavalry to Pomeroy-Colley, and was leading a hundred more when, in another skirmish, on the rocky Majuba hill, the Boers completely outshot their opponents. Pomeroy-Colley was killed, and his small Army routed. The Cavalry were never employed. Captain Ian Hamilton survived with a smashed hand and a conviction that in future individual shooting would dominate war.

After Majuba, Wood was ordered to make peace,

2. Jackson, The Inniskilling Dragoons, p 189
3. Compton, A King's Hussar, pp 238-49, 255
4. Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, vol II, pp 111, 114
5. ibid, vol II, p 135
and the Cavalry fraternised with the Boers while waiting. The 14th Hussars, who organised a shooting match at 300 and 500 yards, were surprised to find their men consistently outshot the Boers. Four years previously the regiment had gained a new Colonel, a believer in dismounted action. The complete transformation this could effect in a regiment was remarkable:

We wore [khaki] serge coats and khaki pants, with Indian puttees, or long strips of cloth bound round and round the leg, in lieu of jackboots: they were far more comfortable and supporting. Our helmets and belts were rubbed over with red clay to harmonise with the colour of the ground, and our steel was all dulled. The squadrons of the Inniskillings and the 15th Hussars adopted quite a different style; they were as spick and span as could be, with helmets and gloves white and clean, and steel and brass work all sparkling in the sun. It was a queer contrast altogether, and represented two widely different schools of military opinion.

So much depended on the individual regimental commander, since there was no general doctrine of dismounted fighting. At about the same date, one Colonel was telling his men not to march on foot in step, since this Infantry habit destroyed their value as Cavalry. Although khaki became general for war in 1885, some regiments would not reach the standard of the 14th Hussars for thirty years.

Meanwhile in India, as a consequence of the Second Afghan War of 1878-80, a group of officers emerged

1. Compton, A King's Hussar, p 270
2. ibid, p 285
3. Western, Reminiscences of an Indian Cavalry Officer, p 247
headed by Sir Frederick Roberts, and known, inevitably, as the 'Roberts Ring'. It was, however, an altogether different association to Wolseley's, who met most of his leading Ring members while still in his thirties, and was their senior by less than five years. Roberts rose to fame at forty-seven, and the men of his Ring were Captains and Lieutenants in their twenties. Nicholson (a future Chief of Imperial General Staff) Pretyman and Pole-Carew all served as aides-de-camp to Roberts in Afghanistan. Another leading Ring member, Ian Hamilton, was adopted by Roberts through a chance meeting in the war. Another, Henry Rawlinson, was the son of an old friend and was given an aide-de-camp's job at his entreaty in 1885; while Rawlinson's close friend Henry Wilson, who never met Roberts in India, was introduced at a cricket match in Britain in 1893. Roberts' relation with these men was paternal, including in Rawlinson's case, as he himself admitted, the tolerance of inferior work.

1. For the Roberts Ring and its activities see: Roberts, Forty-One Years in India; James, Lord Roberts; Hamilton, Listening for the Drums and The Happy Warrior. See also The Second Afghan War, Abridged Official Account
2. Hamilton, The Happy Warrior, pp 38, 46
3. Rawlinson (snr) to Roberts, 27 March 1885, 7101-23-60 Roberts; Morris, The Life of General Lord Rawlinson of Trent, pp 11-12
4. Wilson Diary, 26 May 1893, Wilson
5. Rawlinson to Roberts, 9 January 1890, 7101-23-61 Roberts. Rawlinson was applying to Roberts for a letter to show the Staff College saying he would make a good staff officer, and apologising for his poor staff work. This letter was apparently provided, since Rawlinson entered the Staff College in 1891.
supporters, never his rivals.

Wolseley, like most British officers, claimed to be above politics, and failed to recognise the profound conservatism this view reflected. 'You and I as soldiers', he told a Ring member in 1886, 'have nothing to do with political questions.' He saw changes of government largely in terms of their effect on his own career. Roberts was considerably more politically sophisticated; the problems of India resembled those of the European land powers, with a threatened main frontier and a large permanent Army, and his concerns were chiefly with grand strategy and organisation, into which politics automatically entered. Although no less brave than Wolseley's men, the Roberts Ring was basically a Staff; one member, William Robertson, rose to prominence in the Simla Intelligence Branch and saw virtually no regimental service after being commissioned. Hamilton in particular claimed 'all the difference between amateur and professional separates England and India' in

1. Wolseley to Butler, 13 May 1886, W/PLB/1/69, Wolseley; Arthur, The Letters of Lord and Lady Wolseley, pp 47, 219
2. Arthur, The Letters of Lord and Lady Wolseley, p 60
3. For Roberts' involvement with politics, particularly the 'Forward Policy' in India, see: Roberts, Forty-One Years in India. See also Robertson, From Private to Field Marshal. Robertson was exceptional in that, although aided by Roberts, he never adopted the same filial attitude as the other Ring members, and when working at Simla once complained that he had 'no friends, no interests and not a bob in the world', the importance of all three of which in securing promotion he recognised, Younghusband, A Soldier's Memories in Peace and War, p 237
planning for war. He also possessed his own view of future conflicts, expressed at its most visionary in 1885. Increases in rifle ranges and accuracy would make Cavalry and Artillery obsolete, and battles would consist of mass hordes of widely dispersed sharpshooters picking each other off at extreme ranges, with victory depending on individual cunning and steadiness. More prosaically, Roberts and all his Ring regarded musketry as the most important duty of the Army, and lost no chance to improve it.

Two of the Cavalry regiments which served in the Afghan War were among the smartest in the Army. The 10th Hussars, which four years previously had developed its own system of dismounted work (later generally adopted) proved very efficient. But Roberts concluded from the performance of the 9th Lancers that the lance was obsolete, and eventually ordered them to give it up and carry carbines slung on their backs. He took with him ever after a vivid picture of these men, in tight uniforms, swords hanging from waistbelts, trying to skirmish on foot in

1. Hamilton to Lady Dilke, 5 July 1887, 43908 f 139 Dilke
3. Roberts, Forty One Years in India, p 499; Hamilton, The Happy Warrior, p 51
4. Brandes, The 10th Royal Hussars, p 57. For an account of the war, see The Second Afghan War, Abridged Official Account
5. Roberts, Forty One Years in India, p 437
rocky terrain against Afghan riflemen. Indeed, as another officer observed some years later, describing a training exercise:

To see a hussar trussed up in a skin-tight tunic, white belts, white gloves, tall busby, long boots, carbine in one hand, sword in the other, one foot in a rabbit hole, the other hung up on his 'swagger appendage' [sabretache] falling face forward into a prickly furze bush, is a sight for the gods.¹

Roberts also ordered the Cavalry to carry their swords on the saddle so as not to impede dismounted action. This practice, becoming common in reformed regiments, was generally adopted in 1891.² He also formed an experimental force of Mounted Infantry.³ Baker Russell, a Wolseleyite commanding his own 13th Hussars in Afghanistan, believed Cavalry should be 'able to act on foot as well as the best Infantry'.⁴ Certainly there was considerable dismounted fighting from both British and Indian Cavalry regiments in the war, while charges, usually successful, were of squadron or regimental size.⁵ Russell felt most of the Cavalry's problems were due to an incompetent brigade commander. He was also annoyed at the high reputation won by Roberts in the war, describing the decisive battle of Khandahar to

¹. Graves, 'Cavalry Equipment, Organisation and Distribution', JRUSI Vol 34, p 704
². Roberts, Forty One Years in India, p 437
³. The Second Afghan War, Abridged Official Account, p 380
⁴. Quoted in Baden-Powell, Cavalry Instruction, p 128
⁵. The Second Afghan War, Abridged Official Account, especially pp 60-1, 66, 74, 124, 162, 222-3, 410-11
Wolseley as 'a most ill-managed scramble'.

Roberts' reputation was due in large part to exploitation of the Press. Whereas Wolseley, despite his own use of newspapers to spread his views, shared the common Army dislike of reporters and delighted in misleading them on campaign, Roberts actively encouraged reporting of his expedition - on condition that the reports were censored by his own staff. He felt betrayed when one reporter smuggled out a highly critical despatch without censorship. Despite a brief outcry at this innovation, there was little the newspapers could do but accept Roberts' terms; the result of the campaign was a peerage and public adulation. In Britain at the time of Majuba, Roberts was sent out to take command in South Africa, only to arrive and find peace had been made. According to one account he swore to live an abstemious life so as to live long enough to avenge the 'Majuba surrender'. Wolseley was equally furious, both with Wood for making peace at the Government's insistence, and with Roberts for being sent instead of him-

1. Russell to Wolseley, 15 January 1881, LW/P/7/7/2, Wolseley
2. Minute No 49, NAT 1, pp 90-1, Wolseley; Wolseley to Frere, 9 December 1879, SA1, pp 188-91, Wolseley. See also Preston, 'Wolseley, the Khartoum Relief Expedition, and the Defence of India 1885-1900', p 254
3. SSL 8, p clxxxviii, manuscript Wolseley; Arthur, The Letters of Lord and Lady Wolseley, p 73
5. Lehmann, The First Boer War, p 281
Wolseley's next war was the invasion of Egypt in 1882. But although his force was nearly 40,000 men, only three Cavalry regiments could be sent with it. Even then the regiment next in line for overseas service gave up just under 200 horses and 100 men to the expedition. Wolseley obtained more Cavalry by making up a Composite Regiment of picked men from the Household Brigade, which did not usually serve abroad. The experiment proved successful, the Household delivering a crucial charge at the battle of Tel-el-Kebir. In addition, each Infantry battalion produced forty 'M.I.' (as Mounted Infantry were coming to be known) and for his march into the desert Wolseley took every mounted soldier from Evelyn Wood's reserve brigade, assuming that Wood was 'sure to find some more'. Left holding a front of five and a half miles with no scouts, Wood entrusted this task to an Infantry Captain, Horace Smith-Dorrien, who scoured Alexandria for horses and equipment, and in two days produced a patrol of seventeen Mounted Infantry. It was the kind of initiative

1. SSL 10/1, p xxxix, manuscript Wolseley; Arthur, The Letters of Lord and Lady Wolseley, p 154
2. Whyte and Atteridge, A History of the Queens Bays, p 183; Goodenough and Dalton, The Army Book for the British Empire, p 193; Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 39
3. 'Notes of an Egyptian Campaigner', Blackwoods, Vol 132, p 799; Arthur, The Letters of Lord and Lady Wolseley, p 75
4. Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, Vol II, pp 150-1
5. Smith-Dorrien, Memories of Forty Eight Years Service, pp 38-9
and improvisation which appealed to the Wolseley Ring. The M.I. with Wolseley, a picked elite with a high proportion of officers, did well as advance guards and scouts.¹ But within two weeks problems of overloading, starvation and failure to acclimatise destroyed the Cavalry horses. 'They melted away', wrote one veterinary officer, 'like ice in a summer sun.'²

For the Gordon Relief Expedition of 1884 Wolseley furthered his practice of selecting elite troops, with a Camel Corps of men from Infantry and Cavalry regiments.³ This not only, as Cambridge protested, ran counter to the principle of the regiment as the basis of morale and discipline, it also left the home regiments quite ludicrously weak. Cambridge would have preferred to send Wolseley an extra battalion and a full strength Hussar regiment, but after five years of borrowing horses and men in the Cavalry no such thing existed.⁴ One regiment in Egypt, however, was the 19th Hussars, for which Percy Barrow had gained a high reputation as scouts while still in Britain. Mounted on local arab horses (having lost their English mounts two years before) they led the scouting for

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1. 'Notes of an Egyptian Campaigner', Blackwoods, Vol 132, p 809
2. Smith, A Veterinary History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902, p 235
3. See Preston, 'Wolseley, the Khartoum Relief Expedition and the Defence of India 1885-1900', pp 254-80 for this campaign.
Herbert Stewart's desert column, and lost only three horses to exhaustion.\(^1\) They performed notable dismounted service at Tamasi,\(^2\) and after the battle of Abu Klea and Stewart's death, when Redvers Buller took command of the column, they shepherded it out of the desert to safety. Finding (as did other regiments in Egypt) that the arab tribesmen on foot flung themselves to the ground to avoid swordpoints, the Hussars took to carrying arab spears as lances;\(^3\) but there was little point in a close-order charge, since the arabs, both horsemen and footsoldiers, fought in such a loose formation that they could be ridden through without much effect.\(^4\) Fighting instead consisted of a series of skirmishes. The column's rearguard, twenty Hussars under Major John French (a protégé of Barrow) excelled in this and drew both Wood's and Buller's attention.\(^5\) The success of the Hussars also broke the cycle of weak Cavalry regiments with unfit horses doing badly in war resulting in an

1. Newspaper cutting of 11 July 1882 preserved in Barrow diary, 6009-14 Barrow; Dundonald, My Army Life, p 29; Dormer to Wolseley, 10 February 1882, Autograph Dormer, Wolseley SSL 9/1, p cvii, manuscript Wolseley; French, The Life of...John French First Earl of Ypres, p 32
2. Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 191
3. Ferguson to his parents, 21 March 1885, 6807-269 Ferguson, also mentions this practice. His regiment, 20th Hussars, took over the horses of the 19th Hussars when replacing them in Egypt in 1885.
4. Callwell, Small Wars, Their Principles and Practice, pp 219, 223; Dundonald, My Army Life, p 41 suggests that at Abu Klea Stewart wanted the Cavalry to charge, but the horses were too exhausted to attempt it. In view of the Arab tactics this seems unlikely.
5. French, The Life of...John French First Earl of Ypres, pp 18, 32-5
increased demand for Mounted Infantry. In contrast the 2,200 riding and baggage camels of the Camel Corps nearly all died from overwork and underfeeding.¹ There was nothing of the affection between them and their riders which existed between men and horses in the Cavalry.² This, according to one officer, acted as a powerful bond within the regiments, promoting group unity and horse care.³ But, as had been repeatedly shown, horse care was inadequate and horses overloaded for the conditions they would inevitably meet in colonial war.

The accusations of jobbery generated by his Ring's success led Wolseley deliberately to employ as staff officers in 1884 men who had not previously served with him,⁴ and to bring forward younger officers who had sought his patronage and that of his Ring. He arranged directly, for example, for Lord Cochrane - the future Earl of Dundonald - to command the Life Guards camel contingent in Stewart's column.⁵ Seeing the arab horsemen fail to break into his square at Abu Klea, Dundonald concluded that the days of the arme blanche were over, 'that if men on foot armed with a magazine rifle do not flinch, men on horseback with cold steel have but a poor chance of success'.⁶ This

¹. Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, Vol II, p 175
². Hills, The Royal Horse Guards, p 69
³. Birdwood, Khaki and Gown, p 90
⁵. Dundonald, My Army Life, p 20
⁶. ibid, p 39
was questionable. Cavalry had seldom broken squares in the
days of flintlocks, and the irregular swarms of horsemen
were scarcely comparable to the disciplined arme blanche
charge.

Other junior officers were also brought forward by the Ring. Following the expedition, Major Edward Hutton, a leading specialist on Mounted Infantry, was brought from Aldershot to organise, with Smith-Dorien as Adjutant, an M.I. contingent for the Suakin Field Force of the Egyptian Army, now under the command of Evelyn Wood.¹ The Suakin M.I. represented the triumph of the belief that good scouting horsemen could be readily improvised from a selected elite: its men came from thirty-five different units, including the Royal Marines. But nearly all were also already veterans of Egypt.² Meanwhile in India Baker Russell spotted in his own regiment a promising Lieutenant, Robert Baden-Powell (who had taken the Hythe musketry course) and when offered a temporary brigade in 1883, took Baden-Powell as his Brigade-Major.³

That French, Hutton, Smith-Dorien and Baden-Powell held widely divergent views on the value and function of Cavalry and Mounted Infantry mattered nothing to Wolseley and his men, who were chronically short of mounted troops

¹. Stephenson to Wolseley, 6 May 1884, Autograph Stephenson
². Smith-Dorien, Memories of Forty Eight Years Service, p 55
³. Hillcourt, Baden-Powell: The Two Lives of a Hero, pp 56-60
and good men to lead them. From the 1870s onwards, the two strands of tactical doctrine, Mounted Infantry or hybrid Cavalry, were transmitted less by the works of theorists than by personal contact and example. In particular, of two men who commanded Cavalry Brigades in the B.E.F. of 1914, Philip Chetwode served in the 19th Hussars under French, and Beauvoir de Lisle in the Suakin M.I. under Smith-Dorien. For junior Cavalry officers the small scouting columns provided the independence and exercise of initiative which the inoperative squadron system was meant to supply; for Infantrymen the chance to gain a reputation so hard to come by serving in a battalion. The new doctrines were unofficial and uncodified, and in practice successful Cavalry and Mounted Infantry both employed much the same hybrid tactics.

While these wars were fought, the first steps to codify their lessons, and fit the new hybrid into the Army's structure of Cavalry and Infantry, were made. Following the experiences of South Africa and Egypt, Cambridge recommended in late 1882 that a full company of M.I. should be trained by every battalion. At an enquiry into musketry standards a year earlier, Roberts, insisting his own experimental M.I. had been 'most perfect', put forward

1. French, The Life of...John French First Earl of Ypres, p 40
2. Smith-Dorien, Memories of Forty Eight Years Service, p 64
his case for the sword on the saddle and the lance as inferior to the sword for the Cavalry. Officers of the Cavalry stressed their new awareness of the value of musketry; one Colonel called it 'the most important thing in the world', while another was able to report his regiment had just extended its training course at Hythe.¹ In 1884 Chenevix-Trench, previously the severest critic of the Cavalry's dislike of dismounted action, wrote that it had 'only recently begun to meet with the full and frank recognition it deserves'.² At the same time the Cavalry's shortcomings were the subject of a series of committees enquiring into the sword, the saddle, the structure of the Cavalry and above all its shortage of horses.³ As unease grew Major-General Keith Fraser, late the reforming Colonel of 2nd Life Guards (Dundonald's regiment) felt obliged to deny publicly the rumour that he had chaired a committee to convert Cavalry into Mounted Infantry.⁴

For the first time the confused terminology of the arme blanche controversy became of crucial importance. Participants fought each other over the differences between 'Cavalry', 'Mounted Rifles' and 'Mounted Infantry', while

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2. Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 164
4. Editor's note, USM 1885, pt I, p 78; Hills, The Life Guards, p 80
the majority of officers, and of the interested public, could not see the distinction. Prussian Cavalry carrying the Chassepot in 1870 were claimed as 'mounted riflemen', and this term was used interchangeably with 'Mounted Infantry', even in the RUSI. In 1890 Hutton told a gathering at Aldershot:

I am very anxious to have the distinction made very clear between Mounted Infantry and Mounted Rifles, because the two have been confused in such a hopeless manner by the Press, and even by military writers, that a great deal of uncalled-for controversy has resulted.

In the British Army 'Mounted Infantry' now had a very precise meaning - members of regular Infantry battalions temporarily given horses - as well as its unofficial, and older, meaning as a synonym for mounted riflemen. The threat of conversion to Mounted Infantry was henceforth a nightmare for even reforming Cavalrymen, who interpreted it to mean the destruction of their regiments by absorption into the Infantry. So suspicious did the Cavalry become that when in 1884 it was recommended that regiments should be permanently linked in threes, one abroad, one at home, one training recruits and horses, this was seen as an attempt to amalgamate two-thirds of the regiments out of existence.

They were 'to lose their identity', wrote one critic, 'and

1. Chenevix-Trench, 'Progress in Developing the Capabilities of Cavalry', JRUSI vol 21, p 998
2. Lumley, 'Mounted Riflemen', JRUSI vol 25, p 638; Hayes, The Students' Manual of Tactics, p 5; Parsley, 'A Trooper's View of the Yeomanry', USM vol VI NS, p 58
3. Hutton, Five Lectures on Mounted Infantry, Lecture Three, p 2
the halo of glory which attached more or less to all of
them is to be obliterated'. After much protest, Cambridge
rejected the scheme.  

Wolseley, promoted to Adjutant-General in
1882, worked to secure Army reform as he saw it. In 1885-6,
with war between Germany and France apparently close, the
War Office implemented a scheme, drawn up by Brackenbury,
for a Field Army of two Army Corps and a Cavalry Division,
producing a major increase in the Army Estimates.  

With the change of Government, the Treasury became committed to
reducing these estimates again, and Cambridge and Wolseley,
intent on preserving the Infantry battalions which were the
basis of Imperial defence, and looking at possibilities of
reducing the Cavalry and Artillery, began to realise fully
the extent of the shortage of trained horses. When the
Treasury offered to permit the Army Corps some horses for
Transport and Mounted Infantry, on condition that an equal
number were taken from the Cavalry, the Commander-in-Chief
and the Adjutant General agonised over whether the Cavalry
could spare just 240 horses.  

As Cambridge observed:

we have absolutely not got the full complement
of Cavalry for the two proposed Army Corps, and
then there is nothing left to fall back on as a
reserve for the absolute requirements in Ireland
and England should the Army Corps be required to
take the field.  

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1. 'Cavalry Reorganisation', USM 1882, pt II, p 399
2. Verner, The Military Life of H.R.H. George Duke of
Cambridge, Vol II, p 305
3. Hamer, The British Army, Civil-Military Relations 1885-
1905, pp 93-111; See also Tables, Part One, Table 5
4. W/Mem/3 Memo. 1/31 January 1887, Wolseley
5. W/Mem/3 Memo. 1/undated January 1887, Wolseley
Wolseley himself repeatedly stated that even to discuss the possibility of reducing the Cavalry was a waste of time, and that the removal of a single horse would seriously impair the Army's efficiency.

Although the actual number of Cavalry increased from 13,500 to 14,500 in the decade 1880-1890, mainly through the decision to increase regiments from three to four squadrons in 1885, the percentage of Cavalry in the Army declined in the same period from 10.45 per cent to 9.25 per cent. Yet even this was almost identical to the proportion of Cavalry in the Armies of Germany and France. Despite appearances, the British Cavalry was not understrength, but simply badly organised, split into too many small regiments with too few horses. Whereas the Germans kept their Cavalry sixty horses and men stronger than war establishment (the remainder forming a depot on mobilisation) and produced regiments of 600 men or more, no British Government, as Wolseley declared, would sanction such extravagance. The Cavalry of Continental powers were held at full strength in case of sudden declaration of war.

1. W/Mem/1 Memo. 1/12 November 1885, Wolseley
2. W/Mem/3 Memo. 2/14 March 1887, p 12, Wolseley
3. See Tables, Part One, Table 1
5. See Tables, Part One, Tables 1 and 2
6. Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 19
7. Goodenough and Dalton, The Army Book for the British Empire, p 192; W/Mem/2 Memo. 8/19 October 1886, Wolseley
war and, with no land frontier, there was not the same requirement of instant readiness in Britain.¹ In theory, of the sixteen Home regiments, eight were on the 'higher establishment' (still short of war establishment) of 542 men and 400 horses. In reality just two were on higher establishment.² In one regiment 169 men had less than a year's service.³ In 1887 a Remount Department was founded, and a register begun of civilian owners of suitable horses for Army use,⁴ but only by using up all the reservists, regardless of regiment, could the Cavalry for even one Army Corps in war be found.⁵ The Treasury would scarcely sanction an increase in the Cavalry, an arm with doubts of obsolescence hanging over it, and regimental tradition would not sanction its rationalisation.

Wolseley's solution was a typical expedient. In 1888 he created a Mounted Infantry School under Hutton at Aldershot, the first of three in Britain and several around the Empire. This was to train a section of thirty-three first class marksmen from every line battalion as M.I.⁶ Sixty-four Infantry battalions would provide enough

1. W/Mem/2 Memo. 8/19 October 1886, Wolseley. A copy also exists in "A"76 'Papers on Cavalry Reserve Men', 1886 (War Office)
2. W/Mem/1 Memo. 20 April 1885, Wolseley
3. W/Mem/2 Memo. 8/19 October 1886, p 5, Wolseley
4. Tylden, Horses and Saddlery, p 24; Goodenough and Dalton, The Army Book for the British Empire, pp 182-4
5. W/Mem/2 Memo. 8/19 October 1886, p 5, Wolseley
6. The British Army by a Lieutenant-Colonel in the British Army, hereafter The British Army, p 42
sections, with the extra officers, for two complete M.I. battalions, a thousand strong, one for each Army Corps, costing just £700 a year each to maintain in peacetime. By 1892 Hutton could maintain a trained M.I. force of nearly 4,000 men, more than enough for Wolseley's needs.¹

(As well as regulars, trainees included militia and Volunteer officers, and Colonials. South Africa and Australia had both formed volunteer units of Mounted Rifles, and Hutton was eventually to command the military forces of New South Wales.² ) Cost was the main argument favouring M.I.; as the earliest reports candidly put it, 'we have no experience of Mounted Infantry opposed to a well-trained Cavalry'.³ In the Suakin Field Force, under war conditions, a Cavalry regiment cost £28,000 a year to maintain, and the same number of M.I. just £12,000.⁴ Even without their horses, Cavalry soldiers cost about ten per cent more in dress, training and equipment than Infantry,⁵ and the cost of M.I. was computed only on the basis of the extra paid for horses and tack, not for the men themselves. The earliest plans for the M.I., therefore, rejected the idea of a permanent corps and planned to keep training as cheap

¹. Goodenough and Dalton, The Army Book for the British Empire, pp 172-6
². ibid, pp 483, 488; Hutton, 'The Tactical and Strategic Power of Mounted Troops', USM Vol X NS, pp 431-49
⁴. Hutton, 'Mounted Infantry', JRUSI, vol 30, p 697
⁵. See Tables, Part One, Table 7
as possible. As was explained, 'To be able to keep his seat on horseback over rough ground, and not to roll about in his saddle sufficiently to give a horse a sore back, is about the extent of horsemanship that would be required of a mounted infantry soldier.' In addition it was feared that expert M.I. would adopt the arme blanche proclivities which had ruined the concept of Mounted Rifle Volunteers (who had taken to carrying a sword on the saddle.) They were therefore deliberately undertrained. The training period was just ten weeks; while for the first three years of existence the school at Aldershot was dependent for horses on loans from Cavalrymen on leave. Additional riding experience was gained by most Infantry officers, although not their men, in the sport of polo, just becoming popular in India as M.I became widely used in war. By coincidence a polo pony made an ideal M.I mount; the cost of a good polo pony jumped in India from £4 in 1880 to as much as £80 just eight years later. This gave the Infantry as much of a social stake in the M.I as the Cavalry (most of whom also played polo) had in their own horses through foxhunting.

Wolseley further sought to involve the

2. 'The Best Mounted Arm for Volunteers', USM Vol I NS, p 305
4. Tylden, Horses and Saddlery, p 24
5. Younghusband, Forty Years a Soldier, p 156
Yeomanry in his search for mounted troops, In early 1882 he proposed, at a gathering of the Colonels of all Yeomanry regiments, their conversion to 'Mounted Riflemen', arguing on a tactless analogy with the Boers of South Africa that this was their natural role. The motive behind this was also cost: Wolseley calculated that whereas a Rifle Volunteer, a footsoldier, cost the country £1 13s 1d a year, a Yeoman, who provided his own horse, still cost a remarkable £6 7s 5½d a year in uniform, equipment and an organisation of thirty-nine tiny regiments. Although he was careful not to use the words 'Mounted Infantry', the Yeomanry Colonels, who had no doubt this was intended, expressed a 'general and decided disinclination' to be converted. But, as Cavalry officers retired into the Yeomanry or were transferred temporarily as Adjutants of Yeomanry regiments, they began, about ten years behind the Cavalry, to take up shooting. In one regiment, shooting was started for the first time in 1882 by the arrival of a new Adjutant. In other regiments Colonels actively petitioned to equip some or all of their men with rifles. Generally, however, little shooting was done before the 1890s. At the start of the decade,

1. WO/32/7237, War Office Meetings, December 1881
2. The British Army, p 189
3. Williams Wynn, The Historical Records of the Montgomeryshire Yeomanry, p 45; Stonham and Freeman, Historical Records of the Middlesex Yeomanry 1797-1927, p 69, mentioning also the 2nd Prince of Wales West Yorkshire Yeomanry
Cambridge, knowing Wolseley was planning more reforms, advised him:

I am fully prepared to do all in my power to induce the present Yeomanry Regiments to attend more to their carbines than their swords, but don't attempt to make Mounted Infantry out of them; that would simply destroy the force, and completely take the heart out of them.  

Following a critical investigation, an Army Order in 1893 gave special encouragement to the Yeomanry shooting.

The number of Yeomanry on the muster rolls dropped from 16,000 in 1870 to under 12,000 in 1899, a fact blamed by the regiments on the decline of agriculture producing a corresponding decline in the rural class from which their men were drawn. The number actually turning up to train, however, remained virtually constant from 1878 onwards, and the apparent decline was due to rationalisation as greater obligations were imposed on the Yeomanry by the War Office. In 1888 they were made liable to service anywhere in Britain and in 1893 there was a major

2. 'Report of the Brownlow Committee on Yeomanry', 1892, p 7 (War Office); Army Order 22 1893 (War Office); Parsley, 'A Trooper's View of the Yeomanry', USM Vol VI NS, p 60; Adderley, History of the Warwickshire Yeomanry Cavalry, p 125
3. See Tables, Part One, Table 8
5. See Tables, Part One, Table 9
reorganisation. Regiments were divided into squadrons of a hundred men, those failing to produce at least two squadrons disbanded, and the remainder brigaded in pairs of regiments. The requirement for brigades to train together every three years proved, however, optimistic and was abandoned in 1898. In at least one case it never took place at all. Against this, the apparent decline in numbers produced a corresponding cut in funds to the Yeomanry; apparent expenditure on the force declined steadily with their numbers, and real expenditure did not pick up again until 1885. The major change that was taking place, also recognised by the regiments, was the shift in recruiting patterns from the rural to the urban population as agriculture declined. Increasingly, recruits knew little of horses or of the countryside they were meant to defend. Wolseley's analogy of the Boers was quite wrong. The creation in 1887 of the Cyclist Companies of the Rifle Volunteers, whose cycles cost a third of the price of a Yeomanry horse to buy, and a fifteenth of the cost to maintain each year, was a reflection of this

2. Army Order 91 1898 (War Office); Verdin, The Cheshire (Earl of Chester's) Yeomanry 1898-1967, p 5
3. See Tables, Part One, Tables 9 and 10
4. Stonham and Freeman, Historical Records of the Middlesex Yeomanry 1797-1927, p 65; 'The Best Mounted Arm for Volunteers', USM Vol I NS, p 335
fact. The Yeomanry, however, clung to the display of the arme blanche, despite their training period being far too short to perfect the charge.

The possibility offered to advocates of Mounted Infantry was the perfect weapon for colonial war. 'With two machine guns', as one expressed it, 'the regimental engineers and a squad of Mounted Infantry, which can be easily and quickly organised, a battalion, if detached, would be complete in itself and independent of other branches of the service.' Although, both in Afghanistan and Egypt, the early Gatling and Gardner machine guns tended to jam, their potential value was clearly considerable. In 1887 Baden-Powell demonstrated the new Nordenfelt gun to Wolseley, who had one issued to each Cavalry regiment. A year before this, the Colonel of the 10th Hussars had bought one privately for his men. In this way the smart regiments, under reforming Colonels, were

1. Editor's Note, USM 1887, pt I, p 557; 'The Best Mounted Army for Volunteers', USM Vol I NS, pp 308-9, 325 gives the cost of purchase of a bicycle in 1890 as £12 and its maintenance £3 a year, and of a horse suitable for Yeomanry £35, and £45 a year to keep it.
2. Knollys, 'Suggestions - II', USM 1886, pt I, p 105
3. For the jamming of machine guns, see The Second Afghan War, Abridged Official Account, p 223; Evans, The Story of the Fifth Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards, p 86. According to Editor's Note, USM 1885, pt I, p 397, it was denied both in Parliament and by the War Office that the Gardner guns jammed in the Sudan in 1884-5. According to Wolseley, W/Mem/1 Memo 10, 27.8.1885, Wolseley, they jammed 'on every important occasion'.
4. Hillcourt, Baden-Powell: The Two Lives of a Hero, p 77
5. Brander, The 10th Royal Hussars, p 72
able to exploit their wealth; in 1895 Dundonald, now commanding 2nd Life Guards, paid privately for increased musketry training for his own men. Machine guns opened up even greater prospects, in fact, for believers in Cavalry than Infantry. In 1885, in an official lecture, Baden-Powell had stated that 'Cavalry attacking good infantry formed up to receive them cannot do much without help from artillery or infantry. As a rule, however, they would never be required to do so.' But increasingly into the 1890s Cavalrymen saw the possibility that, using the arme blanche in combination with machine guns and Horse Artillery, they might be able to defeat Infantry by themselves, becoming truly independent. This notion was fed by another, preached particularly in the writings of German authors such as Prince Kraft. It was believed that the next war in Europe would see Cavalry divisions, far in advance or on the flanks of the main armies, clash in a private contest without interference from Infantry, with massed charges deciding superiority. The victorious Cavalry would then, its scouting unimpeded, turn the flanks

1. Dundonald, My Army Life, p 80
2. Baden-Powell, Cavalry Instruction, p 59
3. French, 'Cavalry Manoeuvres', JRUSI Vol 39, pp 559-88; Maude, 'Cavalry on the Battlefield', USM Vol III NS, pp 310-24
and raid against the communications of the main enemy forces.

Although German Cavalry, as representing the leading military power in Europe, was closely studied by the British, there was considerable confusion as to what their tactics actually were. In 1885, one theorist believed that they were pushing the use of the arme blanche alone 'about as far as it will go', while another held that they were 'disestablishing their cavalry and turning them into mounted infantry'. Ten years later the position was no more clear. Lord Roberts, watching German Cavalry on manoeuvres, found them disappointing, inept in attack or defence, and badly mounted. Douglas Haig of the 7th Hussars, one of the emerging new school of Cavalrymen, watching the same men, was impressed, and felt their training in dismounted and shock tactics very thorough. The difficulty and confusion arose because, while theoretically recognising dismounted action, and training for it, the Germans saw their Jägers and Artillery as the main source of firepower, and, having no major colonial wars, never developed the hybrid tactics in squadron-sized

1. Brackenbury, in preface to Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p vi
2. Derby, 'French and German Cavalry', USM 1885, pt I, p 54
3. Roberts to Cambridge, 7 October 1895, 7101-23-107 Roberts
4. 'Notes on German Cavalry Compiled by Capt Douglas Haig', WO, 1896, Acc 3155.74 Haig, especially p 35
packets, nor the Mounted Infantry, of the British. This did not, however, prevent one German theorist from being quoted as saying in 1890 that 'if Cavalry can be properly organised, trained and handled, they will be able to sweep from the field all three arms of the enemy'. The French view was considerably more straightforward, a total belief in the massed armé blanche charge. 'The best reconnoitring Cavalry will be one which is dashing and bold, sceptical of mathematical calculations', French Cavalry were told at manoeuvres in 1897, 'a Cavalry whose men dream of the naked sword and the charge'. Haig, at French manoeuvres in 1893, noticed that whereas the sword was carried on the saddle and the carbine on the man (in the manner recommended by Roberts) the Cavalrymen had wrapped cloth covers around the lock, bolt and trigger, making the carbine impossible to fire without considerable delay. This was, he noted, 'not altogether satisfactory'.

The impact of Continental theorists on British Cavalrymen was now overwhelming. Haig's list of leading modern writers on Cavalry in his Staff College course of 1896-8 consisted of seven French and German authors but not one Englishman. However, as with earlier

1. Altham, 'The Cavalry Revival, A Plea for Infantry', USM Vol II NS, p 17
2. De Négrier, quoted in Talbot, 'Manoeuvres in France of Two Divisions of Cavalry and an Army Corps, September 1897', JRUSI Vol 42, p 1358
3. Haig's report is preserved in Acc 3155.68 Haig
4. Haig's 'Cavalry Notes', Staff College notebook, Acc 3155.14 Haig
British theorists, the practical result of this influence is uncertain. For example, Haig's own views, expressed in 1890, were:

Every cavalry soldier must thoroughly understand that his proper place is on horseback, his proper mode of action the charge. Only in cases where cavalry cannot obtain its object by executing a charge, should men be dismounted in order to use the carbine...[but] unless a cavalry force is by instruction and practice ready to fight on foot its usefulness will be curtailed and it cannot be considered efficient.1

His own troop of Hussars could score 98 per cent hits with their carbines on targets at 300 yards.2

This new faith in the value of Cavalry, spoken of openly as 'The Cavalry Revival' in the 1890s,3 owed more to an increased awareness of the achievement of Cavalry in the American Civil War than to French or German theorists. The renewed study of the war in the late 1880s was encouraged in large measure by Wolseley himself.4

1. Paper by Haig, 'The Dismounted Action of Cavalry', 15 November 1890, preserved in his 'Cavalry Notes' Acc 3155.14 Haig
2. Haig diary entry, 5 February 1889, Acc 3155.1 Haig
3. Moreland, 'The Mounted Infantry Regiment as an Integral Part of the Cavalry Division', USM Vol XII NS, p 532; Altham, 'The Cavalry Revival, A Plea for Infantry', USM Vol II NS, pp 17-34
4. The revival of interest may be said to have begun with the publication of Henderson's Stonewall Jackson in 1886 and Wolseley's reviews of Henderson. For Wolseley's views see Rawley, The American Civil War, an English View. For the whole question of the revival of interest in the war, see Luvaas, The Military Legacy of the Civil War (especially chapter 8, 'The Henderson Legacy'), pp 170-202 which places a very different interpretation of events to the one outlined in this dissertation.
From his own experiences, Denison's teaching, and the need to justify the Mounted Infantry's existence, Wolseley argued that the Cavalry could never learn to fight well on foot, and must be reserved for the *arme blanche* charge. This brought Wolseley, the leading reformer of the Army, into direct conflict with the reforming Cavalrymen, above all with Keith Fraser. Wolseley, Wood and Buller all patronised a series of lectures given by Hutton between 1884 and 1891, to the RUSI and similar institutions, the main theme of which was that the American horsemen owed their success to being Mounted Infantry. At nearly every occasion that Hutton spoke, Fraser or another Cavalryman would rise to protest that the Americans had been Cavalry. It was entirely a matter of definition, but except for the Infantry mounted as a temporary expedient in the Western Theatre, the balance of evidence was with Fraser. At one of these meetings, in Dublin in 1891, tempers were lost completely, with Fraser insisting that the Americans 'always charged' and Wolseley, who chaired the meeting, replying from his own memory of the war that the very idea of their charging at all was 'ridiculous'. The real argument was that touched on by Fraser when he invited the M.I. leader to transfer his men to the Cavalry, and Hutton replied that they preferred to remain Infantry. 'I see', Wolseley

1. See above, Introduction, p 2
angrily summed up, 'even from what has occurred here today, that there is a tendency on the part of cavalry officers to imagine that when men lecture them on the uses of mounted infantry that it is a sort of personal attack on the cavalry service.' Fraser was still arguing the point with M.I. lecturers as late as 1895, shortly before retiring as Inspector-General of Cavalry.

Evelyn Wood took over Aldershot District in 1889, and two years later arranged for the first complete Cavalry Division to train on Salisbury Plain. Wood was also dissatisfied with the Umpiring system. 'It was assumed', he wrote, 'that the effects of rifle-fire on service nearly equalled that obtained on the ranges', and also that 'we over-estimated the value of Artillery practice when guns were laid up on moving targets'. Or, as Haig bluntly put it, 'Umpires always decide against Cavalry.' In the late 1880s, as the magazine-loading small-bore rifles such as the British Lee-Metford were introduced, the results of theoretical tests on firing ranges became even more impressive. It was claimed that:

1. Hutton, Five Lectures on Mounted Infantry, Lecture Four discussion, pp 23-6
2. See Moreland, 'The Mounted Infantry Regiment as an Integral Part of the Cavalry Division', USM Vol XII NS, p 530
3. Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, vol II, pp 192, 214
4. Wood, Achievements of Cavalry, p v
5. Haig, 'Notes on the Skill Required of Cavalry Leaders', p 40 of Haig's 'Cavalry Notes', Staff College note book, Acc 3155,14 Haig
In future wars guns will be able to destroy the enemy's cavalry if halted under their fire 3,000 or even 4,000 yards away, while experiments made at Aldershot with the magazine rifle in 1888 proved that infantry can hit a smaller mark than a cavalry division every other shot at 2,000 yards, and every fourth shot at 2,600 yards.1

In 1895 the newly introduced Maxim machine gun under test scored 90 per cent hits on a target 6 feet by 8 feet at 1,000 yards.2 A rather more realistic test three years later, however, using only average marksmen, gave a firing party of 34 Infantry and a Maxim each one minute to fire at a target representing 100 Infantry and a gun crew, at 700 yards. Counting hits on the figures, the Infantry scored nineteen hits and the Maxim only nine.3 Nonetheless, in the face of such potential firepower the value of historical examples was doubtful in the extreme. One theorist, Colonel F.N. Maude, complained of the Cavalry's 'historical' approach that the typical Cavalry enthusiast 'picks up from some text-book instances in which Cavalry has been successful, never stops to enquire the cause of their success, but jumps to the conclusion that if they only ride home they will always be equally fortunate'.4 He tried to calculate instead the actual volume of fire likely to strike a

1. Altham, 'The Cavalry Revival, A Plea for Infantry', USM Vol II NS, p 27
2. Anstruther-Thomson, 'Machine Guns with Cavalry', JRUSI Vol 38, p 629
3. 'Ajax', 'Machine Guns: their Use and Abuse', USM Vol XVII NS, p 512
4. Maude, 'The Rise, Decay and Revival of the Prussian Cavalry', JRUSI Vol 38, p 20
rapidly moving target like a charging horseman. Veterinary work showed that horses, compared to men, suffered little physical shock from wounds, and only a brain hit, heart hit or major bone break would bring down a charging horse outside the rifle's 'stopping distance', within which the physical impact of a hit was sufficient. For the new smaller calibres like the .303 Lee-Metford this could be as little as fifty yards, and a serious wound was unlikely above 300 yards.¹

Evelyn Wood's own views on Cavalry were that, though they should not dismount 'too often', and the perfect hybrid was impossible,² shooting was still vital. At Aldershot in three years he reduced the percentage of third class shots in the Cavalry from a half to a quarter, the same percentage as in the Infantry.³ In 1891, to improve the effect of the charge the lance was introduced into the front rank only of Dragoon and Dragoon Guard regiments.⁴ Although made largely in imitation of German practice, this was not a major change; the lance had been used in training by Dragoons and Dragoon Guards since 1817.

². Wood in Hutton, Five Lectures on Mounted Infantry, Lecture Two discussion, p 22; Wood, Achievements of Cavalry, p 241
³. Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, Vol II, p 208
⁴. Evans, The Story of the 5th Inniskilling Dragoon Guards, p 90; Goodenough and Dalton, The Army Book for the British Empire, pp 208-9
John French, commanding the 19th Hussars at Aldershot, was allowed to operate the full squadron system in his regiment for three years before it was officially re-introduced in 1892. Wood, however, like Wolseley, still believed in Mounted Infantry, and supported Hutton’s work with them at Aldershot. In July 1892 Fraser tried to disabuse him:

The Federal Cavalry, so called 'Mounted Infantry', which ultimately numbered about 80,000 men, was armed with sword, carbine and pistol. It never carried a rifle from the beginning to the end of the war. If our Mounted Infantry are prepared and intended to play the role of the American Cavalry...the sooner they are similarly armed the better, and then indeed they will be useful (as an increase of trained cavalry seems an impossibility) in swelling the number of mounted men in our attenuated Cavalry Division, whereas at present with their horses (which are only to be used, as I understand, as a means of conveyance from one place to another) they would be, I fear, a heavy encumbrance to it.

Fraser finally wrote to Heros von Borcke, the veteran of Stuart's staff, still alive in 1893. The reply was all he wanted:

I confess to be rather surprised that military men of such science as you name in your letter should be of the opinion, that the cavalry as well of the Southern as of the Northern states during the last great American struggle, had been regarded on both sides exclusively as mounted infantry and had been mostly used as such...Stuart delighted in the charge with sabres drawn...I have conversed with many officers and men who took an active part in

1. Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, vol II, p 208
2. ibid, p 207
3. Fraser to Wood, 21 July 1892. Copy in Haig's 'Cavalry Notes', Staff College note book, Acc 3155.14 Haig
the cavalry fights of the other prominent cavalry leaders of the South...and I know that these Generals led their men in many glorious charges against cavalry as well as infantry...I am not at all averse to the use of cavalry as dismounted sharpshooters. It will be very necessary in the next war... very decidedly I am opposed to the change of cavalry into mounted infantry...Well drilled cavalry armed with a good carbine will be able to execute what mounted infantry can do, but the latter will never be able to suffice the claims which must be made on good cavalry. 1

Copies of both letters are in Haig's Staff College note books. Since he was Fraser's aide-de-camp for the 1894 Cavalry manoeuvres it seems possible that Fraser gave them to him. Fraser found the Cavalry's standards at these manoeuvres, both in scouting and the charge, unacceptable. 2 Apparently at his instigation Redvers Buller, as Adjutant-General, brought John French back from half-pay, 3 and he and Haig re-wrote the Cavalry Drill Book. 4 (At the same time Haig was befriended by Evelyn Wood, who already knew him by reputation. 5) The 1896 Cavalry Drill Book set out

1. Von Borcke to Fraser 3 June 1893. Copy in Haig's 'Cavalry Notes', Staff College note book. Acc 3155.14 Haig; see also Luvaas, The Military Legacy of the American Civil War, especially pp 56-8
2. See cutting from The Times, 6 October 1894, preserved in Acc 3155.6.F, Haig
3. French, The Life of...John French, First Earl of Ypres, p 35; Duff Cooper, Haig, vol I, pp 39-46; and cutting from M.A.P. 3 March 1900, preserved in Acc 3155.6.F Haig, which outlines Fraser's role.
4. Strictly, French began the book, and Haig finished it, see Duff Cooper, Haig, Vol I, pp 39-46 and Haig Diary entry, 31 August 1895, Acc 3155.1 Haig
5. Haig to Henrietta, 4 July 1895, Acc 3155.6.B Haig
the charge against Infantry as being in loose order, from close-in behind cover, from a flank. Failing this only, if the Infantry were shaken, the charge could be started 1,000 yards away. But, with echoes of von Bredow at Mars-la-Tour, it was also laid down that, as a principle, the Cavalry could be 'called upon to sacrifice itself entirely or partially for the general welfare of the Army'.

Dismounted fighting occupied just eleven pages, reflecting the eight days a year shooting practice in the Cavalry, compared to eight months learning the evolutions and manoeuvres for the various forms of charge.

Roberts, as Commander-in-Chief in India, did not have Wolseley's problems of a shortage of Cavalry, and took the view that Indian Cavalry, and British regiments in India, should be fully prepared to fight on foot. Roberts' own view was that:

The function of Infantry is to shoot...Cavalry, on the other hand, have functions more important than shooting, and in their case it is proper (especially as the firearm is really a secondary armament) to give weight to subsidiary factors, of which 'handiness' is the principal one.

He was, however, aware of his reputation for obsession with the rifle, and, determined to work tactfully, appointed in 1887 an Afghan War veteran, Major-General George Luck,

1. Cavalry Drill, 1896, Vol II, p 185. See also pp 43, 190-200, 202, 206 (War Office)
3. Roberts to Lockyer, 27 December 1895, 7101-23-107 Roberts
as the first Inspector-General of Cavalry in India, to supervise reform. As Roberts put it, 'Just at first British officers were apprehensive that their sowars [troopers] would be turned into dragoons, but they soon found out that there was no intention of changing any of their traditional characteristics.' Smith-Dorien, who had on Wood's recommendation taken an Indian staff job, remembered that Luck 'had large ideas on the powers of Cavalry', and that his manoeuvres covered vast distances. This was a Mounted Infantryman's view, not shared by Haig, serving with his regiment on the manoeuvres. 'We go mooning on in close formation', he recorded, 'no reconnoitring, no reserve, no patrols to approaches or flanks'. Two members of the emerging school of exceptional young Cavalrymen, also on the manoeuvres, agreed. George Barrow of the 4th Bengal Lancers thought Luck had little knowledge of 'the employment of cavalry masses in the higher sphere of strategy and tactics'. While Hubert Gough of the 16th Lancers condemned Luck's obsession with set-piece work rather than 'problems we were likely to meet in real war'.

1. Roberts, Forty One Years in India, p 528
2. Smith-Dorien, Memories of Forty Eight Years Service, p 73
3. Haig Diary entry, 29 January 1890, Acc 3155.1 Haig
4. Barrow, The Fire of Life, p 34
5. Gough, Soldiering On, p 34. The Goughs were an old Indian Army family, and Gough was reasonably well-known to Lord Roberts, and a friend of Smith-Dorien. See Soldiering On, pp 45, 55
By 1895 dismounted action, squadron sized combats, and the co-operation between Cavalry and machine guns or Artillery were the most fashionable military ideas of the day, endorsed by Roberts, Wood, Buller, Fraser, Russell and French.\(^1\) Even Wolseley came round to this view shortly after 1895. He told a Yeomanry Regiment at an inspection:

> If any of you will take the trouble to examine the maps of the country lying between the coast and London you will find that there is no spot where Cavalry can charge for a quarter of a mile. It is not likely that the invaders would be so kind as to move to Salisbury Plain to oblige us in order that we with our large Cavalry force and they without any Cavalry to speak of might show how good were our horses and how gallant the men who rode them...

