

LETTER FROM MAJOR-GENERAL T. L. ROSSER, C.S.A.¹

Baltimore, Md., Jan. 27, 1868.

COLONEL,—Enclosed you will find a few thoughts on the subject of your enquiry of the 18th instant.

I have given you the summary of my convictions without discussing the circumstances which led to them.

Neither the Yankees nor Confederates employed cavalry in the late war, it was all *mounted rifles*. I had one brigade (Ashby's old command), and its history fully sustains the theories of Sydlitz and Nolan as regards the irresistibility of cavalry charges.

Cavalry can sometimes be employed successfully in a *coup de main*, but is not safe to undertake it without mounted rifles. During the late war I rode into the strongly-fortified post of New Creek and captured the garrison, with cavalry, and with the loss of only two men. But when I undertook the same thing at Beverly, I saw I would not [sic] succeed on horseback, and dismounted in two hundred yards of the camp, and attacked it as infantry, and thus easily accomplished on foot that which I undoubtedly would have failed in on horseback.

Cavalry was not used on the battle-fields as Ney and [367] Murat used it under the great Napoleon, and the reason was, *that it was not cavalry!*

I am pleased to serve you and my noble friend General Early.

Very truly yours,

THOS. L. ROSSER,

Major-General, C. S. A.

Colonel Geo. T. Denison.

The Cavalry Soldier.

No soldier should be taken into the cavalry service *directly*, but into a general camp of instruction, and there exercised in the use of the various arms until his capacity for each be determined, *intellectually* and *physically*. Then no one should be taken into the cavalry who is not possessed of at least ordinary intelligence, a strong constitution, and of more than ordinary muscular power, for in battle his *muscle* and weight of his horse, are to determine results. Hence he should be a good rider and possess a strong arm.

¹ Printed as Appendix D, pages 366-68, in George T. Denison, *Modern Cavalry: Its Organisation, Armament, and Employment in War* (London 1868).

My experience has been, that the majority of men are defective as soldiers in the feet, and if this is the only difficulty they answer just as good a purpose for cavalry service with this defect as without it. Cavalry which is not *thoroughly drilled* and *ably officered* is worthless under any circumstances. These requisites are necessary in every arm, but more so in cavalry than any other; for in battle, a cavalry soldier has his frightened horse to manage and at the same time to use his weapon, at close quarters upon his adversary, whilst infantry and artillery are employed more or less at long range.

In this country, United States, where there is so much [368] wooded and mountainous country, mounted troops should consist of *cavalry* and *mounted rifles*, in the proportion of two of cavalry to one of *mounted rifles*. The cavalry armed with *sabres* and *pistols*, and *nothing else*. The mounted rifles armed with *breech-loading carbines* and *pistols*, *without sabres*.

I regard the lance a fancy arm entirely; does very well on parade, but worthless against disciplined troops. The sabre should be light with sufficient length and strength, and almost if not entirely straight.

The pistol, Colt's heavy revolver, I think the best. '*Spencer's light charge*' carbine, I think, is the best for mounted, rifles. The next in order of efficiency is the *Sharpe's carbine*.

The M'Clellan saddle is by far the best I ever saw for cavalry. It is strong, light, and comfortable to man and horse.

Cavalry in this country cannot be regarded as *a defensive* arm of service, and should never be detached from the main army without being accompanied by *artillery* and *mounted rifles*. It is worthless except in the charge, and should never be used for any other purpose. The cavalry soldier should never be dismounted to fight if you expect him to ride over masses of infantry, but be educated to the belief *that nothing can withstand a well-executed charge of cavalry*, and should feel perfectly at home on horseback. All picketing should be done by mounted rifles, and all escorts and guards for trains and the like should be composed of the same, and the cavalry *always kept in mass, and used in the charge alone*.

I much prefer the *single* rank formation to the double. It is more easily managed, and nothing like so many accidents occur.