> Now that means that for the 12,000 Cavalry and 9,000 Yeomanry to be of real service in defending England they must learn to shoot well and fight on foot. Cavalry relying on swords in a close country like England can do no useful fighting.\(^2\)

French and Haig restated this doctrine clearly, in the 1896 Drill Book. This stated that in enclosed country like Britain, 'the mounted action of Cavalry will be confined to conflicts between any small bodies (probably not even the strength of a squadron on either side) which may endeavour

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1. In addition to the evidence cited above, see French, 'Cavalry Manoeuvres', JRUSI Vol 39, pp 559-88, given from notes prepared by Haig, see Haig Diary entry, 17 February 1895, Acc 3155.1 Haig, and also Russell to Wolseley, 19 October 1892, Autograph Russell 2, Wolseley

2. Text of speech in Wolseley's handwriting. Undated, but at one point reads 'this is the first Yeomanry regiment I have inspected since I became Commander-in-Chief'. Particularly in view of the evidence cited below (p 117, fn 1) on the Drill Book for 1896, this strongly suggests a date of 1895 or early 1896, W/W 1/14 Wolseley
to make sudden dashes'. ¹ So popular was this view of Cavalry with junior officers of other arms that in 1891 examiners for promotion expressed concern that in tactical exercises on paper, 'dismounted Cavalry are frequently used, when Infantry are available, in a way calculated to dishearten mounted troops'. ²

In 1889, except for five regiments, all Heavy Cavalry became Medium, reducing the weight carried, ³ and in 1893, to ease recruiting, the Cavalry were grouped into three corps, of Dragoons, Hussars and Lancers, each of which recruited en masse. ⁴ This attempt at rationalisation brought the familiar protests from the regiments, and in 1897 was replaced, this time successfully for two years, by the system of linking regiments in threes first proposed in 1884. ⁵ Also in 1897 it was ordered that only three squadrons should serve in war, the fourth forming a depot. ⁶

¹ Cavalry Drill, 1896, Vol II, p 205. It specifically suggests this tactic for 'close country (like most of England)'. (War Office)
² 'Reports on the results of examinations held by officers of regular forces, militia and volunteers', November 1892, p 7. No Cavalry or Yeomanry officers took this particular examination (C.U.L.O.P.R.)
³ Evans, The Story of the 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards, p 81. The practical effect of this was that they were required for the first time to serve abroad. Goodenough and Dalton, The Army Book for the British Empire, p 192. The five regiments were the three of the Household Brigade, and 1st and 2nd Dragoons.
⁴ Goodenough and Dalton, The Army Book for the British Empire, p 100
⁵ Army Order 38 1897 (War Office)
⁶ Army Order 41 1897 (War Office)
while the higher establishment of the six regiments standing first for overseas service was raised to 682 officers and men with 410 horses.¹ Between 1896 and 1898 Cavalry and some Yeomanry regiments were issued with Lee-Enfield, then Lee-Metford, carbines with which they were taught to skirmish at 600 yards, and Maxim guns, still one to a regiment. Shooting standards in the Cavalry were only slightly lower than in the Infantry, and there were occasional instances of Cavalry regiments winning shooting competitions.²

There was still a lot to reform, above all the crushing weight on the horse; while, as Haig acknowledged, although brigades and even on occasion a division might train together, trying to learn brigade drill before the squadrons were properly trained was trying to run before walking.³ Nevertheless, considerable progress had been made both towards the hybrid, and towards the efficient Cavalryman; and the idea of the massed arme blanche charge was just giving way to the doctrine of squadron-sized actions in European war. Unfortunately, the Cavalry entirely failed to project this fact to the rest of the

2. Reynolds, *The Lee-Enfield Rifle*, p 50; The British Army, p 50; Evans, *The Story of the 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards*, p 94; Malet, *The Historical Memoirs of the XVIII Hussars*, p 228. Shooting at the same targets, minimum qualifications for Infantry in musketry was a score of 175 compared to 155 for Cavalry, *The British Army*, p 179
3. Haig Diary entry, 15 August 1895, Acc 3155. Haig
Army, or to the public. They had clashed with the country's leading reformer of the Army, Wolseley, and they clung to a tactic, the charge, that Infantry officers, even in official papers, referred to as no longer possible. The very mention of 'the charge' or 'the Cavalry fight' evoked images of the big, knee-to-knee brigade display, rather than the open formations and squadrons already being practised.¹ The expenses of the Cavalry had also produced a majority of officers who were snobbish, obsessed with sport, social activities and smartness. Even in civilian clothes a Cavalry officer was instantly recognisable from his manner.² It was this image of the Cavalry, rich, incompetent and faintly ridiculous, to which the Duke of Cambridge referred when, according to one newspaper, in 1895 'he congratulated the cavalry very highly on their efficiency, and told them that whatever people might say to the contrary he could not agree with them'.³

The effect of the general standard of the

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1. For Infantrymen's doubts about Cavalry see, for example, "A"¹⁴⁵, 'Magazine and Small Bore Rifles', 1888 (War Office) p 10, stating as fact that Cavalry will in future be divided into two classes, armé blanche Cavalry to charge other Cavalry only, and Mounted Rifles. Infantry themselves were taught to form square against Cavalry until 1899. See Fuller, Last of the Gentlemen's Wars, p 7
2. Maitland, Hussar of the Line, p 107; see also Stotherd, Sabre and Saddle; Cairnes, Social Life in the British Army. It was still possible to tell a Cavalry officer on sight in the 1930s (Shelford Bidwell, 10 August 1981, personal communication)
3. Press cutting preserved in Haig's Diary, 28 August 1895, Acc 3155.1 Haig
Cavalry on the best efforts of the reformers was seen in 1898 at the battle of Omdurman, in the charge of the 21st Lancers. The charge itself was superbly executed, a textbook demonstration of a knee-to-knee crash into about 2,500 Sudanese, standing close-packed in twelve ranks, who became suddenly visible from a depression in front of the Cavalry. They broke through this mass — a remarkable tribute to the cohesion of the charge — dismounted and opened fire from the flank as if on Salisbury Plain, having achieved nothing for the loss of 74 men and 119 horses.

Winston Churchill, who charged with the Lancers, defended the action as the only course open; but, beyond other arguments, it was generally agreed, even by Churchill himself later, that the 21st Lancers, the junior and least smart regiment in the Cavalry, stung at the supposed motto of 'thou shalt not kill' wished on it by other regiments because it had no battle honours, had come intent on establishing its status by an arme blanche charge. Haig, serving with the Egyptian Cavalry 'feared this all along, for the regiment was here to do something, and meant to

1. The account here is taken from Churchill's despatch in Woods, Young Winston's Wars, pp 109-15. Churchill himself wrote in 1930 that in the charge 'one could see the futility of the much vaunted arme blanche'. Churchill My Early Life, p 192. There is nothing in his contemporary accounts to support this claim.

2. Churchill, My Early Life, p 187

3. ffrench Blake, The 17th/21st Lancers, p 79
charge something before the show was over'.

Lord Kitchener, commanding the Egyptian Army, who, it was claimed, had wanted the Lancers fresh to pursue, could only tell them that the charge 'will go down in history in the annals of your regiment'. Its Colonel was commended, decorated and replaced. The regiment's behaviour was exactly the attitude the reformers had been trying to escape from. In 1894 one newspaper, taking its lead from Fraser, wrote of the Cavalry manoeuvres:

It is only in peace manoeuvres that Cavalry attack each other merely for the sake of a fight. In war, a Cavalry fight, if it comes off, does so because the commanders, being entrusted with the carrying out of some mission, regard the fight as indispensable for its performance. If they can execute that mission without a fight, a fight is worse than useless.

Haig preserved the cutting. Among his own impressions of Omdurman was that 'the effects of the infantry fire was poor and not in accordance with the teachings of the theorists who design modern breechloaders', the classic 'historical' view still typical of the Cavalry. He was, however, impressed by the Egyptian Cavalry, the British commanders of which Kitchener allowed complete autonomy.

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1. Haig to Wood, 7 September 1898, Acc 3155.6G Haig
2. Lyttelton, *Eighty Years*, p 191
3. Press cutting from *The Times* 1 October 1898, preserved in Acc 3155.6F Haig
5. Cutting from *The Times* 4 October 1898, preserved in Acc 3155.6F Haig
6. Haig Diary entry, 2 September 1898, Acc 3155.1 Haig
for their squadrons, and the brigade commander, Broadwood. Haig, trying his own hand at patronage, wrote directly to Evelyn Wood commending Broadwood,¹ and also suggesting that, should more officers be needed, John Vaughan of his own regiment might be sent out.² He had, however, formed a low opinion of Churchill.³ The chain started by Wolseley had yet to reach its last link.

The intrigues between Wolseley and Buller over the succession to Cambridge had wrecked the last vestiges of the old Wolseley Ring. French and Haig owed their allegiance to Buller and to Wood.⁴ Wood had in fact even brought Ian Hamilton to Britain in 1897 to command the Musketry School at Hythe.⁵ But the ambitions of Roberts and his men remained unfulfilled. Hamilton was still smarting from the Wolseley Ring's bar on his attempt to join the Gordon Relief Expedition in 1884.⁶ Roberts, in 1895, was given command in Ireland as a prelude to retirement, but when in 1897 war with the Transvaal threatened two of his Ring members, Rawlinson and Wilson, successfully encouraged their 'Chief' to press his claim for command of the Field

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1. Haig to Wood, 15 March 1898, Acc 3155.6F Haig
2. Haig to Wood, 12 April 1898, Acc 3155.6F Haig
3. Duff Cooper, Haig, Vol I, p 62
4. French, The Life of...John French First Earl of Ypres, p 35; Haig to Henrietta, 21 April 1898, Acc 3155.6B Haig
5. Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, Vol II, p 223
6. Hamilton, Listening for the Drums, p 172
Army (which in fact consisted of just one Army Corps and a Cavalry Division) in opposition to Wood or Buller. 'The Wolseley Ring', Rawlinson wrote, 'will do their utmost to suppress your name.' The attempt by Roberts failed, and when the Second Boer War began in 1899 Buller took the Army to South Africa. But to these men the conflicts of the Rings were still a live issue. This fact was to set in motion a chain of events which in five years would take the arme blanche controversy from an important but highly technical debate within the Army to become a national affair of the highest importance.

1. Rawlinson to Roberts, 24 April 1897 and 26 April 1897, 7101-23-60 Roberts
CHAPTER THREE

THE ABNORMAL WAR

'In future campaigns in South Africa, it will have to be borne in mind that, in order to maintain the health and efficiency of English horses, it is imperative that they be liberally fed on suitable food.'

- Report of the Veterinary Department on the Zulu War of 1879

'They came with horses. Puttiala sent horses. Jhind and Nabha sent horses. All the nations of the Khalsa sent horses. All the ends of the earth sent horses. God knows what the army did with them, unless they ate them raw. They used horses as a courtesan uses oil: with both hands.'

- Kipling, A Sahib's War

The third of July 1900 had been a disaster.

Six months before, Erskine Childers had been a clerk in the House of Commons; but, like thousands of others in the aftermath of 'Black Week', he had volunteered to serve in South Africa against the rebels of Cape Colony and the Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.

2. Kipling, A Sahib's War and Other Stories, p 16
3. The narrative of this and the next paragraph is taken, as nearly verbatim as possible, from Childers, In the Ranks of the C.I.V., especially pp 31, 35, 48, 53, 61, 84, 90, 97 and 120.
Childers had arrived in Cape Town in late February as a driver in the Mounted Battery of the City Imperial Volunteers, and two months later had begun the long journey up the inadequate narrow-gauge railway incline to Naaupoort Junction, and on into the heart of the South African veldt, remembered by most of the British as a sea of grass, brown and featureless with spots of green, growing in a sandy soil that burnished the horseshoes until they gleamed like silver. It was broken by a multitude of flat-topped hills (the Boer word for them was kopje, of for the larger ones kop meaning 'head') covered with boulders which made them natural strong points, on which or in the shadow of which the Boers dug in. One could see, and shoot, for miles in the clear air six or seven thousand feet above sea level, but often there was nothing to be seen, no landmarks so that men and horses became lost, or broke their legs in ant-bear holes. The temperature at mid-day could pass a hundred degrees Fahrenheit, and at night it fell below freezing, and a dampness formed on the blankets before dawn. The main problems were not Boers - Driver Childers never saw one in his two months' soldiering career - but water and food, and the Argentine ponies that bit like mad dogs and

Of more recent works, Pakenham, The Boer War, is concerned mainly with the political aspects of the war, and apart from accepting the obsolescence of the arme blanche has little new to say about operations. A good short account is Belfield, The Boer War.

1. Except for the area around Ladybrand and Bethlehem. See de Wet, Three Years War, p 112 and Smith, A Veterinary History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902 (hereafter Veterinary History) pp 6-8
kicked like cows, that had been living on half rations of
bad quality oats since they came to South Africa, and when
made to exert themselves on trek lost weight so rapidly
that the harness slipped and rubbed their backs raw.

On 2 July the battery had joined General
Paget's 20th Brigade as part of General Hunter's big
'drive' through what was now the Orange River Colony.1 The
Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts (who had succeeded General
Buller at the beginning of the year) had captured the two
enemy capitals, Bloemfontein and Pretoria, and at the start
of June had announced that Boer resistance would soon
collapse.2 But the Boers would not surrender, and there
seemed no prospect of the decisive battle to defeat them,
or of the war ever ending. Somebody or something was clear-
ly at fault, and now Driver Childers knew what it was. On
that July day the 38th Royal Field Artillery Battery, part
of Paget's brigade, had taken heavy casualties in a Boer
ambush when, due to a misunderstanding, the inexperienced
Mounted Infantry covering it had retreated. That evening,
Childers found a Serjeant of the battery crouched over his
camp fire, deep in shock and not knowing where he was.
Childers listened as the man began a long rambling soli-
loquy on how British horsemen went along, heels down, toes
in, arms close to sides, all according to regulation,
keeping distance regardless of ground, while the Boers

1. The Orange Free State had been annexed to the crown
under that name in late May 1900.
2. Roberts to Lansdowne, 7 June 1900, 7101-23-110-3 Roberts
cared nothing so long as they got there and did their job. The Serjeant did not call them Mounted Infantry; to him Cavalry were Cavalry. Finally, he became incoherent, and Childers led him back to his own lines, convinced that the Army's failure was the fault of the Cavalry, with its hidebound approach to warfare, and the Cavalry-style training and influence upon the Mounted Infantry.

Childers' melodramatic experience was not unique. Others, through other episodes, came to believe that Cavalry, and the 'Cavalry mentality' were responsible for the Army's troubles. Among these were Lord Roberts himself, and his Ring members. Beyond doubt this belief was sincere, but it was mistaken: the fault lay far more with Roberts' own mistrust of the Cavalry. To appreciate this, the problem facing the Army in South Africa on the outbreak of war must be understood. The Boer armies, with the exception of some professional Artillery, were theoretically composed of all able-bodied men between sixteen and sixty, and fought in loosely organised groupings, the 'Commandoes'. Most Boers lived on widely-spaced farms, and

1. For example, Peel, *Trooper 8008 I.Y.*, pp 17-19
2. The number of Boers who fought is a matter of some conjecture, upper estimates ranging from 87,000 to 65,000. See Belfield, *The Boer War*, pp 10 and 168 for a discussion of this. It is clear from de Wet, *Three Years War*, pp 13, 124, and from Reitz, *Commando*, that some men of military age avoided fighting, boys younger than 16 fought, and generally the Boer leaders had only the haziest idea of how many men they commanded. Estimates of Boer strength at various battles are therefore little more than guesses.
their republics had only a rudimentary political organisation; the loyalties of the Boer were first towards his own family, and then a general respect for the lives of white men. Only a few were willing to fight for such abstractions as Liberty or the State, or even to defend a national capital. They could no more understand the British soldier, who risked his life at his officer's command, than the British understood Boer 'cowardice' in refusing to stand for a pitched battle. 1

The Boers' small ponies, two or three to a man, needed only 8 pounds of grain a day, and were trained to graze placidly beside gunfire. They were also acclimatised to heat, cold, and mostly immune to the South African horse sickness. 2 Although not usually outstanding marksmen, except at close ranges, the Boers shot well enough in the clear air and open plains of the veldt, which made firing at up to 2,000 yards uninterrupted by obstacles possible. They carried old-fashioned Martini-Henry breech-loaders at first, increasingly supplemented with German Mauser magazine rifles, and later captured British Lee-Metfords. 3 They had few revolvers and no swords, and no doctrine of a charge; their tactics remained, as in 1880,

1. "A"596, 'Military Notes on the Dutch Republics of South Africa', p 50 (War Office); Peel, Trooper 8008 I.Y., p 128; Woods, Young Winston's Wars, p 323
2. Smith, Veterinary History, especially p 247; Sternberg, My Experiences of the Boer War, p 240; Childers, War and the Arme Blanche, p 277
3. "A"596, 'Military Notes on the Dutch Republics of South Africa' (War Office); WO/105/27 listing firearms captured at Paardeberg; de Wet, Three Years War, p 135
to hold a defensive position, but ride away if it became untenable. There may have been more than 70,000 fighting in the early stages of the war, and more than 20,000 finally surrendered when peace was signed in June 1902. As Colonel Maude, the British theorist, put it, the British Army was faced by the equivalent of twenty Cossack divisions trying to prevent their advance from Cape Town to Pretoria, a distance comparable to that from Vienna to St. Petersburg.¹

To oppose the Boers a far greater number of horsemen, of some kind, were required than the regular British Army possessed. In addition to the two regiments of Cavalry already in South Africa a number of local units of mounted riflemen (referred to confusingly by the British as 'Colonials') were created under selected British Cavalry officers. The most distinguished were the South African Light Horse under Julian Byng of the 10th Hussars, Colonel Michael Rimington's 'Tigers' and the Rhodesian Frontier Force under Baden-Powell, with an Infantryman, Herbert Plumer, in command of one battalion.² In addition, Buller's Army Corps from Britain provided three Cavalry brigades and two regular Mounted Infantry battalions as intended. More reinforcements came from India. Still, by October 1899 there were fewer than 14,500 mounted men available to fight the Boers.³

¹ Maude, Cavalry: its Past and Future, p 271
² Hillcourt, Baden-Powell, The Two Lives of a Hero, pp 156–9
³ 'Report of His Majesty's Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters
Inevitably, the British and the Boers both suffered from indifferent officers at the start of the war. But the flexible Boer organisation, whereby leaders were elected, allowed outstanding fighters like Christiaan de Wet, de la Rey, and eventually Jan Smuts, to emerge as dominant within a few months. Replacing a British officer, especially in the Cavalry, of which there was the greatest need, was far more difficult, and the British found themselves handicapped by generally indifferent Cavalry leaders. Roberts considered most brigade commanders as no more than 'ordinary', while French was quoted as saying that most of his regimental commanders 'lost their heads in a crisis and were like old fussed hens'. At the battle of Talana Hill in October 1899, an ambitious flanking movement by a squadron of the 18th Hussars under its Colonel was surrounded and forced to surrender. At the end of the month a sizable force, including a complete Cavalry brigade, had been trapped in the siege of Ladysmith. The horses were

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Connected with the War in South Africa', (hereafter Elgin Commission) Report, pp 32-8 (War Office); Amery, The Times History of the War in South Africa (hereafter Times History) Vol II, p 106. The Army List shows that 15 Cavalry officers were sent to South Africa on 'special service' before November 1899

1. WO/105/24 on difficulties of removing an incompetent officer; Rawlinson Diary entry, 29 September 1899, 5201-33-7-10 Rawlinson/Boer; Kitchener to Roberts, 17 December 1902, 7101-23-33 Roberts

2. Roberts to Lansdowne, 30 January 1900, 7101-23-110-1 Roberts; French's remark is attested in a sworn deposition made on 13 November 1902, Mss 5907, Nos 206-9 Haldane

3. Malet, The Historical Memoirs of the XVIII Hussars, p 244
eventually nearly all eaten by the garrison.¹ Two of the disasters of 'Black Week', (10-15 December 1899) the defeats of Lord Methuen at Magersfontein and General Gatacre at Stormberg, along with Methuen's earlier defeat at Modder River, were directly attributable to inadequate reconnaissance owing to a virtual absence of mounted troops. Douglas Haig, acting as French's Chief Staff Officer in an improvised defence of the vital Colesberg railway junction in December, commented angrily that 'if only we had sufficient Cavalry with fit horses, we could do anything we liked with the Boers. It is because self-advertising men like Gatacre push on without realising the value of a well-found Cavalry that we have been checked at so many points.'² An Austrian with the Boers opposing Methuen observed:

One reads in the papers that the bad reconnoitring by the English baffled description, and their general training was condemned on these grounds. As an eyewitness I must protest against these attacks on the English army. The reconnoitring patrols which were sent out had to examine many square miles of barren country and spy the enemy. The country could not be reconnoitred by a few men; regiments were necessary.³

At that time the only horsemen with Methuen's division were the 9th Lancers and a few Mounted Infantry. After Magersfontein, French offered to send Methuen all his own horsemen, the equivalent of a strong brigade, but Methuen did

¹. Rawlinson diary entry, 10 November 1899, 5201-33-7-10 Rawlinson/Boer
². Haig to Henrietta, 12 December 1899, Acc 3155.6c Haig
³. Sternberg, My Experiences of the Boer War, p 204
not feel the country could provide sufficient water for all the horses. The Boers, with their dominance in horsemen, still controlled the main rivers. For political reasons the Indian Cavalry were not employed in South Africa, although a number of their officers came out to command Mounted Infantry or mounted riflemen, and volunteer Mounted Rifle regiments came from Canada, New Zealand and Australia. French, in order to impose a 'moral ascendancy' over the superior Boer force opposing him at Colesberg, taught his New Zealand Mounted Rifles to charge mounted with bayonets fixed to their rifles. The cautious Boer general opposing him did not attack.

The spreading of the few regular Cavalry regiments between areas of fighting produced mixed formations with, as in the 1880s, no common tactical doctrine. The Mounted Brigade with Buller, in the hill country of northern Natal by the Tugela River, was composed of one and a half regular Cavalry regiments, two regular M.I. companies, and five different units of mounted riflemen. The Earl of Dundonald, placed in command, was determined not to risk

3. Roberts to C-in-C India, 6 February 1900, 7101-23-110-1 Roberts
the life of any member of this force if the same result could be obtained by other means. Although, with a scratch force in such country, Dundonald was not expected to achieve much, he was generally highly thought of, and was to emerge from the war as a public idol, much admired by Roberts. This high opinion of Dundonald was not, however, shared by a number of subordinates. Henry Wilson, with characteristic hyperbole, called him 'a suspect fool, and useless', while Hubert Gough, serving as Dundonald's Intelligence Officer, remembered:

Dundonald was another of Buller's weak subordinates. Known to us as Dundoodle, he was hesitating, vacillating and vain. Mistakenly over-praised by a not well-informed Press, he was known as 'the stormy petrel'. The fact behind this sobriquet was that he had men under him of independent character and initiative, whose every act was credited to Dundonald. Gough's particular grievance was his claim that Dundonald robbed him of the credit for the final relief of Ladysmith, aided by the fiction of Winston Churchill, who had attached himself to Dundonald's staff as a war correspondent. Gough, like Dundonald, was however to emerge from the war with a high reputation for commanding horsemen.

1. Dundonald, My Army Life, pp 99-111
2. Wilson Diary entry, 11 April 1900, Wilson
3. Gough, Soldiering On, p 70. This was written more than fifty years after the event. But see Pakenham, The Boer War, p 280 for evidence of Dundonald's nickname.
4. Gough, Soldiering On, pp 75-81; Woods, Young Winston's Wars, p 246
Only once in the early stages of the war could French show what his Cavalry could do, in October 1899 at the battle of Elandslaagte, facing not Boer farmers but a mixed force of urban volunteers from Johannesburg and the various foreign contingents (French, Dutch, German, Irish and American settlers or miners) of the Transvaal Army.1 Attacked by Infantry led by Colonel Ian Hamilton, these men left the decision to retreat too late: when they finally mounted up and fled they were charged in flank and rear by squadrons of the 5th Lancers and 5th Dragoon Guards, which had worked dismounted round one flank. Charging in open formation over the rough ground,2 the lances of the Cavalry shattered the retreating Boers. Haig, interviewing prisoners after the battle, was struck by their intense fear and disgust at the lance.3 It seemed conclusive proof of the value, both physical and psychological, of the arme blanche and the Cavalry. However, twice before starvation, overloading and failure to acclimatise had destroyed the Cavalry force in South Africa, and now it was to happen again on a massive scale.

The attempt to supply the increasing number of horses in South Africa strained the tiny Remount Department, geared to peacetime requirements of 2,500 horses a year, until it collapsed altogether; and with officers

1. Haig to Henrietta, 26 October 1899, Acc 3155.6C Haig
2. Evans, The Story of the Fifth Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards, p 98. Other accounts suggest a closer formation
3. Haig to Henrietta, 26 October 1899, Acc 3155.6C Haig
needed for the fighting arms it remained poorly and inade-
quately staffed. In South Africa itself officers found
incompetent were put in charge of remount depots as an
alternative to dismissal, and the main depot at Stellen-
bosch entered the language as a verb, meaning to be sacked.
There was no time in the war when demand for horses actually
exceeded supply, but the horses from Argentina, North
America, Hungary, and Australia (as well as India) varied
greatly in quality, and were generally poor. If, at the
war's start, the British had made a conscious decision to
adopt Boer methods of fighting, the ponies available in
South Africa might have met their needs, but they were far
too small to carry a fully equipped Cavalryman or Mounted
Infantryman. To use these horses meant giving up not only
the charge, but the entire training system of the British
mounted forces in order to learn another, in combat, against
an enemy born to it.

Those horses which survived the two months
sea voyage to South Africa (and, for example, the 10th
Hussars lost eighteen horses from one of their two troop-
ships on the voyage out) were unfit on arrival. Haig

1. Smith, Veterinary History, pp 120-33; "A"788, 'Report on
the Work of the Remount Department 1899-1902' (War Office)
2. Smith, Veterinary History, especially pp 229-32; WO/105/
24: case of Captain Gage, 14th Hussars; cases of Colonels
Page Henderson, 6th Dragoons, and Frewen, 16th Lancers;
case of Colonel Moller, 18th Hussars
3. Smith, Veterinary History, pp 226-7, 132-4
4. Brander, The 10th Royal Hussars, p 75; Smith, Veterinary
History, pp 252-9
thought two weeks' acclimatisation essential; Lord Kitchener, like Wood before him, would have preferred three. A senior veterinary officer reckoned nine weeks minimum were required. As it was, the horses were rushed in a week in narrow gauge coal trucks up to the veldt and to the Tugela, and pressed into service carrying twenty stones, ridden by men whose horsemastership was quite inadequate to South Africa's problems of heat and food shortage. The horses, unwilling to eat the thin, reedy, bitter grass of the veldt, placed an impossible strain on Buller's supply lines. On 6 November he issued orders reducing horse rations to 12 pounds of oats with no hay ration, the ration to be cut to 8 pounds if hay or grazing were available. In practice this meant that 8 pounds of oats a day alone, a fraction of their requirement in Europe in peacetime, became the standard horse ration. The regulation bit and breast-strap made grazing impossible unless the horse was unsaddled, which in the enemy's presence was unwise. Colonel Rimington, who with his Tigers was thought the best horsemaster in the Army in South Africa, recalled one officer arguing that 'If I graze my horses I shall be likely to lose some, for which the responsibility would fall on me; whereas if they starve they do so in accordance with regulations, and I

1. Haig diary, 13 October 1899, Acc 3155.2 Haig; Kitchener quoted, and criticised, in Smith, Veterinary History, p 189
2. Davies-Cook diary entry, 24 April 1900, 7104-25 Davies-Cook; Smith, Veterinary History, pp 14-16
3. Tylden, Horses and Saddlery, p 29
have no responsibility.\(^1\) Shortly after Buller's order, the senior veterinary officer in Cape Town protested that on this scale of rations the horses would indeed starve.

It was an Army truism that the Cavalryman's first weapon was his horse, not his sword. The effort and anger that had gone into the arme blanche controversy since the 1880s had produced Cavalry reform in minor tactics, but not in the wider issues of horsemastership and the number of horsemen the Empire would need. The Cavalry's success in solving the arme blanche problem, in understanding the relation between sword and carbine, had caused the Army to ignore the fact, attested to by commanders in war and in official documents, that an overburdened, starving, unfit horse, carrying a poor horsemaster, was useless in war no matter what weapons his rider carried.

Despite this, Buller, who owed his own reputation to success as a leader of irregular horsemen in South Africa, continued to press for more. His defeat at Colenso prompted him to request the raising of '80,000 irregulars in England, organised not as regiments but in companies of 100 each. They should be equipped as Mounted Infantry, be able to shoot as well as possible, and ride decently.\(^2\) This call was taken up in The Times by the patriotic Dr Arthur Conan Doyle, who declared that 'England

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1. Rimington, *The Horse in Recent War*, p 19
2. Buller to Lansdowne, SA91, 16 December 1899, 7101-23-114 Roberts
is full of men who can ride and shoot', and by the leading figures of each county.¹ The result was the Imperial Yeomanry, created largely by the men who already officered Yeomanry regiments, but outside both the structure and the tactical doctrines of the Yeomanry itself. The first contingent of ten thousand was poorly trained and just as overladen as the Cavalry. Junior Cavalry officers had to be promoted rapidly to lead them, 'a case', Haig observed, 'of the blind leading the blind',² but a great attraction for those anxious for independent command. Haig himself advised a young friend to 'join the South African Light Horse or some such Skallywag corps, and go on the veldt and command men'.³ Less than a third of those who volunteered had served in the Yeomanry at home.⁴ The remaining two contingents, sent out in the course of the war, were even less competent, and it became proverbial that a new 'I.Y.' regiment was so likely to be cut off and surrounded as to constitute little more than a free gift of clothing and rifles to the Boers.⁵ 'I.Y.' according to one Serjeant, stood not for Imperial Yeomanry but for 'I'm Yours'.⁶

¹. Conan Doyle to The Times, 18 December 1899; Pease, The History of the Northumberland (Hussars) Yeomanry, p 26
². Haig to Henrietta, 30 March 1902, Acc 3155.6C Haig
³. Haig to Henrietta, 27 January 1901, Acc 3155.6C Haig
⁵. Gardner, Allenby, p 50; Kitchener to Roberts S.459, 10 July 1901, 7101-23-33 Roberts; Hamilton to Roberts, 6 February 1902, Hamilton 24/7/10/15 Hamilton
⁶. Hay to Gray, 18 January 1902, 7004/1 Gray
Following Buller's defeat at Colenso Roberts was sent out to take command, with Kitchener as Chief of Staff. Roberts now had the chance to wipe out the 'Majuba surrender' and show his superiority over the Wolseley Ring. On 10 January 1900 he arrived in South Africa, and five days later wrote from Cape Town to the Secretary of State for War, Lord Lansdowne, 'Large bodies of Mounted Infantry are what are chiefly required. Those that are coming from the Colonies and from England, as well as the Imperial Yeomanry, will be most useful, and I am doing all I can to raise more in this country.' Two new corps of Mounted Rifles were created in South Africa, Roberts' Horse and Kitchener's Horse, while the extra M.I. were provided by requiring every Infantry battalion in South Africa to produce one company. Apart from weakening the Infantry, and drastically multiplying the forage problem, this condemned the Army to a long war. These men would have required months of training before they could have coped in South Africa. The flaws in the conception of the original M.I., which had come from Britain as part of the Army Corps, had already been exposed. Ten weeks training a year was simply not enough to produce good horsemen; these specially selected Infantry, according to Haig, were 'the best of officers and men, but feel they are no use and can't get about on their horses'.

1. See above p 86
2. Roberts to Lansdowne, 15 January 1900, 7101-23-110-1, Roberts
3. Haig to Henrietta, 26 November 1899, Acc 3155.6c Haig
Yet, although most of the new M.I. force knew nothing of riding and horses, most getting their mounts only in the first week of February, Roberts planned for them to fight a major campaign within a week. It was the Mounted Infantry theory, the belief that scouting horsemen could be improvised, taken to its furthest extreme. The result was tragic: one M.I. Colonel admitted most of his men did not know how to saddle a horse properly, a sure way to produce sore backs; others went into combat still wearing their Infantry trousers, or even kilts. Rimington, straight-faced, recalled that one Mounted Infantryman had told him he did not know whether to feed his horse on beef or mutton.

Roberts, concentrating his forces at Modder River, where Methuen was still facing the Boers under General Cronje, used most of his M.I. and Colonials to form a protective force (known as 'divisional cavalry') for his main body of Infantry, in order to free the Cavalry for independent action. A Cavalry Division of three brigades, accompanied by two M.I. brigades, would be led by French on a wide outflanking dash to relieve the siege of Kimberley, which had held out against the Boers since the war's beginning. The united force would, when the Infantry had caught up, press on to the Orange Free State capital of Bloemfontein. This was the crucial movement of the war. Up to

this point nothing but defeat had faced the British, and Lansdowne badly needed a victory. Every major power, Japan included, sent observers to the war, and though it lasted three years it was generally appreciated that only the conventional manoeuvring and set-piece battles of the Bloemfontein campaign, and the subsequent advance to the Transvaal capital of Pretoria, had anything to teach observers which was of value to European war. (The history of the war written by the German General Staff dismissed the entire period of Kitchener's command in South Africa in succession to Roberts, eighteen months of guerrilla war, in one paragraph of a two-volume work.) It was also this campaign which provided the evidence for the next phase of the arme blanche controversy.

Into the area which Methuen had felt could not support an extra brigade of horses, Roberts concentrated 37,000 men, 14,000 horses, 12,000 mules and 10,000 oxen, during the summer drought, while at the same time re-organising the transport system. The 5,500 Cavalry and 5,800 Mounted Infantry in French's command were competing directly with each other for water, forage and horses. Roberts' advice to the Cavalry on South African warfare, issued on

1. Roberts to Lansdowne, 27 January 1900, 7101-23-110-1
3. Amery, Times History, Vol III, pp 370-6; Smith, Veterinary History, pp 29-41; Goldman, With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa, pp 73-87
26 January, contained many sound suggestions, learned in the heat of India, on dismounting whenever possible, resting the horses and proper feeding, but was ironic in the extreme in view of the sudden dash on half-rations he had planned for them.¹ There was more than a hint of desperation in Rimington's advice that all surplus equipment should be thrown away to ease the weight carried by the horses, and ending 'they must have a bellyful; I graze whenever safe (and sometimes when doubtful)',² To add to Roberts' burdens, his supply officer was (in Roberts' opinion) incompetent, and the Commander-in-Chief was having to do the job himself, without the help of two of his most trusted staff officers, Ian Hamilton and Henry Rawlinson, both still trapped in Ladysmith.³ It did not, however, occur to Roberts that if 10,000 horses could be maintained on half-rations for the relief of Kimberley, the 5,000 horses of the Cavalry alone could have been properly fed if the M.I. had been dispensed with.

French began his march on the morning of 11 February with five days forage distributed through his column. Many regiments were not equipped with corn sacks, and as the spare horses which carried the surplus load were

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1. Elgin Commission, Evidence Vol I, Appendix, p 532, C.O.S. circular memo no 5, 26 January 1900
2. Elgin Commission, Evidence Vol I, Appendix, p 531, C.O.S. circular memo no 8, 5 February 1900
3. Roberts, confidential letter to Lansdowne on senior officers, August 1900, 7101-23-124 Roberts; Wilson diary entry, 22 December 1899, Wilson
needed to replace horses dropping out through exhaustion, the corn was dumped on the veldt. It was the Army's policy in South Africa at that time, if a horse collapsed, to shoot it rather than leave it to die. Many horses which might otherwise have recovered were, in this manner, destroyed. ¹ Roberts and Kitchener had impressed on French and his officers that Kimberley must be relieved if it cost half his force, that the prestige of the Empire was at stake, and French dramatically replied that he would reach the town by the evening of 15 February, if he were still alive. ² But in addition to their other burdens Roberts chose this time to replace Cavalry officers whom he considered unfit, resulting in new commanders taking over just as the march began. Babington, one of French's brigade commanders, was dismissed by Roberts, causing considerable ill-feeling (Haig attributed the action to 'Pole-Carew's evil tales') ³ and replaced by Broadwood. Another Brigadier-General, Brabazon, was removed at French's request on grounds of old age and incompetence; but Roberts promptly found his old friend from India another post, the

1. Roberts to Wolseley, 1 July 1900, Autograph Roberts 9, Wolseley; Goldman, With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa, p 81; War Diary of the Cavalry Division in South Africa, Acc 3155.34 Haig (and also copy 'Boer War Cavalry Division Diary and Orders', 6807/159 National Army Museum) entry 11 February 1900

2. Cavalry Division War Diary, 10 February 1900, Acc 3155.34 Haig; Kitchener to Broadwood, 10 February 1900, 7508-34 Broadwood; Chisholm, Sir John French, p 67

3. Haig to Henrietta, 23 April 1900 and 26 December 1900, Acc 3155.6C Haig
command of the whole Imperial Yeomanry. Further, Roberts decided that Haig, a local Lieutenant-Colonel, was insufficiently senior to be the Cavalry Division's Chief Staff Officer. Roberts had promised a post, on Wolseley's recommendation, to the Earl of Errol, who himself had served as aide-de-camp to the new Inspector-General of Cavalry before the war. Errol replaced Haig, who had worked with French for five years and was known as one of the best staff officers in the Army. An outraged French simply ignored Errol's presence and Haig continued with the job. So rapid and haphazard was Roberts' plan of campaign that when the Cavalry and M.I. began their march none of the Brigadier-Generals had joined their brigades, and the last was not to do so until the evening three days later.

The march to the Modder River, and across it at Klip Drift, was slowed by heat, dust storms, and the five hours necessary to feed and water the horses each evening. In the first three days 460 horses died or dropped out. On the third day two or three days' supplies were issued, but there would be no more until Kimberley was reached. Meanwhile, far to the rear, a Boer raiding party under de Wet, which had brushed against French's advance, avoided the M.I.

1. Roberts to Lansdowne, 5 March 1900, 7101-23-110-2
2. Roberts to Wolseley, 20 December 1899, Autograph Roberts
3. Roberts; Bellew Diary, 10 February 1900, 5707/8
4. Haig; Elgin Commission, Report p 59
5. Cavalry Division War Diary, 11 February 1900 to 15 February 1900, Acc 3155.34 Haig
and Colonials scouting for the main body of Roberts' forces and captured his main supply column.¹

At about 10 a.m. on 15 February, two miles upstream from the Klip Drift crossing on the route to Kimberley, the Cavalry Division and accompanying M.I. encountered real opposition for the first time: fire from about 800 Boers with two Artillery pieces, forming an extended arc on the ridge of hills barring the advance. Mounted Rifles, or even cautious Cavalry, would have dismounted or tried to outflank the position, but this could take hours. French was not certain of the number of Boers, and they could be reinforced at any moment. The fire seemed least at a low point, or nek, across the middle of the range of hills. French had promised Roberts; it was time for the sacrifice he had written into the drillbook himself. Sending ahead scouts with wirecutters to clear any fences, French called for covering fire from his seven batteries, and ordered his troops, led by two Lancer squadrons, to open out to five yard intervals between files. He then led them in a charge through the Boer position and over the nek, without stopping.² The leading Brigadier-General later estimated that his men charged at about 14 miles an hour; the force spent roughly four minutes under fire, most

2. As with Mars-la-Tour, there are a number of descriptions of the Klip Drift charge, unfortunately none very detailed and with considerable variation. See *Official History South Africa*, Vol II, pp 3-6
of which Haig judged to come from around 1,000 yards, covered by their own Artillery and the dust thrown up from their horses' hooves. One hit for every five rounds fired at them would have killed or wounded every other man or horse in the charge. When the Cavalry and M.I. collected themselves miles behind the nek, they found their casualties to be four men wounded and two horses killed,¹ and the way to Kimberley was open.

The Klip Drift charge rivalled the Death Ride at Mars-la-Tour for drama and controversy. It did not resemble the close-order charge against Cavalry, nor was the destruction of the Boer force to its front its immediate objective, although a few were killed as the nek was crossed. It was undoubtedly a perfect example of a charge for a reason and purpose over and above the charge itself. All the factors which the 'scientists' had failed to consider, dust, covering fire, poor shooting at extreme ranges, and the psychological pressure of a mass of horsemen bearing down on the Boer position, combined to produce what seemed to the Cavalry as a miracle.² They did not know how they had done it. Haig went so far as to suggest, in the Divisional diary, that it was unfortunate a squadron had not

1. Cavalry Division War Diary, 15 February 1900, Acc 3155. 34 Haig. Other accounts place casualties as high as twenty killed and wounded, and up to sixty horses.
2. Cooper, British Regular Cavalry 1644-1914, p 200, suggests that the horses' hooves emerging through a dust cloud may have, with its biblical echoes, panicked the highly religious Boers.
been kept in close order to improve the shock of the charge.\textsuperscript{1} French kept his promise by relieving Kimberley on time, although his supply problems remained unsolved.\textsuperscript{2} Nor could he contact Kitchener, following with four Infantry divisions, since the telegraph was cut and the heliograph unresponsive.\textsuperscript{3} The effort of the march and the last gallop at Klip Drift had reduced the Cavalry, recorded one Colonel, to a 'desperate state' by the morning of 16 February.\textsuperscript{4} French, anxious to catch the Boers who abandoned the siege on his approach, sent out two brigades which, with the extra effort, collapsed completely during the day. One brigade alone lost sixty-eight horses.\textsuperscript{5} Only the remaining brigade, Broadwood's, was fit to move when French received fresh orders that night: the Cavalry were needed elsewhere. Cronje's force at Magersfontein was about 4,000 men, with their families carried in trek waggons.\textsuperscript{6} He had believed, quite correctly, that Roberts could not supply his Army away from the main railways, and therefore concluded a flank march was impossible; he also had a low

\textsuperscript{1} Cavalry Division War Diary, 15 February 1900, Acc 3155.
\textsuperscript{2} Official History South Africa, Vol II, p 94
\textsuperscript{3} Haig; Smith, Veterinary History, p 34
\textsuperscript{4} Haig. The same suggestion occurs in Goldmann, With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa, p 83, indicating that he had access to the diary, or to Haig.
\textsuperscript{5} Official History South Africa, Vol II, p 94, Smith, Veterinary History, p 34
\textsuperscript{6} Bellew Diary, dawn, 16 February 1900, 5707/8 Bellew

This figure is a guess based on the number who finally surrendered. Goldmann, With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa, p 102 puts the figure as high as 6,000.
opinion of Cavalry. Finding, with the relief of Kimberley, that he was cut off, he took the considerable risk of moving across the Cavalry's rear, with Kitchener in pursuit on the other bank of the Modder. On Roberts' orders French pushed Broadwood's brigade thirty-five miles in one morning to place itself in a dismounted blocking position ahead of Cronje at Paardeberg Drift. When the Cavalry opened fire Cronje, with no idea of the size of the force opposing him, assumed Kitchener's Infantry had got ahead of him, and halted, entrenching his force in the banks of the Modder. Kitchener's arrival turned this into a formal siege, and after a relief attempt had failed, Cronje and his men surrendered ten days later.

So Roberts had two spectacular victories, the relief of Kimberley and the capture of Cronje, both achieved by the much criticised regular Cavalry. Christiaan de Wet attributed every defeat of the next two months to his men's poor morale following news of the surrender. Together, the two exploits represented the triumph of the hybrid doctrine. Unfortunately, at the time the sixty-eight year old Roberts was incapacitated by a severe chill, and took no direct part in his Army's movements. He never fully appreciated either the extent of the Cavalry's success, nor the extent of their weakness. As no newspaperman followed the Cavalry through the whole of the campaign, neither did the general.

1. Sternberg, My Experiences of the Boer War, pp113, 159
2. de Wet, Three Years War, p 68
3. Goldman accompanied the Cavalry for most of the campaign.
public. With part of his main supply column lost, Roberts did, however, find the problem of feeding his force impossible. The Cavalry received no supplies for their horses for four days after relieving Kimberley. Their rations for the following day were five pounds and, for the day after that, one pound of corn. Not until 23 February were 'normal' rations issued to the horses. By this time few could move above a walk, and the Division's strength had dropped to 4,500 men with 4,200 horses, despite receiving a number of remounts. ¹ Meanwhile a series of incidents soured the already uneasy relations between the Cavalry and Roberts' headquarters. On the night of 21 February, French, who had been pressing for Haig's promotion, appointed him to command a brigade, moving one Brigadier-General to another command and returning a second to his regiment. On the following afternoon, French was invited to Roberts' headquarters. By the evening, both Brigadier-Generals were re-instated with their original commands, but Haig was appointed Chief Staff Officer to the Cavalry Division, and the Earl of Errol was to escort Cronje into captivity on his surrender, leaving, so French and Haig recorded, because of ill-health. ² In fact, Roberts put Errol, unfit

¹. Haig diary, 15-23 February 1900, Acc 3155.38 Haig; Cavalry Division War Diary, 15-23 February 1900, Acc 3155.34 Haig; Goldman, With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa, p 116

². Haig to Henrietta, 22 February 1900, Acc 3155.6C Haig; Cavalry Division War Diary, 22 February 1900, Acc 3155.34 Haig; Haig diary, 22 February 1900, Acc 3155.38 Haig; WO 105/25 General French's reports upon Major-General Brabazon/Col Earl of Errol/Col Babington, letter dated 27 February 1900
or not, in charge of a brigade-sized force of the new Mounted Infantry. ¹

On 24 February a Cavalry raid towards Bloemfontein planned by Roberts was cancelled: French had announced that his Division was incapable of movement.² Haig, over at Roberts' headquarters that day on a routine visit, was told by Roberts something he recorded in sheer disbelief. 'He said he considered Cavalry Officers did not sufficiently look after their horses!' Haig wrote, 'General French also, to be hard on his horses.'³ Although French's opinion that 'the horsemastership of the Cavalry is very nearly all that we can desire'⁴ is equally questionable, no amount of care could have helped the Division's starving horses, and Roberts knew it. On 22 February he telegraphed Lansdowne:

We are experiencing extreme difficulty about supplies. None are available locally, and owing to the drought water is rarely found except in rivers. In most places there is little or no grazing for animals and it is impossible to carry forage for them.⁵

Five days later he wrote that 'I should be unable to move on account of the crippled state of my horses. For several days they were worked hard, with no grain, and with very

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¹. *Official History South Africa*, Vol III, p 34
². ibid, Vol II, p 172
³. Haig diary, 24 February 1900, Acc 3155.38 Haig
⁵. Roberts to Lansdowne, 22 February 1900, 7101-23-110-2 Roberts
little else to eat.'¹ Because of the transport problem, Roberts made a personal appeal to the Cavalry to put up with inadequate supplies. But on 28 February his supply officer reported that their horses had considerably exceeded their ration. Leopold Amery, the assistant foreign editor of The Times, who was in South Africa, remembered that 'this time the Little Chief let himself go and gave the Cavalry a real dressing down for not playing the game'.² But there had been an elementary error in the calculations. As the Cavalrymen pointed out, with frigid politeness, they were drawing forage not only for their fit horses, but also for those which were sick. 'The Cavalry', wrote Amery, 'never forgave.'³

The strain on relations between French and Roberts finally produced the most controversial episode of the war. On 28 February the Cavalry's fit horses numbered 3,500, including a large number of poor quality remounts.⁴ That day the Army, following Cronje's surrender, began to move towards Bloemfontein, and on 6 March it faced 6,000 Boers under de Wet in a blocking position across the Modder at Poplar Grove.⁵ By this time the effort of marching had

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¹ Quoted in Official History South Africa, Vol III, p 29
² Amery, My Political Life, Vol I, p 131
³ Haig diary entry, 28 February 1900, Acc 3155.38 Haig; Cavalry Division War Diary, 28 February 1900, Acc 3155.34 Haig; Amery, My Political Life, Vol I, p 131
⁴ Cavalry Division War Diary, 28 February 1900, Acc 3155.34 Haig
⁵ Again a rough estimate. The German Official Account of the War in South Africa, Vol II, p 6 lists the possible figures given, ranging from 2,000 to 8,000.
brought the Cavalry down to 2,800 horses, but they were still required to share their forage with the M.I., who had run out.\(^1\) Roberts planned another Paardeberg, intending to trap the Boers against the river bank by a deep turning movement, led by French's Cavalry, which was required by daybreak to be far enough behind the Boer flank to prevent escape when the Infantry assaulted. Unfortunately, Roberts gave his orders in a rousing speech which omitted to mention starting times, and French apparently walked out early, with the belief that he should move at 3 a.m.; while his close friend, General Kelly-Kenny, commanding the supporting Infantry division, believed he should move at 2 a.m., but behind the Cavalry. French and Kelly-Kenny both blamed Roberts for the ensuing confusion, and he blamed them. The result was that by dawn the Cavalry had just got behind the Boer position.\(^2\)

As the Boers were outflanked, de Wet wrote later, 'a panic seized my men'.\(^3\) They abandoned their position and retreated, as a British observer put it, 'as fast as they could get their horses away'.\(^4\) Roberts telegraphed to Lansdowne that they had even left their cooked meals behind them.\(^5\) Poplar Grove, intended as the decisive

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3. de Wet, *Three Years War*, p 69
4. Bellew diary, 7 March 1900, 5707/8 Bellew
5. Roberts to Lansdowne no 259, 8 March 1900, 7101-23-110-2 Roberts
battle, was turning out to be only the Cavalry, trying un-
successfully to raise a trot from their exhausted horses
(according to Smith-Dorrien, an eyewitness)\(^1\) in pursuit of
twice their number of Boers. Small Boer dismounted parties,
which the Cavalry could neither outflank nor gallop through
in their crippled state, slowed the pursuit, and by 3 p.m.
they were ridden to a standstill. 'The rout', Roberts told
Lansdowne, 'was complete, the men declaring that they could
not stand against British Artillery and such a formidable
force of Cavalry.'\(^2\) It was only on the following day that
he learned what had been missed: with the Boers had been the
Presidents of the two republics, who had arrived to confer
with de Wet just as the battle started. To have captured
all three would surely have meant a total Boer collapse.

Roberts tried to explain to Lansdowne:

Owing to the absence of forage and hard work,
a good many [horses] have been lost during the
past month...five hundred and fifty eight were
either killed, died, or went missing during the
relief of Kimberley, and [at Poplar Grove] 54
were killed, 47 wounded, 62 died from exhaustion
and 116 others were reported unfit for work. It
must be remembered that the sickly season is
approaching...The success of the campaign depends
entirely on the mounted troops being efficient.\(^3\)

In thirty days between leaving Modder River and finally
arriving in Bloemfontein, with de Wet still undefeated and

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1. Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of Forty Eight Years Service*, p166
2. Roberts to Lansdowne, no 266, 9 March 1900, 7101-23-110-2
   Roberts
3. Roberts to Lansdowne, no 271, 9 March 1900, 7101-23-110-2
   Roberts
at large, the Cavalry had lost 42 per cent of its mounts, even allowing for remounts, and was competing directly with the M.I. for any horses it could get. The Cavalrymen would have preferred their own big troop horses, which Rimington thought the best in the country, if only they were given sufficient food. ¹ On 16 March a furious Douglas Haig wrote home:

I have never seen horses so beat as ours this day. They have been having only 8 lbs of oats a day, and practically starving since we left Modder River on February 11th. So many colonial Skallywag corps have been raised that the horses of the whole force could not have a full ration. The Colonial Corps raised in Cape Colony are quite useless, so are the recently raised Mounted Infantry. They can't ride, and know nothing of their duties as mounted men. Roberts Horse and Kitchener's Horse are good only for looting and the greater part of them disappear the moment a shot is fired or there is the prospect of a fight. You will see then that the success of the Cavalry Division has been in spite of these ruffians and notwithstanding short rations.²

William Howard Russell, the veteran critic of British Generalship, annoyed at the adulation of Roberts in the British Press following Paardeberg, wrote to Garnet Wolseley from the safety of Dover:

Well ! after all the 'common sense strategy', the 'spinning of the coils', the 'closing of the net', the 'anaconda folds', and the rest of the damnable stuff streaking the columns of the great 'organs' that are set to the same tune, 'Gloria in excelsis Bobbibus !' I cannot for the life of me see anything but an abortive attempt to direct some 40,000 men, three brigades of horse, 100 guns and six Generals to get hold

¹ Smith, Veterinary History, p 42; Tylden, Horses and Saddlery, p 36
² Haig to Henrietta, 16 March 1900, Acc 3155.6C Haig
of some 5,000 Dutchmen not very far from Bloemfontein who could not [be] taken prisoner but who could march away under our noses. 1

Wolseley himself, reading between the lines of Roberts' reports coming into the War Office, realised the supply failure and what it had done to the Cavalry. Knowing that Roberts was due to succeed him as Commander-in-Chief at the end of the year, however, he feared that any statement by him would be misinterpreted as spite. He expressed unfeigned and bitter admiration for Roberts' ability to keep the Press on his side. 2

On the same day that Haig wrote home, 16 March, Roberts wrote again to Lansdowne, with a new note in his despatch:

The Cavalry horses were, no doubt, done up, but we should have had a good chance of making two Presidents prisoner if French had carried out my orders of going straight for the Modder River instead of wasting valuable time by going after small parties of the enemy. 3

On 24 April he developed this theme into his explanation for the failure, so far, of the campaign:

I think we might have done better on more than one occasion if our Cavalry had been judiciously handled. French will never make a great Cavalry leader, he is wanting in initiation [sic] and has no idea of how to take care of his horses. He carried out the relief of Kimberley in a satisfactory manner because he acted exactly in

1. Russell to Wolseley, 28 April 1900, Autograph Russell 28, Wolseley
2. Wolseley to George Wolseley, 20 April 1900 (uncatalogued) Wolseley
3. Roberts to Lansdowne, 16 April 1900, 7101-23-110-2 Roberts
accordance with the instructions I gave him. But the following day, instead of giving his horses a much needed rest, he worked them from daylight to dark without injury to the enemy or advantage to ourselves...At Poplar Grove, French started late and allowed himself to be beguiled by the enemy into fighting a series of rearguard actions, instead of giving them a wide berth and placing himself on the Boer's line of retreat. They were thus able to carry off their guns, and [Presidents] Kruger and Steyn effected their escape.¹

There was no mention of supply problems in this letter, which was the first occasion on which the theory was advanced that the Cavalry's 'failure' at Poplar Grove was due to French, and to Cavalry trained in the arme blanche mentality of always charging, being unable to cope with the skirmishing tactics of mounted riflemen. This claim by Roberts transformed the arme blanche controversy. For the Cavalry to accept it would be to acknowledge that Poplar Grove, and the subsequent two years of war, were their fault. For Roberts to admit that the Cavalry were not incorrectly trained would be also to admit that their failure was due to the collapse of their horses, the fault of himself and of his staff. The members of the Roberts Ring, who would later provide his principal supporters in the postwar arme blanche debate, all arrived in Bloemfontein after its capture. Ian Hamilton, released from Ladysmith on 28 February, was given a divisional command by Roberts, although still only a Colonel, along with administrative command of the entire Mounted Infantry.² His command included French's

₁. Roberts to Lansdowne, 24 April 1900, 7101-23-110-2 Roberts
². Woods, Young Winston's Wars, p 294
best brigade, under Broadwood, despite the latter's high opinion of French.\(^1\) The future exploits of Hamilton's force were guaranteed publicity by the presence of Churchill, who eulogised Roberts as 'Her Majesty's greatest subject', and Hamilton as 'the man who won the fight at Elandslaagte'.\(^2\) Rawlinson, Wilson and Robertson all joined Roberts' staff at about the same time.

Meanwhile, the Army was stuck in Bloemfontein, receiving a little over half the number of supply trucks a day it needed from the railway.\(^3\) There was no rest, however, for the Cavalry. Haig complained that 'Whenever there is an alarm Lord R[oberts] at once orders out French and the Cavalry. I don't know what we'll do for horses. Only wretched beasts and Argentine ponies are arriving'.\(^4\) Fresh horses were distributed, but they were worked too hard too quickly, and rapidly became diseased.\(^5\) After a day spent patrolling on 31 March the three Cavalry brigades (the 4th Brigade arrived in April) had only 1,073 horses fit for action. The 16th Lancers, a particularly bad case, had only eighty-two fit horses in the regiment.\(^6\) The advance from Bloemfontein was delayed by French's confession that, once again, his horses could not move. On 3 May Roberts attempted to

\(^1\) Broadwood to his mother, 21 February 1900, 7508-34 Broadwood
\(^2\) Woods, *Young Winston's Wars*, p 272
\(^3\) Amery, *Times History*, Vol IV, p 13
\(^4\) Haig to Henrietta, 7 April 1900, Acc 3155.6C Haig
\(^5\) Haig to Henrietta, 5 May 1900, Acc 3155.6C Haig
\(^6\) Smith, *Veterinary History*, pp 52-4
advance without the Cavalry, but soon found that his few Colonials, untrained M.I. and newly arrived Imperial Yeomanry were inadequate as scouts for his Army. On 8 May he demanded the Cavalry's presence at Vet River, sixty miles from Bloemfontein, forcing two of the brigades to cover the distance in one day, and then reprimanded French for allowing his horses to straggle.

The Cavalry were needed for another attempt to trap the Boers, at the battle of Zand River on 10 May. This produced another controversy: ten years later, Ian Hamilton wrote of it as the action which destroyed his last faith in the arme blanche. 'The horses were fresh', he told Erskine Childers, 'after several days complete rest', but failed when ordered to break through and pursue the retreating Boers. 'I do not blame the Cavalry personnel', Hamilton continued, 'no finer fellows serve in the British, or any other, Army.' He blamed the 'false training which had taught them in peace tactics palpably impractical for war'. But in the same battle the Cavalry discovered that, although their horses were far too weak to gallop, they could cause a Boer retreat by the threat of a charge, however badly delivered. French led one charge personally:

I galloped from the kopje to the outer brigade with the thought that either every idea which I had ever formed in my life as to the efficacy

1. Haig to Henrietta, 14 May 1900, Acc 3155.6C Haig; Amery, *Times History*, Vol IV, p 122
2. Hamilton to Childers, copy to Roberts and Churchill, 30 October 1910, Hamilton 7/3/15 Hamilton
of shock action against mounted riflemen was utterly erroneous, or this was the moment to show that it was not...The Boers realised what was coming. Their fire became wild, and bullets began to fly over our heads.1

Another participant recalled with amusement the Boers mounting up and retreating before 'the terrifying spectacle of 200 men flogging their horses with the flat of their blunt swords'.2

The same tactic was used successfully at the battle of Diamond Hill on 11 June, virtually the last set-piece battle of the war. Churchill, an eyewitness, described the charge of the 12th Lancers:

Its effect was instantaneous. Though the regiment scarcely numbered one hundred and fifty men, the Boers fled before them...Had the horses been fresh and strong a very severe punishment would have been administered to the enemy, but with weary and jaded animals which were all worn out with hard work and scanty food, they were unable to overtake the mass of fugitives who continued to fly before them...Altogether ten Boers perished by the lance, and the moral effect on those who escaped must certainly have been considerable.3

The Life Guards, who thanks to Dundonald's training proved to be among the best shots and scouts in South Africa, despite being Heavy Cavalry, also had a chance to charge:

Delighted at this unlooked-for, unhoped-for opportunity the Life Guardsmen scrambled back into their saddles, thrust their hated [sic] carbines into the buckets, and, drawing their long swords, galloped straight for the enemy. The Boers, who in this part of the field very

1. French, preface to Bernhardi, Cavalry in War and Peace, p xi
2. Vaughan, 'Cavalry Notes', JRUSI Vol 45, p 452
3. Woods, Young Winston's Wars, p 322
considerably outnumbered the Cavalry, might very easily have inflicted severe losses on them. But so formidable was the sight of these tall horsemen cheering and flogging their gaunt horses with the flat of their swords, that they did not abide, and, running to their mounts, fled in a cowardly haste, so that, though eighteen horses were shot, the Household Cavalry sustained no loss in men.¹

No Cavalryman before the war would have advocated charging Infantry entrenched on a hill crest; yet repeatedly the Cavalry found such tactics worked against mounted riflemen.² The Boers, worried about turning movements on their flanks, stretched their line at Diamond Hill to twenty-five miles, or about one man to every six yards of front. They were unable to concentrate enough firepower to stop even a slow moving charge.³ But also at Diamond Hill, with the armies stretched over such distances, control of the battle by Roberts and his officers proved impossible; chances were missed, and the result was inconclusive. The Boers reverted to skirmishing, and were quite prepared to ride away when threatened. Haig was happy enough with this. 'I hear from several sources', he wrote, 'that the Infantry is quite jealous of the success of the Cavalry. The poor creatures merely carry their guns without a chance of loosing off! In fact they simply wear their boots out to no purpose!!'⁴ To suggest to men in this mood that they had

¹. Woods, Young Winston's Wars, p 323; Roberts to Lansdowne, 30 January 1900, 7101-23-110-1 Roberts
². Elgin Commission, Evidence Vol I, p 293
³. Lascelles, 'The Influence of Ground on Shock Action', CJ Vol 5, no 19, p 492; Maude, Cavalry: its Past and Future, p 253
⁴. Haig to Henrietta, 14 May 1900, Acc 3155.6C Haig
failed was to court ridicule. After a farcical episode (reminiscent of that between Dundonald and Gough) in which Roberts forced French to retreat from a town so that, for publicity reasons, he might receive its surrender personally, Haig observed 'I am afraid he is a silly old man and scarcely fit to be C. in C. of this show'.

In contrast, Roberts, having achieved his objective with the fall of Pretoria on 5 June, took a more charitable view of the Cavalry than previously. He wrote to Lansdowne on 2 August that 'French has been doing very well lately. He lost his head a little after all the praise showered upon him for the relief of Kimberley, but has now recovered and is of great use.' By the end of the month he placed French alongside Hamilton as 'one of the three or four I would entrust with a difficult business', and a few weeks later summed him up as 'an excellent Cavalry commander'. He does not seem to have realised the antipathy towards himself that he had created in French and his Cavalry. By 1 August he thought them 'pretty well off' for remounts and supplies; but the cost of the campaign had been enormous. Allowing for replacements received, the Cavalry between 19 May and 9 June lost 40 per cent of the horses from its 1st

1. Haig to Henrietta, 14 May 1900, Acc 3155.60 Haig
2. Roberts to Lansdowne, 2 August 1900, 7101-23-110-3 Roberts
3. Roberts to Lansdowne, 29 August 1900, 7101-23-110-3 Roberts
4. Roberts to Lansdowne, 17 September 1900, 7101-23-110-4 Roberts
5. Roberts to Kitchener, C.2433, 1 July 1900, 7101-23-111 Roberts
Brigade, while 4th Brigade, relatively new to the country, lost 60 per cent.¹ Nor were these figures to improve for the period of guerrilla war that was just beginning. In an attempt to contain the Boers, great mounted 'drives' were organised through the veldt, demanding yet more horsemen. Nearly every regular Cavalry regiment was rotated through South Africa in the course of the war,² and had to learn the special horsemastership skills of the country. More M.I. units were created, even the Artillery contributing, and more Imperial Yeomanry arrived, 'a helpless looking lot', according to one of their members.³ Horses were overloaded, not with superfluous equipment, but with food as an attempt to overcome the uncertainties of the supply system. 'I should like you to see us sometime!', a happy I.Y. Serjeant wrote to his father, 'with half a sheep hanging behind our saddles, and half a tree in front to cook it with.'⁴ He was puzzled at his horse's poor condition. The ration for horses seldom rose above the 8 pounds of corn accepted as standard, and could easily drop as low as 2½ pounds of corn and mealies if the supply system clogged, as it often did.⁵

More than 500,000 horses were finally used in the war, and

². Stirling, *Our Regiments in South Africa*, pp 398-463. The single exception was the 15th Hussars.
³. Paterson diary, April 1900, (a summary) 7208-8 Paterson
⁴. Britten to his father, 29 June 1900, 7812-34 Britten
⁵. Rawlinson Column War Diary 1901, 5201-33-8 Rawlinson/Boer; Davies-Cook, diary entries 19 February 1901 and 6 March 1901, 7104-25 Davies-Cook
a little more than 66 per cent died, mostly of starvation and mistreatment.\(^1\) The survivors were the small, light ponies of the type the Boers themselves rode.

The British horsemen of the last year of the war, veteran Mounted Infantry and Cavalry (in fact elite Mounted Rifles in all but name) gradually regained their mobility on these horses, but only at the expense of the charge and the *arme blanche* itself. In late 1900, as Roberts relinquished command to Kitchener, set piece battles had given way to skirmishes at 1,000 yards or more by small parties of Boers. As a weight saving, swords and lances were given up and the Cavalry issued with the Lee-Metford rifle to replace their carbines. Some Cavalrymen, grateful for a long-range weapon, even attempted to open fire at 4,000 yards or more, well beyond the rifle's range.\(^2\) These skirmishes at extreme range produced few casualties, and, compared to the rifles of thirty years before, only minor wounds.\(^3\) The Scots Greys, in South Africa from the start of the war, lost only 76 dead in its entire course;\(^4\) the 2nd Dragoon Guards lost 80 dead in seven months, 23 of them in a single ambush.\(^5\) One Imperial Yeomanry company spent eighteen months in the field, under fire sixty-five times, for the loss of only three men; another spent fifteen

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1. Smith, *Veterinary History*, p 226
2. *The Question of Mounted Infantry by a Rifleman*, p 61
4. According to its memorial in the grounds of Edinburgh Castle. This does not state how many died in battle, or of wounds.
months in South Africa without a death in battle. The first Imperial Yeomanry contingent saw far more fighting than the two following ones, but even this lost only 2 per cent of its men in action.

Although Roberts made a general enquiry before issuing the rifle to his horsemen, he did not draft a positive order forbidding the arme blanche. French objected to the suggestion, but the decision was finally left to individual commanders of the mounted 'columns' of 500 to 1,500 men who made the drives. Horace Smith-Domien, whom French regarded as the best of his senior column commanders, actively sought permission to abandon the sword, and gave the 5th Lancers, part of his column, the choice of leaving their swords and lances or being left behind when the column moved. Some regiments, however, kept their swords to the end of the war, and one newspaper was later to quote:

One grim faced horse-soldier of our acquaintance who received a peremptory personal order to cast aside his swords. He did so, but, in his own words, 'As soon as that d----d fellow (mentioning a certain general) had turned his back we picked 'em up again, and what's more' -

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1. Fox, A History of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars Yeomanry 1891-1922, p 13; Edmeades, Some Historical Records of the West Kent (Q.C.) Yeomanry 1794-1909, p 114
2. Elgin Commission, Evidence, Vol I, p 279
3. WO/105/29 'Opinions as to the arming of Cavalry with the long rifle'; Roberts to Hamilton, 4 April 1902, 7101-23-122 Roberts; Hamilton to Roberts, 30 April 1902, Hamilton 24/7/10/23 Hamilton
4. Smith-Domien, Memories of Forty Eight Years Service, p 260
5. Hamilton to Roberts, 30 April 1902, Hamilton 24/7/10/23 Hamilton
he added with exultation - "we used them; and though the Boers took to charging some fellows' columns, by G--! they never tried to charge mine!!"

The remaining Boers, about 20,000 veterans of a year's fighting, did indeed begin to charge British columns in early 1901, and Brabazon, the Imperial Yeomanry commander, also attributed this to his men's lack of the arme blanche.

A Boer 'rifle charge' was a compromise between their normal skirmishing tactics and the need to inflict casualties on the enemy. It consisted of a fast gallop by horsemen in loose formation, firing from the saddle and often supported by a dismounted party; at close range, however, rather than charging through their opponents, the Boers would dismount and engage in a prolonged rifle-duel. At Bakenlaagte on 30 October 1901 a charge by about 900 Boers ended in a firefight taking fifteen minutes to overwhelm a British rearguard of 180 men, while the column they were covering escaped.

At Roodewall in the western Transvaal on 10 April 1902 a Boer force of nearly 1,000 failed to surprise a Mounted Infantry column, and charged in two closely bunched lines quite slowly into the fire of 1,500 rifles. Even so, they were not turned back until the closest were within 70 yards.

1. Saturday Review, 28 May 1910, preserved in 7101-23-222 Roberts
2. Rawlinson Column War Diary, standing order no 4 of 27 April 1901 warns against this, 5201-33-8 Rawlinson/Boer.
For the whole question of the 'rifle charge' see evidence collected in 7101-23-221 Roberts, and Childers, War and the Arme Blanche, especially pp 246-8
3. Elgin Commission, Evidence, Vol I, p 293
yards of contact, and lost only 51 killed, 40 wounded and 36 prisoners. The British General Staff suggested ten years later that a small mounted party with swords, charging into their flank just as they faltered, would have destroyed them.

Only once, apparently, at Blood River, on 17 September 1901, did the Boers deliberately carry a charge home, when they ambushed a column led by Hubert Gough. The column was fixed in front by rifle fire, and in the classic tactics of Mounted Rifles had itself dismounted in open order, when a party of 200 Boers rode into and over it from the flank. Kitchener decided Gough was not to blame for the destruction of his command. The man who went to Gough's rescue, Edmund Allenby of the Inniskilling Dragoons, apparently disagreed, and an enmity grew between them. There were, however, throughout the war a number of clashes between mounted Boers and British forces in which bayonets or clubbed rifles were used. The Cavalry complained they were handicapped without their swords, and Jan Smuts agreed, calling the giving up of the arme blanche the biggest mistake of the war. Kitchener preferred to

1. Amery, Times History, Vol V, pp 530-7
2. Review of Childers, War and the Arme Blanche, by the General Staff, CJ, Vol 5, no 19, p 408
3. Gough, Soldiering On, pp 84-9
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² Review of Childers, War and the Arme Blanche, by the General Staff, CJ, Vol 5, no 19, p 408
³ Gough, Soldiering On, pp 84-9
⁵ Elgin Commission, Evidence, Vol II, p 411, Smuts quoted by Haig.
believe, with some justification, that the successful Boer charges were due instead to the poor shooting and panic of novice M.I. and Imperial Yeomanry. Such disasters as the capture of Lord Methuen and the scattering of his column at Tweebosch on 7 March 1902 were undoubtedly due to inexperienced troops panicking under fire. But Kitchener asked too much of his columns: regiments that had been in South Africa less than two weeks were deemed operational, and thirty or forty miles a day demanded of them. "If a column commander is not successful", Kitchener decided, "it is the first excuse that the horses were no good." He drove the columns so hard that his staff under Ian Hamilton resorted (generally unsuccessfully) to hiding the existence of columns from him in order to rest the horses. Haig, impatient with Kitchener's orders for his own force of six columns, occasionally carried out his own plans and informed the Commander-in-Chief later.

For the duration of the guerrilla war, military reputation and subsequent promotion prospects depended on the ability to command the mobile columns of horsemen on the veldt. The successful commanders included Infantrymen who

1. Kitchener to Roberts, 9 March 1902, 7101-23-33 Roberts
2. Younghusband, Forty Years a Soldier, p 205; Seely, Adventure, p 56
3. Kitchener to Roberts, 7 February 1902, 7101-23-22 Roberts
4. Hamilton to Roberts, 24 December 1901, Hamilton 24/7/10/14 Hamilton
5. Haig to Henrietta, 2 September 1901, Acc 3155.6C Haig
in the normal course of their careers would never have led Cavalry, and whose experience of mounted tactics was restricted entirely to South Africa. One of the main problems in the arme blanche controversy after the war was that there were too many experts. As Colonel Maude acidly remarked:

The hardest task of all is to convince a man who has seen a good deal of active service, that the scope of his personal impressions and opportunities is not in itself sufficient to provide him with brains if he has none, or to over-ride the experience of thousands of others who have gone before him.¹

High on the lists of good column commanders drawn up by Kitchener, Hamilton and French for Roberts² were Infantry-men such as de Lisle, Smith-Dorrien and Henry Rawlinson, as well as Cavalrymen like Haig, Allenby, Rimington, Gough, Byng and a promising Major Charles Kavanagh. All would play significant roles in the arme blanche controversy and reach high rank in the First World War. In fact, French and a number of his Cavalrymen were excluded from the main theatre of guerrilla war by Roberts, who had decided in September 1900 that Kitchener should succeed him in South Africa, and General Neville Lyttelton, a veteran of Egypt like Broadwood, should succeed Kitchener.³ French's

1. Maude, Cavalry: its Past and Future, p 158
2. French to Roberts, 22 September 1901, 7101-23-30 Roberts; Kitchener to Roberts, 6 September 1901, 7101-23-33 Roberts; Hamilton to Roberts, 8 February 1902, Hamilton 24/7/10/14 Hamilton
3. Roberts to Lansdowne, 9 February 1900 and 17 September 1900, 7101-23-110-1/3 Roberts
command of Cape Colony was by no means small, with Haig as a local commander under him, but once Boer attempts to invade the colony, never very practical, were defeated, it was a side-show. This was despite the fact that de Wet, who evaded capture by all the drives for the entire war, regarded French as 'the one Boer general in the British Army', and (according to a fierce admirer of French) had once declared that if the Cavalryman alone had been allowed to pursue him, he could not have evaded capture for two weeks. The most important column work was given by Kitchener to Henry Rawlinson, who had some experience with Mounted Infantry in the Burma campaign of 1886 (where he had met Henry Wilson, also commanding Mounted Infantry). Rawlinson made a shaky start in South Africa against the Boers, however. Roberts wrote, revealingly, to Ian Hamilton 'If you come across Rawly, tell him I hope to hear of him as being one of the most dashing leaders in the Army. It grieves me terribly to hear doubts about him.' Rawlinson eventually repaid Roberts' trust: between April and December 1901 his column of just under 1,500 men marched 3,397 miles across the veldt, accounting for 538 Boers killed, wounded and prisoners.

1. Meintjes, The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, p 37; Chisholm, Sir John French, p 128
2. Maurice, The Life of General Lord Rawlinson of Trent, pp 12-15
3. Roberts to Hamilton, 27 March 1902, 7101-23-122 Roberts
4. Rawlinson Column War Diary, Table 'Bag of Colonel Rawlinson's Column April-December 1901', 5201-33-9 Rawlinson/Boer
The tactics adopted by Rawlinson and other column commanders were the same as those finally adopted by the Boers themselves. Carrying nothing on the horse but a greatcoat, a rifle and three bandoliers, Rawlinson's force covered 80 miles in 26 hours (at the cost of 96 horses dead and 136 sick with exhaustion) and galloped to surprise its Boer opponents in dawn 'rifle charges' on their camps. Rawlinson came to believe that his veteran M.I. were among the best troops in the Army. Once more a name made all the difference to the \textit{arme blanche} controversy. Detractors of the Mounted Infantry after the war drew support from descriptions of the untrained men of 1900; their supporters pointed to columns such as Rawlinson's, whose 'Mounted Infantry', formed by two years of war, bore no resemblance to the temporary and improvised force envisaged by Wolseley and Roberts in the 1880s.

Superficially, the case against the \textit{arme blanche} in the war looked foolproof. Cavalry armed with the sword and lance had failed to cope with Boer mounted riflemen, and had made no successful massed charges which had killed hundreds of Boers. The \textit{arme blanche} had been given up as useless, while when Mounted Rifle tactics had been adopted, from sheer necessity, there had been successes on both sides. This was certainly the way it appeared from

1. See Rawlinson to Roberts, especially 25 November 1901, 15 December 1901, 27 March 1902, 7101-23-61 Roberts
Britain. One of Wolseley's last recommendations as Commander-in-Chief, prior to retirement in December 1900, was that 'all Cavalry, including Yeomanry, should be turned into "rifle cavalry", i.e. carry an Infantry rifle'. It was also the way it appeared to Roberts and his Ring. Hamilton in particular seemed vindicated; much as he had predicted in 1885, war had been a matter of long-range rifle duels, with Cavalry and Artillery falling into disuse.

The Cavalry failure in the first year of war, however, had simply reflected the failure of the supply system, inadequate from the start, and finally swamped beneath large numbers of unnecessary Mounted Infantry, Colonial Mounted Rifles and Imperial Yeomanry. Kitchener, nominally Roberts' Chief Staff Officer, had functioned as a Second-in-Command rather than a genuine Staff officer. The staffwork abilities of the Roberts Ring had proved inadequate to cope with either major problems like the supply and care of horses, or even minor ones such as, at Poplar Grove, making sure that orders were clearly understood. In comparison the Cavalry had been highly successful. The regular Cavalry itself, in proportion to the other arms, never exceeded one to sixteen in South Africa, compared to the ratios of one to nine still thought normal for European war. It had, again in itself, always been

1. W/Misc/11, p 2 Wolseley
outnumbered by the Boers, and had unsurprisingly failed to subdue them single handed. In contrast to Roodewall, no Cavalry charge had been shot down by the Boers, and none that had been attempted had been unsuccessful. The Cavalry also had Paardeberg to its credit, and Elandslaagte, and the mystery of Klip Drift. The war renewed their faith in the arme blanche, by showing that it could be used to turn mounted riflemen, or 'scare' them out of position. The Cavalry interpreted the Boer readiness to retreat if defeat or death threatened, behaviour which was the product of their whole social and cultural system, as deriving entirely from the weapons they carried. Even more than before, they saw the arme blanche not only as a weapon, but as a stimulus providing the willingness to attack, and to risk death.

Within a few years of the war's end, however, the Cavalry theorists, conscious as always of history, would begin to fear that the unusual circumstances under which the war had been fought might have distorted its events to such an extent as to make no parallel with European, or any other, war possible. 'All wars are abnormal', John French noted, 'because there is no such thing as a normal war.'

1. French in preface to Bernhardi, *Cavalry in War and Peace*, p viii
CHAPTER FOUR

BOBS, JOBS, SNOBS & CO.

'No-one can have a greater belief in cavalry than I have. It will, I am satisfied, be more required than ever in war-time.'

- Lord Roberts of Khandahar, 1901

'The simplest and most effective reform would be one which should abolish it altogether, retaining the household regiments for public functions.'

- Dr Arthur Conan Doyle, 1900

The monotony of life in the 9th Lancers at Rawalpindi in 1903 was eased slightly for Private Grainger on 10 July. He wrote in his diary:

Orders had come out no more to do with the lance, as they talk of doing away with them. I suppose that is some smart official's work, making out he is saving the expense of buying lances, to put the money in his own pocket. But I fancy we shall bring them on guard peachy [shortly].

For once, the soldier's reflex of blaming all his ills on the Treasury was wrong. The abolition was a direct order from the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts. Grainger was, however, otherwise quite right: four days later his regiment paraded, in apparent defiance of the order, carrying its lances. The arme blanche controversy had entered its most

1. Roberts to Wood, 29 September 1901, 7101-23-122 Roberts
2. Conan Doyle, The Great Boer War, pp 518-9
3. Grainger Diary entry, 10 July 1903, 7104-31 Grainger
4. Grainger Diary entry, 14 July 1903, 7104-31 Grainger. If this were a parade or inspection, carrying the lance was
bitter phase.

Roberts came to Britain from South Africa intent on the drastic reform of the Army, including the Cavalry. But since he blamed the failure of his campaign in South Africa directly on the Cavalry, he altogether failed to employ, even to recognise the existence of, the strong reforming movement already in being among the Cavalry in Britain. Understandably so, since its leading lights, like French and Haig, were the men he held primarily responsible for the failure. He wrote of Haig, 'I consider it quite a misfortune that Haig should be of the old school in regard to the role of cavalry in the field. He is a clever, able fellow, and his views have a great effect on French, Scobell, and some other senior officers.' Never having been closely involved with the arme blanche controversy in Britain, he did not recognise that there was not one 'old school' but two: traditionalists who believed in the arme blanche alone for the Cavalry, and reformers who believed in the hybrid, in opposition to his own belief - which had proved so mistaken - in Mounted Infantry.

Haig had already outlined his own ideas on the role of Cavalry in June 1900 in South Africa. He produced an aide memoire which set down that 'Cavalry as now arrived is a new element in tactics'. Between Modder River quite correct. The subtleties of Roberts' order do not seem to have been passed on to the rank and file.

1. Roberts to Kitchener, 28 January 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts
and Diamond Hill the hybrid had shown itself to be, as Haig at last recognised, distinct from either Infantry or Cavalry as they were traditionally understood. He recommended an increase in this arm until it made up 20 or 25 per cent of the Army, increasing the strength of the squadron, the basic tactical unit, from 120 to 160 men in peacetime, selecting Cavalry officers for ability and intelligence from the other arms, lighter riders, less weight on the horse, more tactical training in musketry, a better carbine or short rifle, practice in rapid dismounting, a scientific horse-breeding system, and the restriction of the lance to Lancer regiments. 'Question whether the dragoon lancer is not a mistake', Haig noted, 'his lance hampers him.'

Roberts would have approved; he put most of these ideas into practice as Commander-in-Chief. But Roberts was also convinced that the rifle had proved the principal weapon for Cavalry. In August 1901 he wrote to French in South Africa:

> It is quite clear, I think, that Cavalrymen only require one weapon besides the rifle, should it be the lance or the sword, or should there be some of one kind and some of the other?...The Boers have no Cavalry, but they have shown us more than once that the way to keep Cavalry off is by dismounting and opening fire with the rifle...Shock action may be possible in the future but in my opinion the side which dismounts and opens fire with the magazine rifle will prevent the other from

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1. Written into the back of Haig's personal diary for 1899, dated Pretoria 3 July 1900, Acc 3155.2 Haig
coming near them. However, your experience is unrivalled, and I am most anxious to get your views on the subject.¹

French's reply was a reproduction of Haig's programme (which he had almost certainly seen). But French insisted on the dominance of the arme blanche:

Cavalry like other arms will of course gain strength from the possession of an improved fire-arm and (with greater attention paid to training in its use) will probably resort more frequently to dismounted action. Still I should...be averse to curtailing in any degree...its power of offensive action as Cavalry.²

If French were right, then the failure at Poplar Grove and two subsequent years of war were Roberts' fault. At 68 years old, hailed by the Press and public as Britain's foremost soldier, he could not accept this view. He set out to reform the Cavalry.

Roberts' first attempt at this reform was to do with the Yeomanry: he intended finally to enforce the ruling, decided on by Cambridge and Wolseley in 1892, that they should place more emphasis on their fire-arms. The Yeomanry, as before, were apprehensive that they might be turned into 'Mounted Infantry', and in attempting to reassure them, the tactful approach which had worked well in India with the Cavalry, Roberts was frequently vague. The Royal Gloucestershire Hussars were told in May 1901:

The Duke of Beaufort was speaking to him about having some weapon other than the rifle. Well, at present they had got the

¹. Roberts to French, 19 August 1901, 7101-23-122 Roberts
². French to Roberts, 10 September 1901, 7101-23-30 Roberts
sword. What might happen in the future he did not know. They, themselves, might take it that some kind of a sword, or a sword that went on a rifle, would be necessary.¹

By speaking vaguely in this manner of 'Cavalry Reform', Roberts unconsciously tapped the support of the reforming movement in the Cavalry. When his programme for 'reform' finally became clear to them, the hostility was increased by a sense of having been duped. For example, in September 1901 he wrote to Evelyn Wood, then at Salisbury Command:

> It is essential that a Cavalry soldier should be a good rider, and skilful in the use of sword and lance...[but] opportunities for shock action will seldom occur...[and] Cavalrymen will have mainly to depend on their rifles. For this reason, I would do all in my power to encourage musketry, and to make the Cavalrymen understand that they must not think it in any way infra dig to fight on foot.²

Wood had been doing this since 1887. He wrote back that

'I am glad to think that we are absolutely of the same mind. My idea, put very roughly, is that the Cavalry soldier should never dismount when he can overthrow the enemy on horseback with minimum loss.'³ Apparently misled by Roberts' vagueness, Wood did not realise that their views were in fact opposing.

For the first eighteen months of Roberts' period as Commander-in-Chief, all internal divisions were subordinate to the fact that there was still a war to win. Haig, French and most senior Cavalrymen stayed in South

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2. Roberts to Wood, 29 September 1901, 7101-23-122 Roberts
3. Wood to Roberts, 30 September 1901, 7101-23-91 Roberts
Africa until the end of the war, and Hamilton returned there as Kitchener's Chief Staff Officer after a short spell in the War Office. But as soon as he could, Roberts moved his own men into key positions. Hamilton was made Quartermaster-General in 1903; Nicholson, despite not wanting to leave India, was made Director General of Mobilisation and Military Intelligence in May 1901. Pole-Carew was offered, but declined on grounds of health, the Egyptian Army in 1903. Robertson, Rawlinson and Wilson were all given junior but influential posts in the War Office, and in May 1904, on Roberts' recommendation, Rawlinson became Commandant of the Staff College. 'They say the smell of curry all over the War Office is very overpowering!', wrote Wolseley, spitefully. These men, mostly veterans of Simla, with an almost open contempt for the British - as opposed to the Indian - military system, now controlled the distribution of honours for the war, the publication of training manuals, and the setting and marking of promotion examinations. At the same time the Roberts Ring, having achieved success, developed some of the characteristics of the Wolseley Ring. Hamilton and Nicholson, estranged by an alleged slight years before, had little contact with each other, while Hamilton's own

1. Nicholson to Roberts, 16 February 1901, 7101-23-52 Roberts
2. Roberts to Kitchener, 21 May 1903, 11/13 Kitchener
3. Roberts to Knollys, 19 October 1903, 7101-23-122 Roberts; Wolseley to George Wolseley, 6 February 1902 (uncatalogued) Wolseley
4. Wilson Diary entries, 27 February 1901 and 14 June 1901, Wilson
5. Hamilton, The Happy Warrior, p 229
reputation was now high enough to give him considerable independence from Roberts. Also, a number of officers who benefited from Roberts' patronage during and after the war never developed the close personal ties with him that had been the hallmark of the early Ring. Dundonald, Hubert Gough and Beauvoir de Lisle, all with high reputations for leading horsemen in the war, fell into this category.

While amateur military critics flourished in the war's aftermath, 1 condemning the Army's failure to win a quick and cheap victory, the personal prestige of the Commander-in-Chief had seldom been higher. Roberts manipulated this prestige to his own advantage. Redvers Buller was hounded out of Aldershot Command by a Press campaign led by Leopold Amery in The Times, 2 and, in seeking to promote this, Roberts rushed the publication of his South African despatches so that his story might appear before Buller's. These contained a serious mistake: they implied that French's Cavalry had not been responsible for stopping Cronje and his men at Paardeberg. 3 What had been intended as an attack on the last vestige of the Wolseley Ring appeared as an attack on the Cavalry. The extent of Roberts' standing with the Press and public may be judged from a comment which appeared in an editorial by the Daily News following criticism of Roberts' despatch. 'There are men so

1. Baden-Powell, War in Practice, p 13
3. Wilson Diary entries, 8 January 1901 and 19 January 1901, Wilson; Stirling, Our Regiments in South Africa, p 400
utterly lost to all sense of decency', the paper proclaimed, 'that they will speak as disrespectfully of Lord Roberts as earlier scoundrels did of Queen Elizabeth or the Equator [sic].'. Further, Roberts appealed to the populace by lavishing praise on the volunteer soldiers who had come out from Britain to fight in the war. Both the regular Cavalry and the highly competent Canadian and Australian Mounted Rifle units were angered and insulted by this, knowing the little value the Imperial Yeomanry had been.

Meanwhile, with increasing self-confidence, the faults and activities of the Army were held up to scrutiny by civilians who rejected the very basis of military organisation: that the senior officers held their posts by virtue of their expertise. 'The question is not demonstrated by names or authority', wrote one over the arme blanche controversy, 'and a correct solution can only be arrived at by an open mind duly considering the evidence of things.' Books on the history and tactical lessons of the war swamped the market. The United Service Magazine reviewed twenty-seven in 1900 and a further seventy-one in the next three years, by which time authors were apologising for their appearance. C.S. Goldman's detailed account of the Cavalry's supply problems became lost in the morass.

1. W/PR/120/5ii Wolseley
2. Smith-Dorrien, Memories of Forty Eight Years Service, p 248; Broderick, Speech in the Commons, 17 May 1901, pp 56-7, W/PR/116 Wolseley
3. Dalyell-Walton to The Times, 4 May 1903
4. Stirling, Our Regiments in South Africa, p ix
5. Goldman, With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa, especially pp 438-47
But it was the Press, rather than any book, which caused most ill-feeling among Army officers. They blamed editors for sensationalism, so that, according to one, confronted with the headline **ANOTHER BRITISH DISASTER**, 'on reading further, one might discover that a patrol of three men and a serjeant were missing'. Kitchener complained to Roberts that such invented defeats were prolonging the war by encouraging the Boers. Colonel Henderson blamed the gutter Press for the mistaken beliefs of foreign writers that the British attacked, wearing red coats, in solid close order Infantry lines with volley fire, and that the Boers never dug in. The fiction of an Engineer officer summed up the feelings of his contemporaries in the columns in 1902:

He thought of what would happen if they got too close to the enemy's trap to open out in time and were caught in column by cross-fire, Stellenbosch for him! Scare headlines in the papers at home! 'Another regrettable incident!' 'When will our officers learn sense?' 'When will they take their profession seriously?' He had quite recently smelt the railway, and had browsed on old papers and knew the gush by heart. Letters of advice from half the quid-nunns in England, 'Paterfamilias', 'Taxpayer', 'Constant Reader', and 'Briton'. How he would like to have 'Constant Reader' ahead to guide him now, and 'Taxpayer' alongside himself to advise.

The troops themselves were surprised at Roberts' own high popular image. A Mounted Infantryman wrote home late in

1. Younghusband, *Forty Years a Soldier*, p 315
2. Kitchener to Roberts, 9 August 1901, 7101-23-33 Roberts
4. 'Ole Luk-Oie' (pseud. of Ernest Swinton), *The Green Curve*, pp 117-8
I wonder that people have not begun to carp at Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener for their apparent inability to find an end to it, but the public and the papers seem to have unlimited faith in those two and nobody has yet raised a note of disapproval. ¹

More guardedly, Edmund Allenby answered an effusive letter from home, 'Lord Roberts has been very genial to me. I don't know if he is a great man or not.' ² It was against this background that subsequent developments in the *arme blanche* controversy were set.

The Cavalry, under attack in the Press and blamed by Lord Roberts, became extraordinarily sensitive to criticism. When one critic pronounced 'The Epitaph of the British Empire - ruined by a Cavalry subaltern with £1,000 a year', Winston Churchill, himself an ex-Cavalry subaltern, pronounced this to be 'garbage'. But Churchill, despite his own accounts of the charges at Diamond Hill, was by the end of 1900 telling the RUSI that after a month shock tactics had vanished in the war 'never to return', and that the Cavalry 'were well-mounted, they had bigger and better horses than the Boers'. ³ Churchill spread these views in a lecture tour of the country, finally coming together with Henry Wilson on the need for Army Reform. ⁴ Leopold Amery's

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¹ Ballard to his mother, 10 October 1900, Ballard II/1 Ballard
² Allenby to his wife, 14 September 1901, Allenby 1/2 Allenby
³ Churchill, 'Impressions of the War in South Africa', JRUSI Vol 45, pp 835-48
⁴ Wilson Diary entry, 9 May 1901, Wilson
Times History of the War also ensured that Roberts' version of the Cavalry in the war would receive most popular attention. He saw his job as 'essentially propagandist', feeling that 'unflinching frankness of criticism was needed in the public interest', and indeed was 'desired by the great body of officers who supplied me with information'.

Three of the four he mentioned as particularly useful to him were Lord Roberts, Ian Hamilton, and Henry Wilson. The early drafts of Amery's history were sent to Roberts and Wilson for correction. Amery identified himself wholeheartedly with Roberts' views on the arme blanche. He wrote to Roberts in 1904:

I went down to Aldershot last night to stay with General French, and he, Scobell [commanding the Aldershot Cavalry Brigade] and myself talked cavalry tactics hammer and tongs from nine till midnight, and we had some more at breakfast this morning. It was all very interesting, and I was glad to get their point of view, but I confess I heard nothing that would induce me to go over to their camp. Their chief point is that the man who doesn't dismount is much more mobile than the one who does and can therefore always choose the point where he will break through. But they omit from their consideration the mobility of the bullet, which is the greatest factor of all.

Unsurprisingly, the Times History's first three volumes, all out by 1905 (a year before the first volume of the official account) concluded that the Cavalry charge, in any form, was

1. Amery, My Political Life, Vol I, p 192
2. ibid, p 152
3. Amery to Roberts, 25 November 1902, 7101-23-1 Roberts; Wilson Diary entry, 19 June 1904, Wilson
4. Amery to Roberts, 25 November 1902, 7101-23-1 Roberts
obsolete; that at Poplar Grove the Boers had not panicked but fought a skilful retreat; and that the Cavalry had been stopped by the tactics of mounted riflemen. De Wet's evidence to the contrary was handled by the staggeringly simple method of declaring him mistaken. The poor condition of the Cavalry horses was blamed on bad horsemastership, and the overwork of the Cavalry by French on 16 February after the relief of Kimberley - the one day the division was not under Roberts' direct command.¹ The German Official Account of the war (which Amery claimed was based on his own²) appeared in 1904, blaming the Cavalry failure on lack of acclimatisation, overloading and poor horsemastership. Starvation was dismissed as 'an ever-recurring excuse'. The supply position had been so disguised that the Germans believed that the loss of the supply train at Modder River, during the Cavalry march to Kimberley, had cut their fodder allowance only by half, not to practically nothing. They did not appreciate that the Cavalry and other horses in South Africa lived permanently on less than half rations.³

There was so little room at the top of the Army that the inclusion of Roberts' men left few posts for others. No member of the Cavalry Division staff (or indeed the staff of any Infantry division) joined Roberts' head-

¹ Amery, Times History, Vol III, pp 568, 413
² Amery, My Political Life, Vol I, p 219
³ Walters, The German Official Account of the War in South Africa, Vol II, p 143
quarters after the war. Allenby, Gough, Byng, Kavanagh and
Haig all went to regimental jobs. Roberts and his men were
not, however, an anti-Cavalry conspiracy. They wanted
Cavalry reform, as they understood it, and regarded belief
in the arme blanche as a comparatively minor aberration on
the part of capable soldiers, rather than as a deeply held
tactical doctrine. Consequently, in the war's aftermath,
French got Aldershot Command in succession to Buller, and
Roberts was keen to promote Haig and other good Cavalry
Majors to Colonel. He persistently refused, however,
despite French's requests, to make Haig a Brigadier-General.
Against this must be set Hamilton's promotion from Colonel
before the war to Lieutenant-General in its aftermath, or
de Lisle's from Captain in 1899 to a Lieutenant-Colonel
commanding an Infantry battalion after the war. In April
1902 French told Haig that he wanted him for the Aldershot
Cavalry Brigade. Four months later Kitchener, having
taken up the post of Commander-in-Chief in India, wanted
Haig as his Inspector-General of Cavalry. Haig preferred
the first post, but was given the second, while Aldershot
went to Scobell, a lesser protégé of French. Haig was
convinced Roberts, with his reputation for jobbery, had

1. Herbert Lawrence was offered the Colonelcy of the 17th
Lancers in succession to Haig, but left on inheriting
his fortune. Roberts to Cambridge, 31 March 1903, 7101-
23-122 Roberts

2. Roberts to Hamilton, 31 August 1901, 7101-23-122 Roberts;
Roberts to Kitchener, 7 February 1902, 0/71 Kitchener

3. Haig to Henrietta, 7 August 1900, Acc 3155.6C Haig

4. Haig to Henrietta, 25 April 1902, Acc 3155.6C Haig

5. Haig to Henrietta, 17 September 1902, Acc 3155.6C Haig
blocked the appointment. In late August he wrote to his sister, 'I fancy the excellent house at Aldershot in which the G.O.C. Cavalry Brigade lives will oblige Lord Roberts to select the husband of "dear Mrs" So & So because the nursery and rooms will so exactly suit the family'. By the next month he was clearly worried about his prospects. He wrote again that 'I have heard nothing officially about either going to Aldershot as G.O.C. Cavalry Brigade or to India as Inspector-General, so no doubt one of Roberts' pals (or ? Lady Roberts' pals) has been chosen for the former'. There is in fact no evidence Roberts had anyone in mind for the post. He had intended Broadwood for the Cavalry Brigade in Ireland, but his health broke and Rimington got the job. Nevertheless, as Roberts' reputation spread, the phrase 'Bobs, Jobs, Snobs & Co.' began, to Wolseley's delight, to be used to describe the War Office.

After a war which had seen horsemen used to such an extent, it was no longer argued that the horse in war was useless; but its tactical role was subject to fierce debate as some officers, and most members of the public, discovered the arme blanche controversy for the first time. Conan Doyle, in his own account of the war, insisted that 'lances, swords and revolvers have only one place - the

1. Haig to Henrietta, 25 August 1902, Acc 3155.6C Haig
2. Haig to Henrietta, 17 September 1902, Acc 3155.6C Haig
3. Roberts to Hamilton, 11 January 1902, 7101-23-122 Roberts
4. Wolseley to George Wolseley, 6 December 1901 (uncatalogued) Wolseley; Lehmann, All Sir Garnet, p 388
museum', and that 'the best shots and skirmishers' would always win a Cavalry engagement. A Major from India who had commanded one of the New Zealand Mounted Rifle battalions in South Africa declared:

Cavalry, as such, when opposed by modern rifles, can make no headway on the flat... a force of cavalry and mounted rifles, with a preponderance of the latter, is the best combination for war. One regiment of cavalry to three of mounted rifles is ample.3

He also called for the dropping of the lance from three Lancer regiments out of four: a significant judgement for a Lancer officer. Colonel Callwell, the author of the Official Handbook on colonial wars, also wrote that 'mounted troops should now depend on their rifles and carbines rather than upon shock action', although 'it would be as unwise to deprive the trooper of the arme blanche as it would to rob the infantryman of his bayonet'.4 Colonel Maude came closest to realising the reason for the successful charges at Diamond Hill:

For practical purposes the Boer Mauser does not fire twice as many bullets in a minute as the Chassepot, hence...if the fire of 5000 Chassepōts to the mile of front failed to stop the Prussian Cavalry...there is no reason to suppose that 500 Mausers to the mile would have any better effect.5

Maude also noted the trend of the Boers, the Mounted

1. Conan Doyle, The Great Boer War, p 591
2. ibid
3. Andrew, Cavalry Tactics of Today, p 109
4. Callwell, Tactics of Today, p 93
5. Maude, Cavalry: its Past and Future, pp 253
Infantry and the Cavalry, after a year's fighting, all to become the same hybrid troop type. The distinction, he maintained, was artificial, and therefore neither Mounted Rifles nor Mounted Infantry in peacetime offered any benefit over Cavalry. Rimington, now a Brigadier-General, added his authoritative voice to the argument. Although his own reputation had been made with Mounted Rifles he still believed in the wider value of the charge. 'It is generally conceded', he wrote, 'that once cavalry superiority is gained we may consider the difficulties of the forage supply as almost settled. One successful charge may mean this. No fire effect is likely to do so.' In 1905 Colonel Henderson's collected essays, The Science of War, appeared posthumously. Consisting of extracts, undated, from more than twenty years of lectures, they could be read for almost any shade of opinion on the arme blanche. Still, although Henderson felt that increased firepower had made the massed knee-to-knee charge an impossibility, that 'small-bore and smokeless powder have destroyed the last vestiges of the traditional role of cavalry', he nevertheless opted for a combination of Cavalry and Mounted Rifles. Moreover, like others before him, he tried to set the whole controversy in perspective:

That men on horseback are no match for men on foot, with confidence in their weaponry, in good heart, and expecting the attack, has been

1. Maude, Cavalry: its Past and Future, pp 269, 274
2. Rimington, The Horse in Recent War, p 15
apparent since men were first drilled and disciplined. No cavalry soldier ever dreamed - ever did dream - of supporting so wild a proposition.¹

The views of the most prestigious military historian in the Army were not easy to dismiss as blind Cavalry sentiment.

The lack of precise terminology was now felt more than ever, as more writers entered into the controversy. When Roberts wrote that he wanted more Cavalry and Conan Doyle that he wanted them abolished, they both, in fact, wanted Mounted Rifles. As de Lisle, advising Roberts on the matter, wrote:

[When] Cavalry object to becoming Mounted Infantry the term itself forms part of the objection. Cavalry are taught, and rightly taught, to despise Infantry, with a view to encouraging them, when the occasion arises, to charge broken and demoralised Infantry with confidence and boldness.²

De Lisle himself transferred from Infantry to Cavalry before the First World War. Roberts was keen to refute the idea that he was 'the one who turned, or wishes to turn, the Cavalry into Mounted Infantry',³ but he failed to convince the Cavalry itself. The bulk of officers feared for their regiments, those who believed in reform would not accept Roberts as a leader, and indeed he made no effort to win their support. Roberts himself, not the arme blanche, had become the single greatest factor in the controversy.

All this was demonstrated in Roberts' first

2. de Lisle, 'Cavalry Training', ?1902, 7101-23-221-3 Roberts
3. Roberts to Hamilton, 4 April 1902, 7101-23-122 Roberts
attempts at Cavalry reform. A committee of Yeomanry officers enquiring into the organisation and equipment of the force reported to him in January 1901. A majority were prepared to accept conversion to Mounted Rifles, and arming with rifle, bayonet and revolver. Of the five who signed this report only three signed a minority opinion calling for the sword to be retained. But there was also another minority report, calling for the title 'Imperial Yeomanry' for the force, rather than 'Yeomanry Cavalry', so identifying it completely with the men whom Buller had conceived of as 'Mounted Infantry', and armed with the rifle alone. This recommendation was made by just one Yeomanry officer, and the regular Cavalry representative on the committee - Lord Dundonald. This was good enough for Roberts, who prevailed upon the Secretary of State for War to accept Dundonald's report. Dundonald also submitted a memorandum, calling (as Haig had done) for a special elite corps of Cavalry officers, but arguing that since they would have to train the new Imperial Yeomanry, they must themselves be Mounted Rifles. The Lancer regiments would be kept for nothing but the armé blanche charge.

An attempt in late 1901 to return the sword to the Imperial Yeomanry at home was turned down because, according to the Army Council, reviewing the position in 1904, 'It was feared that if a sword was issued to the

1. 'Recommendations of Committees on Army Matters 1900-20', (War Office) p 459
2. Dundonald, My Army Life, pp 180-1; 'Opinion of the Earl of Dundonald on Yeomanry Armament', 7101-23-221-15 Roberts
Yeomanry generally, the Mounted Infantry character which had been given them on reorganisation would tend to be obscured. They were in 1903 issued with an Infantry bayonet, while in the new training manual for Imperial Yeomanry of 1902 Roberts exhorted them 'Not to aim at what they have not the time at their disposal to become, i.e. an efficient Cavalry, but to strive to perfect themselves in those duties for which the Imperial Yeomanry are eminently qualified'.

The Yeomanry, much as Cambridge had predicted, complained bitterly. They also suspected Roberts' motives. They were right. In June 1902 Hamilton wrote to him:

I have just read your preface to the Yeomanry Training Regulations, and I think you have skated over this thin ice with all your wonted skill, and that you have made your point with a minimum of disturbance to the preconceived ideas of those immediately concerned.

Roberts, and above all Hamilton, thought that from deference to sentiment in the Cavalry and Yeomanry they had disguised their real opinions. The disguise was in practice completely transparent. As one Yeomanry officer declared, 'the real object of this halting policy was to discourage the Cavalry tradition', but the attempt 'paid very little attention to the powers of sentiment'.

The Royal Gloucestershire Hussars, led by their Colonel, the Duke of Beaufort,

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2. 'Memorandum on the Arming and Training of Yeomanry', ? 1909, 7101-23-222-11 Roberts
3. Yeomanry Training 1902, preface (War Office)
4. Hamilton to Roberts, 7 June 1902, Hamilton 24/7/10/28
5. Le Roy-Lewis, 'Imperial Yeomanry in 1905', JRUSI Vol 48, p 1024
petitioned the King directly for permission to carry swords on ceremonial parades.¹ The sword, which a year previously they had been prepared to give up, became a symbol of their opposition to Roberts and the manner in which he had ignored and deceived them. The Middlesex Yeomanry obtained the same permission, as did the Montgomeryshire Yeomanry, and petitions became so common that at the end of the year Roberts had to fight off a request from Edward VII to make this general.² The South Nottinghamshire Hussars refused to carry the rifle, and in 1904 equipped the whole regiment with lances.³ Roberts had made his own prophesies of a 'sentimental' reaction self-fulfilling. In a force of Volunteers there was, moreover, little he could do about it without grass roots support. In 1905 the Inspector-General of Cavalry was still, repeatedly, trying to convince the Yeomanry of the value of the rifle, against the opposition of his own District Inspectors and Adjutants, all regular Cavalrymen.⁴ The Yeomanry were branded as hopelessly reactionary.

Roberts created another committee, to enquire

¹ Fox, The History of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars Yeomanry, pp 16-17
² Stonham and Freeman, Historical Records of the Middlesex Yeomanry, p 109; Williams Wynn, The Historical Records of the Montgomeryshire Yeomanry, p 82; 'Memorandum on the Training and Arming of Yeomanry', 1909, 7101-23-222-11 Roberts
³ Fellows and Freeman, Historical Records of the South Notts Hussars Yeomanry, Vol I, pp 193-6
⁴ 'Reports of the Inspector-General of the Forces 1904-13', Baden-Powell to Connaught, 10 June 1905, 34/322 (War Office)
into the weight carried by horses in the mounted branches of the Army. It consisted of just three members, Major-General Grant, the current Inspector-General of Cavalry, Ian Hamilton for the Mounted Infantry and Dundonald for the Yeomanry. But Roberts did not get the majority report he wanted. By juggling weights and discarding equipment the committee increased the ammunition carried by Cavalry horses from thirty to fifty rounds, while cutting the total weight by over two stones.1 But they could only submit divided reports on the question of armament. Dundonald revived the idea of discarding the sword for Lancers as a weight saving, clearly still thinking of them entirely for the shock charge. Grant, partly agreeing, still wanted the lance kept in the front rank of Dragoon and Dragoon Guard regiments.2 Hamilton submitted a lengthy dissent from them both on the whole value of the arme blanche, which he then watered down:

> I do not mean the foregoing remarks to be read as an advocacy for the immediate relegation of all lances and swords to museums. I would leave the existing Lancer regiments alone, and would retain the sword for Hussars and Dragoons:
> (1) Because it is always well to proceed with caution, and the feelings of the whole of the Cavalry have to be considered.
> (2) Because I admit that the consciousness of an ability to meet a mounted charge without dismounting undoubtedly tends to boldness of movement in the field.3

It is one thing to show consideration for another's

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2. Ibid, p 5
3. Ibid, p 3
mistaken but cherished beliefs; it is quite another to tell him you are doing so. By assuming that nothing but tradi-
tionalist sentiment opposed his ideas, Hamilton created yet more opposition.

In 1902 Dundonald went to command the armed forces of Canada, and in September issued orders for the Canadian Mounted Rifle regiments to discard the sword, for which he received Roberts' congratulations.¹ When this was formalised as a Cavalry Training manual in 1904, however, it received a highly critical, but anonymous, review in the United Service Magazine:

It is all very well to write of 'coolly dismounting, forming up, and when the enemy gets within range' - (pray what is that - fifteen or fifteen hundred yards ?) - 'pouring in such a withering fire as will kill as many of the enemy as the same enemy with sword and lance would kill in five years of active service'. But what happens in war ? We have not yet forgotten Botha's charge at Bakenlaagte and Kemp's charge in the Western Transvaal, both unsupported by artillery fire. What became of the coolness and accurate fire ?²

The review ended with the sarcastic suggestion that Dun-
donald should read Prince Kraft. Dundonald was told that the author of this piece was Douglas Haig. If so (there is no evidence for it) both the tone and arguments illustrate the extent to which, over three years, the views of the Cavalry had hardened in opposition to Roberts.

In January 1903 Grant retired as Inspector-

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1. Dundonald, My Army Life, p 194; Roberts to Dundonald, 22 April 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts
2. 'Reiver', 'Cavalry Training Canada 1904', USM Vol XXIX NS, pp 414-8, and see Dundonald, My Army Life, p 194
General of Cavalry. It was by use of this post that Roberts had achieved partial reform of the Cavalry in India. Indeed the last two Inspectors-General had transferred from the same post in India to Britain. The designated Inspector-General of Cavalry in India was Haig, who might have expected the same post. But Roberts evidently believed that neither Haig, nor any of his Cavalry brigade commanders, would wholeheartedly support his views. Instead he chose the Commandant of the para-military South African Constabulary, Major-General Robert Baden-Powell. It was an odd choice. Baden-Powell's service with his own regiment had been largely in India, and he felt himself out of touch with British Cavalry opinions. He was not a Staff College graduate, and his military history was poor. Moreover, he was a Wolseleyite who had created his own military force in South Africa, and believed his career was settled. But he was also an accepted authority on scouting and outpost work, particularly in colonial war. In South Africa Roberts and Hamilton thought him a poor organiser of troops; Haig thought him a self-advertiser; French and Kitchener thought him slow. But he was a competent leader, and the Hero of Mafeking, the most popular officer with the Press and public in the Army, excepting Roberts himself. He was also willing to obey Roberts' orders. He wrote gratefully from South

1. Hillcourt, Baden-Powell, The Two Lives of a Hero, pp 163, 233; Roberts to Hamilton, 27 November 1901, 7101-23-122 Roberts; Haig to Henrietta, 9 July 1900, Acc 3155.60 Haig; French to Haig, 20 May 1901, Acc 3155.334 Haig; Kitchener to Roberts, 24 May 1901, 7101-23-33 Roberts
Africa:

Your selection of me for the post of Inspector-General of Cavalry has come to me as a great surprise, and as a great gratification, for it means that you have confidence in me...I will do everything in my power to carry out any designs you may have with regard to the development of Cavalry.¹

Baden-Powell, having served outside the country and outside his regiment for so long, was also ignorant of the details of the controversy. When asked by the Elgin Commission in 1903 what arm Cavalry should have besides the rifle, the very heart of the matter, he answered that 'I do not care much about that. I do not think it matters what they have', but that 'a good sword-bayonet, which you can use as well as a bayonet, is as good a thing as any.'² Before the end of the year he had endorsed in a preface to his brother's book the view that 'Whereas formerly it was the golden rule for Cavalry never to receive a charge at the halt, but to gallop forwards to meet it, now it would almost invariably be preferable to dismount and receive the charge with a volley of musketry'.³ Baden-Powell was a good officer and reformer of long standing who in the war's aftermath inclined even more to musketry than previously. Nor was he a bad Inspector-General. But he was not the best man for the job. The arme blanche controversy had begun to affect the highest ranks of the Army and its most basic needs of

¹ Baden-Powell to Roberts, 18 January 1903, 7101-23-191 Roberts
² Elgin Commission, Evidence, Vol II, p 430
³ Baden-Powell, War in Practice, p 248
training and efficiency.

In late 1902 and early 1903 the Elgin Commission on the conduct of the war met to hear evidence. The armes blanches was a major issue: every Cavalry, Yeomanry or Mounted Infantry officer giving evidence was asked about his views on it. In contrast, no member of the Veterinary Service or Remount Department was called, evidence on horse-supply coming from the Quartermaster-General, who had not served in South Africa. Kitchener, who as Roberts' Chief Staff Officer had at least nominal responsibility for the supply system's failure, minimised its importance:

No doubt the war horse suffered to some extent for the shortness of the ration that he received in the field, especially the large animals that were so generally in use at the beginning of the campaign, but I consider that the falling off of condition was due more to the want of rest and the general hardships experienced from the heavy work and new climate, a condition on which an extra 6 lbs or 8 lbs of oats would have little or no effect.¹

Despite the evidence of French and Rimington in particular on their horses' condition, the Commission never appreciated the extent of the Cavalry collapse. It reported that:

The evidence before us confirms the view that the chief cause for the loss of horses in the war was that they were for the most part brought from distant countries, submitted to a long and deteriorating sea voyage, when landed sent into the field without time for recuperation, and there put to hard and continuous work on short rations.²

This entirely failed to mention either the overloading of

¹ Elgin Commission, Evidence, Vol I, p 9
² Elgin Commission, Report, p 98
horses or the standard of horsemastership, the two things
which might be altered to prevent repetition in future war
of the same losses. Nor did the commissioners make the
obvious link between these facts and the arme blanche con-
troversy, that all arguments about tactics depended on the
fitness of the horses. Fortunately, the committee under
Grant had already taken the first steps to lessen the weight
on the horse, while every column commander in South Africa
had learned from sheer necessity to be an expert horse-
master, and this knowledge was now being passed on in
Cavalry training.

When asked about the arme blanche itself,
French gave evidence that the Cavalry depended on the sword
for its morale, that the Yeomanry should, while being
Mounted Rifles, carry the sword, and that Mounted Infantry
could only be regarded as a form of Infantry transport,
with no value as scouts. Haig agreed, stressing that 'the
ideal Cavalry is that which can attack on foot and fight on
horseback'. Rimington wanted an all-Cavalry force, and the
Mounted Infantry disbanded.¹ Of the Yeomanry commanders who
gave evidence, Brabazon caused amusement by suggesting that
it was not Anglo-Saxon nature to point with a sword, and
Yeomanry should carry a tomahawk (incredibly, one turned
up at the 1908 manoeuvres, where Haig pronounced it
'absolutely useless').² This was not the sort of minor

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¹ Elgin Commission, Evidence, Vol II, pp 300-17, 402-12, 27-31
² Elgin Commission, Evidence, Vol I, p 294; Haig Diary
entry, 23 August 1908, Acc 3155.2 Haig
detail with which the commander of the entire Imperial Yeomanry should have been chiefly concerned, as one of the commissioners recognised. 1 Other Yeomanry officers wanted a sword-bayonet or light sword for their men. The M.I. commanders denounced the sword as an 'absurdity' and expressed themselves entirely satisfied with the improvised nature of their force. Indeed the head of the Aldershot M.I. School wanted his men to both support the Cavalry 'and, in the absence of Cavalry, to take its place'. 2

Roberts gave evidence that the rifle should be the main weapon of Cavalry, although he was uncertain as to whether the lance were needed, and ideally Cavalry should be perfect with rifle and sword. He also told the Commission that the Yeomanry liked their new training as Mounted Rifles - a flat lie. 3 While Roberts gave evidence Ian Hamilton sat beside him to prompt his Chief; the close association was evident, and where Roberts was sometimes vague as to his views on the arme blanche, Hamilton was not:

I have heard it said that if the Boers had possessed Cavalry, in the European sense of the word, our men would have had a chance of showing the advantages of a boot-to-boot charge over a looser formation admitting of more individual initiative. It is difficult to answer this sort of argument. If both sides were to agree to carry out their fight with punctilio and a chivalrous disregard of

1. Esher, quoted in Gooch, The Plans of War, p 34
the requirements of scientific arms, then no
doubt there would still be suitable scope in
warfare for old-world methods... Compared to
the modern rifle, the sword or lance can only
be regarded as a medieval toy.¹

and again, patronising:

I think that the regular Cavalry still ought
to have a weapon of offense, because for
hundreds of years it has been so intimately
connected with every Cavalry story, and their
whole history, that, morally, it gives them
the idea that they can do things which they
cannot, but still they think they can, and
therefore it enables them to act with greater
boldness than they otherwise would.²

Within two weeks of this speech, made in February 1903,
Roberts with Hamilton's support took the step which was to
transform the controversy into a crisis: the abolition of
the lance.

The Elgin Commission, trying to balance
contradictory views on the arme blanche without understanding
the motives behind them, reported:

Most of the witnesses agree that in view of
the great extension of the field of operations
in modern warfare, an Army should contain a
much larger proportion of mounted men than
formerly. There was, however, much diversity
of opinion as to what should be the nature and
armament of these mounted forces.³

It concluded that a regular Cavalry, armed with the sword
'if not the lance' (a nice ambiguity) should be supported
by considerable forces of Mounted Rifles, including Yeo-
manry.⁴ This compromise, with much goodwill on all sides,

¹. Elgin Commission, Evidence, Vol II, p 105
². ibid
³. Elgin Commission, Report, p 49
⁴. ibid, p 51
might have worked. But Roberts had already set the seal on hostility between the Cavalry and the War Office. Before either French or Haig gave evidence to the Commission, he issued at the end of February an Army Order limiting the use of the lance, in Lancer, Dragoon and Dragoon Guard regiments, to escort duties, reviews and parades. It was not to be carried on manoeuvres, nor taken to war. With the order came a memorandum signed by Roberts (although French believed its real author was Hamilton)\(^1\) setting out historical arguments for the action. It listed the disastrous French charges of 1870, explaining that Bazain's orders, not von Bredow's charge, halted the French advance at Mars-la-Tour, and contrasting these with the successful use of firepower by horsemen in the American Civil War. The conclusion to be drawn was that the rifle was the principal Cavalry weapon; the lance was conspicuous when scouting and made dismounting difficult, therefore it should go.\(^2\)

At once, in a battery of letters to The Times, ex-officers and honorary Colonels of several regiments which carried the lance attempted to prove that the lance was superior to the sword.\(^3\) This was quite irrelevant to

\(^1\) Arnold-Forster Diary entry, 29 February 1904, add ms: 50336, Vol LXII Arnold-Forster

\(^2\) 'Memorandum by Lord Roberts on Cavalry Armament', JRUSI Vol 43, pp 575-82

\(^3\) Compton to The Times, 4 May 1903; Dunham-Masser to The Times, 26 April 1903; Wilkenson to The Times, 23 April 1903; Howard to The Times, 24 December 1903; also 'Lance v Sword by a very old cavalry officer', Army & Navy Gazette, 18 April 1903. All in 7101-23-221-9 Roberts
Roberts' argument. However these reactionary Cavalrymen carried considerable influence, and at the end of March a group of them, all M.Ps., raised the matter in the House of Commons. Echoing the old bogey-cry, one, the future Lord Jessel, believed that 'on the initiative of Sir Ian Hamilton a movement was afoot to abolish Cavalry and substitute Mounted Infantry'.

Trying to force the issue, these men argued that it was unfair to ask a soldier to care for a weapon he would never use: it must be re-instated or discarded altogether. The high point in this drama came at the beginning of May, when the RUSI heard a paper on 'The Lance as a Cavalry Weapon' by an Engineer officer. This had been deliberately advertised in The Times beforehand as offering the definitive statement on the subject, and in the chair was Lieutenant-General Wilkinson, Colonel of the 4th Dragoon Guards. The paper itself, although attacking Roberts' memorandum as 'a bit of special pleading' which struck at 'the proud traditions of our Cavalry', concluded, after a long historical review, that there was in fact little to choose between lance and sword, and the loss was no great handicap. But then, in a remarkable scene, Colonels of regiments which carried the lance, led by the Chairman, stood up to declare its

1. Hansard, 4th Series, Vol 120, pp 639-63; Jessel to Lady Haig, 16 February 1930, Acc 3155.254, p 3 Haig
2. Hale to The Times, 4 May 1903
superiority in extravagant terms:

...being taught to frequently and habitually abandon their first and second weapons for the sake of performing some of the duties of Infantry on the ground with their rifles...
In mortal combat in the field a good lancer will defeat a good swordsman in nine cases out of ten...in the mêlée and pursuit they are immeasurably superior to swordsmen...a well-timed cavalry charge need never be stopped by modern rifle-fire...I claim that lancers can and do dismount faster than swordsmen...even supposing the lance never succeeded in doing any damage in the field...the morale effect must be remembered as the most important item. 1

For good measure, the Chairman had with him a dismounted lancer, who proceeded to go through full lance drill as a demonstration. These bizarre episodes only reinforced the opinion of Roberts and his men that they were opposed by foolish reaction only. When Evelyn Wood, along with two other officers, wrote calling for the lance's re-introduction, Roberts observed to Hamilton that it was 'rather amusing' that Wood, who had seen no service for a quarter of a century, should pose as an expert. 2

The new generation of Cavalry reformers opposed the move for entirely different reasons. They could not accept Roberts' premise that the rifle was the principal Cavalry weapon. The Lance itself mattered little to them. French wrote to Roberts:

I do not attach so much importance to the question of sword versus lance as some people do, but I think that the lance should be

2. Roberts to Hamilton, 4 May 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts
retained in the existing lancer regiments, on the same principle that they are probably retained in the Russian Army by the Cossacks of the Don.¹

This principle was entirely one of morale, the Cossacks being mounted riflemen. Haig had considered abandoning the lance three years earlier; in April 1903, although Colonel of the 17th Lancers, he suggested its replacement by 'a good hog spear' rather than outright abolition.² But Haig had his own influence to contribute. In June Roberts wrote to Kitchener:

I am glad to get your opinion about the lance as it helps me with the King, who is somewhat regretting that weapon having been done away with after he had some conversation with Haig in Edinburgh. Haig, I am sorry to say, still inclines to the lance, though he can have no experience of its use in war. I agree with you that a cavalry soldier must have a sword and be able to use it.³

The assumption of opposition based on grounds of sentiment only was Roberts' greatest error throughout the whole controversy. In Haig's case, he had forgotten about Elandslaagte and Omdurman.

Roberts, or Hamilton, was also no match at history for Haig, who prepared another aide mémoire which destroyed the arguments of Roberts' memorandum. Roberts had cited the French disasters of 1870 and not the Prussian successes. 'What', Haig asked, 'does that prove? that German Cavalry were better trained and better led than the

¹ French to Roberts, 18 March 1903, 7101-23-30 Roberts
² Haig to Jessel, 23 April 1903, Acc 3155.254, p 3 Haig
³ Roberts to Kitchener, 30 June 1903, 11/16 Kitchener
French, and again the French, in having a better carbine, were better armed." As for the interpretation of the Death Ride, 'who can say? it is merely an ex parte statement.'

On American Cavalry Haig added:

We do not wish to deny that the firearm is a useful weapon. What Lord Roberts says about the American Army in a matter of combination of fire and shock admits our entire contention. We maintain that shock action can produce important effects and particularly in combination with fire action that the sphere of usefulness of Cavalry is increased.¹

Haig's history was in fact too good. He recognised that the use of trenches by Infantry would render shock action less effective, but pointed out that no modern army fought from them. To the British Army in 1903, 'the trenches' meant the Crimea, or possibly Richmond in 1865.

Shortly afterwards, Haig went out to India as Inspector-General of Cavalry. But after three years of failure, Roberts' attitude was hardening. He wrote to Kitchener:

I am all in favour of cavalry soldiers being bold riders, and of their endeavouring to overthrow their enemies' mounted men, but I am convinced that in 99 cases out of a hundred this will be done more effectively by artillery and dismounted fire in the first instance. I hope you will keep Haig on the right line, as I intend to keep Baden-Powell.²

In September, shortly after Haig's departure, Roberts called a meeting of senior Cavalry officers and tried to

¹ Undated, unsigned, typewritten paper with corrections in Haig's handwriting. The original has 'shot' not 'shock', indicating that it may have been dictated or typed from notes. Acc 3155.32a Haig

² Roberts to Kitchener, 24 September 1903, 7101-23-122 Roberts
convince them of his case. He found them unresponsive.\(^1\)
At about the same time he ordered Cavalry bugle calls to be abolished, and calls taken from the Infantry to be employed instead. This apparently trivial and quite unnecessary decision produced from Private Grainger in Rawalpindi the glum observation, on hearing the news, that '[I] expect we shall soon be M.I. in peace as well as war'.\(^2\)

Haig worked through the year on the various manuals which would enshrine the reformed Army's doctrines: Field Service Regulations, Combined Training, and Cavalry Training.\(^3\) The Cavalry book was a considerable improvement on the previous manual, with sections on horsemanship, the importance of resting horses by dismounting on the march, skirmishing, and the value of firepower. But Haig incorporated the ideas of Austrian and German writers into his drafts for all three manuals;\(^4\) and Roberts, seeing them in November, was surprised to find that Haig 'clings to the armé blanche system, and in the chapter for the revised edition of the Drill Book, which was entrusted to him, on Collective Training, there is not one word about Artillery or Dismounted fire'.\(^5\) Cavalry Training was found un-

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1. Roberts to Kitchener, 8 October 1903, 7101-23-122 Roberts
3. Field Service Regulations 1907; Combined Training 1905; Cavalry Training 1904 (all War Office)
4. Haig Diary entry, 8 November 1903, Acc 3155.2 Haig; 'Obsolete Theories in Tactics,' The Standard, 13 April 1910, in 7101-23-223-5 Roberts
5. Roberts to Kitchener, 24 November 1903, 7101-23-122 Roberts
satisfactory for the same reason, its emphasis on the arme blanche. A partial revision was entrusted by Roberts to de Lisle, now a Cavalryman, to Rimington, and to Hubert Gough, who in early 1904 was given a Staff College instructorship under Rawlinson. The biographers of Henry Wilson have claimed he also had a share in it. In its final version Cavalry Training 1904 remained a Cavalryman's work, however. It taught the necessity for the charge in close or open order:

When the chance of a charge arises, it should be seized without a moment's delay, and the attack delivered with the full determination of riding the enemy down by sheer force and impetus. It should, as a rule, be assisted by the fire of horse artillery and dismounted men.2

The only point with which the Cavalry reformers seriously disagreed was the statement that the rifle was the principal Cavalry weapon. Even the requirement for Cavalry to sacrifice itself if necessary had been retained.3 Haig himself, when the book appeared, queried only a few minor points of

1. Roberts to Kitchener, 28 January 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts; Callwell, Life of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, p 56; Ash, The Lost Dictator, p 49; undated, unsigned paper headed 'The following is suggested as a substitute for Col Haig's introduction to Part IV'. The writer refers to its authors as 'de Lisle, Rimington and myself'. This last is almost certainly Gough, since also Gough to Roberts, 1 December 1903, 'I have been re-reading the suggested introduction to Part IV that I sent you last week, and find it capable of a good deal of improvement'. 7101-23-221-5/8 Roberts

2. Cavalry Training 1904 (War Office)

3. ibid, pp 199-201
But just before publication, Baden-Powell suggested to Roberts that he might write a preface for the book. Three days later the preface appeared. Roberts had chosen to provide a précis of his memorandum on the lance, which would now be incorporated into the official manual of Cavalry Training.

The re-appearance after the war of suggestions that charging Cavalry might be supported by Mounted Rifles gave, as previously, little attention to the realities of British military spending. After the war the M.I. commanders, Rawlinson included, begged Roberts to keep their units in being. But the plan of reform advanced by the new Secretary of State for War in 1900 called for only five mounted brigades, and only two of those to serve abroad.

In 1901 Roberts was told that the Treasury would not sanction large-scale reforms. As previously, the hybrid was the only feasible form of Cavalry, given the size of the force. In 1902, to Roberts' alarm, there was an attempt by the Government to reduce the Army Estimates and cancel the 1903 manoeuvres as an economy measure.

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1. Kitchener to Roberts, 5 May 1904, Q/30 Kitchener
2. Baden-Powell to Roberts, 9 January 1904, 7101-23-6 Roberts; Baden-Powell to Roberts, 12 January 1904, 7101-23-6 Roberts
3. Rawlinson to Roberts, 27 March 1902, 7101-23-61 Roberts; Dunne, 'A plea for the formation of a special corps out of the present Mounted Infantry in South Africa', 7101-23-221-5 Roberts
4. Wilson Diary entry, 21 December 1900, Wilson
5. Wilson Diary entries, 10 February 1901, 3 May 1901, Wilson
6. Roberts to Broderick, 10 October 1902, 7101-23-122 Roberts
for reform was scarce, and with Roberts as Commander-in-
Chief the bulk went to the Infantry and Field Artillery -
itself badly in need of reform. ¹ The Cavalry's share of the
Estimates dropped from 6 per cent in 1900 to 4.34 per cent
in 1903. ² In October 1902, despite an already existing
shortage of men, Cavalry recruiting was stopped temporarily;
between 1899 and 1905 the number of Cavalrymen
dropped by over 1,300, or from 8 per cent to 6.5 per cent
of the regular Army. ³ The Yeomanry too suffered; in 1902
the Government rejected a scheme for the Army to pay for
their horses. ⁴

Stringent efforts were meanwhile made to
bring down the expenses of life as a Cavalry subaltern,
still costing about £500 a year. ⁵ In November 1901 ex-
pensive regimental polo tournaments were banned. ⁶ Even so,
one I.Y. officer in South Africa with the chance of a
regular commission wrote sadly, 'I could not afford to stop
in a Cavalry regiment at home'. ⁷ Roberts noted that
regular officers of high ability took commands in India for
the same motive; even Broadwood was lost to the home Army in

¹ Spiers, 'Rearming the Edwardian Artillery', pp 167-76
² See Tables, Part One, Tables 4 and 7
³ See Tables, Part One, Tables 1 and 2
⁴ 'Recommendation of Committees on Army Matters 1900-20', p 179 (War Office)
⁵ 'Report of a Committee to Enquire into the Education and Training of Officers in the Army', Appendix 42, p 71 (War Office)
⁶ Wood to Roberts, 25 November 1901, 7101-23-91 Roberts
⁷ Britten to his father, 18 May 1900, 7812-34 Britten
this way. With Haig's help, Roberts set up in 1903 a committee of Cavalry officers to plan reductions in expenses. As de Lisle told him, 'It ought to be made impossible for any officer to say, as is so often said at the present day, that he would like to be in a Cavalry regiment but could not afford it'. These reforms cut into the pleasures of the rich volunteers who still largely officered the Cavalry. They did not like it, and a number exercised their prerogative by leaving; voluntary resignations among Cavalry officers were in 1903 triple what they had been in 1898. The War Office made no attempt to attract them back: a suggestion by a committee on officers' expenses that the Army should pay for the two riding horses that every officer must have, made in 1902, was indignantly rejected on the grounds that the Army had no intention of paying for officers to hunt in their leisure time. In the same year, a special section of a report on education in the Army expressed deep concern over the cost of joining a Cavalry regiment. 'Our Cavalry must be officered', it noted. 'We may require from the candidates either money or brains. The supply is most unlikely to meet the demand if we endeavour to exact both.' The report's recommendations,

1. Roberts to Kitchener, 31 January 1902, 0/59 Kitchener; Roberts to Kitchener, 3 April 1903, 11/7 Kitchener
2. Roberts to Kitchener, 19 March 1903, 11/5 Kitchener
3. de Lisle, 'Cavalry Training', 71902, 7101-23-221-3 Roberts
4. 'Mrs Clarke', 'Jobbery under Arms', USM Vol XXX NS, p 538
5. WO/163/5, pp 256-8. For hunting as an aid to judging ground, see Alderson, Pink and Scarlet, p 9
6. 'Report of a Committee to Enquire into the Education and Training of Officers in the Army', p 35 (War Office)
intended to reduce the private income necessary to £200 a year by drastically curtailing social expenses, were implemented by a string of Army Orders over the next year. By 1904 a private income of £300 was adequate, and stayed so until 1914.

Nonetheless, the standard of officers in the Cavalry, with more demanded of them, energetic reformers returning from the Boer War, and constant exposure to public criticism, continued to decline with their number. 'How can any ill come to our beloved country so long as the shires produce such men?' enthused Private Maitland of the 19th Hussars, 'Has any writer, philosopher, psychologist ever properly placed these young men who officer the proud British Army?' Less enthusiastically, Private Grainger summed up the officers of the 9th Lancers as 'our Blue Blooded bacon dryers, cheese mongers and pork butchers that are in command and have money'. Doubtless, both were right.

The Cavalry officers intended by Haig and Dundonald as an elite corps remained an exclusive gathering of sportsmen, through which an occasional outstanding soldier would emerge. They caused Roberts much anxiety with their

1. Army Order 1, 1903; Army Order 169, 1903; Special Army Order 9, April 1903; Army Order 121, 1905 (War Office)
3. Allenby to his wife, 11 December 1914, Allenby 1/5/74
4. Maitland, Hussar of the Line, p 37
5. Grainger Diary entry, 9 April 1903, 7104-32 Grainger
generally poor examination results and diminishing numbers.\textsuperscript{1}

But this was largely his own fault: an enquiry into the shortage of Cavalry officers in 1905 gave the three main causes as low pay in the Army, the cutting of social activities and long leave, and the ridicule of the Cavalry in the Press.\textsuperscript{2} All these factors, stemming from Roberts' attempts at reform, and from blame placed on the Cavalry in South Africa, meant that they went out of fashion. 'Young men with private incomes of £400-£1,000 a year are ceasing to join the British Cavalry', Baden-Powell was informed, 'while young men with smaller incomes cannot afford to join'.\textsuperscript{3}

When, at the end of 1905, the Adjutant-General issued a strongly-worded memorandum on expenses in the Cavalry, Baden-Powell took his officers' side:

They were seldom, if ever, consulted or taken into the confidence of their legislators, with whom they were altogether out of touch (even up to date: a typical example being the recent unfortunate memorandum on the expenses of Cavalry officers)

This feeling of discouragement has not merely been confined to the senior officers, but has in a measure extended down to all.\textsuperscript{4}

Physically and spiritually, the \textit{arme blanche} controversy

\textsuperscript{1} Roberts to Haig, 10 January 1903, 7101-23-122 Roberts. The popular view of the Cavalry officer was still as brave but brainless, holding that 'sweating at tactics is all bally rot'. Blaire, \textit{Epaulettes}, p 31

\textsuperscript{2} 'Recommendations of Committees on Army Matters 1900-20', p 179 (War Office)

\textsuperscript{3} Carbon of letter, unsigned, undated, 1903-05, to Baden-Powell from ?Haig, Acc 3155.2 Haig

\textsuperscript{4} 'Reports of the Inspector-General of the Forces 1904-13', summary of Cavalry winter training by Baden-Powell, 18 April 1905 34/317 (War Office); WO/163/10 Army Council Decisions 1905, no 191, p 241
had all but destroyed the Cavalry as a fighting force. Almost unnoticed in the noise of the controversy, Cavalry reform continued. In 1901 pom-pom guns were introduced for the Cavalry, who later reverted to machine guns in light carts.\(^1\) In early 1904 the strength of a home regiment in peace time was fixed at 565 officers and men, recruits being less than 11 stones in weight.\(^2\)

Between 1903 and 1905 the Cavalry were given the same new rifle as the Infantry, the Short Magazine Lee Enfield, far superior to any carbine. Roberts and Baden-Powell wanted this carried (as in Afghanistan) slung across the back, but were opposed by a bloc of senior Cavalry reformers (French, Scobell, Rimington, Byng, Broadwood and Haig) who in October 1904 convinced the new Army Council that the rifle should be carried in a long bucket from the saddle to balance the sword.\(^3\) Two years later a committee under Haig unanimously approved this decision.\(^4\) Roberts' hopes for this rifle help explain his approach to the question of the arme blanche. 'Our Cavalry', he wrote in late 1903, referring to the S.M.L.E., 'will shortly be armed with a magazine rifle which can be depended upon to kill at a distance of

\(^1\) Recommendations of Committees on Army Matters 1900-20', p 47 (War Office)

\(^2\) ibid, p 129


\(^4\) Haig Diary entry, 13 March 1906, Acc /155.2 Haig
at least 2,800 yards. One and a half miles was the extreme range of the rifle, but any kill made at that distance would have been a complete fluke. The unusual conditions of South Africa alone had made such shooting possible.

The Roberts Ring, having achieved its objectives by promoting its own members to high rank, began (as the Wolseley Ring had done) in early 1904 to break up. This was largely precipitated by the action of the Esher Committee, which recommended Roberts' retirement, while he was hustled out of a possible post as Inspector-General of the Forces to make way for the Duke of Connaught. Even Hamilton finally broke with Roberts professionally, although not personally, on the issue of conscription. Robertson, Rawlinson and Wilson had established their own careers, while in December 1904 Wilson was warned unofficially to see less of Roberts, a warning he ignored. The upheavals in the War Office generated by Esher co-incided with the completion of Cavalry Training 1904, which was due for issue on 1 March 1904. Before its issue, Roberts attempted to secure public opinion by a series of articles from the military correspondent of the Morning Post, clearly briefed

1. Memorandum by the C-in-C in addition to memorandum by the I-G.C, on 'B' Cavalry Division, Germany, September 1903, 7101-23-221 Roberts; WO/163/9 Army Council Decisions 1904, no 133, pp 281-3. At a test firing in 1902 at a target representing a quarter of a battalion in column at 2,800 yards, there were five hits from 1,100 rounds. Wood, From Midshipman to Field Marshal, Vol II, p 276
3. Wilson Diary entry, 31 December 1904, Wilson
as to the book's contents. But not until 18 February, the day after Roberts' retirement and the creation of the Army Council was formally announced, did the new Secretary of State for War, Arnold-Forster, ask to see John French about the manual:

I said I had heard how much he had been concerned to hear of recent decisions with regard to the use of Cavalry. It appears to me that as a sort of 'by product' it has been decided that we should cease to have any Cavalry, in the ordinary Continental sense. As a civilian I did not know whether this were right or wrong, but it seemed to me far too important a question to be decided off hand. He entirely agreed. I suggested that he, as the only Cavalry Officer commanding an Army Corps, should write a full statement of the case for submission to the Army Council.2

The need that Arnold-Forster felt for a specialised vocabulary to describe the arme blanche controversy, and the complete absence of such a vocabulary, is very clear from this passage. Arnold-Forster discovered that his military advisers on the Army Council were also opposed to Cavalry Training 1904 as it stood. 'There will of course be a hideous row', he wrote, 'but after all it is our Council and not Lord Roberts which is now responsible.'3 Unfortunately, it was not that easy. A week later, Lord Lansdowne, now Foreign Secretary, called on Arnold-Forster.

1. Prevost Battersby, 'The Future of Cavalry', 7101-23-221-9 Roberts
2. Arnold-Forster Diary entry, 18 February 1904, add mss 50336, Vol LXII Arnold-Forster
3. Arnold-Forster Diary entry, 23 February 1904, add mss 50336, Vol LXII Arnold-Forster
Lansdowne had just lunched with Roberts, who on hearing of the delay in issuing the manual 'threatened to give up the Committee of [Imperial] Defence, indeed to throw up everything, and make a violent attack upon the Government in general and the Prime Minister in particular, for their supposed bad treatment of him'.\footnote{Arnold-Forster Diary entry, 26 February 1904, add mss 50336, Vol LXII Arnold-Forster; Roberts to Hamilton, 28 February 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts} Arnold-Forster was astonished: he had asked his technical advisers for details of a military problem, and had not anticipated the vehemence of Roberts' reaction. He suggested, as a compromise, that the manual should be issued provisionally, got the new Adjutant-General to agree to this in the afternoon, and sent a message offering this solution to Lansdowne to put to Roberts over dinner, without consulting French or anyone else. The Government's safety was more important than the Cavalry's training. Roberts accepted the proposal 'with gratitude', and a relieved Arnold-Forster explained the position to French two days later.\footnote{Arnold-Forster Diary entries, 26 February 1904, 27 February 1904 and 28 February 1904, add mss 50336, Vol LXII Arnold-Forster} Meanwhile, the ultimate form of persuasion was tried. On 3 March the King himself told Roberts of the Cavalry's fear that they were to be turned into Mounted Rifles. At once Roberts wrote to French:

\begin{quote}
Nothing could be further from my views…
There is nothing in the training I advocate which could possibly interfere with the dash and confidence in himself which it is so essential for a Cavalry soldier to possess…
It distresses me to think that your views
\end{quote}
and mine are so much at variance on a matter which is of such vital importance to our Cavalry.¹

French duly replied to this:

As I tried to explain to you the other evening I have only made the same representations on the subject to the Army Council as I have repeatedly made to you as Commander-in-Chief. Nothing can make me alter the views I hold on the subject of Cavalry, and I am sure they are nothing like so much at variance with yours as you seem to think.²

The following day his memorandum was given to the Army Council, supported by Rimington and Evelyn Wood, calling for the omission of Roberts' preface. The Council agreed to the provisional issue of the manual with the preface (this, since the deal between Roberts and Arnold-Forster, was a foregone conclusion) and balanced this by rejecting the call from French, Scobell and Rimington for the reintroduction of the lance for war. Instead, they proposed to abolish it altogether, the new Quartermaster-General, Herbert Plumer, asking the delicate question whether regiments without lances could still be called Lancers.³

Tradition and influence, however, were too strong for the Council: on 5 May they were told that Edward VII, who had taken a close interest in the arming of the Cavalry, would not sanction the abolition.⁴ Short of provoking a constitutional crisis, there was nothing to be done. Despite

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1. Roberts to French, 4 March 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts
2. French to Roberts, 6 March 1904, 7101-23-30 Roberts
Roberts' usual tactic of a series of articles, this time by Amery in The Times during summer (at Roberts' request), Cavalry Training was issued provisionally for six months with the preface, and in the re-issue of January 1905 the preface was dropped.

Haig, who was in India, played no direct part in all this. But the affair forced Kitchener to choose between Roberts and his own Inspector-General of Cavalry. In late March and April 1903 Roberts had written to Kitchener stressing, from his own memories of Afghanistan, the valuelessness of the lance. Kitchener had, even before receiving these letters, taken his own steps in the same direction: on 20 April he ordered Roberts' memorandum on the lance circulated to all Indian Cavalry regiments, for information, and in the next two months removed the lance from three of the twenty-four Indian regiments which carried it. But Kitchener was considerably more sensitive than Roberts to his own Army. 'I think it is well to work gradually', Kitchener wrote to him, 'as the natives of the Lancer regiments think a good deal of their lances, more as show than anything else.' He sought Haig's advice, meeting with him briefly in early September to talk over the

1. Amery to Roberts, 11 May 1904, 7101-23-1 Roberts
2. Roberts to Kitchener, 27 March 1903, 11/6 Kitchener; Roberts to Kitchener, 17 April 1903, 11/10 Kitchener
3. Kitchener to Roberts, 20 April 1903, Q/7 Kitchener; Kitchener to Roberts, 10 May 1903, 11/11 Kitchener
4. Kitchener to Roberts, 10 June 1903, 7101-23-33 Roberts
Cavalry question, on which, Haig recorded, they were quite agreed.¹ In the meantime Roberts wrote warning Kitchener of Haig's devotion to the arme blanche.² When Haig and Kitchener met again in November Haig recorded that Kitchener was 'quite at one with me regarding method of Cavalry action, namely offensive tactics'.³ Kitchener did not see it that way at all; he wrote to Roberts:

Haig has arrived and I have had one talk with him and mean to have another, he seems to have a wrong idea that the morale of the Cavalry will be injured by dismounted training. I have told him that I disagree with this; that while I do not wish in any way to injure the dash or power of shock tactics of Cavalry, they must understand that whereas in the old days the carbine was the adjunct to the sword or lance in all training, now the sword must be the adjunct to the rifle and its practice.⁴

Their second talk took place six days later, and again Haig came away happily, recording that 'he quite agrees with me as to the need for impressing on cavalry the importance of offensive action mounted, while insisting on the necessity of being able to act dismounted with effect.'⁵ The complete failure to communicate with Kitchener may have been due to Haig's notorious verbal inarticulateness, not eased by the ambiguous language of the arme blanche controversy. They were clearly more in agreement than Kitchener realised.

The Indian Cavalry had been subject to Roberts'

1. Haig Diary entry, 5 September 1903, Acc 3155.2 Haig
2. Roberts to Kitchener, 24 September 1903, 7101-23-122 Roberts
3. Haig Diary entry, 3 November 1903, Acc 3155.2 Haig
4. Kitchener to Roberts, 5 November 1903, Q/11 Kitchener
5. Haig Diary entry, 9 November 1903, Acc 3155.2 Haig
views on firepower for nearly twenty years, and many of their officers had commanded M.I. in South Africa. Haig was not impressed. In December, after manoeuvres, he noted:

From what I see there is a risk of making our Cavalry act on the defensive too much: at the Punjab manoeuvres it struck me on several occasions that Commanders dismounted their men to hold positions passively, when the military situation demanded an energetic offensive at once. On one occasion I saw a cavalry Brigade attacked by Infantry when holding a village, and eventually [they] were outflanked and surrounded !!

Twenty-five years later, one of Haig's staff recalled:

The Indian Cavalry under the influence of many of its officers who had served in South Africa with mounted infantry units was permeated with the new doctrine and looked for approval from the new Inspector-General. There was a rude awakening. Haig would have none of it. Both at his inspections of regiments, and still more by means of his training memoranda and staff rides, he taught unceasingly to his Cavalry in India that warfare still offered scope for horse and man and bare steel.

This exaggerates. Haig's own notebooks reveal his preoccupation with 'thorough instruction of every horseman in skirmishing - they already shoot well', and 'higher training of officers in tactical use of the rifle'. Horace Smith-Dorrien, at that time commanding the 4th (Quetta) Division, recalled that in 1904 Haig inspected the Cavalry under his command, 'and shortly afterwards I submitted to him my scheme for cavalry training and manoeuvres, which he

1. Haig to Edmunds, 29 December 1903, Edmunds 1141 Edmunds
2. Charteris, Douglas Haig, p 28
3. Notebooks on Manœuvres 1903-6, Acc 3155.40 Haig
returned to me, remarking that he could not improve on it'.

But to Haig, India seemed to confirm the Cavalryman's fear that too much reliance on the rifle meant passivity and poor morale.

In April 1904 Roberts wrote to Kitchener asking for a letter in support of his Cavalry Training manual, to show the Army Council. Before this letter could reach India Haig reported to Kitchener on the new Cavalry Training and Kitchener issued an Army Order in support of the manual. Roberts found this admirable, writing back that 'what you have said in that order is exactly what I want'.

But Haig also found it quite acceptable. In May he and Kitchener met twice to discuss Roberts' request, and, Haig recorded:

Had a long talk with Lord K[itchener] re new Cavalry Drill Book. He read me his remarks in letter [sic] which he had sent to Lord Roberts on the subject. He takes a middle course, thinking exact drill re training for charge necessary, but putting efficiency in rifle first.

Kitchener's 'letter' was in fact his Army Order. As he wrote to Roberts during his meetings with Haig:

I think someone must have given you the wrong impression about Haig. I have only just arrived here so I have not been able to go into his work in detail but I had a long talk and he certainly

1. Smith–Domien, Memories of Forty Eight Years Service, p 326
2. Roberts to Kitchener, 28 April 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts; Haig Diary entry, 11 April 1904, Acc 3155.2 Haig
3. Roberts to Kitchener, 4 May 1904, 11/22 Kitchener
4. Haig Diary entry, 14 May 1904, Acc 3155.2 Haig
never referred to old-fashioned charges, he quite agrees with what I wrote about cavalry in the enclosed Army Order and told me so more than once.¹

Haig's views had been moving away from the 'old-fashioned' mass, knee-to-knee charge towards squadron fire-and-movement tactics since the 1890s, virtually the start of his Army career. The issue that was dividing the Cavalry and the War Office, and tearing the Cavalry itself in pieces, was not reform, not the arme blanche, but the personality and methods of Lord Roberts. At bottom, the Cavalry did not trust him. Kitchener caught a hint of this in his conversations with Haig:

It was not quite satisfactory, because although he agrees with my views he always seems to hark back as if something more were intended or that he was afraid more was intended than was said...The Cavalry are, I think, evidently very nervous that more is intended than is written down and that training for the role they can now perform with their rifle, they may lose the power or spirit to attack the enemy Cavalry when it is necessary.²

It was a point that Roberts did not himself appreciate. In June 1904 he again saw French about the Cavalry, and wrote to Kitchener afterwards, 'I am afraid our conversations will not result in much good, although French promised me he would endeavour to disabuse Scobell, Haig, and the few other officers who agree with them, that there is not the slightest wish to turn them into mounted rifles'.³

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1. Kitchener to Roberts, 12 May 1904, 7101-23-33 Roberts; Haig Diary entry, 11 May 1904, Acc 3155.2 Haig
2. Kitchener to Roberts, 12 May 1904, 7101-23-22 Roberts
3. Roberts to Kitchener, 3 June 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts
only showed how completely Roberts failed to understand the opposition to him. Beyond doubt, he now believed his own version of the Boer War.

The Russo-Japanese War broke out in February 1904, and its most startling news was that, in poor Cavalry country, a Japanese Cavalry with a limited but firm doctrine of the arme blanche was holding its own against ten times its own number of Cossacks, reputedly the best mounted riflemen in the world. British officers expressed amazement: 'What has happened to the Cossacks?' one wanted to know. Most critics waited for more details. Roberts, locked in the struggle with the Army Council, did not. His only source of information was Ian Hamilton, acting as an observer with the Japanese Army. Roberts let Hamilton know what he wanted to hear and why:

I gather [the Japanese Cavalry] are really mounted riflemen riding ponies chiefly...I am most anxious to hear about them for a great opposition has set in against the opinion expressed in my Preface to 'Cavalry Training'...[the Chief of General Staff] said that nothing would be done until he knows what success the cavalry on the two sides meet with during the present war. This is why I want you to give me all the information you can on the subject.2

Hamilton, unique among British observers of the war, concluded that the arme blanche came badly out of it. To Roberts his letters were a vindication:

Your letters are most interesting and instructive. I wish French could see them, if

2. Roberts to Hamilton, 4 May 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts
he would take them to heart, but he is going on, as is Haig in India, with incessant knee-to-knee charges, having one or two dismounted days a season, and paying very little attention to musketry.¹

Roberts did not understand that his actions had interrupted, and distorted, a programme of reform within the Cavalry nearly twenty years old. He imagined that, as all his wishes were not being carried out, the Cavalry must be regressing to the standards and outlook of the 1870s. He took refuge in revenge: in December 1904 he urged Kitchener to recommend Hamilton as his successor in India, in opposition to French (in fact neither got the post).² In January 1905, when Cavalry Training was re-issued without its preface, he wrote directly to the Prime Minister's personal secretary:

I should have been inclined to prevent [the making of the issue with the preface provisional] had I not been confident that the manual would be generally approved of. The officers' reports have now been received, and I understand that they are unanimous as to the usefulness and practicability of the new regulations...I know that in some commands, particularly Aldershot, the training is being carried out very much as it was before the war. Very little attention is paid to dismounted work...I do not think Mr. Balfour has any idea of how inefficient the cavalry were during the war. I had to get rid of six officers commanding brigades and five officers commanding regiments. The men did not know how to take care of their horses. When despatches had to be sent not only local irregulars but even Australians and Canadians were employed in preference to our own men; and General French would never go anywhere without some Mounted Infantry to assist him, because his Cavalry could not cope with the

¹. Roberts to Hamilton, 7 December 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts
². Roberts to Kitchener, 23 December 1904, 7101-23-122 Roberts
Boers when fighting with the rifle... We must not allow the sensitivity of the more senior Cavalry officers - some of whom cling to their traditions of bygone days - to prevent the necessity for changes in the future being pointed out.¹

Roberts' view of the Boer War did not, for the moment, matter. But again it would have serious consequences in the future.

Roberts' tenure as Commander-in-Chief, by encouraging contempt for the Cavalry, set back its understanding by officers of other arms by several years. In 1901 the examiners for promotion of junior officers were impressed by their understanding of the handling of mounted troops (usually learned in the war). By 1904 'the mobility of mounted troops was not always sufficiently considered', and a year later, 'Cavalry was frequently badly handled'. It remained a weak point among junior officers until the First World War.² But Roberts' retirement removed the main source of trouble in the controversy, which even he recognised was damaging the Cavalry far more than it could be worth. In February 1905, therefore, he used a speech at the Kimberley Reunion Dinner 'to dispel any notion that I am not favourably disposed towards the Cavalry branch',³ and made his peace with French:

I know your wishes are identical with mine...
You want, as I do, to see Cavalry able to

¹ Roberts to Sanders, 12 January 1905, 7101-23-122 Roberts
² 'Reports on the examinations of officers of the regular forces, militia and volunteers', May 1901 Captains, November 1904 Captains, May 1905 Lieutenants, December 1913 Captains. (C.U.L.O.P.R.)
³ Roberts to French, 16 February 1905, 7101-23-122 Roberts
carry out a pursuit as effectively as Sheridan's Cavalry did to Lee's Army in 1865...I lay more stress on the rifle, you on the sword. The Cavalry soldier must be able to use both weapons skilfully.1

The Cavalry reform programme continued. In 1905, at Baden-Powell's suggestion, a Cavalry Committee of officers was formed to debate technical problems of the force; a Cavalry School was opened with Byng as Commandant, and The Cavalry Journal founded, with Goldmann's help.2 In the first issue, Broadwood answered the hypothetical question, 'Is the rifle or sword the principal weapon of Cavalry?1 with a cheerful 'whichever you like to call so, provided that you are equally prepared to use either'.3 So the arme blanche debate subsided again into an affair for Captains and Majors to write articles about. It would never again be as bitter, or as important. But its consequences would be felt for years to come.

1. Roberts to French, 16 February 1905, 7101-23-122 Roberts
2. WO/163/19 Army Council Decisions 1905, no 177, pp 167-9 and no 216, p 373
3. Broadwood, 'The Place of Fire Tactics in the Training of British Cavalry', CJ Vol 1, no 1, p 90
CHAPTER FIVE

CAVALRY SPIRIT

'Each side will be under the supreme command of a General, who will be represented by a Cavalry soldier.'
- H.G. Wells, Little Wars (1913)

'It is sad to think I am no longer in the Regiment. I was a rifleman for 22½ years and very proud and happy to be one and I owe much of my good fortune to having been one.'
- Henry Wilson's Diary, 1 January 1907

In 1878 a War Office report on the Russo-Turkish war noted the novelty of the Russian Cossacks, armed with lance, sword and rifle, but trained to fight mainly on foot. Six years later, Captain Chenevix-Trench emphasised that the Russian Cavalry, including Cossacks 'now differs in type, training and equipment from all other European Cavalry, and is avowedly intended to act as mounted infantry rather than regular Cavalry of the established type'. In 1901 the British attaché in Pekin reported that both Russian Cossacks and Japanese Cavalry there 'appear to be very good Mounted Infantry'. Soldiers cramming for examinations in Britain in 1903 learned that 'the Russians alone have mainly

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1. Wells, Little Wars, p 104
2. Wilson Diary entry, 1 January 1907, Wilson
4. Chenevix-Trench, Cavalry in Modern War, p 14
5. "A"669(3) 'Notes regarding the French, German and American Cavalry in China'[sic] (War Office)
armed their Cavalry with the rifle as their sole [sic] weapon.¹ The point was not in dispute. The majority of British officers reporting on the Russo–Japanese war confirmed that the Cossacks (who made up the bulk of the Russian Cavalry) and the remaining horsemen in the Russian Army, were trained primarily to fight on foot.² A high proportion of Cossack officers were transfers from the Infantry³ and one Russian officer condemned their 'exaggerated and useless practice of dismounted action'.⁴

In 1910, however, Ian Hamilton wrote to Erskine Childers, author of a volume of Amery's Times History of the War in South Africa, and now of his own book, War And The Arme Blanche:

Next came the Manchurian War. Extremely awkward for the framers of the 1907 Cavalry Training, even you must admit...The upholders of the arme blanche have been driven, in discussing it, to invent the astonishing theory that Russian Cavalry and Cossacks are not Cavalry at all, but are merely Mounted Infantry...In their complete adherence to shock tactics and the arme blanche the Russian regular Cavalry are second only to the British. As for Cossacks, a Cossack off his horse is like a duck out of water.⁵

Childers, who had been surprised at the poor performance of the Cossacks,⁶ now had the explanation. His next book

¹ Moores, Summary of Tactics for Military Examinations, p 173
² "A"958 'Report on the Russo–Japanese War', (War Office); see also other reports on the war, "A"983; "A"984; "A"1180
³ 'How not to do It', CJ Vol 8, no 32, p 404
⁴ Zalesskij, 'The Russian Cavalry in the War with the Japanese', CJ Vol 1, no 3, p 316
⁵ Hamilton to Childers, copies to Roberts and Churchill, 30 October 1910, Hamilton, 7/3/15 Hamilton
⁶ Childers, War and the Arme Blanche, p 335
announced that Cossacks were swordsmen totally ignorant of the rifle. Hamilton sent copies of his letter to Lord Roberts, and to Winston Churchill.

'Lessons' were ruthlessly extracted from the few mounted and dismounted actions in Manchuria, seldom of more than squadron size. But the ensuing debate consisted of little more than contradictory assertions on the nature of the Cossacks and their Japanese opponents. The anxiety of rifle theorists to save the reputation of the Cossacks, who for years had been held up as the ideal mounted riflemen, produced the strange result of von Wrangel in Austria condemning their obsession with dismounted work, while de Négrier in France insisted that they owed such success as they had achieved to their skill dismounted and Hamilton in Britain blamed their failure on a total lack of such skill. As before, these arguments over the value of the arme blanche, viewed in the abstract, obscured other reasons for the lack of fighting between horsemen. The terrain in Manchuria was thought too broken for large masses of Cavalry

1. Childers, German Influence on British Cavalry, p 145
5. de Négrier, Lessons of the Russo-Japanese War, pp 8, 72
(Hamilton called it 'five squadron country'), the weather in winter was freezing cold and the horses of both sides, on the end of tenuous supply lines, kept in poor conditions and short of food. But this did not explain the Cossack failure to dominate their Japanese opponents, Mounted Rifles who were taught to charge mounted in emergencies, and who avoided contact with their numerically very much superior foe. Most British observers blamed the quality of the Cossacks themselves. One wrote that 'Even with very inferior numbers, the cavalry of any other great Power would literally have walked round the numerous Cossack squadrons, either in shock tactics or in shooting.' Another recorded that the Cossacks were 'very nearly useless', they were 'badly led, badly drilled, and very often wanting in courage.' The Cossacks themselves disliked the Army, while their recruiting districts had become cultivated and even industrialised. They were no longer natural mounted riflemen. Rawlinson, watching them drill shortly after the war, wrote that his South African M.I would have completely routed them.

1. Hamilton, A Staff Officer's Scrap Book, Vol 1, p 191
5. 'German Cavalry and the Lessons of the Russo-Japanese War', CJ Vol 2, no 6, p 220
6. Maurice, The Life of General Lord Rawlinson of Trent, p 93;
British Cavalrymen, still concerned mainly with the value of the *arme blanche*, preferred to believe that the doctrine, rather than the troops, had been at fault. One wrote:

The operations of the Cossacks merely seem to confirm the deduction, made between the 16th and 18th centuries, that excessive dismounted work and dependence on fire effect destroy that true cavalry spirit without which any army in the field is deprived of its eyes and ears.¹

George Barrow of the Indian Cavalry, making the first of a series of contributions to *The Cavalry Journal*, believed:

If we go below the surface and seek the reason why the Russian Cavalry played so subordinate a part in this titanic struggle, we will find that it lies in the fact that for many years the Russians have been teaching their men to look upon their rifles as the principal thing.²

This was an echo of the first British views of the American Civil War: two cautious groups of horsemen, depending on firearms, meant little fighting and no advantage taken of a massive superiority. The behaviour of both sides after the war gave support to this view. The Russians took away their Cossacks' rifles for a while in an effort to improve their courage by concentrating on the charge.³ Rather more soberly, the Japanese doubled their number of Cavalry regiments and issued new regulations that 'the weapons of Cavalry are the sword when mounted and the rifle on foot. As a general rule

². Barrow, 'The Spirit of Cavalry', CJ Vol 1, no 1, p 22
Cavalry will fight mounted.¹ British defenders of the hybrid welcomed this support of their views; the opponents of the arme blanche regarded it only as proof that idiotic, sentimental Cavalrymen were not confined to the Western hemisphere.² Russian Cossack failures when raiding against Japanese Infantry strongpoints put the idea of the long strategic Cavalry raid out of favour in Britain. But critics were impressed by the need for Infantry to close hand-to-hand in firefights (in contrast to South Africa) and by the battle fatigue noticeable in front-line troops after two or three days fighting.³ Belief in the physical attack, as opposed to the long-range rifle duel, reappeared. At the same time the break-up of the Roberts Ring allowed into high rank other men who had made their reputations in the Boer War.

In 1905 John French joined the Committee for Imperial Defence, and in 1907 was promoted to Inspector-General of the Forces in succession to Connaught. In the same year Haig returned to Britain as Director of Military Training, and later Director of Staff Duties. Neither appointment had anything to do with their views on Cavalry. French was wanted for his organising talents, Haig for his high reputation as a staff officer,⁴ but both brought their

¹ 'The New Japanese Cavalry Regulations', CJ Vol 3, no 11, p 218
² Repington to The Times, 26 March 1910, and Childers to The Times, 17 May 1910, both in 7101-23-223-5 Roberts
³ 'The Value of the Arme Blanche from Actual Instances in the Russo-Japanese War', CJ Vol 6, no 23, p 322
⁴ Gooch, The Plans of War, pp 48-50; Duff Cooper, Haig, Vol 1, p 105
beliefs on Cavalry to the War Office. Henry Wilson had taken the precaution, a year earlier, of expressing a belief in the notion of an elite corps of Cavalrymen to French, telling him they should get the pick of Sandhurst and Woolwich, and that French himself should succeed Kitchener in India. To Wilson's delight, French replied that 'I must never fear living on half-pay, and he would see me given command of a brigade'.¹ To Roberts, still his 'Chief', Wilson continued to show contempt for French both as a soldier and a Cavalry theorist.² In 1907 he was rewarded when, on Roberts' strong recommendation, he succeeded Rawlinson as Commandant of the Staff College.³ Roberts, although retired, still had immense public prestige, and continued to involve himself in military affairs to the end of his life. As late as 1913 he caused serious embarrassment for the Government with the public statement that since the S.M.L.E. rifle was slightly inferior to the German Mauser at extreme ranges, British troops would fight Germans at a severe disadvantage.⁴

The rest of the Roberts Ring continued to make their way in the Army. Ian Hamilton became G.O.C. Southern Command on his return from Japan, a side-step which

1. Wilson Diary entry, 1 August 1906, Wilson
2. See Wilson to Roberts, 27 March 1910, 7101-23-223-10 Roberts
3. Ash, The Lost Dictator, p 50; Wilson Diary entry, 9 October 1906, Wilson
4. Seely, Adventure, p 158
resulted in his not becoming Adjutant-General until 1909. Rawlinson also went to a field command, an Infantry brigade at Aldershot, in 1906. A year later Robertson's job at the War Office ended and he requested a Cavalry brigade. Instead he went to Aldershot as Assistant Quartermaster-General. Cavalry brigades had already gone to Allenby and Byng, while in 1907 French secured the Inspector-Generalship of the Cavalry for Scobell. At the same time, de Lisle found his candidacy for Commandant of the Cavalry School blocked - he believed by Haig. Two years later, John Vaughan, Haig's old fellow officer of the 7th Hussars, was given the job. Rimington meanwhile replaced Haig as Inspector-General of Cavalry in India following the latter's arrival at the War Office. Other successful officers began to emerge into high rank: from being suddenly replaced as Quartermaster-General in 1905, Plumer took a divisional command two years later, and Northern Command in 1911. James Grierson, a staff officer of outstanding ability with no Ring connections became Director of Military Operations in the Esher reforms, and went on to command a division at Aldershot two years later. In 1907 Horace Smith-Dorrien was given Aldershot Command, recommended - so he believed - by

2. For Scobell's career, see French to Knollys, copy to Haldane, 16 September 1908, no. 55 mss 5908 Haldane
3. De Lisle to Roberts, 25 November 1907, 7101-23-222 Roberts
4. Brander, The 10th Royal Hussars, p 89
both French and Kitchener.\(^1\)

By 1913 two Cavalrymen held the highest Army commands, French as the designated commander of the B.E.F., and Haig as G.O.C. Aldershot. But the supposed Cavalry dominance of the Army effectively meant just these two men. Hamilton was Inspector-General of Overseas Forces, Wilson, as Director of Military Operations, believed he was dominating French,\(^2\) Rawlinson was in command of a division, Grierson held Eastern Command, and Smith-Dorrien Southern Command. Of the outstanding Cavalrymen of the Boer War only Allenby still held a significant post as Inspector-General of Cavalry and designated commander of the Cavalry Division. Byng was given a Territorial division on leaving his brigade in 1910, Kavanagh was put on half-pay on leaving his three years later. By 1914 only de Lisle and Gough still had their Cavalry brigades. The remaining three brigades were led by men, such as Chetwode, who had made their reputations since 1902. By the start of the First World War, excluding honorary appointments, of eight Field Marshals only two were Cavalrymen, John French and Evelyn Wood. Of eighteen Generals just one, Haig, was a Cavalryman. Of twenty-seven Lieutenant-Generals three were Cavalrymen. Of a hundred and fourteen Major Generals eight were Cavalrymen (7 per cent, a little lower than the 8.25 per cent of Cavalry in

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2. Wilson Diary entries 19 March 1912 and 22 September 1914, *Wilson*
the Army, and the 7.8 per cent of the B.E.F. justified). This should be compared with the two Generals, three Lieutenant-Generals and nineteen Major-Generals at the same date who had served with the Mounted Infantry. The Boer War did not advance the careers of Cavalrymen; if anything the upsets over the arme blanche in its aftermath retarded their promotion as a group.

After Roberts' departure, a conscious effort was made to repair the damage done in the Army by the controversy. The Cavalry were demoralised and confused; as Ian Hamilton observed in 1907:

The fact is that they are afraid of Umpires. If they charge, some Umpires will declare them all dead men. If they dismount and use their rifles, other Umpires will accuse them of having lost the Cavalry Spirit, which in peace-time seems to them even worse than annihilation.

Hamilton told Southern Command at manoeuvres a year later:

Without for a moment touching on the controversial question of Cavalry being capable or incapable of 'getting home' against modern firearms, it will be admitted on all sides that they will do well, whenever they have the option, to choose the lesser of two evils and not the greater. Now although the modern rifle may be taken for general purposes to be several times as effective as it was in 1870, still, when the increased resisting power of Infantry against Cavalry shock tactics is brought under discussion, there are several saving clauses which must be placed on the other side of the balance. Thus, taking the rifle itself, there is good reason to believe that the present .303 bullet, with its

1. See Tables, Part One, Table 2
2. 'The Passing of the Old M.I.', CJ Vol 9, no 34, pp 209-11
3. 'Copy of Notes on Manoeuvres 1907 by Sir Ian Hamilton', 1 September 1907, 7101-23-220 Roberts
complete cupro-nickel envelope, is less capable of stopping a horse than the .577 or .45 leaden bullet which preceded it. Again, it is unquestionable that, since the days of the Franco-Prussian war, Infantry have been forced by other considerations to weaken their powers of resistance to shock and run some serious risks in respect to the dangers of a charge. Firing lines, for instance, are much less in hand than formerly; extensions are infinitely wider and, the depth of formations being also greater, formed supports are considerably further from the front than they used to be...The greatest and best ally of Cavalry is panic.¹

He noted with pleasure that Cavalry had lost its tendency to hang back uncertainly at manoeuvres, and saw reason to hope that 'the heated controversies of the past few years as to the respective merits of fire and shock tactics are at last cooling down to the sensible conclusion that there may be room on the battlefield for either or both'.² John French entirely agreed. 'One amateur centaur would dash the sword and lance entirely out of the Cavalryman's hand', he told the RUSI in 1906, while another 'would throw the horseman's splendid firearm to the wind'.³ Three years later he informed the Army Council:

I do not think [the Cavalry] realise fully that the enormous advances in modern firearms have, to a large extent, modified, if not revolutionised, the methods to be adopted by Cavalry when supporting other arms...[I hope] a somewhat wider and more far-reaching view may be taken of the possible action and tactics of dismounted men.⁴

1. 'Tactical Teachings', USM XXXVIII NS, pp 302-3
2. Notes in CJ Vol 3, no 9, p 117
3. French in discussion of Bethune, 'Uses of Cavalry and Mounted Infantry in Modern War', JRUSI Vol 50, p 633
4. 'Reports of the Inspector-General of the Forces 1904-13', report for 1909 (War Office)
In 1907 Douglas Haig, in an often-quoted passage, expressed the belief that 'the role of Cavalry will always go on increasing'. The reasons he gave for this belief were as follows:

1. The extended nature of the modern battlefield means that there will be a greater choice of cover to favour the concealed approach of cavalry.

2. The increased range and killing power of modern guns, and the greater length of time during which battles will last, will augment the moral exhaustion, which will affect the men's nerves more, and produce more demoralisation amongst the troops. These factors contribute to provoke panic, and to render troops (short service soldiers nowadays) ripe for attack by cavalry.

3. The longer the range and killing power of modern arms, the more important will rapidity of movement become, because it lessens the relative time of exposure to danger in favour of the cavalry.

4. The introduction of the small-bore rifle, the bullet from which has little stopping power against a horse.

This was not an arme blanche fanatic's fantasy. It was a summary of the case for the tactics the Cavalry were still developing; the use of cover for small parties, the use of surprise, the use of speed, and the fact that, in practice, a charging horse was a hard thing to kill. It said nothing about high troop density, barbed wire, or heavy enemy Artillery dominance. When, between 1914 and 1918, those factors were absent, it proved a remarkably accurate prediction of events. This was, however, only Haig's personal opinion.

1. Haig, Cavalry Studies, p 8; see also Fuller in introduction to Wolff, In Flanders Fields, p xiii, and Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as Military Commander, p 65

2. Haig, Cavalry Studies, p 8
not Army doctrine. He laid down in the official Field Service Regulations of 1909 that, as a principle, 'The fact that [Cavalry] is armed with a long-range rifle has endowed it with great independence, and extended its sphere of action; for cavalry need no longer be stopped by difficulties which can only be overcome by the employment of rifle fire'.

There was a general consensus that the hybrid Cavalryman would be independent in war. Even Roberts subscribed to this view.

This consensus did not mean the end of the controversy. As a fresh generation of junior officers discovered the problem the military journals (above all The Cavalry Journal) were dominated by it. But little had changed, indeed could change, about the arguments since the 1860s. There was the same emphasis from Cavalrymen on the value of examples from actual warfare, the preservation of morale through the arme blanche, and rapidly the same complaints about an over-worked subject. Following the Cavalry achievements in South Africa the tendency to despise theoretical reasoning was even stronger than after the Franco-Prussian war. George Barrow wrote in 1906 that 'according to theories of trajectory, energy, penetrative intensity, rapidity of fire and ballistics, there should long ago have ceased to be any place for Cavalry on the battlefield'.

1. Field Service Regulations Part One, 1909, p 25; see also Haig Diary entry, 23 December 1908, Acc 3155.2
2. Roberts, 'The Army as it Was and Is', 19th Century, Vol LVIII, p 21
3. Barrow, 'The Spirit of Cavalry', CJ Vol 1, no 1, p 15
This view could easily slide into dogma. Four years after Barrow, another Cavalryman poured scorn on the whole notion of analysing combat. 'The theories of today', he wrote, 'are oft the falsehoods of yesterday! War oft makes of them lasting heresies! Damn theories, let us remain practical! Attack - attack quickly - attack persistently and tenaciously. Keep on the attack and chance the casualties.'

As the Drill Book had laid down in 1896, the losses from firepower simply had to be accepted if the result justified it. In Barrow's words, 'Cavalry must be prepared to face heavy losses, to suffer annihilation, if victory is gained thereby'. This was not just rhetoric. On mobilisation in 1914 the commander of 1st Cavalry Brigade told his Colonels that they must expect 50 per cent casualties in the first week of war. There was constant emphasis from junior officers on the improvement dismounted action made to the Cavalry's attacking ability. One wrote that 'Cavalry will only succeed on condition that it knows how to make best use of all its means, and does not confound Cavalry Spirit with the unreasoning obstinacy of wishing only to fight mounted'. Another suggested that it was possible to use the rifle on appropriate occasions, 'without losing the Cavalry spirit'.

1. Haag, 'Contact Squadron', CJ Vol 5, no 19, p 313
2. Barrow, 'The Spirit of Cavalry', CJ Vol 1, no 1, p 19
3. Lumley, History of the Eleventh Hussars, 1908-34, p 22
4. Review of 'Cavalry in Action in Wars of the Future', CJ Vol 1, no 2, p 194
5. 'A Rough British Military Summary by an Indian Army Officer', USM XXXVIII NS, p 80
amounted to an effort to re-create one, destroyed by the 
arme blanche controversy under Roberts. The emphasis which 

began shortly after 1904, to be placed on the arme blanche 
was largely, if not entirely, an attempt to boost the 
Cavalry's low morale and opinion of itself. 

Discussion was still, incredibly, complicated 
by the lack of an agreed terminology, although such a termi-
nology was gradually emerging. Captain Cecil Battine, a 
military theorist, told the RUSI in 1908 that, 'We hear a 
lot of talk about mounted infantry, but I don't think any-
one could really tell you what was the difference between a 
mounted infantry corps and a cavalry corps'.

Two years later, an Infantryman, trying to write a book summarising 
the arguments on Mounted Infantry, complained that there 
were no clear definitions of such fundamental terms as 
'Cavalry', 'Mounted Troops', and 'Mounted Rifles'.

It was 
still possible for soldiers, and even more for civilians, to 
talk at complete cross-purposes on these matters. However, 
in another respect, argument about the Cavalry had been con-
siderably simplified. Before 1906 the Cavalry, like the 
rest of the Army, had been liable to both fight colonial 

wars, for which the lance (for example) was of undoubted 
value, and at the same time be ready for European war, which 
would require considerably different tactics. With the 
creation of the B.E.F. between 1906 and 1909, although

1. Battine, 'The Uses of the Horse Soldier in the Twentieth 

Century', JRUSI Vol 152, p 315

2. The Question of Mounted Infantry, by a Rifleman, p 9
colonial war remained a possibility, the Army's outlook was increasingly geared to the notion that its next war would be in Europe. The massed 'Cavalry Fight' meanwhile was, in the opinion of most theorists in Britain, declining in favour as a likely opening to such a war. Instead, it was expected that the side with inferior Cavalry would use dismounted action to slow their enemy's advance. But the arme blanche was also expected to prove its value, as in South Africa, in turning dismounted horsemen out of position by manoeuvre and the threat of a surprise charge. The conviction was also growing that, as in Britain, there was nowhere in western Europe where the ground was clear enough for a major charge.¹

As 1914 approached, both the percentage of the Army Estimates spent on Cavalry, and the percentage of Cavalry in the Army, were lower than they had been in 1870.² Following the recommendation of a committee chaired by Haig, the depot system was altered in 1909 so that entire 'reserve regiments' would in wartime supply replacements to the Cavalry; but an Army Council decision that it could not afford to keep Home regiments at their optimum strength meant that two years later there was still a considerable

¹. See Lascelles, 'The Influence of the Ground on Shock Action', CJ Vol 5, no 20, p 492; 'British Cavalry by one of them', USM XXXIII NS, p 316; Clifton-Brown, 'The Increased Importance of Training our Cavalry in Mobility', CJ Vol 2, no 8, p 447
². See Tables, Part One, Tables 2 and 4
shortage of trained men and horses. The officer shortage was also still acute. In 1904 up to 70 per cent of the posts usually held in Cavalry regiments by Lieutenants, such as troop officer, were being filled by non-commissioned officers. In the following year the Cavalry were allowed the desperate expedient of 'probationer' officers, nominees of officers already in the regiment, who did not pass through Sandhurst and served for two years before taking any examination. As late as 1912 a Cavalry subaltern at Sandhurst was thought as rare as a black pearl. Paradoxically, the one section of the Cavalry left untouched by Roberts' attacks was the most exclusive of all, the Household Brigade, which had a long waiting list for officers, and regiments at full strength.

Nevertheless, on paper at least the regiments were strong, and with a little over 15,000 men the Home Cavalry force was in numbers stronger than it had been for fifty years. The Cavalry Division, with four brigades of

1. 'Recommendations of Committees on Army Matters 1900-20', 1909, p 8 (War Office); WO/163/11 Army Council Decisions, 1909, no 418, p 43; Speech by the Secretary of State for War quoted in Army Estimates 1910-11, p 2 (War Office)
2. 'Reports of the Inspector-General of the Forces 1904-13', Report for 1904 (War Office)
4. 'P.O.', 'Military Officers' Education', USM Vol XLV NS, pp 188-92
5. Fenwick to Wolseley, 1 October 1905, Autograph Fenwick
6. See Tables, Part One, Table 1
three regiments each, was double the size of those in the French and German Armies, and was increased by a fifth brigade in 1908. (Intended originally for Egypt, and theoretically independent of the Cavalry Division, it was in practice under divisional command in 1914.)¹ This was a lot for one man to control. J.E. Edmonds, the future official historian of the First World War, recalled asking Haig why four brigades were needed. According to Edmonds, Haig replied that in case of a massed charge, two brigades were required in the front line, one in the second, and one in reserve.² In fact the Cavalry Division - like the rest of the B.E.F. - owed its structure to administrative convenience rather than tactical theory.³ In 1913 it was proposed to create a second division by using two regiments then in South Africa; but the new staff, signallers, engineers and support troops could not be found without increasing the Cavalry's 5.6 per cent share of the Army Estimates.⁴

But if the Cavalry Division was too large to control easily, it was very small for its role as the single arm of reconnaissance and exploitation the Army possessed for European war. 'Are our two or three brigades of cavalry',

¹. WO/32/7084 'Organisation of a Force for Operations in Egypt', memo by D.M.O., 31 July 1908
². Gardner, Allenby, p 75
³. Steiner, Britain and the Origins of the First World War, p 194
⁴. WO/163/18 Army Council Decisions 1913, no 734, pp 446-8; and see Tables, Part One, Table 4
one officer demanded, 'to go on charging and annihilating division after division of German Cavalry and still remain a serviceable arm?'.\(^1\) Since British Cavalry would always be weaker than its opponents, another argued, it should concentrate on the dismounted defensive and preserve itself for scouting.\(^2\) This tension between the two roles of the Cavalry, first evident in the theories of the 1860s, of scouting and the charge, remained unresolved. The Cavalry Division, in theory the main procurer of information for the B.E.F., had no Intelligence Officer until Allenby unofficially appointed Barrow on mobilisation in 1914.\(^3\)

The battlefield charge still occupied around four-fifths of the Cavalry's total training time,\(^4\) to the detriment of dismounted work, and reconnaissance. As Rimington acknowledged, while 'a good swordsman on a perfectly trained horse should account for any three of ordinary ability on average horses',\(^5\) this training was largely for morale purposes. Cavalry were taught they could, in the right circumstances, ride Infantry down; Infantry that they could shoot down any charge. Shock action for the Cavalry was an 'ideal',\(^6\) a metaphor for aggression. One

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1. 'The British Cavalry by one of them', USM XXXIII NS, p 315
2. Buckley-Johnson, 'Cavalry Organisation - a suggestion', CJ 2, no 7, p 339
3. Barrow, The Fire of Life, p 141. As an Indian Cavalry officer Barrow was technically ineligible for the post.
4. de Lisle to Roberts, 7 June 1910, 7101-23-223-8 Roberts; Edwards, Notes on the Training, Equipment and Organisation of Cavalry for War, p 64
5. Rimington, Our Cavalry, p 193
6. ibid, pp 51-3, 58
junior officer summed up the prevailing attitude as a belief that 'Cavalry which is taught in peace to have a belief in mounted action, the arme blanche and shock tactics, will be likely, now and then, to take a reasonable risk to achieve a great end'. Senior officers, faced with a serious morale problem in the Cavalry, saw a tendency among their men to resort to firearms as symptomatic of their lack of confidence in themselves. In the 1908 manoeuvres, in which he was highly critical of Scobell's work, French complained that the division 'were worked too much like Infantry'.

Haig also noted:

The Cavalry Division dismounted three brigades and formed for attack like Infantry with 'the object of deceiving the enemy'. Question whether the risk was worth the results likely to be obtained: no commander would be likely to risk his reserve at the sight of a thousand men!

French removed Scobell, and until Allenby was appointed as Inspector-General of Cavalry in 1910 Haig, while still D.S.D., took over the training of the Cavalry. This apparent lack of belief in the aggressive use of Cavalry was not confined to Cavalry officers. The examiners for promotion of officers of all arms to the rank of Captain in

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1. 'Notrofe', Cavalry Taught by Experience, p 62
2. 'Reports of the Inspector-General of the Forces 1904-13', Inspection of the Cavalry Division 21-28 August 1908 (War Office)
3. Haig Diary entry, 28 August 1908, Acc 3155.2 Haig
4. Gough, Soldiering On, p 95; Haig Diary entry, 11 July 1909. Acc 3155.2 Haig
1910 reported:

Scarcely any of the candidates appeared to realise that Cavalry are meant to fight just as much as the Artillery or the Infantry. When the advance guard commenced its attack, orders were sent to the Cavalry to... do everything except to attack the enemy in conjunction with the other arms.¹

As for junior Cavalry officers themselves, one of their seniors complained, 'to such pernicious and absurd lengths has this so-called lesson (sic !) of South Africa been carried, that our Cavalry officers will now throw themselves off their horses at once on seeing, or even hearing of, an enemy'.² They set out to reverse this trend by emphasising the arme blanche. In 1907 a new Cavalry Training manual was issued, which, while retaining most of the previous book, laid down that:

Thorough efficiency in the use of the rifle and in dismounted action is an absolute necessity. At the same time the essence of the Cavalry spirit lies in holding the balance correctly between fire power and shock action, and while training troops for the former they must not be allowed to lose confidence in the latter.

Experience in war and peace teaches us that the average leader is only too ready to resort to dismounted action which often results in acting defensively. It is of importance to lay stress during peace training on the necessity for offensive tactics for cavalry even when fighting on foot.³

This was followed by a passage which, taken from this

1. 'Reports on the Results of Examinations Held of Officers of Regular Forces', 1910, Captains, p 26 (C.U.L.O.P.R.)
2. 'Further Letters on Cavalry, not by Prince Kraft', CJ Vol 5, no 18, p 152
3. Cavalry Training 1907, p 187 (War Office)
context, became notorious:

It must be accepted as a principle that the rifle, effective as it is, cannot replace the effect produced by the speed of the horse, the magnetism of the charge, and the terror of cold steel. For when opportunities for mounted action occur, these characteristics combine to produce such dash, enthusiasm, and moral ascendancy that cavalry is rendered irresistible. It is this that explains the success of many of the apparent 'impossibilities' of cavalry action in the past. 1

This was a morale-booster and nothing else. By 1911 it had done its work and the manual was again revised, removing this passage. It formed no part of wartime Cavalry doctrine.

A second morale-booster was the return of the lance to Lancer regiments. In comparison to its abolition this was a slow process: in 1906 ten dummy practice lances were permitted each squadron, 'for recreative purposes'. In the following year, the Lancer regiments of the Aldershot Cavalry Brigade all defied orders by carrying their lances at manoeuvres. The Duke of Connaught, now Inspector-General of the Forces, sympathised. The position was, after all, absurd; the lance was being carried on parade but not used in war. Eighteen months later the Army Council was invited to re-consider the position on the lance, and a new way of carrying it was adopted which did not hinder dismounted action (it was left in the rifle bucket on dismounting). It was re-introduced for drill in 1909, but not until 1912 were the Lancer regiments allowed to take their lances to

1. *Cavalry Training 1907*, p 187 (War Office)
war. As proof of the nature of this decision, entirely a matter of morale, the lance was taken altogether from the Dragoon and Dragoon Guard regiments. Indeed, the 5th Dragoon Guards expressed a certain relief to be rid of it.²

In 1903 a committee under French had proposed a new Cavalry sword, to replace the sword which had, in South Africa, been found inadequate,³ but Roberts had turned the idea down on grounds of cost. In 1906 a new committee under Scobell produced a better pattern. Introduced in 1908, it was intended primarily for thrusting, like a shortened lance; and like the lance, became a symbol for the Cavalry of the value of shock action.⁴ Even the Cavalry trumpet calls were re-introduced.⁵ Haig meanwhile approached Henry Wilson with the idea of a Cavalry Instructor at the Staff College.⁶ Haig selected George Barrow, whom

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2. Pomeroy, The Story of a Regiment of Horse, Vol I, p 270. A number of later regimental histories suggest that the Dragoons and Dragoon Guards did take their lances to war in 1914. If so, it was against orders. However, photographs of regiments in the war show clearly that, at least, the 1st Dragoons, 2nd Dragoons, 6th Dragoons, 2nd Dragoon Guards and 5th Dragoon Guards did not carry lances in 1914-18. See Hills, The Royal Dragoons, p 66 photograph; Blacklock, The Royal Scots Greys, p 78 photograph, and photographs nos Q3269-70; Q2146-51; Q4236-8; Q51483-5 in possession of the Department of Photographs, Imperial War Museum.
4. 'Recommendations of Committees on Army Matters 1900-20', 1908, p 11 (War Office)
6. Wilson Diary entry, 31 March 1908, Wilson
he had met in India, and Wilson approved. But Barrow (or so he remembered) was dismayed to be told on arrival at the College that only three lectures a year would be given on Cavalry - and those by the Artillery specialist. Barrow tried to resign, only to be told by Haig he had been appointed precisely to counter the influence of Wilson. Wilson was himself considered enough of a rifle specialist to chair, between 1909 and 1914, investigative committees on new rifles for the Army. He remained a committed opponent of the Cavalry.

In emphasising the *arme blanche* for morale reasons, the senior Cavalrymen had the full support of their own reactionary wing, and also of French and German theorists. In fact the Cavalry were a little suspicious of the French doctrine that it mattered little what weapons Infantry were armed with 'if they can no longer use them and fear conquers the soul'. Haig's own book on Cavalry contains many quotations and paraphrases from French and German writers; but the French influence on official British doctrine at this time was nevertheless minimal.

2. ibid, p 131. Note, however, that Barrow's memory is not perfect. He believed *War And The Arme Blanche* had been published by this date (1908) instead of 1910.
3. 'Interim Report of the Wilson Committee on Automatic Rifles 1911', (War Office)
5. Compare Haig, *Cavalry Studies*, pp 66-9 with "A"281 'Lectures by Colonel Cherfils on Cavalry Tactics', Ecole de Guerre, 1892-3, of which it is a repetition (War Office)
When Lieutenant Edward Spiers, a believer in the rifle, translated one French theorist with the sole object of gaining a reputation, he was mildly rebuked in the United Service Magazine for subscribing to the French arme blanche cult. ¹ When in 1909 the French announced that it was only by means of their thirteen armoured Cuirassier regiments 'that we shall be able to give ourselves elbow room',² The Cavalry Journal noted carefully that 'this remains to be seen', and looked askance at their 'robust and perhaps fanatical faith in the importance of shock tactics'.³ At least in print, no British officers ever agreed with two French Light Cavalrymen that dismounted action was fit only for Cavalrymen 'too scared, old or worn out to ride properly';⁴ nor did any British General echo General Sordet's observation to his men in 1912, that the charge was the only Cavalry action of which the Infantry need be afraid.⁵

The German Cavalry still practised its massed charges against Infantry, and relied on its Jägers and Artillery for fire.⁶ Early in the century, however, the

¹. Spears, The Picnic Basket, p 73 (Spiers anglicised his name to Spears during the war); review of 'Tactical Schemes', USM XLVIII NS, p 691
². Lowther, 'The French Cavalry', CJ Vol 4, no 14, p 196
³. 'Cavalry in France and Germany 1909', CJ Vol 5, no 18, p 222
⁴. Quoted in CJ Vol 8, no 29, p 94, from a French journal (the original is in French)
⁵. 'French Manoeuvres of 1912!', CJ Vol 9, no 33, p 107
notion of a balance between fire and shock in Cavalry tactics made considerable progress in the German Army through the writings of General Frederick von Bernhardi. Bernhardi's subsequent influence on British Cavalry was massive. The most ignorant Cavalryman was expected to have heard of him by 1914. John French wrote the preface to the English edition of his book, *Cavalry in Future Wars* (published 1906) and parts of Cavalry Training 1907 were said to derive from it.

The Germans regarded Mounted Infantry as valuable only in colonial war, a particularly British phenomenon. While the Cavalry in Britain were given new swords and lances, the M.I., without a patron to support them, were phased out of existence. South Africa had shown clearly the inadequacy of an improvised force of horsemen; yet, when offered the chance of a permanent force in 1905, the M.I.

1. 'Report of a Conference of General Staff Officers at the Staff College, 17-20 January 1910', pp 7-15 (War Office) gives a clear indication of the importance of Bernhardi at the highest levels of the British Army.

2. de Lisle, 'Letters of an Old Cavalry Officer to his Son - 4', 7101-23-221-14 Roberts; Edwards, Notes on the Training, Equipment and Organisation of Cavalry for War. A ponderous joke in 'Summary of Information 2nd Cavalry Division Christmas Number 1914', Charrington I/2 Charrington, depended on a totally ignorant Staff Officer having heard of Clausewitz and Bernhardi.


4. See also Bernhardi, *Cavalry in War and Peace*, English edition, also with preface by French

5. See 'Obsolete Theories in Tactics', *The Standard*, 13 April 1910, preserved in 7101-23-223-5 Roberts

6. 'German Views on Mounted Infantry', CJ Vol 2, no 7, pp 348-51
commanders clung to their theory of improvisation. The idea was finally rejected on grounds - as always - of cost. Within a year of this, the Duke of Connaught discovered that, thanks to the rotation of battalions, one-fifth of the M.I. in South Africa was permanently untrained. 'The principle', he declared, 'is all wrong.' As even Roberts admitted, the equipping of Cavalry with the S.M.L.E. rifle destroyed the argument that M.I. were needed with the Cavalry for long-range fire. They were instead made the divisional cavalry of the B.E.F. In 1908 and 1909 the M.I. schools in Egypt and India were closed down as unnecessary and when, three years later, two Cavalry regiments returned from South Africa, they took the M.I.'s last remaining role. French told the Army Council:

It would not be possible to provide on mobilisation even the twelve companies of Mounted Infantry [two for each Infantry division of the B.E.F.] without incorporating a large percentage of reservists. The presence of such men in the ranks of the Mounted Infantry would undoubtedly be a source of danger in the event of a European campaign.

3. Roberts, 'The Army as it Was and Is', 19th Century, Vol LVII, p 21
4. ibid.
5. The Question of Mounted Infantry by a Rifleman, p 5; WO/32/7084 'Organisation of a Force for Operations in Egypt', memo by A.-G., 3 November 1908
It is not obvious why this argument did not equally apply to the Cavalry, who went to war with 30 per cent reservists. Nevertheless, the 1914 Estimates announced the closing of the M.I. schools permanently.¹ How they would have fought against regular Cavalry will never be known. But they had been only an attempt to rectify a weakness in numbers of the Cavalry which no longer existed; their lack of training prevented their ever being a serious alternative to the Cavalry.

Unlike their Cavalry opposite numbers, officers in the Yeomanry saw no flagging of interest in the arme blanche. In 1904 the Army Council was petitioned by all but one of the thirty-five Yeomanry regimental commanders to re-instate the sword.² With the creation of the Territorial Army the title 'Imperial' was quietly dropped from their names, and they were officially designated as 'Cavalry' to provide one regiment each for the fourteen Territorial Infantry divisions, and fourteen additional mounted brigades.³ From 1908 they were no longer required to carry the Infantry bayonet, and a year later a deputation of Mounted Brigade commanders, all Cavalry officers, received support from the Director-General of Territorial Forces for their request that they should carry instead a sword-bayonet.⁴ In fact

¹. Army Estimates, 1914 (War Office)
³. Cardigan, 'The Cavalry of the Territorial Army', 19th Century, Vol LXIV, p 866
they had never given up the *arme blanche* or its traditions. In 1911 it was reported that at manoeuvres a Yeomanry brigade had charged uphill against a dismounted Cavalry brigade waiting to receive them. In training in July 1914 squadrons of the Middlesex and the Warwickshire Yeomanry actually charged into each other; twelve horses were knocked over in the collision, but, as the Middlesex historian put it, 'fortunately, swords were not drawn'. The Yeomanry, like the rest of the Territorial Army, had the option of accepting foreign service in war (over 6 per cent had done so by 1910) and believed that in Europe they would need the charge. 'Armed with a rifle only and precluded from taking part in mounted combats', grumbled one officer in 1908, 'Yeomanry must be content to abandon all idea of a strategic role.' In 1912 French convinced the Army Council that although 'the Yeomanry could never be more than Mounted Rifles', they should be given swords on mobilisation, and practise swordsmanship in peacetime. The Warwickshire Yeomanry (an unusually wealthy regiment) bought the 1908 pattern sword privately for its own troopers when it first appeared.

2. Stonham and Freeman, *Historical Records of the Middlesex Yeomanry 1797-1927*, p 126
3. Speech by Haldane, quoted in *Army Estimates, 1911* (War Office)
4. 'The Training of a Yeomanry Brigade', *CJ* Vol 3, no 12, p 547
With some variation, the minimum strength of a Yeomanry regiment was fixed in 1908 as about 450 all ranks, and all regiments given, like the Cavalry, two machine guns. But although annual training was increased to fifteen days, only eight days were needed for a pass certificate. Training was carefully timed to come between the Mayfly season and the hunting; the same horses were shipped round the country for different regiments to ride; and a Yeoman might turn up on Salisbury Plain riding a horse he had met only a few days before, carrying a rifle he had never fired. Their training, like that of the M.I, was insufficient for competence in any aspect of war. Their desire for the arme blanche was therefore viewed with alarm by Ian Hamilton, who in 1910 as Adjutant-General wrote to Roberts that 'never, so long as I am here, will the Territorial Mounted men be given back the sword'. There was a considerable gap between the Cavalry's perception of itself and the Yeomanry (laid down by senior Cavalrymen and repeated by regimental officers in The Cavalry Journal) as well trained in dismounted work but anxious to restore their

2. ibid, p 25
3. Carton de Wiart, Happy Odyssey, p 43
4. Memorandum from D.A.A.G. to A.G. on Yeomanry, 1 January 1904, 7101-23-221-10 Roberts
5. Knox, 'Yeoman Hopkins, one Asset in our Armour', 19th Century, Vol LXIX, p 560
6. Hamilton to Roberts, 10 March 1910, 7101-23-233-7 Roberts
aggression by emphasis on the *arme blanche*, and the perception of observers outside the Cavalry. A Colonial veteran of South Africa, on his arrival in London in 1904:

met several Cavalry officers whom I had met during the war, and was surprised to learn from them that 'if a squadron leader wishes to get on now, spit and polish, knee to knee drill, and a studious avoidance of useful dismounted work was the way to do it. On the other hand, if he studied individuality, Boer tactics, mounted or dismounted, concealed outposts, common-sense ideas in combination with sufficient close Cavalry drill, he was at once classed as a Mounted Infantryman, and thus a marked man.'

An Infantry officer on the Umpire's staff at the 1907 Cavalry manoeuvres reported:

What impressed me as an Infantryman was the number of times squadrons advanced against entrenched positions mounted. These tactics seemed impossible, dismounted action being the only chance of success against entrenchments held by modern rifle fire, and where dismounted action was used it was generally successful; but the Cavalry soldier seemed very loath to leave his horse.

The same complaints came also from junior Cavalry officers; but Boer war veterans, remembering the successful charges against Boer trenches, saw this only as confirmation of their timidity. Lieutenant Spiers recalled an incident at Aldershot just before 1914, in which, as Machine Gun Officer, he fired blank from all six machine guns of 1st Cavalry

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1. 'The British Cavalry and the Lessons of 1899 to 1902 by a Colonial', USM Vol XXIX NS, p 420
2. Letham, 'Impressions of an Infantry Officer at the Cavalry Manoeuvres 1907', CJ Vol 3, no 9, p 55
3. 'Further Letters on Cavalry - not by Prince Kraft', CJ Vol 5, no 18, pp 138-58
Brigade for ten minutes at 1,000 yards at the rest of the brigade, stationary in close order, which ignored the fire completely. When Spiers informed Brigadier-General Kavanagh that his command had been wiped out twice over, he was denounced for lack of Cavalry Spirit and forced to walk back as a punishment. However, even senior officers who had supported Roberts in the arme blanche struggle came, before 1914, to have the same perception of the Cavalry as their former opponents. De Lisle, now a Cavalry officer, wrote in 1908:

Some of our best officers...fearing that modern reformers were attacking the principal weapon of the Cavalry, felt obliged to defend the future importance of the sword, sometimes perhaps beyond their own convictions. The dispute is now happily at an end, and a sensible mean has been reached to which both parties in the encounter were aiming, namely, a proper appreciation of both weapons, fire and steel, and an equal ability to use the right one at the right time. 2

Six years later, Hubert Gough insisted:

The rifle is a weapon which Cavalry should know how to use, and I may say that the British Cavalry certainly do know how to use it, but it is not the weapon with which they must normally seek their decisions. The decision can only be arrived at by closing with the enemy, and when cold steel comes into play.

The exception was William Robertson, a 'Cavalryman' who

1. Spears, The Picnic Basket, p 79. Based on average rates of fire for the Maxim, Spiers' claim - if taken seriously - implies one hit for every three bullets, not unreasonable against a closed up stationary target at a known range.

2. de Lisle, 'The Letters of an Old Cavalry Officer to His Son - 2', 7101-23-221-14 Roberts

had not served with the Cavalry since 1890, who considered that:

Cavalry are, indeed, very loath and slow to adjust their tactics to modern requirements, and I doubt if much improvement will be made as long as the Brigades are automatically pooled in a division and trained on Salisbury Plain...at present the Cavalry regiments are encouraged...to continue on the same lines as forty years ago. ¹

As previously, in India in the 1890s, the man whose view of the Cavalry differed the most from their own was Smith-Donien. In the 1908 manoeuvres, of which French and Haig were so critical, he considered the Cavalry 'got in some most excellent reconnaissance as well as a lot of dismounted work and that they proved themselves most capable of doing it'. ² However, this does not agree with his memories of taking over Aldershot from French a year later:

I was not at all pleased to find that the Cavalry Brigade at Aldershot were low down on the annual musketry courses, and, further, on field days and manoeuvres they were hardly ever dismounted, but delivered perfectly carried out, though impossible, knee to knee charges against Infantry in action. So, on 21st August 1909, ordering all cavalry officers to meet me at the 16th Lancers Mess, I gave them my views pretty clearly, with the result that dismounted work was taken up seriously, and the improvement in musketry was so marked that the cavalry went nearly to the head of the lists in the Annual Musketry. ³

¹. Robertson to Roberts, 10 March 1910, 7101-23-223-11 Roberts
². Smith-Donien to Roberts, 26 September 1908, 7101-23-223-9 Roberts. This view of the Cavalry's improvement 1908-9 is supported by de Lisle to Roberts, 16 January 1909, 7101-23-221-24 Roberts
³. Smith-Donien, Memories of Forty Eight Years Service, pp 358-9
When compared with Smith-Dorien's contemporary account of 1908 this is clearly an exaggeration. To what extent the improvement in musketry depended on Smith-Dorien's personal intervention, or on the Cavalry's existing enthusiasm and ability reviving after a bad year under Scobell and the upsets of the *arme blanche* controversy under Roberts, is impossible to judge.

Letters from Smith-Dorien, and from Hamilton, who was trying 'to drive a coach and pair through the Cavalry drill book', along with his own beliefs on the state of the Cavalry and the Yeomanry's agitation for the *arme blanche*, led Lord Roberts to re-open the old wounds of the controversy. In late 1908 he wrote to Leopold Amery, asking that he or Erskine Childers should provide incidents from the Boer war proving the sword was unnecessary for the Yeomanry. Childers replied:

> I am only too glad to fall in with the suggestion...for my studies have led me inevitably to your conclusion...I go further and would like to see the *arme blanche* totally abolished in the regular service and all our mounted troops trained to act as mounted riflemen...I believe it is mainly the weight of the old Cavalry tradition which perpetuates the present system.


1. Childers to Roberts, 10 August 1909, 7101-23-222 Roberts  
2. Childers to Roberts, 4 November 1908, 7101-23-222 Roberts  
3. Childers, *War And The Arme Blanche*; see also the whole of Childers' correspondence to Roberts in 7101-23-222 Roberts on the *arme blanche* controversy.
He was clever enough to appreciate (as no other theorist had) that the Cavalry's beliefs in German and French theorists, the lessons of history, the authority of experts and the value of the arme blanche in promoting morale were a seamless whole: he attacked all these points simultaneously. Written as an extended critique of Bernhardi, his book rejected the evidence of all wars but South Africa and Manchuria; he aimed it at 'all thinking men, whether professional soldiers or not', and dismissed defence of the arme blanche as 'the incalculable influence of purely sentimental conservatism upon even the ablest Cavalry soldiers', from which neither French, de Lisle, nor even Henderson was immune. Finally, having no official terminology for the debate, he invented his own.

Childers realised from South Africa that Cavalry charges against Infantry were undoubtedly possible. He insisted, however, that the 'charge' should be in loose order, in imitation of the Boer rifle charge. He attributed the success of this tactic to the morale effect of saddle fire, and rejected the arme blanche charge up to the point of physical contact as an attempt to produce 'shock', the impact of solid bodies hitting each other, as no longer possible against dispersed Infantry formations. He denied completely the possibility of the hybrid. 'The Cavalry

1. Childers, War And The Arme Blanche, p 3
2. Childers, War And The Arme Blanche, pp 8, 14; Childers to Roberts, 8 March 1910. 7101-23-223-6 Roberts
spirit', he wrote, 'in its inmost essence, means the spirit of fighting on horseback with a steel weapon, in contradiction to the spirit of fighting on foot with a fire-arm.' 1 Since the 'terror of cold steel' did not exist, for the Infantry were taught not to fear it, Childers argued that the theory was unsound.

Two crucial points were missing from Childers' book. He omitted the condition of the Cavalry horses in South Africa as unimportant, 2 and accepted completely Roberts' version of their failure there. He also assumed that the rifle charge which had worked against novice volunteers would succeed against trained Infantry. He allowed only two troop types, the obsolete 'cavalry', obsessed with the arme blanche, and 'mounted riflemen' - all other horsemen - so defining the hybrid out of existence. For Childers the lesson of Klip Drift was not that the arme blanche brought the desire to attack, but that:

> mounted men not only can pass a fire-zone unscathed, but make genuine destructive assaults upon riflemen and guns. But...the mounted men who do these things must be mounted riflemen, trained to rely on rifle and horse combined, and purged of all leanings towards shock. 3

Childers wrote with the 'extremely cocksure' 4 style of one

1. Childers, War And The Arme Blanche, p 37
2. Childers to Roberts, 20 February 1910, 7101-23-222 Roberts
3. Childers, War And The Arme Blanche, p 105
who enjoyed being 'a controversialist'! He attacked French for holding up Bernhardi as 'a conclusive answer to the English critics of shock manoeuvre'. French used no such words; he sought an antidote to 'the increasing tendency of umpires and superior officers to insist on Cavalry at manoeuvres and elsewhere being ultra-cautious', hence his support of the arme blanche. Roberts was warned when Childers' book was still in draft that 'The tone, for an unknown civilian, is too didactic and absolutive. A very little change in the wording would do away with this and would prevent the writer arousing angry and hostile feelings at the outset'. Childers' tone was indeed irreverent. When Bernhardi recommended dismounted action, he commented 'One can almost hear the ghost of Frederick the Great whispering in the impious General's ear, "what is this despicable talk about dismounting? Betray the steel? Never!" He dismissed counter-arguments grandiously as containing 'the logical hiatus, so familiar in all writers on shock'. Yet he was totally unaware of the effect his words would have. He told Roberts:

I am sorry to hear that Cavalry officers seem likely to take offence at certain passages. I

1. Childers, War And The Arme Blanche, p 129
2. ibid, p 10
3. French, introduction to Bernhardi, Cavalry in Future Wars, p xxvii
4. Unsigned, undated ms notes on War Office notepaper in 7101-23-223-2 Roberts. The phrase 'it was agreed the other day at the General Staff Conference', (of 17-20 January 1910) suggests a date of late January or early February 1910.
5. Childers, War And The Arme Blanche, p 309
6. ibid, p 14
have taken...the utmost care to prevent this
...But the whole history of the subject so far
is that of a tentative over-deferential
advocacy of change which is sneered down with­
out argument at once by ex cathedra pronounce­
ments of the arme blanche school.7

Childers' tone was so violent his book was interpreted, both
at the time and later by his own biographer,2 as an argument
to abolish Cavalry.

War And The Arme Blanche was an anachronism,
a throwback to the arguments of the 1860s, fervently denying
the hybrid, and linking the Cavalry with the arme blanche
completely in order to condemn both. Its single innovation,
the use of saddle fire, had been advanced by Conan Doyle,
Churchill and Childers himself in the immediate aftermath of
the Boer war.3 The Japanese had experimented with it in
Manchuria, and found it as ineffective as the Austrians had
in 1866.4 Childers' book owed its massive impact, on the
Army, the Press and the public, entirely to Roberts' patro­
nage.5 Roberts wrote the preface to the book, after con­
sulting with Rawlinson and Wilson. Rawlinson, unhappy at
the whole notion, declined to take part,6 but Wilson, still
Commandant of the Staff College, became actively involved.

1. Childers to Roberts, 2 February 1909, 7101-23-222 Roberts
2. Boyle, The Riddle of Erskine Childers, p 136; Barrow, The
Fire of Life, p 111
3. Conan Doyle, The Great Boer War, p 519; Kitchener to
Roberts, 5 May 1904, 7101-23-33 Roberts on Churchill;
Charteris, Douglas Haig, p 29 on Childers c1904-6
Home, p 14 (War Office)
5. The impact has been equally massive on historians.
In February 1910 he discussed the book with a College instructor, John Gough, (Hubert's brother, soon to be Haig's Chief Staff Officer at Aldershot) arguing that Childers' case was unanswerable. According to his diary Wilson then:

persuaded the Chief to entirely alter his preface and instead of comparing the present Cavalry Training with his own of 1904 to strike a higher note and ask his brother officers to read Childers' book and either refute or agree. I am sure this is the wisest course. To me there is something distasteful in the Chief crossing swords with a man like French, his inferior immeasurably in every way.

Wilson virtually re-wrote Roberts' preface, which did indeed call upon 'my brother officers, in whatever part of the Empire you may be serving, whether in the mounted or dismounted branches...to study the facts for yourselves, weigh the arguments, follow the deductions, note the conclusions'.

Roberts himself suggested the Cavalry might keep a sword-bayonet, for use 'at night, in a mist, or on other occasions when a fire fight might be impossible'. Publicly this was the most extreme position on the arme blanche he had ever adopted. But as his preface declared:

My opinion on the subject...is already so well known throughout the army that I need not labour to say how entirely I agree with

1. Wilson Diary entry, 4 February 1910, Wilson
2. Wilson Diary entry, 5 February 1910, Wilson
3. Wilson Diary entries, 7 February 1910 and 20 February 1910, Wilson
4. Roberts preface to Childers, War And The Arme Blanche, p xvi
5. ibid, p xii
the author's main thesis; indeed, anyone
who will take the trouble to read 'Cavalry
Training' (1904) will see that I anticipated
the arguments which he has so ably developed. 1

The Cavalry had been right to doubt him when Commander-in-
Chief.

Robert sent copies of Childers' book to the
editors of several newspapers, and to his Ring members. 2

On Wilson's suggestion, he also sent copies to a number of
senior officers, including some Cavalrymen (but not French,
or Haig, who was again in India). 3 Responses varied from the
polite acknowledgements from Allenby and Rawlinson to whole-
hearted support from Robertson and Wilson. 4 De Lisle, al-
though approving of the book, stressed its main flaw, 'he
builds all his arguments on the assumption that Cavalry
cannot be taught the tactical use of two weapons', adding
that, still, a number of Cavalrymen believed the same. 5 The

1. Roberts Preface to Childers, War And The Arme Blanche, p v
2. The covering letter, dated March 1910, of which there
are six unsent copies in 7101-23-223-3 Roberts; replies
also in 7101-23-223 Roberts, came from Hamilton, de Lisle,
Smith-Dorien, Wilson, Lord Esher, Lancelot Kiggell
(future Chief of Staff to Haig 1915-18),Hubert Gough,
Charles Douglas (Inspector-General of the Forces 1912-14),
Allenby, Rawlinson, Robertson, a number of other officers
and three newspapers.
3. Wilson to Roberts, 9 March 1910, 7101-23-223-10 Roberts
suggests Allenby, Fanshawe (2nd Cavalry Brigade, future
wartime Cavalry Corps commander), de Lisle, John Vaughan,
Chetwode, Kavanagh, and Charles Douglas, along with the
other Cavalry brigade commanders.
Roberts; Allenby to Roberts, 23 April 1910, 7101-23-223-
11 Roberts; Robertson to Roberts, 10 March 1910, 7101-23-
223-11 Roberts; Wilson to Roberts, 9 March 1910, 7101-23-
223-10 Roberts
5. de Lisle to Roberts, 29 April 1910, 7101-23-223-8 Roberts
public response produced a Press uproar. 'There is', observed one writer, 'no public journal of any standing which has not something to say on a question which has clearly attracted public attention to a quite remarkable degree.' Reviews were generally favourable, although few writers understood Childers' argument, and several criticised his tone. The reviewer of the Morning Post, who had supported Roberts six years before, wrote in Messianic terms of the Cavalry, 'To be freed from the consequences of the so-called "Cavalry Spirit", they must be delivered from its paralyzing faith, and Mr. Childers has written to bring them deliverance.' Several reviewers (aware of the Cavalry's opinion of Pressmen) simply fell back on the authority of senior Cavalrymen. Colonel Repington of The Times considered 'the question of the armament of Cavalry to be one which can only be determined by Cavalry officers with much experience in peace and war'. Roberts collected all the reviews. Again the question of Cavalry focussed entirely on the merits of arme blanche or rifle; there was little discussion of the real problems of Cavalry, neatly summed up in one letter to

1. Westminster Gazette, 2 August 1910, preserved along with cuttings from eleven other papers reviewing the book in 7101-23-223-5 Roberts
2. Childers to Roberts, 27 May 1910, 7101-23-223-6 Roberts
3. Army and Navy Gazette, 2 April 1910; Spectator, 21 May 1910; Times Literary Supplement, 28 July 1910, all in 7101-23-223-5 Roberts
4. Morning Post, 29 March 1910, 7101-23-223-5 Roberts
5. The Times, 26 March 1910, 7101-23-223-5 Roberts
In South Africa mounted action was not so often used as it might have been because (1) the horses were starved (2) the English Press advocated making war without risks (3) the higher commanders had never studied the use of Cavalry (4) the Boers would not chance it in the open when there were swords and lances about. ¹

There were, however, a number of sentimental defences of the arme blanche, which, to a public unacquainted with the subtleties of the debate, only served (as Childers told Roberts)² to strengthen the anti-arme blanche case.

Three almost simultaneous semi-official reviews challenged Childers' argument. In The Cavalry Journal a review attributed to Allenby maintained that 'It is the sharp point of the steel weapon in the hands of a skilled and resolute rider that counts in shock tactics', and that 'all cavalry leaders who have seen war know that only confidence in the steel weapon can keep alive the spirit of the eager offensive'.³ In the same issue the General Staff (which, with the single exception of French, contained no Cavalrymen)⁴ also stressed the professional knowledge of Cavalry leaders, and pointed out the shortcomings of the

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1. Letter 'Common Sense' to Spectator, 16 June 1910, 7101-23-223-5 Roberts
2. Childers to Roberts, 13 June 1910, 7101-23-223-6 Roberts
3. Review in CJ Vol 5, no 19, pp 283-7. The attribution to Allenby is made by the Westminster Gazette, 2 August 1910 7101-23-223-5 Roberts
4. Review by General Staff, CJ Vol 5, no 19, pp 406-13. Strictly, one of French's aides-de-camp was in the Yorkshire Hussars Yeomanry, and the Staff had a Cavalry Staff Officer in lieu of the Inspector-General of Cavalry.
rifle charge. 'It seems to us', they wrote, 'that it would be more difficult for cavalry to pull up and dismount in the open, under close rifle fire, than to charge home led by its officers'.¹ In the same month, with Allenby as Chairman, Cecil Battine delivered an almost identical denunciation to the RUSI, observing that such a consensus was 'very satisfactory'.² For good measure, The Cavalry Journal published a review by Bernhardi, who dismissed Childers as ignorant and his book as 'amateurish and illogical', concluding that Roberts must have supported him from some unfathomable personal motive. He attributed the success of the Boer rifle charges to the British 'militia' who 'lost their heads completely'.³ Childers' reply railed against the German for daring to accuse British troops of 'cowardice'.⁴

The General Staff's review, however, admitted that, for Infantry or Cavalry, the main value of the arme blanche was to encourage a desire to close with the enemy.⁵ Allenby told the RUSI 'everyone nowadays agrees that the rifle will be the main arm of the cavalry in war'.⁶ When, after his book's publication, Childers actually talked to Cavalry officers, he was amazed that they made no strong case

¹. Review by General Staff, CJ Vol 5, no 19, p 408
². Battine, 'The Proposed Changes in Cavalry Tactics', JRUSI Vol 54, p 1416
³. Review in CJ Vol 5, no 20, pp 466-83
⁴. Childers to CJ Vol 6, no 22, pp 234-9
⁵. Review in CJ Vol 5, no 19, p 410
for the *arme blanche*, Cavalry Training 1907, having done its job, was being discarded. Two months before Childers' book was published, a General Staff Conference had agreed on a revised Cavalry doctrine of the perfect hybrid, with Cavalry attacking or defending dismounted, but not up to the final assault. Just as *War And The Arme Blanche* appeared a new manual was being written, of which Allenby as Inspector-General saw all the proofs, placing more emphasis on the rifle. Roberts was told of this as it happened, but did not see fit to inform Childers.

With the appearance of Cavalry Training 1912 the reformers achieved everything Roberts had demanded nine years before, and which they themselves had been working steadily towards for much longer. As a reviewer in the United Service Magazine explained:

In one respect [Childers'] book might have been written immediately after the South African war, since the author writes as though the defects then noticed in our cavalry training, and now once more brought forward, still existed - that no improvement had since taken place, that the fire-action of our horsemen was as ineffective today as it admittedly was ten years ago.

1. Childers to Roberts, 15 July 1910, 7101-23-223-6 Roberts
2. 'Report of a Conference of General Staff Officers at the Staff College 17-20 January 1910', pp 7-15 (War Office)
3. Cavalry Training 1912, p 286; Allenby to Vaughan, 2 March 1919, Allenby 2/5/9 Allenby
4. The undated, unsigned notes on Childers' book (see fn 4, p 263 above) in 7101-23-223-2 Roberts, makes this clear, referring to the General Staff Conference decision. That Childers did not know of this is shown by Childers to Roberts, 15 July 1910, 7101-23-223-6 Roberts, expressing surprise on just hearing that the doctrine had changed.
5. This appears to have been released, in fact, in late 1911
6. Review in USM Vol XLI NS, p 234
Childers did not re-open the *arme blanche* controversy in the Army; Roberts' 'brother officers' firmly rejected his arguments. But he did introduce it, for the first time, to a large body of public opinion. Even more than in the 1860s, to anyone unaware of the actual conditions of war, the case against the *arme blanche* looked watertight; and Childers' portrayal of the Cavalry of the Boer war as incompetent idiots, fit to be ridiculed, only reflected the Cavalry's popular image. But Roberts had learned his lesson. When, a year later, Childers followed the publication of another book by Bernhardi in English (again with a foreword by French, replying to Childers' criticisms)¹ with a second book of his own on an identical pattern, he received no support from Roberts, and the book made no impact.² From a year's talking to Cavalry officers, however, Childers had considerably changed his views:

The lance should go altogether. Whether the sword is retained, as the American Cavalry retain it, rather as a symbol than as a factor in tactics, or it is dispensed with altogether, as our divisional mounted troops [Mounted Infantry and Yeomanry] and our Colonial mounted riflemen dispense with it, is a matter of very small moment, provided that the correct principle be established and worked out in practice. It was because I doubted the possibility of establishing the correct principle in this country

1. Bernhardi, *Cavalry in War and Peace*

2. Childers, *German Influence on British Cavalry; correspondence between Childers and Roberts in the Roberts' Papers ceases abruptly with Childers to Roberts, 15 August 1910, 7101-23-223-6 Roberts, in which Childers mentions that Roberts is going abroad shortly and suggests he talks to Bernhardi.*
without abolition that in my previous book I advocated abolition, on the precedent of the South African War.¹

Childers' whole case had been built on the impossibility of the hybrid, because of the attraction of the arme blanche for reactionary Cavalrymen. He now rejected this in favour of the hybrid that the Cavalry had nearly achieved.

The distortion of the Cavalry reform programme by Roberts between 1902 and 1910 not only delayed this reform, it damaged severely the understanding of, and respect for, the Cavalry by officers of other arms. Nevertheless, reform continued, although the Cavalry Division trained as a body only twice between 1910 and 1914.² In the 1910 manoeuvres both French and Allenby were distressed by the lack of fire discipline shown by the Cavalry.³ Allenby pressed successfully for a Cavalry officer on the staff at Hythe to improve this.⁴ A year before (and also a year before Childers would denounce him as a fanatical believer in the arme blanche) French told the Cavalry that 'the chief use of the Cavalry Division in battle is its rifle fire'.⁵ Haig, listening, thought this one of French's 'terrible heresies'.⁶ He alone, of the senior Cavalrymen in the Army, continued to believe in the superiority of the arme blanche.

¹. Childers, German Influence on British Cavalry, p 215
². Bond, 'Doctrine and Training in the British Cavalry, 1870-1914' in Howard, The Theory and Practice of War, p 117
³. 'Reports of the Inspector-General of the Forces 1904-13', Report for 1910 (War Office)
⁴. ibid
⁵. Haig Diary entry, 11 September 1910, Acc 3155.2 Haig
⁶. ibid
French's successor as Inspector-General of the Forces in 1912, Sir Charles Douglas, an Infantryman who was recommended by Wilson to Roberts for a copy of War And The Arme Blanche, also saw the Cavalry in a different light to that in which they saw themselves. 'Our Cavalry commanders', he reported, 'are inclined to employ shock action whenever possible without reference to the circumstances in particular cases.' Nevertheless, he considered Kavanagh's 1st Cavalry Brigade, inspected in 1913, as liable to 'render a good account of itself in war, for which, in my opinion, it is in a state of preparedness'.

Although standards varied between regiments, some Cavalry regiments of the B.E.F. had better shooting records than some Infantry battalions. By 1913 the 11th Hussars were all but eighty men either marksmen or first class shots, with no third class shots.

Even in the 19th Hussars, which, according to one soldier, hated musketry, 'daily we are taught that the rifle is our best friend'. 1st Life Guards, in contrast, enjoyed their 'glorious outings' to the ranges. Cavalry officers at the Staff College were taught 'a soldier who is not an

1. 'Reports of the Inspector-General of the Forces 1904-13', Report for 1912, (War Office)
2. 'Reports of the Inspector-General of the Forces 1904-13', Report for 1913 (War Office)
3. The Question of Mounted Infantry by a Rifleman, p 61
4. Spears, The Picnic Basket, p 77; Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars 1908-1934, p 10
5. Maitland, Hussar of the Line, p 29
expert with his rifle is an encumbrance to the Army'. In addition, Haig, French and Allenby all stressed the value of the machine gun with the Cavalry, which, despite the comment of an Artilleryman that they needed 'nursing like a child and humouring like a woman', had lost the tendency of earlier models to jam persistently. The Cavalry were also taught that their main duty was scouting: their officers trained them in road fighting, ambushes, demolition, bridge building, night reconnaissance and above all horsemastership, all in small parties. As Gough put it, 'if the Cavalry failed in every other duty but reconnaissance, and did get information, they would be a most valuable arm'. Despite the time it took to learn, the 'Cavalry Fight' in manoeuvres was increasingly seen by Cavalrymen as a symbol of the lack of understanding from Generals of other arms of their potential. 'Nobody seemed to know what to do with it', lamented George Barrow, 'and got out of the difficulty by giving it a free hand'. After the 1912 manoeuvres, French observed that the Cavalry still had a lot to learn about

1. Cecil, Staff College Notebook on Strategy, p 75, 7501-20
2. 'Reports of the Inspector-General of the Forces 1904-13', Report for 1910 (War Office)
4. See the Diary of Captain Winwood, 5th Dragoon Guards, for this training schedule, 7105-3
5. Gough, quoted in The Question of Mounted Infantry by a Rifleman, p 13
6. Barrow, The Fire of Life, p 130; see also 'Further Letters on Cavalry - not by Prince Kraft', CJ Vol 5 no 18, pp 138-58
co-operation with other arms.¹

After more than thirty years of effort, ten of them wasted, the British Cavalry had arrived at a tactical doctrine of the hybrid, emphasising the rifle but theoretically perfect with the arme blanche also, trained in scouting, horsemastership, and squadron fire-and-movement tactics, as well as the massed charge. Even so, in those thirty years the trends which would eventually make them obsolete had caught up. As the RUSI was told in 1906, 'the age is undoubtedly becoming more mechanical'.² The Cavalry was to have less than five years before the outbreak of war to respond to the challenge of the bicycle, motor-car and aeroplane.

The Territorial Army absorbed ten Volunteer cyclist battalions on its creation.³ The advantages of the bicycle over the horse were cheapness and simplicity; its disadvantages were that the man supplied his own power — wind or rain could more than halve the average speed⁴ — and movement was restricted to roads or level ground.⁵ But cyclists, unlike Mounted Rifles, knew they could not outrun a Cavalry charge, and were taught instead to shoot it down. If two

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1. French, The Life of... John French First Earl of Ypres, p 187
2. 'The Use of the Motor Car in Warfare', JRUSI Vol 50, p 775
3. 'The Future of Cavalry by a Cavalryman', USM Vol XLIII NS, p 655
5. Trapman, 'Cyclists in Conjunction with Cavalry', CJ Vol 3, no 11, p 353
Cavalry patrols spotted each other two hundred yards apart, to dismount with the rifle would take half a minute, while a charge could cover the distance in twenty seconds. But in the same time a cyclist could travel a further hundred yards and dismount to a firing position.¹ The cheapness of cyclists led the Adjutant-General's office to consider in 1904 replacing the Yeomanry's horses with bicycles.² On the creation of the Territorial Army, Yeomanry commanders were told that the men who could not find horses might use bicycles instead; and the Mounted Brigades were in fact a mixture of Mounted Rifles and cyclists.³ Haig pressed in 1906 for a specialist cycle unit with the Cavalry Division; the idea was revived in 1913, and a committee under Allenby was studying the idea when war broke out.⁴ Meanwhile, with the abolition of the M.I. the B.E.F.'s Infantry were given one cyclist company as well as one squadron of Cavalry to each division. This use of cyclists represented part of the Army's acceptance of the fact that Britain was an industrialised country. The Adjutant-General's staff noted in 1904 that 'a large number of Yeomanry are really townspeople with no

1. Trapman, 'Cyclists in Conjunction with Cavalry', CJ Vol 3, no 11, p 358
2. Memo by D.A.A.G. to A.-G., 1 January 1904, on Yeomanry, 7101-23-221-10 Roberts
4. 'Report of a Conference of General Staff Officers at the Staff College, 9-12 January 1912, pp 19-29 (War Office); 'Report of a Conference of General Staff Officers at the Staff College, 13-16 January 1913, pp 40-6 (War Office); "A"1648 'Report of the Allenby Committee on Cyclists for the Cavalry Division 1913' (War Office)
intimate knowledge of, or feeling for, horses'. 1 Rimington thought only one-sixth of Cavalry recruits were natural riders, 2 and traditionalist Cavalrymen scoffed at the idea that 'townbred men can be taught to scout like Buffalo Bill or ride like Cossacks'. 3 Except for the foxhunting, polo-playing gentry from which the majority of the officers still came, the Cavalry was an artificially pastoral graft on industrial Britain. 4

In 1895 the latest Canstatt-Daimler motor-car did 4 m.p.h. on a slight incline and 16 m.p.h. flat out - three quarters of the speed of a charging horse. Five years later the Royal Automobile Club had only two hundred members, and Parliament thought 12 m.p.h. a reasonable speed for British roads. By 1904 100 m.p.h. had been passed, and there were 8,500 motor vehicles in the country; ten years later there were 26,238 private cars and an estimated 132,000 vehicles in total. 5 The Army was indifferent to this expansion at first. In 1903 a Motor Reserve of 1,500 hired cars was created - considered a luxury by the Treasury since they were used to ferry officers. 6 Not until 1912 were

1. "A"756 'Report of a Committee on the Provision of Horses for the Imperial Yeomanry', p 3 (War Office); Memo by D.A.A.G. to A.-G., 1 January 1904, on Yeomanry, 7101-23-221-10 Roberts

2. Rimington, Our Cavalry, p 18

3. 'Cavalry Training by X.Y.Z.', USM Vol XXXIII NS, p 192. He assumed the scouting role in any war would be performed by Colonial volunteers.


6. Report of a Conference of General Staff Officers at
permanent mechanical transport columns created for the B.E.F. The Cavalry Division possessed just fifteen staff cars. A Lieutenant-Colonel in the Motor Reserve wrote in The Cavalry Journal in 1909:

Armoured machine-gun wagons have of course been talked of, although we are not aware that any such vehicles have been built in this country; their advantages are small and their practical disadvantages many. If the machine guns are to be fired from the car they are confined to the road; if not, the armour is superfluous.¹

The Cavalry, their own preservation founded on the authority of experts in a specific field, respected this judgement. The B.E.F. also possessed just under 150 motor-cycles; but they were thought too noisy for scouting, and awkward if carrying a rifle.² Nevertheless, if it did not touch their tactics, this mechanisation of transport in Britain put a severe strain on the Cavalry's most important weapon - the horse. The horse population of Britain declined between 1904 and 1910 by over 11 per cent.³ In 1908 it was suggested - rather desperately - in The Cavalry Journal that motor-buses and lorries should be limited in order to preserve the country's horse population.⁴ The Regular Cavalry employed

¹ Mayhew, 'Motor Cars with the Cavalry', CJ Vol 4, no 16, pp 438-42
² 'A"1507 'Report of the Advisory Committee on Motor Cycles 1911', pp 3-7 (War Office)
³ 'The Scarcity of Horses in the British Empire', CJ Vol 6, no 24, pp 472-84
⁴ 'The Provision of Horses in War', CJ Vol 3, no 11, p 341
from 1911 onwards a system of boarding out horses to civilians, and had no shortage on mobilisation. The Yeomanry were less lucky; on mobilisation in 1914 the Middlesex Yeomanry had 85 per cent of its horses, supplied by the dairy and transport companies of west London, rejected as unfit for Cavalry work.\(^1\)

If motor-car development was fast, that of the aeroplane was phenomenal. In 1908 Major Bannerman-Phillips, an aeronautics specialist, wrote that heavier than air machines, while they evoked admiration for their pilots, 'remain interesting scientific toys, of little or no practical value for purposes of war'.\(^2\) A year later, Blériot flew the Channel. One frequent contributor to the United Service Magazine reflected:

It seems conceivable that the aeroplane may revolutionise the functions of the mounted man in war, or even that the 'airman' may in time entirely supersede the horseman. The wheeled motor, or, indeed, the more antiquated man-driven cycle, would have already to a great extent have taken the place of the saddle-horse if only either mechanism could have been made to leap fences and negotiate the varieties of rough and soft 'going'. But the cross-country cycle and 'auto' have failed to materialise, and it may be assumed that at least the flag end of the pre-aviation age is still in the future so far as military men are concerned.\(^3\)

The two aeroplanes which scouted for the 1910 manoeuvres

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1. "A"1508 'Report of the Committee on the Horsing of the Cavalry Division 1911'. (War Office); Stonham and Freeman, Historical Records of the Middlesex Yeomanry 1797-1927, p 129
3. 'Patrick Perterras' (pseud. of Colonel Henry Pilkington) 'Reflections on the Future of Cavalry', USM Vol XLI NS, p 396
convinced Bannerman-Phillips of their value in war. Even so, he insisted:

It would be fatuous to suppose for a moment that the time has come, or ever will come, when the air-scout by reason of his elevated position will be able to take the place of a reconnoiterer on terra firma, or that cavalry will no longer be employed for reconnaissance.¹

The experts told Cavalrymen that poor weather would ground aircraft on two days out of three in a European climate;² and that aeroplanes were so unstable that a single rifle shot would bring one down.³ But not everyone agreed with the Major. Colonel Callwell, for example, proclaimed a revolution in warfare after watching aircraft in the 1912 manoeuvres:

The reconnaissance service is of such vital importance that the virtual sacrifice of the mounted troops in its interest is fully justified so long as no other means of obtaining the information exists; but if that service can be carried out by a totally different arm, the whole scheme falls to the ground.

The hussar and lancer have no reason to regard their supplantment by flying corps as a dire calamity. Rather would such a development in the art of war tend to relieve them of duties which are apt to virtually banish them from the battlefield.⁴

If their scouting role was gone, the Cavalry had little to

¹ Bannerman-Phillips, 'Progress in Aeronautics', USM Vol XLIII NS, p 92
² Bannerman-Phillips, 'Aircraft in Co-operation with Cavalry', 19th Century, Vol LXIX, p 810
³ Haig recalled being told this before 1914. See Haig Diary entry 15 August 1915, Acc 3155.102 Haig
⁴ Callwell, 'A Revolution in Land Warfare, Blackwoods, Vol CXCII, p 652
justify their existence but the battlefield fight and the
arme blanche. In Repington’s phrase, they were meant to be
both the eyes and the fists of the Army,¹ and the tension
between these two roles had been a major factor in the arme
blanche controversy since its beginnings. It now looked as
if it might disappear entirely. But as one reflective
soldier wrote in 1910:

We see that its reconnaissance duties will be
lessened, its shock action must be of infrequent
occurrence, its protective duties can be carried
out by less expensive branches, while envelopment
is considered a waste of power, strength and co­
hesion. What, therefore, is left to our Cavalry ?²

In 1914, as in 1899, all the theories would be put to the
only practical test of any importance. Cavalry theorists
before the First World War invited their readers to 'picture
the state of two armies, each consisting of five or six
corps, after three or four days' desperate strife on the
banks of the Meuse'.³ While the Infantry and Artillery
fought, the Cavalry would be held in reserve until 'the
right moment' when the enemy reserves were exhausted, his
soldiers numb with battle fatigue, and a weak point could
be created for the Cavalry to break through and complete the
rout. 'This may not come, remember', wrote one cautious
theorist, 'for two or three days'.⁴

¹. Repington to The Times, 26 March 1910, 7101-23-223-5
Robert
². Fraser, 'Military Aircraft in the Light of Experience',
USM Vol XLIII NS, p 653
³. 'Cavalry in France and Germany 1909', CJ Vol 5, no 18,
p 225
⁴. 'Eques', 'Cavalry on the Battlefield', CJ Vol 3, no 10,
p 143
CHAPTER SIX

OUR MEDIEVAL HORSE SOLDIERS

'C for the Cavalry who (so I've heard say)
Have not seen their gee-gees for many a day.
But soon they will mount them and gallop away
And we'll all say goodbye to the trenches.'
- The Wipers Times, 5 March 1917

'Lessons. Thorough preparation...Deception...
re-inforce where winning & accept losses...
Trust your luck...Cavalry and Beersheba?
Water!!'
- Allenby's notes for a briefing before the Palestine Campaign, October 1917

Allenby's responsibility as commander of the Cavalry Division in August 1914 was incredible. If his Cavalry were wrongly trained for this particular war, if he wrecked them in an ill-judged charge, he could lose the scouting force on which the B.E.F. depended in ten minutes. As he left for France he received the final shot in the arme blanche controversy from Lord Roberts:

I congratulate you most warmly on having such a splendid command, and I shall look forward with interest to the doings of the cavalry in the war. May I say how earnestly I hope that the men may be made to understand that they should never be on their horses when they can be off them. I issued an order to this effect both during the Boer War and when I was Commander-in-Chief at home - but I fear the custom still is never to dismount except by order.

Contrary to these fears, the British Cavalry impressed the

1. Beaver, The Wipers Times, p 178
2. MS notes for a briefing in Allenby 3/7 Allenby
3. Roberts to Allenby, 11 August 1914, Allenby I/5/94 Allenby
French with their horsemastership and their willingness to
dismount and even entrench. They themselves had nothing
but contempt for the poor horsemastership of the French and
Germans, and mocked their short 'toy' carbines, heavy lances
and cluttered equipment. Allenby wrote to his wife in
October that 'the French are much struck by the all round
work of our Cavalry, but are rather shocked to see them in
the trenches, as they think that's derogatory to the
Cavalry Spirit !' The British Infantry, in contrast, were
impressed by the aggressive patrol work of their Cavalry,
'always' looking for the chance to charge rival German
patrols. For all their deficiencies and limitations, their
tactics of mixed fire and shock were highly successful in
subduing their more numerous German opponents (a complete
Cavalry Corps of three divisions, or eighteen regiments)
from first contact on 22 August. The strategic recon-
aissance and intelligence gathering of both sides, however,
bore little resemblance to pre-war theory. The B.E.F.
gained incomplete warning of the German approach, and von

1. Allenby to his wife, 7 October 1914, Allenby 1/5/25
   Allenby; Bridges, Alarms and Excursions, p 81
2. Cook to his wife, 20 September 1914, Cook; Maze, A
   Frenchman in Khaki, p 22; Lloyd, A Trooper in the Tins,
   p 92; Barrow, The Fire of Life, p 147; Haig War Diary
   entry, 21 August 1914, p 21, Acc 3155.98 Haig; French to
   Kitchener, 'German fighting characteristics', WA/28
   Kitchener; Spears, The Picnic Basket, p 142
3. Allenby to his wife, 7 October 1914, Allenby 1/5/25
   Allenby
4. Terraine, General Jack's Diary, p 63
   Documents, (hereafter Official History) France & Belgium,
   1914, Vol I, especially p 126
Kluck's First Army none at all of the B.E.F.  

More importantly, in contrast to the efficient British supply system (under William Robertson) the German horses were starving and sore-backed almost from the war's beginning. By 4 September scarcely a horse could move above a walk. In November the Life Guards noted of some captured German Cavalry horses:
The captured horses were reduced to skin, bone and sores. The saddlery was superior to that of our officers. The wallets were huge, and contained more odds and ends than a whole troop of ours. No wonder the much vaunted Uhlans is a poor Cavalryman.

Outmatched in patrolling, and with their horses in poor condition, the German Cavalry fell back on their fire support. Allenby thought them little more than an escort for their own Artillery, machine guns and Jägers. The

1. Liddell Hart, Reputations, p 241  
2. Robertson, Private to Field Marshal, pp 201-10  
3. von Moltke, quoted in Barnett, The Swordbearers, p 81; van Creveld, Supplying War, pp 124-5; Coleman, From Mons to Ypres with French, p 140. The amount of fodder received seems to have varied between regiments, but there is no evidence of horse starvation on the British side, see Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 87; Whyte and Atteridge, A History of the Queens Bays, p 219; Burnett, The Memoirs of the 18th Hussars, p 35  
4. Lloyd, A Trooper in the Tins, p 99  
5. Nash, Handbook of the German Army, April 1918, p 63, the assessment prepared by Haig's staff on that date, states that before the war German Cavalry was taught to rely on squadron-sized conflicts and dismounted fighting rather than the arme blanche. Although this view is not supported by the German Cavalry Training 1909, it reflects the events of 1914.  
6. Allenby to his wife, 30 August 1914, Allenby I/5/6 and 14 October 1914, Allenby I/5/31 Allenby; Burnett, The Memoirs of the 18th Hussars, p 22; Gough, The Fifth Army, p 21. Haig was more concerned about possible attack from German Infantry in lorries than Cavalry, see Haig War Diary entry, 4 September 1914, Acc 3155.98 Haig
first major British Cavalry action of the war, in comparison, at Audregnies on 24 August, produced a charge which joined the Cavalry's legends. De Lisle's 2nd Cavalry Brigade, covering the retreat of the 5th Division from Mons, came under increasing pressure from German Artillery and skirmishers, so that de Lisle told the Colonel of the 9th Lancers, if there were no other way to slow the German advance, to charge. In column of squadrons the Lancers (with two troops of the 4th Dragoon Guards) swept towards the Germans 1,200 yards away and into the fire of at least nine field batteries. The path of the charge was then seen to be blocked by a high wire fence between the Cavalry and their target. Wheeling to the right, they halted among some slag heaps and opened fire dismounted. Eventually, shell-fire drove off the brigade, including the two regiments in reserve. Casualties were less than two hundred, but the brigade was so badly scattered that troop officers believed for days later they had lost half their men. The German advance was halted, and the 5th Division escaped.¹

There could scarcely have been a more ambiguous incident. De Lisle praised the 'true cavalry spirit of the 9th Lancers in daring to charge unbroken infantry in order to save neighbouring troops'. The commander of the 5th Division declared the charge had saved his men from disaster. Members of the brigade, however,

¹. There is a detailed account of this, and a personal diary in Fraser; see also Haslam to his parents, 4 September 1914, 26 September 1914 and 3 October 1914, 7612/21 Haslam
felt the charge over-rated, one subaltern complaining that de Lisle 'lost half his brigade that day for no reason whatsoever'. The Colonel of the Lancers, in his official report, did not even mention the wire; he broke off the charge 'no object being discernible and on account of the terrific fire to which we were subjected'. The story spread that the charge had been bungled, a disaster, even (with echoes of the Light Brigade at Balaclava) a mistake.¹

The charge was stopped by wire and Artillery, which between them ended traditional Cavalry - and for that matter traditional Infantry - tactics on the Western Front. Conservative Cavalrymen complained that the flat ground, the wire, the slagheaps, the cottages, the canals and rivers, had ruled out massed charges. The argument was circular: where there was no cover a mass of Cavalry could not form for a charge, and where there was it might conceal enemy Artillery.² This had been recognised for twenty years. The British Cavalry did, however, regularly outfight their opponents in troop or squadron conflicts, both in the retreat and the subsequent advance to the Aisne. On 7 September, in one notable contest, a troop of the 9th Lancers, its machine-gun disabled, charged straight through a squadron of the German 1st Guard Dragoons; shortly afterwards, when another squadron of Guard Dragoons attempted to charge a

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¹ Coleman, From Mons to Ypres with French, pp 4, 7; Hamilton, The First Seven Divisions, pp 33-4; Haig War Diary entry 17 September 1914, Acc 3155.98 Haig
² Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 126; Talbot-Rice to his parents, 23 October 1914, 7511-80 Talbot-Rice
troop of the 18th Hussars, the British dismounted and shot the charge down.\textsuperscript{1} This superiority in minor tactics provided in itself the 'morale dominance' meant to come from the massed charge. But these methods were a slow way to make progress.\textsuperscript{2} The cyclist companies were often behind the Cavalry in retreat and ahead in the advance, and while the Cavalry provided local information, the crucial strategic intelligence came usually from aeroplanes.\textsuperscript{3}

The only serious threat from German Cavalry after the first day of the retreat came in the dawn fog of 1 September, as the German 4th Cavalry Division came on the British 1st Cavalry Brigade in billets at the village of Néry. The German division, six regiments and four batteries, was without its Jäger battalion, and after virtually destroying the British Horse Artillery troop with shell fire made only a slow attack, held off by highly effective rifle shooting, while 4th Cavalry Brigade rode to the rescue of the Néry garrison. When the fresh brigade arrived, squadron and regimental charges with covering fire drove off the German division, capturing four of its guns and dispersing it; three days after the battle it mustered only two

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{1. Burnett, The Memoirs of the 18th Hussars, pp 40-42; Official History, France & Belgium, 1914, Vol I, pp 308-9 The 9th Lancers claimed their machine-gun jammed, the Germans that they drove off the crew and wrecked it. There was also disagreement on the numbers involved. Fraser Diary entry, 7 September 1914, Fraser}

\footnote{2. See Official History, France & Belgium, 1914, Vol I, pp 53, 60, 214, 216, 277, 316 for examples of these combats; also Brander, The 10th Royal Hussars, p 10}

\footnote{3. Hamilton, The First Seven Divisions, p 78; Official History, France & Belgium, 1914, Vol I, pp 99, 299}
\end{footnotes}
squadrons. This confused action, primarily a test of basic training, was cited, with understandable British smugness, as displaying 'the excellence of our Field Service Regulations and Cavalry Training Manual'. More importantly, for the first time a dismounted defensive action had joined the Cavalry's store of morale-building legends.¹

When the advance to the Aisne began, regimental officers felt the Cavalry missed a chance to break the German lines, blaming their superiors.² There was every excuse. The retreat had worn out the horses and horse shoes on both sides. Most British Cavalry had no more than three hours' sleep a night; the 11th Hussars once had to ride for twenty-seven hours without a rest; French caught the Scots Greys literally asleep in the saddle.³ But this was not the whole story. Haig was dismayed to find the Cavalry positioned behind his own I Corps for the advance, and unimpressed by the apparent lack of urgency in Philip Chetwode's 5th Cavalry Brigade.⁴ The effort that had gone into the arme blanche controversy produced superbly confident

². Charrington to Clark, 14 March 1935, Charrington I/7/1
³. Charrington; Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 105;
   Gough, The Fifth Army, pp 43-7

⁵. Haig War Diary entries, 7 September 1914, p 72 and 9 September 1914, p 79, Acc 3155.98 Haig
tactics but hesitant strategic use of Cavalry. The one major Cavalry failure of 1914 was Allenby’s confession that he could not screen II Corps properly on 26 August, making the battle of Le Cateau on the following day necessary. Allenby had completely lost touch with two of his brigades on this date. Chetwode and Barrow both believed this was due to Hubert Gough deliberately taking his own and another brigade 'as far away from the Bull [Allenby] as possible', without orders, and that only Gough's friendship with French and Haig saved him from dismissal.\(^1\) Gough's defence was that he had received no orders, and the whole emphasis of Cavalry doctrine was on initiative and rapid decision.\(^2\) He managed to get his de facto independent command confirmed as 2nd Cavalry Division, and Haig (who indeed had no confidence in his own superior, French, at this date)\(^3\) continued to promote Gough's career. Allenby himself remained loyal to French even after the war.\(^4\) The 'Cavalry Generals' of 1914-18 were in fact no more a homogeneous group than the Cavalry. Haig accused French of open jobbery over Allenby's appointment to an Army command in October 1915,\(^5\) and ignored Allenby's advice at Army commanders' conferences.\(^6\)

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1. Chetwode to Wavell, 20 June 1938, Allenby 6/VI/26 Allenby; see also Barrow to Wavell, n.d., Allenby 6/VI/10 Allenby
2. Gough, The Fifth Army, pp 12-29; see also Smith-Doucet's own ms account, vol I, pp 31-3 Smith-Doucet
3. Marshal-Cornwall, Haig as Military Commander, pp 91-2
4. Allenby, foreword to French, The Life of...John French, First Earl of Ypres, p xxi
5. Haig War Diary entry, 24 October 1915, Acc 3155.103 Haig
6. Wavell, Allenby: A Study in Greatness, p 170
These rivalries were minor compared to the hangover of the conflict between the Roberts Ring and the Cavalry. Roberts himself died of pneumonia in November 1914, but Rawlinson was completely frank that the divisions created by the Ring still existed:

The appointment of Pulteney to the command of the III Army Corps and the selection of Monro for the command of the 2nd Division in place of Murray were clear indications that I was not in favour with Sir John [French]. However, when on August 4th it seemed likely that Lord K[itchener] would be appointed Secretary of State for War my hopes revived and altogether I was not sorry to find myself working under his direct orders.2

Despite French's protests, Kitchener gave Rawlinson an independent Corps command (including 3rd Cavalry Division under Byng) to attempt the relief of Antwerp.3 Kitchener had already enraged French by ignoring his request for a replacement when Grierson, commanding II Corps, died suddenly on 17 August. Significantly, French did not ask for a Cavalryman - there were none remotely senior enough - instead he wanted Herbert Plumer. Kitchener, aware of the long-standing antipathy between French and Horace Smith-Dorrien, nevertheless appointed him to II Corps.4 In November 1914 Kitchener suggested to Joffre that Ian Hamilton might replace French, and through Henry Wilson

1. While visiting troops in France.
2. Rawlinson Diary entry, 7 September 1914, Rawlinson/WW1
3. Maurice, The Life of Lord Rawlinson of Trent, p 101
4. Smith-Dorrien's ms account, vol I, p 2, Smith-Dorrien; the reason for the intermittent feud between Smith-Dorrien and French is unknown, French fluctuating between the highest and lowest opinions of him. Harrington, Plumer of Messines, p 69
French learned of it. Subsequently, Kitchener gave Hamilton the Gallipoli command, with another subordinate of long standing and veteran of Egypt and South Africa, William Birdwood, in command of the ANZAC Corps. Kitchener was attempting to re-create the team which had served him in South Africa, and with it promoting old opponents of the Cavalry over the objections of French. Although, of course, the past arguments on Cavalry tactics went unmentioned in debate on strategy, the conflict between Kitchener and French, and the larger conflict between 'Easterners' and 'Westerners' in the Army, must be seen against the background of mistrust generated by the arme blanche controversy. By the end of 1915, however, Hamilton and Smith-Dokken had been dismissed and branded as failures, while Kitchener's own powers as Secretary of State for War had been curbed. The lasting result of his attempt to re-create the Ring was Rawlinson's rise to command the Fourth Army in 1916, and William Robertson's appointment as C.I.G.S. in the same year to balance Kitchener's own influence. (Birdwood eventually also rose to command the Fifth Army in May 1918.) Rawlinson and Robertson, by these two very different routes, both came to have a major influence on the big offensives of 1916-18 on the Western

1. Hamilton, The Happy Warrior, p 268
3. Birdwood, Khaki and Gown, for his own career.
4. Robertson, Private to Field Marshal, pp 236-43; Hamilton, The Happy Warrior, p 424; Smith-Dokken, ms account in vols I & II, Smith-Dokken
5. Robertson, Private to Field Marshal, pp 236-43
Front. Neither had any faith in the Cavalry.

The Cavalry themselves concluded 1914 at the Aisne and the First Battle of Ypres with the one tactic for which they were untrained, orthodox Infantry defence in trenches, holding seven miles of front at Ypres with a Corps of all three divisions. Fortunately, in contrast to the French Cavalry, fighting dismounted with inadequate carbines, the British found their shooting sufficient. Haig thanked Allenby, commanding the new Cavalry Corps, deeply, while the Cavalry were themselves told that they had done 'the finest thing Cavalry have done in history, as you had an Army Corps against you'. A puzzled subaltern modestly recorded that 'for a matter of fact we only did what the Infantry always do, except for the fact that we had no supports or big guns'. As with the rest of the B.E.F. at Ypres, losses damaged this force of Cavalry beyond repair: one brigade lost all three regimental Colonels; the 18th Hussars mustered only a strong squadron after the battle; the 9th Lancers had all but two of its twenty-nine officers killed or wounded before Christmas. The Household Cavalry, long-service troops with no reservists, used up

1. Gough, The Fifth Army, p 66
2. Haig War Diary entry, 23 September 1914, p 123, Acc 3155, 98 Haig
3. Talbot-Rice to his parents, 4 November 1914, 7511-80 Talbot-Rice
4. ibid
5. Fraser Diary, notes at start of diary on casualties, Fraser; Brander, The 10th Royal Hussars, p 92; Burnett, The Memoirs of the 18th Hussars, p 74; Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 188; Lloyd, A Trooper in the Tins, p 130
the whole Line Cavalry reserve of trained men to replace their losses.¹ Replacement horses came largely from America and Australia, inferior to the fully trained troop horses which were the basis of the Cavalry's mobility.² To make up the three divisions of the Cavalry Corps, Yeomanry regiments volunteered to serve in France, while one brigade was composed of Canadian Mounted Rifles (who, despite Dundonald, had regained the arme blanche).³ In October 1914 an Indian Cavalry Corps of two divisions, Indian and British regiments, also arrived in France. These five divisions trained for the trenches, being given bayonets, Lewis guns and, in early 1916, Hotchkiss automatic rifles.⁴ From December 1915, on Haig's orders, they formed every winter dismounted brigades from each division for trench duty.⁵ Divisional Cavalry squadrons were grouped into regiments at Corps level in early 1915, and employed as orderlies, snipers, traffic controllers, working parties and other duties before being

1. Lloyd, A Trooper in the Tins, p 75
2. ibid, p 254; Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 247
3. See the official publication, Order of Battle of Divisions in the Great War, Vol 1, pp 1-23 and Vol 2a, pp 1-34 for the changes in the composition of the Cavalry during the war (I.W.M.)
5. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission three works - The 1st Cavalry Division in France and Flanders, The 2nd Cavalry Division in France and Flanders, and The 3rd Cavalry Division in France and Flanders - give a day to day account of the location, composition and casualties of the divisions, including working parties and dismounted brigades. (I.W.M.)
phased out in the summer of 1917.¹ The two Cavalry Corps
tried to keep their horses fit outdoors in all weathers - a
full time occupation²- and, as well as serving in trenches,
were largely employed to dig them. 'No doubt this was
necessary work', one officer complained, 'but nothing could
have been devised to dampen the spirits of Cavalrymen more.'³
Their officers went on training courses, practised sports
and organised horse-shows. In December 1914 Gough, Byng,
and all their Brigadier-Generals, along with members of the
two divisional staffs, took an afternoon off to play football
before Prince Arthur of Connaught. Haig was disgusted,
visiting Rimington's Indian Cavalry Division in early 1915,
to find its commander playing bridge with his staff.⁴ How-
ever, although not regularly exposed to trench duty like the
Infantry, the three British divisions saw enough fighting
during the war to lose 16,000 casualties, or two-thirds of
their strength.⁵

1. Moynihan, A Place called Armageddon, p 124; Pease,
History of the Northumberland (Hussars) Yeomanry, p 52;
Haig War Diary entry, 18 March 1915, p 31, Acc 3155.105
Haig
2. Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 258; Lloyd, A
Trooper in the Tins, pp 152, 175; Tylden, Horses and
Saddlery, p 38; Haig War Diary entry, 19 January 1915,
p 44, Acc 3155.100 Haig
3. Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 258
4. Stotherd, Sabre and Saddle, p 29⁴; Allenby to his wife,
13 December 1914, Allenby 1/5/76 Allenby; Fraser Diary
entry, 23 March 1915, Fraser; Haig War Diary entry,
1 September 1917, p 2, Acc 3155.117 Haig; Talbot-Rice to
his parents, 6 December 1914 and 3 April 1916, 7511-80
Talbot-Rice; Haig War Diary entry, 18 April 1915, p 44,
Acc 3155.101 Haig
5. See Tables, Part Three, Table 1
The Cavalry were under-employed while the Army expanded, and the circumstances which had attracted competent officers to the Cavalry in the 1890s were therefore reversed: promotion was significantly more likely through transferring out of the Cavalry than staying in it.¹ There was considerable variation between regiments in this matter, and also in the promotion of N.C.O.s to commissioned rank outside their own regiment. None of the eleven 2nd Lieutenants in the 2nd Dragoon Guards in June 1915 was still with the regiment on the same date three years later, the majority transferring to Staff work, the Machine Gun Corps and the Royal Flying Corps (Royal Air Force from April 1918). The 3rd Hussars kept four of its eleven 2nd Lieutenants over the same period; the 5th Lancers kept six out of seven.² Of the 123 officers who passed through the 11th Hussars in France, only one served with it from the beginning of the war to its end.³ Nearly twenty N.C.O.s and privates of the same regiment were given commissions outside the regiment; of the 1st Life Guards, not one.⁴ Between January 1915 and January 1916 the number of Cavalrymen in the Royal Flying Corps increased from four to forty-seven; two years later sixty-three were serving as flight commanders

1. See Tables, Part Two, Table 7
2. These figures are taken from a comparison of the monthly Army List for June 1915 and June 1918 (War Office)
3. Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 232
4. Brett-Smith, The 11th Hussars, p 161; Lloyd, A Trooper in the Tins, p 75
or higher ranks. Cavalrymen in fact made up only about
5 per cent of the R.F.C.; but the Cavalry, short of officers
before the war, could not afford to lose these men, nor the
twenty-three ex-Cavalrymen who had reached the rank of
Captain or higher in the Tank Corps by January 1918. ¹ In
Egypt, the Duke of Westminster's armoured car patrol column,
fighting rebel Sudanese, acquired so many Cavalry officers
that it was nicknamed 'the petrol hussars'.² As might be
expected, those who sought, or kept, commands in the Cavalry
were seldom the best men available.³ As both standards and
morale declined, Cavalry officers fought a losing battle to
teach their men 'to lift their heads and think again at
fifteen miles an hour'.⁴

Surprisingly, the Cavalry brigade commanders
all survived the First Battle of Ypres, so placing a block
on promotion inside the Cavalry below Brigadier-General's
rank. Taking January 1915 as a starting point, the Corps
commander, Allenby, and two of his divisional commanders,
Byng and Gough, rose by the end of the war to join the group
of ten who had commanded Armies on the Western Front. The
third divisional commander, de Lisle, and two brigade com-
mmanders, were eventually to lead Army Corps, while a third
Brigadier-General, Kavanagh, rose to lead the Cavalry Corps,

¹. See Tables, Part Two, Table 8
². Buchan, The Long Road to Victory, pp 63-4
³. Whyte and Atteridge, A History of the Queens Bays, p 272;
Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 229; Lloyd, A
Trooper in the Tins, pp 219, 275
⁴. Whyte and Atteridge, A History of the Queens Bays, pp
296-7
and two more to command Cavalry Divisions. Of the Cavalry's regimental Colonels at the same date, January 1915, however, only one had after three years been promoted to command an Infantry Division; two more became Major-Generals and eight Brigadier-Generals, mostly on non-operational duties. A Cavalry Colonel would have done slightly better than average to receive any promotion at all over these three years of war, but quite exceptionally well to be still commanding fighting troops after promotion. It was less likely that such a man would reach Major-General than that his brigade commander would become a Lieutenant-General, or his divisional commander eventually lead an Army. Of the twenty-one men who, by January 1918, filled the Cavalry regimental commands made vacant by promotion, dismissal or death, no fewer than fifteen were Majors of the same regiment inheriting the post by seniority, and a further five were Majors from other Cavalry regiments.¹ Neither signs of favouritism nor outstanding ability were shown in the ranks reached by most Cavalrymen during the war. When it ended there were just eighteen Cavalrymen with the rank of Major-General, and only in seven cases did this mean more than one promotion since 1914. Eleven of these Major-Generals served in more than one regiment of Cavalry, four in another arm of the service, and seven were Staff College graduates.² There

¹. These figures are taken from a comparison of the monthly Army Lists for January 1915 and January 1918, and from The Order of Battle of Divisions in the Great War, Vol 1, pp 1-23 (I.W.M.)

². See Tables, Part Two, Tables 4, 5 & 6
was a single case among Cavalrymen of promotion from Major to temporary Lieutenant-General between 1914 and 1917.¹
Most of these promotions were achieved in non-operational duties and staffwork; at the war's end only five Cavalrymen commanded divisions and only one commanded an Army Corps.²
Although a large number of junior Cavalry officers also received promotion through staff duties, they produced no significant number of successes. By the end of the war, the most prestigious staff grouping in the Army, the first echelon of Haig's G.H.Q., 326 officers, contained just 22 Cavalrymen.³

Nevertheless, the highest ranks of the Army contained a far greater number of Cavalrymen than could be accounted for by chance. French and Haig commanded on the Western Front, Allenby in Egypt, Robertson was C.I.G.S. for two years, and five of the ten Army Commanders on the Western Front were also Cavalrymen.⁴ Beneath these, the number of Cavalrymen appointed as temporary Lieutenant-Generals was far higher than the proportion of Cavalry in the Army, either before the war or during it, could explain.⁵ This represented the rise of the exceptional Cavalrymen of the 1890s, a fact which Philip Chetwode took for granted.

¹ G.T.M. Bridges; see his own account, Bridges, Alarms and Excursions
² Terraine, The Smoke and the Fire, p 163
³ 'Composition of Headquarters of British Armies in France, 1 February 1919', copy in Acc 3155.220j Haig
⁴ Terraine, The Smoke and the Fire, pp 161-8
⁵ See Tables, Part Two, Table 4
after the war in assessing the ability of Cavalry officers. 'The average British officer', he wrote, 'unless he has been trained in the cavalry, or is a very exceptional man, enters into an operation, whether in peace or war, without having made up his mind what he intends to do.' But these men were not at all average, they were a tiny elite. Robertson and Birdwood, both from Cavalry regiments, owed their rise at first to Roberts and Kitchener, later to skills in staffwork and the complex politics of the relations between the Army and the Government (in Birdwood's case the government of Australia, of which, as commander of the Australian Imperial Force, he was the representative). Allenby showed considerable military skill at First Ypres, and put his reputation beyond question in Palestine. Byng, who commanded successively the Canadian Corps and the Third Army, was known in France as a sensible, careful, even slow and pessimistic soldier, in contrast to the myth of the fire-eating Cavalryman. Gough decided soon after the war's opening that Infantry would be considerably more important in it than Cavalry, but found the popular image of the Cavalryman hard to shake. After his removal in March 1918 from command of the Fifth Army he noted a Press report

1. Chetwode to Liddell Hart, 11 March 1930, LH I/166/2
2. Barrow, The Fire of Life, p 164; Cavan, unpublished autobiography, no pagination, description of Byng mid-1917, Cavan; Haig War Diary entry, 8 May 1915, p 91, Acc 3155, 101 Haig; Hamilton, Gallipoli Diary, Vol I, p 303; Byng to Chetwode, 30 May 1917, folder three, Chetwode
3. Gough, The Fifth Army, p 74
that:

being a cavalry officer I knew nothing about the handling of all arms, and had only one idea, which was to charge about the field and hurl my cavalry at the enemy. 'With this end in view' — so one correspondent who was explaining 'how we lost the battle' actually asserted — I 'had all the wire on the army front pulled up in order to enable my cavalry to charge unhampered by obstacles' !!!

Like Allenby and Byng, Gough had commanded Infantry since 1915.

The Western Front commander most consistently criticised as a 'Cavalryman' is Douglas Haig. This criticism ignores his work in co-ordinating the tactics of Cavalry with other arms,2 his staff work, and the fact that for two years before the war he held, at Aldershot, the single largest Infantry command in the British Army. Only one of the four Infantrymen who commanded Armies in France, Smith-Dorrien, could claim as much; and along with two others, Rawlinson and Plumer, Smith-Dorrien owed much of his reputation to his command of Mounted Infantry.3 All were equally unprepared for a war dominated by Heavy Artillery. The hierarchy of the Royal Artillery itself placed the Horse Artillery at its peak and the Garrison Artillery far below; the only gunner to command an Army, Horne (who had served with the Boer War Cavalry Division) proved neither noticeably more nor less

1. Gough, Soldiering On, p 176
2. See especially Haig, Cavalry Studies
3. The fourth was General Sir Charles Monro, who held, briefly, command of both First and Third Armies during the war.
competent than his fellows. ¹ But if Haig's time in the Cavalry left a lasting impact on his behaviour, it was a subtle consequence of the arme blanche controversy. He distrusted unproved theory, was impatient with rhetoric, and suspected glib or easy theoretical solutions, preferring methods tested in practice. 'All I require', he had written at the height of the controversy, 'is people of average intelligence who are keen to do their work properly.'² He placed great reliance on his own experts, both his Army commanders and his Staff, where closer control might have corrected their mistakes. He also kept the Cavalryman's belief in morale: in April 1916 he noted of the new Fokker monoplane, 'It is strange how with such a comparatively poor machine the enemy has been so successful', and therefore that 'this again shows that the man who controls the machine has more than anything to do with gaining success'.³ Most importantly, alone among Western Front commanders, Haig never lost faith either in the value of Cavalry or of the arme blanche, and continued to look for ways to employ them.

In September 1914 the British were informed

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¹ Notes' by Liddell Hart, 15 January 1965, LH I/305.28b, and 'Talk with Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh Jeudwine', LH 11/1930/18, both Liddell Hart

² Haig to Henrietta, 1 September 1904, Acc 3155.6D Haig

³ Haig War Diary entry, 11 April 1916, Acc 3155.105 Haig; and for recent assessments of Haig's personality, see Terraine, Haig: The Educated Soldier; Marshal-Cornwall, Haig as Military Commander
of a change in German Cavalry doctrine. 'The dismounted
Cavalryman', pronounced the German War Minister, 'should be
able to fight exactly as an Infantryman; Cavalry charges no
longer play any part in warfare.'¹ There would never be a
charge of Cavalry against Cavalry on the Western Front.
The British Cavalry's replacements still learned mounted
charges at squadron and regimental level,² but most officers
in France thought a quick breakthrough remote.³ At best
they hoped that other arms would create a gap in the German
trench line so the Cavalry might, in the contemporary catch-
phrase, 'ride for the G'.⁴ The problem first considered
thirty years before here presented itself: after the Infantry
attack the Cavalry, each division occupying nine miles of
road space,⁵ had to be brought rapidly through the rear
areas, guided through the confusion of battle by communi-
cations based, at their most sophisticated in 1917, on non-
portable wireless, despatch riders, aeroplanes, signalling
from kite balloons and homing pigeons;⁶ and by Infantry

¹. Quoted in Editor's Notes, USM Vol LI NS, p 226
². Wingfield, Lectures to Cavalry Subalterns of the New
Armies, pp 62-6; Notes on Modern Cavalry Tactics by a
Cavalry Officer, p 4
³. Marling, Rifleman and Hussar, pp 341, 353; Seely,
Adventure, p 247; Haslam to his parents, 21 September
1914 and 8 August 1916, 7612-21 Haslam
⁴. This phrase derives from the Army in South Africa 1899-
1902 working on sketch maps without map grids. To de-
scribe an otherwise featureless location, the lettering
on a map was treated as if it existed physically on the
ground, for example, 'Half a mile due South-West of the
second r in Zand River'.
⁵. Barrow, The Fire of Life, p 172
officers taught to regard Cavalry with contempt. Waiting to move forward, Cavalry rode at only nineteen stones, with virtually no supplies; any delay in movement required more to be transported for them, increasing the congestion. The problem looked insoluble, and the Cavalry's morale plummeted at the thought that they were fit for nothing but digging. In mid-1915 Haig thought it necessary to tell the 17th Lancers that they must be perfectly efficient mounted as well as dismounted, an ironic reversal of his position twenty years before.

In the first major British attack on the Western Front, at Neuve Chapelle in March 1915, Haig's First Army, with Rawlinson's IV Corps in its centre, made a gap, but confused staffwork and communications delayed the Cavalry's advance and the chance was lost. Rawlinson, sharing his thoughts with Kitchener and Henry Wilson, felt that:

[Haig] looked for too much. He expects to get the Cavalry through with the next push, but I very much doubt if he will succeed in doing more than kill a large number of gallant men without effecting any very great triumph. I should be content with capturing another piece out of the enemy's line of trenches and waiting for the counter attack. I am not a believer in the Cavalry raid, which even if it comes off will not effect very much.

1. Burnett, The Memoirs of the 18th Hussars, p 120
2. Haig War Diary entry, 31 July 1915, Acc 3155.102 Haig
3. Rawlinson Diary entry, 14 March 1915, Rawlinson/WW1, see also Wilson Diary entry, 15 March 1915, Wilson and Rawlinson to Kitchener, 23 March 1915 and 1 April 1915, WB/17-18 Kitchener
This echoed the traditional views of the Roberts Ring. In fact, Rawlinson's time on the Western Front closely paralleled his earlier career: he made a poor start at Neuve Chapelle, and his handling of the Somme offensive of 1916 remains controversial; but he learned from experience, and by 1918 showed considerable military skill.\(^1\) The old rifle theories of the Roberts Ring proved even more out of place on the Western Front than massed Cavalry charges; troops in trench combat preferred to rely on hand-grenades, machine-guns and mortars, and in mid-1917 it was felt necessary to impress on them the need to employ their rifles at ranges greater than bomb throwing distance - about twenty-five yards.\(^2\)

According to Haig, John French, who had shown such uncertain faith in the Cavalry in September 1914, had decided even before the battle of Loos a year later that the Cavalry breakthrough would never take place on the Western Front.\(^3\) Loos was another failure, but marked a step forward in Cavalry doctrine: Haig told his Corps commanders to employ their own Cavalry with machine-guns and cyclists to fight their way forward in the Infantry's wake, rather than

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2. Rawlinson documents 1/10 3g and 5, Rawlinson/WW1; Lloyd, *A Trooper in the Tins*, p 271. Haig War Diary entry, 26 December 1914, p 1, Acc 3155.100 Haig gives grenade throwing range as about this distance.
3. Haig War Diary entry, 9 July 1915, p 221, Acc 3155.101 Haig
wait for a perfect gap. But again, G.H.Q. failed to release the Cavalry divisions, along with three Infantry divisions, to First Army in time to exploit the initial attack. Once more, the Cavalry were left unused; and once more it was doubted whether they could be of any value. Belts of barbed wire, a material invented to restrict the movement of animals, Heavy Artillery and an enemy troop density of three men to a yard of front (eighteen times that at Diamond Hill) were formidable obstacles. Infantry firepower was less so: the dictum (quoted with approval by Edmunds in the Official History) that 'you can't have a Cavalry charge until you have captured the enemy's last machine gun' proved false. But if the Cavalry were to break through, it would only be at heavy loss. Still, this was what they had always known and trained for; it was what 'Cavalry Spirit' and the arme

1. Haig War Diary entry, 8 September 1915, p 94, Acc 3155. 102 Haig; Pease, History of the Northumberland (Hussars) Yeomanry, p 122
2. Marshal-Cornwall, Haig as Military Commander, pp 162-7; Official History, France & Belgium 1915, Vol II, p 397
3. Official History, France & Belgium 1918, Vol V, p 196, quoting an anonymous American officer. On p 216 of the same volume there is a description of a Canadian Cavalry charge capturing 230 prisoners, one howitzer, two field guns and 40 machine guns. Haig War Diary entry, 1 March 1916, plan p 2, Acc 3155. 105 Haig, shows British and German forces both as having between 2 and 3.5 rifles per yard on the Western Front, the British average being 3.08 and the German 2.25. Stone, The Eastern Front, 1914-17, gives the troop density of both sides on the Italian Front as 3 rifles to a yard. For comparison, according to Lascelles, 'The Influence of Ground on Shock Action', CJ Vol 5, no 19, p 492, concentration of men per yard at the following battles was: English at Waterloo, 13.25; Prussians at Gravelotte/Mars la Tour, 16.5; English at Diamond Hill, 0.9; Russians at Mukden, 3.0
wait for a perfect gap. ¹ But again, G.H.Q. failed to release the Cavalry divisions, along with three Infantry divisions, to First Army in time to exploit the initial attack. ² Once more, the Cavalry were left unused; and once more it was doubted whether they could be of any value. Belts of barbed wire, a material invented to restrict the movement of animals, Heavy Artillery and an enemy troop density of three men to a yard of front (eighteen times that at Diamond Hill) were formidable obstacles. Infantry firepower was less so: the dictum (quoted with approval by Edmunds in the Official History) that 'you can't have a Cavalry charge until you have captured the enemy's last machine gun' proved false. ³ But if the Cavalry were to break through, it would only be at heavy loss. Still, this was what they had always known and trained for; it was what 'Cavalry Spirit' and the arme

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Following his replacement of French, Haig told his Army Commanders in January 1916 that the first stage of his strategy would be a wearing out fight in which the Cavalry breakthrough would play no part. For the planned summer offensive he issued instructions on the Cavalry's role in exploiting a gap:

We cannot expect to do this by at once pushing mobile troops through the breech to operate at any great distance beyond it. The first gap will probably not be wide enough to pass great forces through, even if they were immediately available; while small forces, however mobile, pushed through beyond supporting distance would, under the existing conditions of the enemy's reserves, certainly be held up, and eventually enveloped by superior numbers...The operations to be undertaken will entail both attack and defence, mounted and dismounted, and the closest cooperation between the cavalry and the other arms will be essential.¹

Haig therefore rejected the main tenet of Cavalry strategic doctrine since the 1890s, the belief that Cavalry should be independent of the other arms. Instead, in March, the two Cavalry Corps were broken up, and three of the divisions, along with three Infantry divisions, given to Gough to create, in his words, 'a striking force composed of all arms with cavalry predominating'.² This was to come under the orders of Rawlinson's Fourth Army, which was to make the attack, and be inserted behind the first advance to fight

¹. Haig War Diary entries, 8 January 1916, p 39 and 18 January 1916, p 56, Acc 3155.104 Haig; Haig War Diary paper 32(b), p 31, Acc 3155.105 Haig

². Gough, The Fifth Army, p 138
its way forward. If successful, the leading Cavalry division was intended to reach Bapaume, an advance of just ten miles, and a far cry from the raids envisaged in earlier theory. Haig instructed Gough to improve the Cavalry's training and dismiss incompetents. 'Above all', Haig wrote, 'he is to spread the "doctrine" and get cavalry officers to believe in the power of their arm when acting in co-operation with guns and infantry. I am told that there are some officers who think that cavalry are no longer required!'

Just prior to the attack, Haig told Rawlinson 'to impress on his Corps commanders the use of their Corps cavalry and mounted troops, and if necessary to supplement them with regular Cavalry units'. Rawlinson, unimpressed, recorded that although the Cavalry were 'dying to get at the Boches', he would not use them 'unless there is a really good chance for them'. Such a chance in fact occurred on the first day of the attack, 1 July, on the right flank, where in contrast to the rest of the line, by mid-afternoon considerable success had been achieved. However, at mid-day Rawlinson had already decided there was no use for the Cavalry, and they received no orders. Gough with the reserve Infantry

2. Haig War Diary entries, 9 April 1916, p 71, Acc 3155.105 and 18 June 1916, p 61, Acc 3155.106
3. Haig War Diary, secret memo to Rawlinson, 13 April 1916, p 76, Acc 3155.105, and entry, 27 June 1916, p 71, Acc 3155.106
4. Rawlinson Diary entry, 30 June 1916, Rawlinson/WWI
was instead sent to restore order to the shattered left wing of the Fourth Army, a command which was to grow into the Fifth Army by the end of the battle. In this sense, Gough was the one Army commander to owe his position to the Cavalry. Shortly afterwards, the Cavalry Corps of all five divisions was reconstituted under Kavanagh, the experiment having apparently failed.

The next major push, on 14 July, only showed the impracticality of the existing method of keeping Cavalry rigidly separate from the rest of the Army. At 7.40 a.m. Rawlinson, directing the attack against High Wood, called for the 2nd Indian Cavalry Division, and at 8.20 a.m. it began to move forward. At 1.30 p.m. the German Artillery began to withdraw safely before the attack. 'If only', Rawlinson complained, forgetting himself, 'we could get the Cavalry through to charge them!' Finally, at 7 p.m., nearly twelve hours after beginning its advance, the leading brigade crossed the old British trench line, and its leading squadron was able to charge through German Infantry and machine-guns, quite successfully, retiring with thirty-two German prisoners for twenty-four casualties, before darkness fell. Rawlinson's prophesy of the uselessness of Cavalry was becoming self-fulfilling. At the next major attack on 15 September,

1. Rawlinson Diary entry, timed at 12.15 p.m., 1 July 1916, Rawlinson/WW1; Gough, The Fifth Army, p 138
2. Rawlinson Diary entry, 14 July 1916, Rawlinson/WW1; Official History, France & Belgium, 1916, Vol II, pp 85-7; Scott, Records of the Seventh Dragoon Guards During the Great War, pp 71-5
after the Cavalry Corps had been re-created, Haig again stressed to him the need to employ the Cavalry in a major role. 'I think that there is a fair chance of getting the Cavalry through', Rawlinson noted, 'but I am a little anxious lest Kavanagh should act prematurely, and thus compromise the actions of the other arms.'

Again on the day of the attack Haig visited Rawlinson to impress on him the use of the Cavalry, and again they received no orders. The Cavalry, who were taught that 'it is better to act quickly and chance a mistake than not to act at all', were, to the disgust of regimental officers, left 'still waiting about in the mud'. The one improvement in the theory of using Cavalry to come from the Somme offensive was Rawlinson's agreement with Kavanagh that 'the leading regiment must settle the moment for the Cavalry to go through'. But this method of control depended very heavily on the quality of regimental officers, and this quality was steadily declining.

The War Committee, and later War Cabinet, were educated civilians who, like Arnold-Forster in 1904, knew little about Cavalry and only the public face of the armé blanche controversy. They saw no reason to keep useless

1. Rawlinson Diary entry, 14 September 1916, Rawlinson/WW1; Haig War Diary entry, 14 September 1916, p 16, Acc 3155.
2. Rawlinson Diary entry, 15 September 1916, Rawlinson/WW1
3. Bateman, Cavalry School Notebook, p 27, 7910-87 Bateman
4. Talbot-Rice to his parents, 20 September 1916, 7514-80 Talbot-Rice
5. Rawlinson Diary entry, 11 September 1916, Rawlinson/WW1
6. Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 281
troops in France. In May 1916, anxious over British shipping losses to mines and submarines, they told Robertson, as Chief of Imperial General Staff, to investigate the possibility of reducing the number of Cavalry in France or sending them elsewhere. Shortly afterwards, George V intervened, in an echo of his father's approach to Roberts, to ask Haig if the number of Cavalry could not be reduced. To the King Haig insisted that the mobility of Cavalry was essential 'to shorten the war and reap the fruits of any success'. To Robertson he replied that 'if we can't effect economy then some must go, but I have an inward feeling that events will make us regret the reduction in mounted troops'. This explains Haig's anxiety to employ the Cavalry during the Somme offensive: he needed to justify their existence. But at the same time, if used wrongly, or prematurely, they could be fatally weakened; the British Empire had no Cavalry reserves.

On the outbreak of war, as a reserve to the Cavalry, two Mounted Divisions had been formed from the Yeomanry Brigades, each with a cyclist battalion per brigade (so regularising the position of the Yeomanry cyclists). Yeomen who declined to serve overseas were replaced by

1. Haig War Diary, Robertson to Haig, 19 May 1916, notes 26-7, Acc 3155.106 Haig
2. Haig War Diary entry, 7 June 1916, p 48, Acc 3155.106 Haig
3. Haig War Diary, Haig to Robertson, 29 May 1916, p 30, note 108, and see also Haig to Robertson, 20 May 1916, note 30, both Acc 3155.106 Haig
4. Order of Battle of Divisions in the Great War, Vol 2a, pp 1-34 (I.W.M.)
volunteers, characteristically of the urban artisan classes, men such as railway trainees, teachers, clerks, and shop assistants, with no experience of horses.\textsuperscript{1} To compensate for this, up to four regular Cavalry officers were transferred to each regiment going overseas.\textsuperscript{2} The first line regiments of 1st Mounted Division were sent to France to make up the Cavalry Divisions or act as Corps Cavalry; but the second line formations had scarcely acquired horses, Artillery or even rifles when, in June 1916, Robertson converted them into cyclists. Haig was angry at being robbed of his reserve,\textsuperscript{3} but with prevailing views on the training of Cavalry the change made sense, and was greeted with only mild grumbling by the recruits. One regiment, in a mixture of humour and sentimentality, erected a monument, 'Sacred to the Memory of Spurs'.\textsuperscript{4}

In August 1915 the 2nd Mounted Division was sent, dismounted, to Gallipoli, where it was effectively destroyed by losses. Two more complete brigades had to be added to the original three during the fighting. When in early November the original contingent was withdrawn, one brigade numbered only 854, and a regiment just 127 men.\textsuperscript{5}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Moynihan, A Place Called Armageddon, p 107
\item Stonham and Freeman, Historical Records of the Middlesex Yeomanry 1797-1927, p 137
\item Haig War Diary, Haig to Robertson, 3 February 1916, p 86, Acc 3155.104 Haig
\item Rogers, The Mounted Troops of the British Army, p 233
\item Order of Battle of Divisions in the Great War, Vol 2a, pp 1-34 (I.W.M.); Rowe, The 2nd County of London Yeomanry, p 59; Stonham and Freeman, Historical Records of the Middlesex Yeomanry, pp 140-9; Fox, The History of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars Yeomanry, pp 77, 317
\end{enumerate}
In Egypt, two months later, the division was broken up, some regiments going to Salonika, some remaining dismounted, and others being re-mounted, along with regiments of Australian Light Horse and New Zealand Mounted Rifles (neither of which carried the arme blanche) to form the Imperial Mounted Division and ANZAC Mounted Division, opposing the Turkish forces in Sinai. The regimental system provided a central cadre and a tradition, but the majority of officers and men in the Yeomanry were by 1916 either wartime soldiers or regular Cavalrymen. This gave the Empire a total of seven Cavalry or Mounted Divisions, not counting independent brigades or Corps troops. (In fact the Cavalry in Mesopotamia, which were, all but one regiment, Indian troops, were formed into an eighth, the Indian Cavalry Division, in 1918.) These divisions were composed of British Household and Line Cavalry, Indian Cavalry, Canadian Mounted Rifles, British Yeomanry, Australian Light Horse and New Zealand Mounted Rifles, without a common tactical doctrine and with every gradation of belief in the arme blanche. As in South Africa, this made almost no difference. On the Western Front the Cavalry became Mounted Rifles in all but name; in Palestine the Mounted Rifles became Cavalry.

On 9 November 1916, in the aftermath of the Somme offensive, the War Committee again discussed the Cavalry's fate. They heard from David Lloyd George, Secretary of State for War, that there were 54,828 Cavalry horses in France, 45,900 of them in the Cavalry Divisions.
It was his intention at the proper time to raise the question of whether we need these cavalry in France. Was there...the slightest chance that the cavalry could be used for a breakthrough? He was told that on the Eastern Front, where the cavalry had several times gone through, they had invariably been roughly handled and driven back often badly shattered by a few machine-guns.¹

The Russian Cossacks were indeed still poorly led troops, and the Austrian Cavalry, imbued with the doctrine of the massed charge, not much better.² Neither resembled British Cavalry in standards or tactics. Lloyd George, like the rest of the War Committee, did not understand such subtleties; while the Committee's ignorance of the Cavalry itself was remarkable. Haig's G.H.Q., replying to their suggestion that the Cavalry might be wintered in Britain to save shipping over forage (now 13 pounds of oats for each horse) pointed out that whereas the transport of rations and horse forage for the three British divisions would require, for a three month period, 74,620 ship tons, it would take 480,000 ship tons to move the divisions from France to England and back again.³ Lord Curzon suggested that the Indian Cavalry might be sent to Egypt on grounds of economy:

The consequent saving would be eight ships of 4,000 tons for two months and eight ships a year for forage. This might appear a negligible quantity, but he wished the War Committee to realise that we had come to such a pass that we had literally to scrape up ships.⁴

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1. CAB/22/65 pp 4-5
2. Stone, The Eastern Front 1914-17, pp 50, 80
3. Haig War Diary entry, 23 November 1916, p 30, Acc 3155.109 and Memoranda on Cavalry, Acc 3155.214h, Haig; CAB/23/1 p 82; CAB/22/73, pp 1-7 and p 3 of the conclusion.
4. CAB/22/73 p 5; Memoranda on Cavalry, memo by Curzon, 14 November 1916, Acc 3155.214h Haig.
In truth the Cavalry, about 2\frac{1}{2} per cent of the B.E.F.'s personnel and 6 per cent of its horses, was too small a force to have any great effect on supply and manpower problems.\(^1\) As an arm of exploitation its value was simply unknown, but there was no apparent alternative.

The trench crossing tank, a slow moving vehicle, was not an alternative nor meant to be one. Even the 'Whippet' medium tanks, which did not come into action until the spring of 1918, were, with a speed over normal ground of 8 m.p.h., regularly outpaced by the Cavalry.\(^2\) Armoured cars were invaluable in open country: Yeomanry practising manoeuvres against them in 1914 and 1915 found that they had no real answer to them other than Artillery,\(^3\) and Haig looked forward to their being used against machine-guns in co-operation with Cavalry.\(^4\) They were used in this manner following up the retreat to the Siegfried Line in 1917,\(^5\) and in Palestine.\(^6\) But, unlike Cavalry, they could not easily

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1. Memoranda on Cavalry, memo 14 November 1916 from Q.M.G. to C.in C., B.E.F., Acc 3155.214h Haig; Terraine, The Smoke and the Fire, p 162; Table, Part Three, Table 3
2. The War History of the 6th Tank Battalion, especially p 132
   In the abortive South African rebellion of September-November 1914, a small party of horsemen under de Wet was captured by using constant pursuit by light cars to deny the horses any rest until they collapsed. See Sampson, The Capture of de Wet, p 204
4. Haig War Diary entry, 8 March 1915, p 144, Acc 3155.100 Haig
6. See below p 340
clear the broken ground of a battlefield to reach open
country. Aeroplanes had taken part of the Cavalry's role in
scouting, but were sometime rendered useless by the weather\(^1\)
and tended to detect formations rather than identify them;
Cavalrymen gleefully collected anecdotes of aerial misidentifi-
cation.\(^2\) But Cavalry had no answer to attack from the air
(any more than to Heavy Artillery) other than to hope their
own aircraft would achieve air superiority.\(^3\) When in the
last days of 1918 this was achieved, Haig drew up plans for
a force of 300 ground attack aeroplanes to co-operate with
the Cavalry in the event of a breakthrough.\(^4\)

Lloyd George, in raising the question of the
Cavalry's value, ignored its known successes in defence.
This was perhaps understandable, as Haig's plans were offen-
sives which looked for ways to use the Cavalry on the attack,
but he himself expected their dismounted defensive abilities
to be of use even in these operations.\(^5\) After consulting
with Robertson he replied to Lloyd George's criticism:

> The point was, was there a reasonable possi-
bility of using the cavalry: had the enemy's moral [sic] been so shaken that there was a
> chance of breaking through and letting the
cavalry get to work?...[Haig and Robertson]

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\(^1\) According to Whyte and Atteridge, *A History of the Queens Bays*, p 215, a heavy dawn mist prevented aerial reconnais-
sance before the battle of Le Cateau.

\(^2\) 'Summary of Information, 2nd Cavalry Division, Christmas
Number 1914, Charrington 1/2 Charrington

\(^3\) Lloyd, *A Trooper in the Tins*, p 259. Transport horses
were also extremely vulnerable to air attack.

\(^4\) Haig War Diary entry, 7 October 1918, p 15, Acc 3155.132

\(^5\) See above p 306
were satisfied that the moral [sic] of the enemy had been so far reduced that there appeared to be a reasonable prospect of the use of cavalry. He reminded the Committee that the cavalry were the only force left which consisted of seasoned soldiers. ¹

Given the state of the Cavalry, this was highly questionable. It amounted to Haig's 'feeling' that the Cavalry would be needed. But Haig knew, and explained to the Committee, how weak the Cavalry force was: nearly 9,000 short of Lloyd George's estimate. ² The problem causing the crisis in shipping was forage, and this depended on the number of horses in the Army, not in the Cavalry. Horses were needed for Artillery, Engineers, and Transport, and their number would continue to increase as the Army in France expanded. At the highest point, in June 1917, there were 460,000 horses and mules in the B.E.F., over 128,000 of which needed replacing by the following month. It was later calculated that a greater tonnage of fodder was sent to France than of ammunition. ³ Robertson's most pressing problem was the damage done to stone-flagged roads in the Army's rear areas by motor-vehicles, he wanted more Transport horses to ease this; ⁴

¹. CAB/22/78 p 3
². ibid
³. Official Publication Statistical Abstract of Information Regarding the Armies at Home and Abroad, 1 October 1919 (I.W.M.), p 477 shows that between 9 August 1914 and 2 August 1919 the British forces in France received 5,269,302 tons of ammunition and 5,916,104 tons of oats and hay across the Channel. These and similar figures have been mistakenly used as a criticism of the Cavalry. See Liddell Hart, A History of the First World War, p 35; Stone, The Eastern Front 1914-17, p 49
⁴. Haig notes, 20 November 1916, 'Notes on a letter from C.I.G.S. to C-in-C. dated 18 November 1916', Acc 3155. 214th Haig
while Haig had already saved over 18,000 horses by 'combing out' the divisional ammunition columns, more than would have been saved by sending the Indian Cavalry, nearly half the Cavalry in France, to Egypt.¹

For the Arras offensive of April 1917, Haig planned for a possible breakthrough with the Cavalry. But at the same time he issued orders that 'they should be carefully handled so that their value may remain unimpaired; it is essential that the Cavalry Corps should be in a condition to deliver an effective blow against the enemy in battle; this moment has not yet arrived.'² To attack and not to take casualties were mutually exclusive objectives. Both Haig and Kavanagh expressed deep concern when a Cavalry brigade, pressing hard on an apparently successful assault at Monchy, was counter-attacked and lost heavily holding the village dismounted.³ Byng wrote gloomily to Chetwode (then in Sinai commanding the Desert Mounted Column, including the two Mounted Divisions) that 'it seems rather a pity to lose all these chaps who were perfect Cavalrymen for the sake of a village which is a complete shell trap for the British side'.⁴

Byng, like Rawlinson, had ceased to believe in the decisive breakthrough, 'we gave up that catchword some time ago',⁵ he

¹. CAB/22/78 p 6
². Haig War Diary, 20 March 1917, p 29, note 337, Acc 3155.
³. Haig
⁴. Byng to Chetwode, 30 May 1917, folder three Chetwode
⁵. ibid
told Chetwode. In fact, Cavalry losses at Monchy were about 500 killed and wounded, but even these could not be spared.

By February 1917 the Cavalry regiments were noticeably below strength, and some Corps Cavalry units were too weak even to train effectively. Haig's G.H.Q. discovered that Robertson, more anxious about the weakness of the Infantry divisions, had been sending Cavalry recruits to France as Infantry or Engineers, and they were impossible to recover for the Cavalry. The Cavalry reserve in Britain, theoretically 15,000 men, was less than 5,000 all told.¹

The Third Battle of Ypres was launched later in the year with no plan to use the Cavalry until after the Passchendaele ridge was captured.² This occupied the rest of the battle while the Cavalry waited. In the later stages of the offensive, Robertson, still worried about Infantry manpower, stopped Cavalry recruiting; it was not resumed for the rest of the war.³ During September, when it appeared that the ridges in front of Ypres might be taken quickly, Haig instructed Kavanagh to train the Cavalry in co-operation with tanks.⁴ This was a new departure, tanks

¹ Haig War Diary entry, 20 December 1916, p 58, Acc 3155. 109 and Note 79 of Army Commanders' Conference, 3 February 1917, p 2, also entry, 1 February 1917, p 33, Acc 3155.110 Haig. See also Tables, Part Three, Table 2
² Haig War Diary, 22 July 1917, note 111, 'Note on possible employment of the Cavalry Corps during the forthcoming operations', Acc 3155.115 Haig
³ Terraine, The Road to Passchendaele, p 235
⁴ Haig War Diary entry, 24 September 1917, p 48, Acc 3155.117 Haig
being previously regarded as Infantry support weapons. ¹

Following the failure at Ypres, nearly four hundred tanks were available to attempt this co-operation in November at the battle of Cambrai. Attacking this late in the year presented its own problems. There was no reserve if the attack succeeded; first light on the day of the attack, 20 November, was after 6 a.m., the Cavalry advanced at 8.30 a.m., and dusk was less than nine hours later, with heavy rain in the afternoon.² Quite exceptional co-operation was needed between Byng's Third Army, III and IV Corps, which would make the attack, the Tank Corps, and the Cavalry Corps. This now consisted of average or poor officers and men, who rode indifferent horses (getting less than 10 pounds of oats a day because of the shipping shortage)³ and, after three years of inactivity, were despised by the rest of the Army, particularly the ultra-modern Tanks.

Haig, remembering his own experiment before the Somme, recommended to Byng the formation of 'detachments of all arms, lightly equipped' to lead the attack. But, as in the 1880s, this represented a personal belief, not an Army doctrine. Byng and his planners ignored it. In the

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¹ Haig War Diary entries, 5 April 1916, p 66, Acc 3155.105 and 19 August 1917, p 36, Acc 3155.116 Haig; CAB/23/1, p 146
² Woolcombe, The First Tank Battle, pp 68, 135
³ CAB/23/5, p 105. This was the official rate; according to Lumley, History of the 11th Hussars, p 267, winter forage rates were cut to 9 pounds of oats and 6 pounds of hay, and often fell below that rate.
⁴ Haig War Diary, Haig to Byng, 3 November 1917, note 6, Acc 3155.119 Haig
centre IV Corps planned to make its main attack with two separate brigades from different divisions, while one tank commander summed up his orders as 'we go straight in and sit on the Germans until the Cavalry come', rather than co-operating in the advance. On the right flank, the bulk of the Cavalry Corps, led by the 5th Cavalry Division (previously the 2nd Indian Division) and the 2nd Cavalry Division, was to pass over the Canal de l'Escourt and advance towards Cambrai itself. But as Brigadier-General Seely of the Canadian brigade complained, his men were faced with an impassable obstacle. 'Horses can cross almost anything', he wrote, 'they can even swim broad rivers, as they have often done in war. But the one thing they cannot get over, unless they can bridge it, is a canal with perpendicular banks. They can get in but they can't get out.' It was comparatively easy for the Germans to destroy or defend the existing bridges before the slow-moving tanks could reach them. One tank commander, finding his target bridge already damaged, recalled:

Then a most ludicrous thing happened. There was a great deal of clattering, galloping and shouting and a lot of our medieval horse soldiers came charging down the street; I yelled at them that the bridge was gone but they took no notice of me and went right up to it, one m.g. would have wiped out the lot, and then they turned about and with a very pious air trotted back the way they had come.  

2. Seely, Adventure, pp 273-4
3. Quoted in Woolcombe, The First Tank Battle, p 85
These were probably not British Cavalry but Canadians of the Fort Garry Horse. Finding the bridge down, they sought for another, and came to a narrow undefended footbridge. One squadron crossed with half an hour of daylight remaining, and charged successfully through the German rear areas before, having lost half their numbers, the men stampeded their horses and re-crossed the canal on foot. Another undefended bridge was missed altogether by the Cavalry. In the mid-afternoon the commander of 2nd Cavalry Division, assuming local command and finding his target bridge not secure, ordered the rest of the Cavalry off their horses to start a fire-fight, ending Cavalry operations on the right flank.

In the centre there was no such obstacle, but neither was there the enterprise shown by the Canadians under Seely, an ex-Yeoman and Boer War veteran who believed firmly in the mounted charge. The commander of the 1st Cavalry Division, uncertain in his dual responsibility to the Cavalry Corps and IV Corps, and frustrated by orders that took more than an hour to arrive, hesitated to commit his troops. Headquarters of IV Corps was convinced that for two hours they had made a clear gap that the Cavalry failed to find, and after the battle made a formal complaint to that effect. Again, only one squadron (of the 4th Dragoon Guards) found its way through into the open before dusk, and charged in the pouring rain through German

1. Seely, *Adventure*, pp 213, 254. Seely was also a Liberal Member of Parliament who had served as Secretary of State for War, 1912-14
ammunition columns and foot patrols, returning with fifty prisoners for the loss of fifteen men and thirty horses. ¹

But that was all.

At Cambrai, as at previous battles, there was no solution to the communications problem, and no attempt to use Cavalry in co-operation with other arms. Disappointment after the failure on the first day (with the subsequent loss of surprise) was immense, and most of it focussed on the Cavalry itself. A junior Cavalry officer reported to Haig on the 1st Cavalry Division:

When the Infantry gained their first objective with hardly a casualty the dreamed of 'gap' was there...why did the cavalry fail? for fail they did to justify their traditions...

1) Incredulity on the part of many senior officers...

2) Lack of enthusiasm...due to stagnation which now obtains in the cavalry; due to slow promotions, boredom, and the waning of the fire which must always burn in good cavalry.

3) Lack of 'drive'...

It was the one chance the cavalry have had in the war, to date, and it failed from lack of offensive spirit, amongst the leaders, not, as a rule, the regimental officers...it failed as a result of three years in the back areas, in 'intensive training' usually of the wrong description...It failed because the offensive has entirely given way to the defensive spirit, and because failure is not visited with the drastic penalty it deserves.²

Another, more senior, observer blamed the lack of success on the complete lack of liaison between the Cavalry, Infantry and Tanks, and lack of vigour on the part of the commander and Brigadier-Generals of 1st Cavalry Division. Haig felt

1. Gibb, Records of the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards in the Great War, pp 51-2
2. Haig War Diary, note 111, 'Private', Acc 3155.119 Haig
there was 'much truth' in this. ¹ The argument was, in effect, that too much dismounted action produced poor Cavalry, as Haig had believed before the war.

In contrast to the Western Front, in Palestine the main problems were heat and the shortage of water, and the lessons of South Africa in horsemastership and tactics of direct value. ² The 1917 campaign depended on the Beersheba water supply being taken intact; in fifteen days fighting the Egyptian Expeditionary Force consumed 610,900 gallons which otherwise would have had to have been transported twenty miles from the railhead. ³ Forage was an average of 9½ pounds of barley a day, about 75 per cent of the nutritional value of the ration in France. Horses and camels were vital, since although light cars and lorries were widely used their engines could not stand constant work in semi-desert conditions. However, after June 1917, because of shipping problems, the mounted troops in Palestine received no remounts at all. ⁴ The Turkish Army, formidable in defence and high in morale until the last months of 1918, was below European standards in training, leadership and equipment. In fact, the Palestine campaign was a

¹. Haig War Diary, note 115, 'Personal narrative', Acc 3155. ¹¹⁹ Haig
². For the theory of wars between alliances resembling multiple separate wars with different characteristics, see Blainey, The Causes of War, pp 235-7, 271
³. Returns for the Egyptian Expeditionary Force 27 October 1917-11 November 1917, folder six, Chetwode; Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps, p 13
⁴. Dawney to Chetwode, 6 February 1917, folder two, Chetwode; Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps, pp 311-21; but see also below, Appendix Two
colonial war, in which by comparison with South Africa there was no altitude problem, few diseases, and the theatre of war was tiny: only fifty miles from the coast to the Jordan Valley, and barely four hundred from Gaza to Aleppo. The Turks had by April 1917 been driven back to a defensive line from Gaza to Beersheba, with an open flank towards the desert, held by a troop density of less than one man to a yard with few reserves. More importantly, their trenches were never wired. By October the British and Australians had 56,000 Infantry opposing 50,000 and 550 guns to 360, along with a massive superiority in mounted troops, 20,000 against 1,500 poor quality Turkish Cavalry who gave no opposition. There would be no Cavalry against Cavalry charges in Palestine, but all the factors which inhibited the use of Cavalry against Infantry on the Western Front were also absent.¹

Chetwode considered his ANZAC Mounted troops lacked the flexibility of British Regular Cavalry, and their commanders the dash of true Cavalry officers. He insisted on referring to them, and to the Yeomanry, officially as Mounted Rifles. This was partly a trick: it enabled Chetwode to keep the 18-pounder Field guns with which his Mounted Divisions were equipped, rather than the 13-pounder guns of Horse Artillery.² The Yeomanry and an Independent Indian

¹. Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps, p 43
². Whigham to Chetwode, 17 January 1917, Lynden-Bell to Chetwode, 22 January 1917, folder one; Chetwode review 20 April 1917, Chetwode to Lynden-Bell, 8 May 1917, Lynden-Bell to Chetwode, 30 May 1917, folder three, Chetwode
Cavalry brigade in his force carried the **arme blanche**, the ANZAC troops only the rifle and bayonet on the principle advocated by Childers. Nonetheless, as an American study of the campaign refreshingly put it, 'however they may have been classed prior to 1917, they had by training and experience in war in fact become Cavalry, and there is no good purpose gained by splitting hairs about the meaning of the word Cavalry'.

In July 1917 Allenby arrived in Palestine with reinforcements. This was not the deliberate placing of a Cavalryman with a large Cavalry force: Smuts, Horne, Lord Cavan and even Birdwood had all been previously considered for the post. Along with Allenby came two Cavalry Major-Generals, George Barrow and J.M. Shea (who had been a Major in Barrow's regiment in India before the war) both of whom gave up Infantry divisions in France to do so. The extra troops made it possible to form two complete Army Corps, XX and XXI Corps, and a Desert Mounted Corps under the Australian Major-General Chauvel. This contained a Yeomanry Division under Barrow (all of the brigades and five of the nine regiments of which were commanded by British or Indian regular Cavalrymen), an Australian Mounted Division under another British Cavalryman, Major-General Hodgson, and an ANZAC Mounted Division under the New Zealander, Major-General Chaytor, plus two independent brigades. Chetwode was given

1. *The Palestine Campaign*, monograph by the United States Cavalry School, hereafter *Cavalry School Narrative*, p 66
2. CAB/22/2, pp 129, 156; Haig War Diary, Robertson to Haig, 15 April 1917, Acc 3155.112 Haig; Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Vol II, p 1087, writes that Allenby was Robertson's recommendation.
the new XX Corps, and Shea an Infantry division.¹

In order to achieve the necessary concentration of troops for his plan, which involved pinning the Turkish force at Gaza while turning their other flank at Beersheba, Allenby left a seventeen mile gap between his Infantry Corps, covered only by mounted patrols. On 31 October Chetwode's Corps attacked Beersheba while Chauvel's men, with the Australian Mounted Division leading, out-flanked it from the desert. This division, coming under increasing Turkish fire, found itself pinned an hour before dusk a few miles from the town. The water supply was vital; the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade was ordered to charge through the Turkish trench lines, two trenches deep, and take it. Reconnaissance showed that the ground was clear of obstacles, and the brigade could deploy concealed from the enemy. Machine guns and Artillery gave covering fire from a flank as, two regiments in front and one in reserve, the brigade formed three successive lines of squadrons, with 300 yards between lines and four yards between files. As dusk fell the Australians, holding their bayonets like swords, charged over and through the unwired Turkish trenches for the loss of sixty-four killed and wounded, causing the defence to collapse and the town to fall with more than a thousand prisoners. The Turks had not lowered their rifle

¹ Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps, pp 331-6; Order of Battle of Divisions in the Great War, Vol 2a, pp 7-34 (I.W.M.) compared with past Army Lists for previous careers of brigade and regimental commanders.
sights below 800 yards.¹

Before Allenby's arrival, it had been argued that the sword should be abandoned as it had been in South Africa.² The charge at Beersheba, so similar to Klip Drift, renewed the Cavalry's faith in the arme blanche. It was not, however, by any means the most spectacular charge in the campaign. For months the possibility of mounted troops 'rushing' unwired trenches had been discussed and practised.³ With, again, no official doctrine, methods varied between brigades, the guidelines being that fire support should always be used if available, as near to right angles to the charge as possible.⁴ In Palestine the ideas worked out before the war and on the Western Front were put into practice: co-operation between all arms, the leadership of junior commanders, directing from the front, and the use of mobile troops to reinforce success. These are the essential elements of the German 'expanding torrent' tactics which provided an answer to trench defences, and which they themselves worked out in semi-mobile warfare on the Eastern Front.⁵ The Germans, of course, evolved these tactics without Cavalry, and it is not suggested that the British could not have done the same. However, if the British had paid

1. Allenby to Robertson, 3 November 1917, Robertson I/21/74 Robertson; Cavalry School Narrative, pp 72-5
2. Official History, Egypt & Palestine, Vol I, p 123
3. Hampton, memoirs, p 11, Hampton
4. Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps, p 55
5. Liddell Hart, Thoughts on War, pp 207, 303-8; Bidwell, Modern Warfare, p 194
more attention to the value of Cavalry, had there been more Cavalry and more Cavalry Generals on the Western Front, of the calibre of Haig or Allenby, it is possible they might have reached these tactics first.

Gaza fell to XXI Corps on 6 November, and the Turks retreated, followed by the Cavalry and XX Corps. Most of the pursuing horses were without water for two days, and one Yeomanry formation endured 84 hours. Yet, although the horses were weakened, there were virtually no deaths. The pursuit lasted only 19 days, and the lessons of South Africa had been learned by the Cavalrymen and Colonial officers of the Desert Mounted Corps. Sore backs were almost unheard of; as one Yeoman said, 'these men do not want telling how to make things easy for the old 'oss', they have learned by experience and a genuine sympathy for horses, a remarkable tribute to the training of townsmen who were thought incapable of such understanding in peacetime. They began to create their own Cavalry legends. At Huj on 8 November Major-General Shea, his division facing 2,500 yards of open plain to cross under shellfire, called for mounted support. A hundred and seventy Warwickshire and Worcestershire Yeomanry moved under cover to within 900 yards of the flank of three defending Turkish batteries, and charged before more than two guns could be turned against them. For 60 per cent losses, they captured all the Turkish guns, four

1. Barrow, The Fire of Life, p 174
2. Quoted in Tylden, Horses and Saddlery, p 42
machine guns and 70 prisoners. 'We had to mourn the loss of many a good Yeoman whom we could ill spare', wrote one traditionalist Major, 'but they had at least upheld the traditions of British Cavalry, they had accomplished the end-all of a Cavalryman's training.' They had also cleared the way for Shea's advance far more quickly, and at far less cost, than he could have done for himself. Five days later at El Mughar the 52nd Division, held up by Turkish trenches on a ridge behind 4,000 yards of open ground, asked for the same assistance. Two Yeomanry regiments, concealing their approach, charged uphill into the flank of 1,200 Turks in the trenches, killing or capturing nearly all for the loss of 129 men and 265 horses killed and wounded. About twenty wounded horses charged across the trench line before collapsing.

On 8 November, as the Turks retreated into the hills north of Jerusalem and reinforcements began to arrive from the north, Barrow ordered the Yeomanry Division off its horses to press the pursuit on foot against four times its own number of Infantry. Two days later, wheeled vehicles and guns, unable to cope with the hill paths, were sent back. Heavy rain turned the black cotton soil of the plains into a quagmire, paralysing camel and motor transport, and, three days after that, the horses were withdrawn.

1. Hampton, memoirs, p 22; Hampton; Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps, pp 53-4; Adderley, The Warwickshire Yeomanry in the Great War, pp 123-32
2. Falls, Armageddon, p 104; Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps, pp 80-4
as they could no longer be fed. After four more days the
division, under repeated Turkish counter attacks, having
taken more than 40 per cent casualties fighting dismounted
after riding 170 miles, was fought to a standstill, cold and
wet, holding four miles of front with 800 rifles, no Artillery,
and the rock too hard to dig in. But by ceaseless
pursuit they had prevented the Turks from forming an orga-
nised defence. They were relieved by two Infantry brigades,
and Jerusalem fell a few days later.¹ After the war Allenby
commented:

Armed with modern weapons of precision, rifle
and machine gun, in addition to its old-time
equipment of sword and lance, Cavalry can adapt
itself to any conditions. We used to hear,
especially in peace manoeuvres, that such or
such a tract of country was suited to Cavalry
action. The truth is, that Cavalry can and
will fit its tactics to any country. This has
been shown repeatedly during the war just
ended - in the wire-enclosed fields of Flanders,
the holding clay of Picardy, the deserts of
eastern and western Egypt, the alluvial areas
of Mesopotamia, the rocky hills of Judea, the
plains of the Palestine coast, the deep valley
of the river Jordan, and the Mountains of Moab.²

The contrast between Allenby's confident and successful
troops and those in France was absolute.

The declaration of unrestricted submarine
warfare by Germany in February 1917 greatly increased the
shipping crisis, but new methods, notably the convoy system,
eased the problem considerably, and by September, despite
the anxiety of the Ministry of Shipping over horse trans-

¹ Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps, pp 93-116; Chetwode
to Dobell, 31 December 1917, folder six, Chetwode
² Allenby, quoted in Cavalry School Narrative, p 277
port and predictions of a new year cereal shortage, the crisis was clearly over. Lloyd George, who had become Prime Minister in December 1916, felt able, under pressure from the Jockey Club, to over-rule the War Cabinet and allow 18,000 pounds of grain a day from July to December (enough for three Cavalry regiments) for use in training racehorses. Nevertheless he was intent on removing the Cavalry from France. At a meeting of the War Cabinet Committee on Man-power in December, Lloyd George argued from the Chair that Cavalry would never be used there, and (taking up an idea of Churchill's) that its personnel should be transferred to aircraft, tanks or armoured cars; a suggestion with which, Lloyd George said, Robertson was 'in substantial agreement'.

On 7 January Haig defended his Cavalry to the War Cabinet:

Sir Douglas Haig stated that he considered the value and importance of cavalry to be very great not only in offensive but also in defensive operations. This was due to their superior mobility and the ease with which cavalry could be moved from one sector to another and then used dismounted. He pointed out that the British Cavalry resembled highly trained mobile infantry rather than the old cavalry arm.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the cavalry question vitally affected shipping, and that, in view of the shortage of shipping, he hoped that every effort would be made to economise the requirements of the Army in the matter of horses and their maintenance. It would be most helpful if some of the ships now utilised for the transport of horses and


2. CAB/23/13, p 187; CAB/27/14, p 14 of report, pp 3-4 of 4th meeting; CAB/1/25/26, memo by Churchill, p 4
hay could be used for the purpose of bringing over American troops.

Lord Curzon added that it would appear that the character of warfare during the ensuing few months would present few opportunities for the use of cavalry.

Sir Douglas Haig stated that once the cavalry had been disbanded it would be difficult to build up again so highly trained and technical an arm, and it would be many months before the cavalry, once dissipated, could be re-created.¹

It made no difference. The Manpower Committee recommended the reduction of the Cavalry in France, on the argument that there were 13 Allied Cavalry divisions there facing two German Cavalry divisions, a clear indication of their opinion of the value of Cavalry. Following Curzon’s suggestion, the eleven Indian Cavalry regiments from 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions² were sent to Palestine, where the Yeomanry Division and separate brigades were broken up and the regiments used to re-form the two divisions.³ The nine Yeomanry regiments left over from this process were converted into machine gun battalions and sent to France, not to arrive until May. In France itself four British Cavalry regiments freed from the Indian divisions, along with the three Household regiments and two Corps Cavalry regiments which had so far escaped disbanding, were earmarked for conversion to cyclists or machine gunners. The result was twenty regiments of Cavalry less in France for two more in

1. CAB/23/13, p 187

2. Before the single Cavalry Corps was formed in the summer of 1916 these had been known as 1st and 2nd Indian Cavalry Divisions

3. Order of Battle of Divisions in the Great War, Vol 2a, pp 1-34 (I.W.M.)
Palestine: Allenby was not substantially re-inforced. Robertson approved, but as he had already told the War Cabinet, sending the Cavalry to Palestine would not save on shipping. On the contrary, it took six times the amount of shipping to supply troops in Palestine from Britain as in France. The apparent saving of this re-organisation was the supplies of eleven Indian Cavalry regiments, or less than 2 per cent of the 2,700 tons of oats consumed daily by the B.E.F. But the tonnage of shipping required to move the various regiments to Palestine and France in fact exceeded the shipping saved in this manner. Further, when the American troops did arrive, they were severely handicapped through lack of transport, and in October Pershing had to ask Haig for 25,000 horses.

The Household Cavalry and Yeomanry had just surrendered their horses, and the Indian Cavalry embarked at Marseilles, when the German offensive began on 21 March, a fact for which Gough never forgave Robertson. Haig had given Gough the remaining three Cavalry divisions as a mobile reserve for defence, on the lines he had already explained to Lloyd George. In the emergency, the Yeomanry regiments

1. CAB/22/78, p 6; Robertson, From Private to Field Marshal, p 324
2. Haig War Diary entry, 27 January 1918, p 39, Acc 3155. 123 Haig
3. See Appendix Two
4. Haig War Diary entries, 23 June 1918, p 50, Acc 3155.128 and 23 October 1918, Acc 3155.132 Haig
5. Gough, The Fifth Army, p 254
6. See above p 331
(with one exception) also reclaimed their horses, and between them the Cavalrymen fought a successful mobile defence mainly dismounted in small groups, in a close co-operation with the other arms born of necessity. To check the rapid German advance, however, the surprise of an *arme blanche* charge was sometimes employed. In this manner a squadron of Seely's Canadians re-took the vital Moreuil Ridge, sacrificing 70 per cent of their number, killing about 70 Germans with their swords and 300 with supporting fire, and halting the German advance. Had the Canadians followed Dundonald's doctrine of always dismounting, the ridge would not have been re-captured, the Germans would surely have broken through to Amiens, and the battle — perhaps, at this crucial stage, the war — would have been lost: an interesting commentary on the *arme blanche* controversy. In contrast, the Germans made no use of their own Cavalry. British officers subsequently felt this a mistake, arguing that their men would have probably run from a Cavalry attack; indeed at Nesle one battalion panicked and retreated at a false report of German Cavalry attacking.

1. *Official History, France & Belgium, 1918, Vol I*, p 185, Vol II, p 33; Haig War Diary entry, 1 April 1918, p 2 Acc 3155.125 Haig; Pease, *The History of the Northumberland (Hussars) Yeomanry 1819-1923*, p 181

2. Seely, *Adventure*, p 303. This was not the only charge of the battle; see, for example, Brander, *The 10th Royal Hussars*, p 98

3. Toland, *No Man's Land*, p 45; Terraine, *To Win a War*, p 72; Haig and Gough both felt that with Cavalry the Germans would have broken through. See Haig's final despatch of 21 March 1919, paragraph 5, quoted in notes by Lady Haig on Jessel to Lady Haig, 16 February 1930, Acc 3155.254, Vol 1, p 3, Haig; Duff Cooper, *Haig*, Vol I, p 102; Gough, *The Fifth Army*, p 323
After the crisis was over, the Household regiments were converted into lorry-borne machine-gunners, and for the rest of the war provided fire-support for the Cavalry Corps. The Yeomanry were broken up to make up the numbers of the now severely depleted regular Cavalry regiments. Meanwhile, Haig worked to re-vitalise the Cavalry. At the start of the year he had planned with Kavanagh to remove the promotion block in the Cavalry by replacing some divisional and brigade commanders; Kavanagh was also considered for replacement, but finally kept his command. Before his major counter-offensive opened with the Battle of Amiens on 8 August Haig impressed upon Kavanagh 'the training of the troop under its leader' as the basic tactical unit, and direction from the front in the attack. At Amiens, for the first time on the Western Front, there was co-operation between the arms (learned during the German offensives) and the Cavalry broke through to open ground: squadrons of two leading regiments delivered successful charges, although a third was stopped by wire. For the loss of under 1,000 men and 1,800 horses the Cavalry Corps took over 1,300 prisoners;

1. Haig War Diary entries, 15 January 1918, p 20 and 27 January 1918, p 39, Acc 3155.123; 19 March 1918, p 40, Acc 3155.124 Haig
2. Haig War Diary entry, 1 August 1918, p 1, Acc 3155.130 Haig
3. Official History, France & Belgium, 1918, Vol IV, pp 53, 69, 100; Haig War Diary note 63, Acc 3155.130 Haig; Scott, Records of the Seventh Dragoon Guards During the Great War, pp 149-50; Whyte and Atteridge, A History of the Queens Bays, pp 440-1
a major success, but one which inevitably weakened the force, with no way to make up the losses. 'I feel sure', Haig wrote, 'that without the rapid advance of the Cavalry the effect of the surprise attack on the 8th would have been much less.' Even Rawlinson admitted that the Cavalry had done 'splendid work', despite another pre-battle disagreement with Haig about their value and the scale of use intended for them. But neither Rawlinson nor Byng, whose Armies would lead the offensives through to November, believed in Cavalry, or the possibility of victory that year.

The one major failure in co-operation in the battle was between the Cavalry and the new Whippet medium tanks, to which a number of Cavalry officers had been transferred in January precisely to encourage co-operation. The Whippet crews complained that the Cavalry outpaced them in open country, and lagged behind them when under fire. The difficulty was genuine, but the complaints unjustified. The problem of co-ordinating tanks with more vulnerable but more mobile supporting troops exists to this day; it requires no more than correct tactics and co-operation to solve it. As at Cambrai, the tankmen showed little concern for an arm

1. Haig War Diary entry, 13 August 1918, Acc 3155.130 Haig
2. Rawlinson Diary entry, 8 August 1918, Rawlinson/WW1
3. Haig War Diary entry, 5 August 1918, p 9, Acc 3155.130 Haig
4. Byng quoted in Haig War Diary, 29 November 1918, p 54, Acc 3155.131 Haig; Rawlinson Diary entry, 11 November 1918, Rawlinson/WW1
5. The War History of the 6th Tank Battalion, p 97
which, after all, many had left since they considered it obsolete.¹

When the Third Army resumed the attack on 21 August Haig found Byng just as reluctant to use the Cavalry as Rawlinson:

Byng had only arranged to use about a brigade of Cavalry. I told him that the Cavalry Corps is now 100 per cent better than it was at Cambrai. He must use the Cavalry to the fullest extent possible... I ordered him to detail a Cavalry regiment to each Corps taking part in the attack, because the enemy's line of resistance may have been withdrawn some distance from our front trenches, and it will be necessary to push forward Advance Guards of all arms to reconnoitre.²

To one Corps commander, Haig (echoing Allenby) instructed 're-inforce where we are winning, not where we are held up!'³

He supported the Cavalry Corps with an Infantry brigade in buses and the motorised machine guns of the re-named Household Machine Gun Regiment. But there was still a conflict between employing the Cavalry and keeping it up to reasonable strength. On 1 September the Cavalry Corps was pulled out of action to keep it as strong as possible should the German fighting retreat collapse completely.⁴ To Henry Wilson (who had replaced Robertson as C.I.G.S. at the start


². Haig War Diary entry, 19 August 1918, p 46, Acc 3155.130 Haig

³. Haig War Diary entry, 21 August 1918, p 51, Acc 3155.130 Haig

⁴. Haig War Diary entries, 25 August 1918, p 61, Acc 3155.130 and 1 September 1918, p 1, Acc 3155.131 Haig
of the year) Haig wrote demanding more mobile troops, and complaining that 'Our shortage of Cavalry is daily becoming more noticeable, and there is no doubt that your predecessor committed a serious error in sending off to Palestine two Cavalry Divisions last February. I hear that they are doing little or nothing there.' \(^1\) By this date the three divisions still in France mustered fewer than 14,000 men, or less than 60 per cent of their nominal strength.\(^2\) With remarkable irony, the Imperial War Cabinet, hearing Wilson's complaints on the difficulty of finding ships to supply Allenby's force, only narrowly decided in June against sending the Australian Mounted Division to France.\(^3\)

Largely through Robertson's and Lloyd George's belief in the valuelessness of Cavalry, Allenby had in September 1918 four Cavalry divisions, two of them composed of Yeomanry and Indian Cavalry. Moreover, the Australian Mounted Division, during its operations in the Jordan Valley that summer, had persistently and successfully pressed to be equipped with swords. As one Australian brigade commander said, 'One of the chief values of the sword is the spirit of progress that it inculcates in the carrier',\(^4\) a classic expression of the arme blanche theory. Allenby

\(^1\) Haig War Diary entry, 18 September 1918, p 20, Haig to Wilson, personal, 1 September 1918, Acc 3155.131 Haig

\(^2\) See Tables, Part Three, Table 4

\(^3\) CAB/22/44, pp 2, 6

\(^4\) Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps, p 335; Official History, Egypt & Palestine, Vol I, p 123; Fox, The History of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars Yeomanry 1898-1922, p 177
planned to use this division, along with his two Indian divisions, in a rapid advance based on declining Turkish morale and a superiority of 95,000 Infantry to 85,000, 540 guns to 400 and 25,000 Cavalry to 5,000 Turkish horsemen. The Indian Cavalry believed they were chosen to lead the advance by virtue of their superior faith in the importance of the arme blanche. One traditionalist even claimed that 'Our tactics were the same as those which had invariably proved successful in France, viz: to charge at the gallop, no matter what disparity of force there might be'. Three years of transfers and promotions had drained both the Indian and British Cavalry of their most competent officers, and of progressive believers in the hybrid. In Palestine, however, the Indian Cavalry met these men again in the Yeomanry, and as their brigade and divisional commanders, in particular Barrow as commander of the 4th Cavalry Division.

On 19 September XXI Corps attacked the Turkish line, which had been re-established north of Jerusalem after its capture, at its coastal edge. A gap was made for the three Cavalry divisions to pass through to the plain beyond, rush through any enemy on the plain, advance through the Musmus and Sindiane passes in the hills beyond, and take the key locations blocking the routes through the hills through which the Turkish forces would, pressed by Allenby's Infantry, attempt to retreat. Only hybrid Cavalry were capable of this

1. Preston, The Desert Mounted Corps, pp 193-8
2. Tennant, The Royal Deccan Horses in the Great War, p 68
3. ibid
operation, which required the speed and surprise of the 
arme blanche charge for the advance, as well as dismounted 
firepower to hold the trap. At Birket Ata in the plains 9th Hodson's Horse, leading the 5th Cavalry Division, 
charged frontally and captured 250 prisoners with four guns. 36th Jacob's Horse charged and broke a Turkish battalion at Jett. Most importantly, 2nd Lancers, supported by two 
armoured cars, as it emerged on the far side of the Musmus 
pass successfully engineered a charge in front and flank of an approaching Turkish battalion, destroying it. 1 Barrow, conscious of the argument that only poor Turkish morale 
made such charges possible, asserted:

The depot regiment, the force engaged by the advance guard [2nd Lancers], had not yet been 
previously engaged and its morale had not suffered from defeat or retreat. What was it that enabled this small, tired mounted force to over-ride a fresh infantry battalion at so small a cost to itself? It was the result of a happy combination of the principles of surprise, fire, movement and co-operation. 2

As Barrow candidly admitted, if the battalion had occupied the pass, two machine guns could have held the Cavalry up for hours. 3 Again, this was a revealing commentary on the respective views of Haig and Roberts on the training of Indian Cavalry.

The 4th Cavalry Division managed the 70 mile advance in thirty-four hours, with the loss of just 26 horses.

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2. Barrow, *The Fire of Life*, p 201
3. ibid, p 197
In contrast, the small French Cavalry contingent with them was almost unhorsed by sore backs.¹ A few armoured cars came through the Musmus pass with the Cavalry, but staff cars broke down repeatedly on the rocky ground, and the Sindiane pass was found to be unfit for wheeled vehicles of any kind.² Once in position, the Cavalry set a dismounted trap which captured 13,000 demoralised and retreating Turks in two days.³ Then on 23 September they remounted to continue the advance against a virtual rout. So poor was Turkish morale by this time that one Lancer regiment managed to charge a hill position capturing 800 prisoners with 25 machine guns, which unsurprisingly shot high.⁴ But such success bred carelessness: when 2nd Lancers again charged, at Irbid on 26 September, they failed to reconnoitre or use supporting fire, and the charge was shot down by machine guns - one of the very few occasions in the war on which this actually happened.⁵ By the end of the month the Desert Mounted Corps had reached Damascus, covering 200 miles, capturing 60,000 prisoners, 140 guns and 500 machine guns.⁶

At Allenby's orders they pressed on to Aleppo by 25 October and six days later Turkey signed an armistice. The value of strategic Cavalry divisions in colonial war had been proved.

3. Preston, *The Desert Mounted Corps*, p 225
4. ibid, pp 230-1
5. ibid, p 253; Whitworth, *A History of the 2nd Lancers*, pp 156-60
6. Preston, *The Desert Mounted Corps*, p 283
Haig hoped to add to this on the Western Front. On 17 September the Cavalry Corps was given a major training exercise in locating bridges across waterways, in the face of a rearguard of Infantry and machine gunners. Results were disappointing: one brigade commander took ninety minutes to learn from his scouts that a key bridge was undefended. Nevertheless, Rawlinson dutifully held the Cavalry Corps behind his lines from 1 October, and seven days later the chance came to put them through again. In three days, for the loss of 604 casualties, the Corps took over 500 prisoners, 10 guns and 60 machine guns. Edmonds in the *Official History* considered the Infantry could have done as much for themselves at less cost — an indication of how much had come to be expected of Cavalry — but there was no German rout and breakthrough. On 10 October Rawlinson, feeling the Cavalry were 'sticky' pulled them out of the line. As with the Indian regiments, the weak British Cavalry now contained too many officers either of poor quality, or with traditionalist views on the *arme blanche*. A Sergeant-Major in one of the leading regiments, who had himself turned down the chance of an Infantry commission, recorded this attitude:

8th Oct. 6 p.m. Col. Franks D.S.O. sends for the sergeants and myself of C Squadron. He explains to us that we are for battle tomorrow.

1. Haig War Diary entry, 17 September 1918, p 29, Acc 3155.
3. Rawlinson Diary entry, 9 October 1918, *Rawlinson/WW1*
4. Brunton Diary entry, 10 January 1916, *Brunton*
and that the Cavalry Corps is to be in Le Cateau by 5 p.m. C Squadron will be as advance guard to the regiment, who in turn are advance guard to the corps. We are to push on as fast as possible up the main Le Cateau road. It is a case of 'death or glory' and no turning aside come what may. His words were 'I am the man to drop the flag, and off we go to Death or Glory'. If successful it will be a bigger thing than the Palestine affair.¹

Against the German defence such crude tactics would not work.

On the following day:

About four in the afternoon Col. Franks D.S.O. formed the regiment up for the charge as our position was getting desperate. Our objective was two batteries of field guns and a nest of machine guns about 1000 yards away on high ground. The charge was sounded, squadron formed line, and away we rode hell for leather; it was a mad ride through shell fire. We rode clean through the guns, killing many gunners with the sword. Those we spared bombed us as we passed through. We rode through the second time coming back...One troop of B Squadron came back with 5 men alive out of about 30 men. Altogether we lost 4 officers killed [including the Colonel] 9 officers wounded, 2 taken prisoner (wounded) 96 men killed and wounded, 120 horses killed. Altogether a bad day's work for the regiment, but it clearly shows that the true cavalry spirit still lives.²

There was no further chance for the Cavalry Corps before the armistice, both Byng and Rawlinson letting transport for their Infantry divisions take precedence over Cavalry in their rear areas. Consequently, according to Edmonds, 'the absence of mounted troops was severely felt' in the last days of the war.³ The Cavalry's career in France ended, as

1. Brunton Diary entry, 8 October 1918, Brunton
2. Brunton Diary entry, 9 October 1918, Brunton
3. Official History, France & Belgium 1918, Vol V, p 535; Haig War Diary entries, 5 November 1918, p 9 and 9 November 1918, p 18, Acc 3155.133 Haig
it had begun, with ambiguity.

To the Cavalrymen these achievements seemed to justify their pre-war faith in their arm. Haig wrote in December 1918:

Cavalry has been, is, and will continue to be indispensable in modern warfare... It is my considered opinion that had I had at my disposal a much larger force of cavalry the fruits of victory would have been more rapidly gathered... In rearguard actions, when fighting becomes loose and units scattered, the value of Cavalry has been constantly proved both in the retreat from Mons and during the retirement of the Fifth Army in the Spring of the present year... In open country, such as the theatre of war in which General Allenby's forces were operating, Cavalry may well still exercise a decisive influence.¹

When, in 1919, a revision of the Cavalry Training Manual was again mooted, Allenby wrote to John Vaughan:

I'm sorry that they have started to revise the Cavalry Training. I don't think there is anything in it that needs revising. I have never found any reason, during the war, to find fault with it; and I have had as much experience, in this war, of cavalry fighting - mounted and dismounted - as anyone. I also saw all the proofs of the present book before it was printed.²

The 1920 revision, however, did no more than confirm Allenby's experience:

Cavalry develops its maximum power only when acting mounted, supported by the fire of its guns, machine guns and automatic guns. Notwithstanding the fact that the destructive power of modern mechanical weapons tends ever to increase, the moral effect of a mounted attack remains as great as ever, where the enemy is not protected by physical or mechanical contrivances.³

¹. Haig to Prothero, 1 December 1918, Acc 3155.13/4 Haig
². Allenby to Vaughan, 2 March 1919, Allenby 2/5/9 Allenby
³. Cavalry Training 1920, Vol II War, p 10
The new Cavalry Division was planned as three brigades with a tank battalion of 48 tanks. Each squadron kept a Hotchkiss gun troop of four guns, with two more in regimental reserve. The Desert Mounted Corps, however, was disbanded. Barrow, told that the horses would be sold off in Egypt, since there was insufficient shipping to justify bringing them home, and aware of the cruelty with which Egyptian workhorses were treated, allowed some of his men to shoot their horses instead. The decision not to bring the horses home only served to increase resentment in the Cavalry which, as after the Boer War, felt it was due for some credit after its successes. When in 1921 the disbanding of four regular Cavalry regiments, and most of the Yeomanry and Indian Cavalry was proposed, Seely protested:

It is the strangest non sequitur in military history that, as a result of a great war in which the cavalry on the Western Front twice saved our Army from ruin, while the lion-hearted Philip Chetwode with a great part of the cavalry of the Empire struck the decisive blow to end the war on the Eastern [Palestine] Front, the cavalry should have been reduced to half their previous number.

The exaggeration was pardonable. On achievement the Cavalry's defenders still had a good case. But the 'Cavalry' they defended had changed beyond recognition from the brightly-uniformed, understrength, overloaded, poorly trained force of the 1870s with its muzzle-loading carbines and reluctance to dismount.

2. Barrow, The Fire of Life, pp 12, 217-20
3. Seely, Adventure, p 298
In April 1920 The Cavalry Journal resumed publication, containing the first of a series of articles, 'The Influence of Tanks on Cavalry Tactics', by Brevet Colonel J.F.C. Fuller. Bursting with confidence, Fuller began his exposition on Cavalry in the traditional manner with the Ancient Greeks. He told his readers that in the mid-nineteenth century the rifle musket with 'a range of over a thousand yards' had sealed the doom of the Cavalry charge; that the American Civil War Cavalry had been 'Mounted Infantry pure and simple', and that the Second Boer War also was 'a rifle war pure and simple, the arme blanche play[ed] practically no part in it'. Fuller also took the opportunity to insult his readers. 'Forethought', he wrote, 'has seldom formed part of the soldier's intellectual outfit.' The arme blanche controversy had re-emerged, in a form that was depressingly familiar. But so little did Fuller understand the background to the controversy that he could write of Cavalry in Palestine in 1918 that 'the use of Cavalry in Palestine was masterly, but it was the moral threat and not the arme blanche or even the rifle and machine gun which was their strongest weapon'. ¹ The Palestine campaign of 1917 he ignored altogether. Cavalrymen replied with a mixture of sentimental and traditionalist defences of the arme blanche, and precise historical references which cut Fuller's case

to ribbons. 1 This led at the end of the year to a full debate at the Senior Officers' School, where, as Fuller put it, 'I spoke for the Tanks, Philip Chetwode for the cavalry'. 2 The meeting was chaired by Winston Churchill as Secretary of State for War. At the end of an inconclusive debate Churchill told Fuller privately that though he supported his views, it was important to 'go easy on this question'. 3 Neither Fuller, who believed the opposition to him came entirely from a sentimental view of Cavalry, nor later Liddell Hart, could understand why so competent a soldier as Chetwode supported the Cavalry. They could only assume that his judgement had been distorted by a love of horses. 4 This was the final tragedy of all the debates about the arme blanche. When in the 1920s and 1930s Cavalrymen were told their arm was obsolete, they had long ago heard it all before.

1. See in particular the two contrasting articles: Bird, 'Years versus Ideas', CJ Vol 10, no 37, pp 331-3 and Howard-Vyse, 'A Defence of the Arme Blanche', CJ Vol 10, no 37, pp 323-9, which clearly show the 'sentimental' and 'historical' approaches to the controversy.
2. Fuller to ffrench-Blake, n.d., ffrench-Blake, LH I/282/5b
3. ibid
4. Liddell Hart to ffrench-Blake, 5 October 1960, LH I/282/2
CONCLUSION

THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

'There are always indefinite factors, unknown quantities and indeterminate effects to be contended with. Nevertheless, by constant application of trained minds, judicious experiment and a sharp observation of events, a tolerably accurate forecast of conditions is procurable.'

- Major Dening, R.E., The Future of the British Army

'A vivid and correct imagination, though it sees clearly the course of future events, almost invariably antedates results.'

- J.C. Masterman, The Double-Cross System

The arme blanche Cavalry charge against Infantry was not obsolete in 1918, or at any point before that date. In the conditions of colonial war, that is to say an enemy troop density of one man to a yard or less, with little or no Artillery support, indifferent firepower, no wire, and where manoeuvre and an attack from the flank were permitted, it was possible by formations of between two and three British regiments or the equivalent - between 1,000 and 2,000 horsemen. In the conditions of European war, faced by a troop density of two or three men to a yard of front with a higher standard of shooting, wire, and Artillery support, it was possible in troop or squadron strength - between 50 and 250 horsemen. In both cases it benefited

1. Dening, The Future of the British Army, p 18
greatly from covering and suppressing fire, either from the Cavalry's own support weapons or from other troops, and in the second case these were absolutely necessary. As such, it did not differ markedly from Infantry tactics as developed by the end of the First World War.

Why this tactic worked is altogether another matter. Theorists of the time laid the greatest emphasis on the psychological impact of the charge, the mental stress it laid on the Infantry soldier attempting to fire at a target the range of which was constantly changing at high speed. In doing so, they probably underestimated the value of purely physical factors, the terrain, the technical problems involved in accurate shooting at unknown ranges under any circumstances, and the effects of a bullet wound on a horse. They also underestimated the value of suppressing fire, although not by a great deal. However, it is doubtful if such factors alone could explain the results achieved by the Yeomanry in 1917 or the Indian Cavalry in 1918. Behavioural research into the conduct of American Infantry in the Second World War showed that, of troops in combat with a clear target to shoot at, only 25 per cent actually fired their weapons. The change from volley fire to individual marksmanship, on which Ian Hamilton had laid such stress, almost certainly reduced the actual volume of fire from any Infantry formation. It has also been noticed that in Napoleonic battles temporary truces, or 'chivalrous'

behaviour, occurred between rival Cavalrymen, and Infantrymen, although not between the Cavalry on one side and the Infantry of another. There has been recent speculation that such behaviour was primarily social, rather than psychological, in origin. It is hard to envisage a simple motive, either social or psychological, for an Infantryman not to shoot at a Cavalryman coming towards him. However, there has always, in most cultures, been less moral odium attached to killing a horse than a man. The classic anti-Cavalry tactic of shooting at the horses of a charge was intended as a method of discouraging shooting high. But its effect might have been due more to a willingness of soldiers to shoot horses rather than men, and therefore to an increased volume of fire. Indeed, the more accurate such shooting, the more hits on the horses and not their riders, the less likely that the charge would be stopped. This is all speculation. Since the matter is now of only historical, or at least academic, interest, it is unlikely that an answer will be found to this question in the immediate future. The shock charge itself still remains a valid tactic. Its most recent well-documented appearance was in the Vietnamese war, in which South Vietnamese soldiers, rather than dismount from their armoured personnel carriers, chose to drive them directly at the enemy, firing

2. Ashworth, Trench Warfare 1914-18, pp 214-18
3. Keegan, The Face of Battle, pp 153-9; Wyndham Crole, Questions and Answers for Cavalry Non-Commissioned Officers, p 191
from the top. To the bafflement of American military theorists, they achieved swift victories with few casualties to themselves, and many to their opponents. The tactic was adopted by the Americans themselves later in the war.¹

The Cavalry charge against Cavalry also remained valid as a tactic until 1914. After that date, since their principal enemy had abandoned it, the British Cavalry found no opportunity to use it themselves. As with the charge against Infantry, it was used successfully by groups of 50 to 250 men, benefiting from supporting fire. The massed charge of division against division did not take place. Like a fleet action in naval warfare it had to be deliberately sought by each side, both in the belief that they were stronger; and also like a fleet action its object was to determine superiority in manoeuvre and protection of other forces. From their first contact with the German Cavalry on 22 August 1914 the British discovered that in minor actions they already had such superiority. They therefore had absolutely no motive for undertaking such a charge. In fact, four days later (three days after the Battle of Mons) Allenby lost touch with the two of his four brigades under Gough, which never came back under his divisional command. Only in those four days was the divisional charge of all four brigades even possible. In practice the threat of the massed charge worked as a deterrent,

¹. Starry, Mounted Combat in Vietnam, especially pp 21-3
an action with a high risk of disaster to each side, which both sides were therefore reluctant to employ. It is possible to argue both that this failure to use the massed charge shows that it was unnecessary, and that the same failure shows that training for it to a high standard by the British Cavalry had been completely successful.

The Cavalry of Britain and its Empire were equally not obsolete by the end of the war. Allenby's men had, in the first three days of the 1918 campaign, achieved the highest measured rate of opposed advance in two centuries, fractionally faster than the Israeli tanks in 1967, twice as fast as the breakout from Normandy in 1944 or the Barbarossa offensive of 1941. On the Western Front the Cavalry had for three years been drained of their best officers, reduced to well below their effective strength, and ignored in the plans of battles. Any troops will fight badly in such circumstances; it is surprising that in 1918 they proved themselves still to be so effective. The suggestion of obsolescence merely adds insult to injury. Cavalry, or horsed soldiers, became obsolete at times and in places where the mechanical vehicle, less vulnerable to fire, became also as manoeuvrable over all terrain, easier to supply and maintain, and cheaper to keep. In western Europe this happened at some date between 1919 and 1939, probably about the middle of the period. In eastern Europe it did not happen until after 1945. In

1. Dupuy, Numbers, Predictions and War, p 16
the Wars of Intervention\(^1\) and the Russo-Polish war\(^2\) between 1918 and 1922 all sides made extensive use of horsed troops. In the Second World War on the Eastern Front all sides again made wide use of horsemen in rough country, and a number of successes were claimed over tank formations.\(^3\) In other parts of the world it has not happened yet. The Israeli Army, not noted for its stupidity or conservatism, disbanded its last horsed units in 1956.\(^4\) Mounted patrols were used in the jungles of Portuguese Angola in 1972.\(^5\) At the moment a number of South American states keep mounted forces for patrol work.\(^6\) The last horsed soldiers to see combat, to date, were probably the 250 strong Grey's Scouts of the Rhodesian Army in 1979.\(^7\)

These facts should have formed the basis for any assessment of the motives, or the abilities, of defenders of the Cavalry and the arme blanche before 1918. But the whole complex problem of the arme blanche controversy was riddled with paradox. Simple calculations clearly showing the charge to be impossible were themselves faulty, for no obvious reason. The failure to agree a terminology for the debate meant that men who wanted the same kind of horsed

4. Luttwak and Horowitz, *The Israeli Army*, p 117 
5. Lawford, *The Cavalry*, p 9 
7. ibid, pp 145-6
troops could find themselves opposed. The British Mounted Infantry was never an alternative to the Cavalry, but a supplement to it; and Cavalrymen like Fraser and French opposed Mounted Infantry not because they scorned dismounted fighting but because they believed in it. While in the 1890s the standards of the Cavalry declined it nevertheless attracted the most capable officers. The apparent reform of employing firearms and machine guns in co-operation with the charge was actually a retrograde step; by encouraging the belief that Cavalry could be independent of the other arms it hampered co-operation with Infantry and Artillery. Haig realised this by early 1916, others never did so. The Cavalrymen in the aftermath of the Second Boer War did not oppose 'reform' in the abstract but the attempt by Roberts to alter their own reform programme. While the reforming movement in the Cavalry rose to dominance, it remained virtually unperceived by the public, and by all but a minority of the rest of the Army. Cavalrymen, in an age unfamiliar with deterrence, spent a considerable time practising a tactic which might never be used. The British Cavalry entered neither the Second Boer War nor the First World War 'wedded to shock tactics',¹ by 1899 they had worked out a doctrine of fire and movement tactics considerably in advance of that of the Infantry, and by 1914 this doctrine was chief among their tactics. Finally, the whole massive arme blanche controversy thoroughly obscured, and relegated

¹. See above, p 10
to a minor issue, the fact that the effectiveness of Cavalry depended primarily on the maintenance and care of its horses. Neither the Cavalry nor the rest of the Army took steps to improve this before 1899; when the controversy was at its height between 1902 and 1904 the Cavalry had already learned the necessary lessons, and between 1914 and 1918 they owed their successes as much to superior horsemastership as to any other factor.

Above all, the public image of the foolish or reactionary Cavalryman still remained after the war. The term 'Cavalry General' had threefold implications. First, by suggesting a member of a Cavalry regiment it implied identity with the rich, privileged sportsmen who made up the majority of Cavalry officers, low in intelligence and unconcerned with their profession. Secondly, it implied belief in the Cavalry, which had been condemned as obsolete as far back as the 1860s, and for four years had apparently remained inactive on the Western Front while the other arms fought. Thirdly, it implied belief in the massed 

\textit{arme blanche} charge, the classic public display of the Cavalry, with its emphasis on 'smartness', and a naïve and sentimental conservatism. Drawing on this stereotype, which bore no resemblance to the ex-Cavalry officers who had risen to prominence before the war, Siegfried Sassoon, in his fictionalised autobiography, described one of the Army commanders of 1916:

\begin{quote}
He had taken the salute from four hundred officers and N.C.O.s of his Army. How many of them had been killed since then, and how
\end{quote}
deeply was he responsible for their deaths? Did he know what he was doing, or was he merely a successful old cavalryman whose peace-time popularity had pushed him up on his present perch?1

In reality the officer in question was Rawlinson. The novelist C.S. Forester in 1936 created his character of 'The General',2 in a novel which portrayed as the typical Western Front commander a Cavalryman who had not served outside his own regiment prior to the war, despised the Staff College, and was ignorant of staffwork or science. A thinly disguised portrait of Allenby appeared in the novel, dismissed by his biographer, Lord Wavell, as 'a grotesque caricature'.3 Forester's novel was greeted with wide acclaim as representing, according to The Times, 'the real thing',4 and continues to be cited in factual works on war to this day as an example of the typical Cavalry General's mentality.5

Those who criticised the conduct of the war on the Western Front were able to draw on this stereotype in condemning Haig, Robertson, and the 'Cavalry Generals'. Lloyd George in his own war memoirs cited as evidence of their incompetence their 'ridiculous cavalry obsession'.6 Churchill, who had himself been closely involved with the controversy,

1. Sassoon, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer, p 163
2. Forester, The General
3. Wavell, Allenby: a Study in Greatness, pp 158-9
4. Review in The Times, 5 June 1936; see also The Manchester Guardian, 5 June 1936, and The Observer, 7 June 1936 for agreement.
understood more of the truth, but nevertheless could not resist referring to the presence of supposed 'large masses of Cavalry' at Loos as due to 'the absurd misconceptions of the Staff'. The advocates of the tank in the 1920s and 1930s also, finding themselves opposed by the reactionary sportsmen who still composed the bulk of the Cavalry officer corps, made the assumption, in criticising the conduct of the war, that the 'Cavalry Generals' had been representative of the majority, of whom Seely wrote that 'a love of the horse and of hunting seems to blunt all their reasoning faculties'. This was most unfortunate. The Cavalry reformers of the 1890s, under excessive and largely unjust condemnation from the rest of the Army, had boldly proclaimed both the superiority and independence of Cavalry, only to learn in the First World War that co-operation with the other arms was essential to their success. Although the parallel is by no means exact, the tank theorists fell into virtually the same trap in the 1930s. It is possible, if no more, that had they understood the arme blanche controversy they might have avoided this. Instead, they failed to accept the possibility that the reform movement had ever existed in the Cavalry. Liddell Hart wrote in 1928 of Haig:

Despite the experiences of the South African and the Russo-Japanese wars, he declared himself the champion of the arme blanche and of

1. Churchill, The World Crisis 1911-18, p 583
2. Quoted in Liddell Hart, Memoirs, Vol I, p 242
3. For the changes in tank doctrine before and during the Second World War see: Liddell Hart, The Tanks, Vol II; Messenger, The Art of Blitzkrieg and Keegan, The Face of Battle, pp 285-95
shock tactics, and was so determined and sure of his opinion that he did not hesitate to remove subordinates who dared to maintain more realistic views. Basing himself on history, he was convinced, rightly, that the cavalry charge had ever been the decisive instrument of the Great Captains. His failure was that he could not, or would not, realise that modern firearms had made the cavalry charge impossible in its traditional form, and that this essential factor could only be revived by finding a substitute for the excessively vulnerable horse.¹

Even forty years later, when the battle to achieve acceptance of the tank was long over, Liddell Hart's understanding of the nature of the controversy had not improved. He wrote that the most remarkable feature of the Elgin Commission 'was the way that French and Haig discoursed on the paramount value of the arme blanche, implying that so long as the cavalry charge was maintained all would be well with the conduct of war'.² Fuller himself wrote of Haig in 1958:

Unlike so many cavalrmen of his day, he had studied war, and, strange to say, this proved to be his undoing, because he was so unimaginative that he could not see that the tactics of the past were as dead as mutton. We are told that he held that 'the role of cavalry on the battlefield will always go on increasing' and that he believed bullets had 'little stopping power against horses'. This was never true, as an intelligent glance at past battles would have made clear to him. Yet it must be true, otherwise how could he employ his cavalry? Thus, in spite of fire, wire and mire, cavalry figured in all his battles.³

Given this lead, and the established stereotype, it is

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¹ Liddell Hart, Reputations, p 86
² Liddell Hart, A History of the First World War, p 35
³ Fuller in introduction to Woolfe, In Flanders Fields, p xiii
necessary for a military historian to do no more than refer to the 'Cavalry charge' mentality of the First World War British Army to condemn its leaders instantly. The image of the charge against machine guns in particular has become a common tool of criticism. One distinguished and able military historian has in fact described the charge on 24 August at Audregnies as 'the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars [sic] attempted a flank attack near Valenciennes, only to be mown down by machine guns'. A biographer of Henry Wilson has compressed Fuller's interpretation of Haig's arguments in 1907 into 'Haig's famous maxim, "Bullets can't stop Cavalry".' The metaphor of the charge against machine guns, or of the incompetent Victorian Cavalry General attempting to control a tank battle, has spread beyond military studies into the general vocabulary of historians and readers of history, as a touchstone of all that is reactionary, foolish and futile. It is probably too well established ever to be removed.

1. Carver, The Warlords, pp 139-40
2. Ellis, Cavalry: a History of Mounted Warfare, p 174
3. Collier, Brasshat, p 96
APPENDIX ONE

Application of the 'Scientific' Model to the Charge of the Prussian 1st Guard Dragoons on 16 August 1870 at Mars-la-Tour

During the battle the 1st Guard Dragoon Regiment was ordered to sacrifice itself in order to save a retreating Infantry brigade from further pursuit, by charging against the three battalions of the French 13th Infantry Regiment, which had the 43rd Infantry Regiment in close support behind it. The final charge was sounded about 80 paces from the French line, and it was remembered that the French, equipped with Chassepot rifles, had time to fire two volleys before contact. The Cavalry had already taken casualties from fire before the charge and would take more from fire by the 43rd Infantry Regiment. Since the number of these is unknown it will be ignored. The charge hit the front of the 13th Infantry Regiment, halting it, so fulfilling its purpose in enabling the Prussian Infantry to escape, but not breaking it. The Cavalry subsequently rallied, and at the end of the day were recorded as having lost, of 426 all ranks, 15 officers, 123 men and 216 horses killed and wounded. It will be assumed, however unlikely, that all these casualties were taken from the two volleys under consideration. It will further be assumed, although again extremely unlikely, that no officer or man who was killed or wounded also had his horse either killed or wounded. The maximum number of officers, men and horses which could have been killed or
injured by these two volleys is therefore 354 out of 426 or 83 per cent of the regiment. But the three battalions of the 13th Infantry Regiment did not muster fewer than 2,000 men. Presuming that all of these were in a position to fire, and did so, then each volley of 2,000 bullets caused an average of 177 hits on the Cavalry, or 8.85 per cent of all bullets fired were hits.

This example is, of course, extremely crude. Yet nothing like it was attempted at the time, and the 'scientific' arguments were seldom subject to the same kind of analysis.

Source: Wood, Achievements of Cavalry, pp 193-204
APPENDIX TWO

The Shipping Cost of the Cavalry Redeployment of February 1918

In December 1916 the Quartermaster-General of the B.E.F. calculated that the three British Cavalry divisions in France required between them 49 tons dead weight of rations and 246 tons dead weight of fodder daily. These calculations were clearly based on the standard wartime estimate of a Cavalry Division as 8,000 men and horses, and the forage allowance in war of 14 pounds of oats and 8 pounds of hay for horses, along with an allowance for men of a little over 4\(^1/2\) pounds of all foodstuffs daily. For a period of three months, or 93 days, this weight of supplies required 74,620 ship tons to transport it from Britain to France. On this basis, one Cavalry division would require approximately 267.5 ship tons daily to keep it supplied.

Between December 1916 and March 1918 the strength of the Cavalry divisions dropped by an unknown amount, varying between divisions. Since this would, if anything, weaken the argument advanced by Curzon and Lloyd George, it will be ignored.

In March 1918 the 4th Cavalry Division was broken up in France. The Artillery and all support troops remained in France along with the British regiments, only the Indian regiments being sent to Palestine, where the division was re-constituted using some of the regiments, the
Artillery and support troops of the Yeomanry Division. The 5th Cavalry Division left France for Palestine as an intact entity, but without its British regiments. What actually left France therefore, were eleven Cavalry regiments plus the supporting troops of one Cavalry division - in effect, a strong division. The war strength of an Indian Cavalry regiment was in fact slightly greater than that of a British regiment, with four medium-sized squadrons instead of three strong ones. On transfer to the British Cavalry divisions those British regiments which had previously served in Indian divisions absorbed their extra squadron to bring them into line with British practice, indicating that by 1918 the difference in numbers was not significant. At a maximum, the Indian Cavalry force which left France represented the equivalent of one and a quarter British Cavalry divisions. By the Quartermaster-General's calculations, the forage and food saved for this force in France would be, for the approximately 260 days between its leaving France and the end of the war, at most the equivalent of 87,000 ship tons in transport. Making allowance for unknown or variable factors, this might be stretched to 90,000 ship tons.

Against this must be set the shipping costs of moving the Indian Cavalry to Palestine and the Machine Gun battalions converted from Yeomanry to France. Field Service Regulations, cited by the Quartermaster-General, laid down that for sea transport eight ship tons should be allowed for each horse in these circumstances and two ship tons for each
man. Taking this time a minimum, it is unlikely that the eleven Cavalry regiments and divisional troops which left France amounted to a force weaker than 8,000 men and horses. This would therefore require at least 80,000 ship tons to transport it. The five Machine Gun battalions sent from Palestine to France were formed from nine Yeomanry regiments. Even if these were considerably under strength it seems unlikely that the battalions mustered fewer than 800 men each or 4,000 altogether. This force would therefore have required at least 8,000 ship tons to transport it. This left at least 4,000 horses still in Palestine, and requiring to be fed. These were apparently used as remounts for the Cavalry still left in the country. In addition, the British Cavalry regiments in France released from Indian Cavalry divisions (or their replacements) and earmarked for conversion to cyclists or machine gunners, represented no saving in supplies. The men clearly still required to be fed. It seems improbable, given the constant demand for horses in France, that they were shipped out of the country. If it had been done, presuming the nine regiments involved were considerably under strength at 500 horses and men each, this would have required 36,000 ship tons.

To this cost must be added the cost of feeding the two extra Cavalry regiments in Palestine (eleven Indian less nine Yeomanry) following the re-deployment. At a low average these might have been 500 men and horses each. (Indian Cavalry regimental histories suggest that this
The horses, being fed on the Palestine scale of 9\(\frac{1}{2}\) pounds of barley and 6 pounds of hay daily, would consume a little under 3\(\frac{1}{2}\) tons for each regiment daily. The men's rations would have amounted to a little over one ton for each regiment daily. An unknown amount of this, probably the bulk, came from Egypt rather than Britain. Making no additional allowance for the weight of ammunition, equipment or any other factor, it will therefore be assumed that each regiment received no more than one ton of supplies each day from Britain. Bringing in the Quartermaster-General's calculations, this would have required 2.719 ship tons each to transport it to France, or by Robertson's estimate six times the amount, or 16.3 ship tons to Palestine. For the 260 days remaining of the war this would have required a total of a little more than 4,000 ship tons for one regiment, or 8,000 for two.

The maximum saving of shipping which could have been achieved by the re-deployment was therefore 90,000 tons. It was probably considerably less. The immediate shipping cost was 88,000 ship tons, plus a further 8,000 ship tons for the rest of the war, at a minimum.

By Curzon's estimate, a reasonable sized transport ship was 4,000 tons. British shipping losses for April 1918 were 214,426 ship tons, and for May 179,395 ship tons.

Source: Memoranda on Cavalry, memo. by Q.M.G. to C.-in-C. E.E.F., 14 November 1916, Acc 3155.214h Haig
### PART ONE

1: Total of Regular Cavalry (Guards, Line and Depot) in the British Army from 1871-2 to 1914-5

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2: Number of Regular Cavalry as a Percentage of All Regular Troops 1871-2 to 1914-15

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3: Trained Troop Horses as Percentage of Regular Cavalry 1871-2 to 1914-15 Actually Serving with Regiment

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4: Cost of the Regular Cavalry as a Percentage of the total Gross Army Estimates 1888-9 to 1914-15

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Note: n.a. means not available
No figures available before 1888-9

5: Net Army Estimates 1872-3 to 1914-15 as a Percentage of the Net Estimate for 1871-2, corrected for Real Prices

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6: Net Army Estimate for Cavalry 1893-4 to 1914-15 as a Percentage of the Net Estimate for 1892-3, corrected for Real Prices

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7: Approximate Cost per annum of Soldiers of other Branches as a Percentage of the Cost of a Line Cavalry Soldier 1888-9 to 1914-15

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8: Number of Yeomanry on Muster Rolls 1871-2 to 1913-14

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9: Number of Yeomanry Training per annum 1878-9 to 1913-14

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<td>26,811</td>
<td>23,036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1906-7</th>
<th>1907-8</th>
<th>1908-9</th>
<th>1909-10</th>
<th>1910-11</th>
<th>1911-12</th>
<th>1912-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23,498</td>
<td>23,471</td>
<td>27,638</td>
<td>26,545</td>
<td>26,447</td>
<td>26,447</td>
<td>26,433</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1913-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25,993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: no figures available before 1878-9
10: Annual Yeomanry Estimates 1872-3 to 1908-9 as a Percentage of the Estimate for 1871-2, corrected for Real Prices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1871-2</th>
<th>1872-3</th>
<th>1873-4</th>
<th>1874-5</th>
<th>1875-6</th>
<th>1876-7</th>
<th>1877-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1871-2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878-9</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>97.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885-6</td>
<td>108.9</td>
<td>120.7</td>
<td>123.6</td>
<td>120.8</td>
<td>118.1</td>
<td>115.6</td>
<td>111.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-3</td>
<td>118.3</td>
<td>121.1</td>
<td>128.6</td>
<td>129.5</td>
<td>132.9</td>
<td>136.4</td>
<td>129.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899-00</td>
<td>252.2</td>
<td>603.1</td>
<td>799.8</td>
<td>974.8</td>
<td>799.8</td>
<td>770.5</td>
<td>721.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906-7</td>
<td>1907-8</td>
<td>1908-9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>672.4</td>
<td>623.1</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: After 1908 the Yeomanry cost was included in the total cost of the Territorial Army

Source: All figures in Part One derived from the Army Estimates 1870-1 to 1914-15 (War Office)
PART TWO

1: Branch of Senior Officers in the British Army
January 1895

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Generals</th>
<th>Lieutenant-Generals</th>
<th>Major-Generals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infantry</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marines</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Army</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2: Average Age of General Officers in the British Army
January 1895

- Generals (excluding Royal appointments): 64 years
- Lieutenant-Generals (excluding Royal appointments): 60 years
- Lieutenant-Generals of Cavalry: 61 years
- Major-Generals (excluding Royal appointments): 57 years
- Major-Generals of Cavalry: 57 years

3: Staff College Graduates among General Officers in the British Army January 1895

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant-Generals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant-Generals of Cavalry</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major-Generals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major-Generals of Cavalry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4: Branch of Senior Officers in the British Army January 1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Lieutenant-Generals</th>
<th>Temporary Lieutenant-Generals</th>
<th>Major-Generals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infantry</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8\frac{1}{2}</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8\frac{1}{2}</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marines</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6\frac{1}{2}</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6\frac{1}{2}</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Army</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5: Average Age of General Officers in the British Army January 1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant-Generals</td>
<td>59 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant-Generals promoted to that rank after July 1914</td>
<td>58 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant-Generals of Cavalry</td>
<td>57 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Lieutenant-Generals</td>
<td>55\frac{1}{2} years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Lieutenant-Generals of Cavalry</td>
<td>55 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major-Generals (including temporary Lieutenant-Generals)</td>
<td>56 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major-Generals promoted to that rank after July 1914</td>
<td>55 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major-Generals of Cavalry (including temporary Lieutenant-Generals)</td>
<td>53 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6: Staff College Graduates among General Officers in the British Army January 1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant-Generals</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45\frac{1}{2}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant-Generals promoted to that rank after July 1914</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45\frac{1}{2}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant-Generals of Cavalry</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank Description</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major-Generals</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major-Generals promoted to that rank after July 1914</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major-Generals of Cavalry</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All ages correct to the nearest half-year; all percentages correct to the nearest half a per cent

7: Promotion Prospects for Regimental Cavalry Officers between June 1915 and June 1918 from a Sample of Six Regiments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Officers in sample June 1915</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number promoted June 1915-June 1918</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number still with regiment June 1918</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number still with regiment receiving promotion before June 1918</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number serving with reserve of regiment June 1918</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number with reserve of regiment promoted by June 1918</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers transferred to Staff work by June 1918</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers on Staff work promoted by June 1918</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers transferred to R.F.C. by June 1918</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers in R.F.C. promoted by June 1918</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers transferred to Tank Corps by June 1918</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers promoted in Tank Corps by June 1918</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers transferred to Machine Gun Corps by June 1918</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers promoted in Machine Gun Corps by June 1918</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers transferred to Infantry by June 1918</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers promoted in Infantry by June 1918</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers transferred to Artillery by June 1918</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers promoted in Artillery by June 1918</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers transferred to other branches including those achieving General rank by June 1918</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers promoted in other branches by June 1918</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number transferred from regiment by June 1918</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number transferred from regiment receiving promotion by June 1918</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number seconded or retired by June 1918 12
Number dead or left the Army by June 1918 23

Percentage of all officers promoted June 1915-June 1918 56
Percentage of officers still with regiment promoted 58
Percentage of officers having left regiment promoted 83

Note: Sample taken from the following six regiments, chosen from all three Cavalry divisions as representative of the various types of Cavalry:
1st Life Guards; 2nd Dragoon Guards; 2nd Dragoons; 3rd Hussars; 5th Lancers; 1st Essex Yeomanry

8: Cavalry Transfers to the R.F.C. and the Tank Corps 1914-18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total R.F.C.</th>
<th>Cavalrymen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1915:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers under</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1916:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wing Commanders</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squadron Commanders</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight Commanders</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment Officers</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flying Officers</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balloon Officers</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1918:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wing Commanders</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squadron Commanders</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight Commanders</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the R.F.C. was not dependent upon transfers but also recruited direct

Source: All tables in Part Two derived from the Monthly and Quarterly Army Lists (War Office)
## PART THREE

### 1: Casualties of the Regular Cavalry and Yeomanry August 1914—September 1919 in Various Theatres of War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Killed</th>
<th>Wounded</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France &amp; Belgium</td>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>10,997</td>
<td>1,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yeomanry</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>1,981</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yeomanry</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Gallipoli)</td>
<td>Yeomanry</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salonika</td>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yeomanry</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesopotamia</td>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>1,434</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yeomanry</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>3,780</td>
<td>11,310</td>
<td>1,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Palestine)</td>
<td>Yeomanry</td>
<td>2,426</td>
<td>5,155</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>Cavalry</td>
<td>6,206</td>
<td>16,465</td>
<td>2,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yeomanry</td>
<td>10,997</td>
<td>2,765</td>
<td>6,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>17,122</td>
<td>19,225</td>
<td>4,264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2: Official Strengths of Regular Cavalry Reserves in All Stages of Training October 1914 to July 1917

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Other Ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 1914</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>32,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1915</td>
<td>1,061</td>
<td>33,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1915</td>
<td>1,072</td>
<td>34,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1915</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>21,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1915</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>20,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1916</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>17,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1916</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>18,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1916</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>18,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1916</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>18,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1917</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>14,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1917</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>20,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1917</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>22,621</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: after July 1917 Cavalry recruiting was stopped permanently until the end of the war
3: Cavalry in British Forces in Various Theatres 1914-1918 as a Percentage of the Total and Combat Strengths in these Theatres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Mediterranean</th>
<th>Salonika</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Mesopotamia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 1914</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat</td>
<td>9.28</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1915</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9.48</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1916</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1917</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>6.51</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>8.06</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1918</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cavalry in this table includes Yeomanry and all British Mounted forces

4: Combat Strengths of Various Branches of the Army in France and Belgium on 1 September 1918

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch</th>
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<th>Cyclist Corps</th>
<th>Machine Gun Corps</th>
<th>Tank Corps</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13,644</td>
<td>4,733</td>
<td>52,030</td>
<td>11,723</td>
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</table>

Source: All tables in Part Three derived from Statistical Abstract of Information Regarding the Armies at Home and Abroad, 1 October 1919 (Imperial War Museum)
BRITISH UNITS OF MEASUREMENT

Currency: Before 1971 the Pound (£) was subdivided into twenty shillings (s) each of which was divided into twelve pence (d). There were thus 240 pence to a pound, one shilling was the equivalent of five (modern) pence and one old penny of 0·41 pence.

Length: One inch is the equivalent of 25·4 mm. There are twelve inches to each foot (305 mm), three feet to each yard (0·914 metres) and 1,760 yards to each mile (1,609 metres). For bullet calibres the following are approximate conversions: ·577 inches is 14·655 mm; ·45 inches is 11·43 mm; ·303 inches is 7·696 mm. For approximate conversion when judging long distances, three feet or one yard may be taken as equal to a metre, and a mile as equal to 1·5 kilometres.

Weight: One ounce is the equivalent of 28·35 grammes. There are sixteen ounces to each pound (0·454 kilograms), fourteen pounds to each stone (6·36 kilograms) and 160 stones to each ton (1,016 kilograms). For approximate conversion a pound may be taken as just under half a kilogramme, a stone as a little less than 6½ kilogrammes, and a ton as a little more than 1,000 kilogrammes. Twenty stones is just over 127 kilogrammes.

Temperature: On the Fahrenheit scale the boiling point of
water is 212 degrees, and its freezing point is 32 degrees. To convert to Centigrade subtract 32 from the temperature, multiply the result by 5 and divide by 9. One hundred degrees Fahrenheit is therefore almost 38 degrees Centigrade.
<table>
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Haslam National Army Museum
Kitchener Public Record Office P.R.O. 30/57
Liddell Hart Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives
Marter National Army Museum
Paterson National Army Museum
Rawlinson/Boer National Army Museum
Rawlinson/WW1 Churchill Archive Centre
Roberts National Army Museum
Robertson Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives
Smith-Dorrien British Library Students Room
Talbot-Rice National Army Museum
Thorne Imperial War Museum
Wilson Imperial War Museum
Winwood National Army Museum
Wolseley Hove Public Library

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Blackwoods Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine
CJ The Cavalry Journal
JRUSI Journal of the Royal United Services Institute, later the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies
19th Century The Nineteenth Century, later The Nineteenth Century and After
USM Colburn's United Service Journal, later the United Service Magazine

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