

The "stamina" of the man-horse couple neglected, the "moral strength" of the rider started.

2/2 - BRENNUS 4.0

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Published on 22/11/2019

Histoire & stratégie

The honor guard is young, very young. He often comes out of a family cocoon where he is not constrained. At that time, there were many servants. If a large number of guards mastered horse riding, their condition took them away from the chores related to the maintenance of the mounts (grooming, food), those of its armament.

Overnight, these young people are forced to get up very early; they are forced into a new world, where you sleep under the stars, where you have to submit to military discipline while your life is at stake. Generally speaking, the guard of honour is full of ardour and enthusiasm, showing extreme enthusiasm in the first few marches. But he has neither the physical stamina nor the moral constancy to sustain it for long. His bravery is not in question, what he lacks is the ability to make an effort^[13]. ^{13]} The campaigns of 1813 and 1814 were a succession of precipitous and rapid marches, orders and counter-orders, continual warnings... the weather was dreadful: rain and mud were the soldier's daily routine. To make matters worse, the administration was deficient and very few distributions (food, shoes) took place. In Saxony, in five months, our young men benefit from it, in all and for all that of three and in 1814 none! Unaccustomed to life in the field, the soldier suffers. Thus, the retreat from Leipzig resembles a Way of the Cross. On 19 October 1813, the imperial army begins a retreat under difficult conditions (lack of food, unfavourable climatic conditions, harassment by the enemy). Morale is affected. On 20 October, the columns must pass through a parade in Rippach (near Lützen).

Congestion was at its worst. The officers observed the men of the Imperial Guard and the honour guards: "it was necessary to march in single file and slip, so to speak, through this narrow parade. The Old Guard "ballasted" through the obstacle. On the other hand, the column of honour guards was divided into several fractions: "... they came in pairs, in fours, in platoons...". Some of the weakest were unable to keep up with their regiment. Some were even so harassed following the battle of October 18, 1813, that they took refuge in the outskirts of the city and fell asleep in the gardens surrounding it. A large number were taken prisoner, while others escaped back to the Rhine in small groups in disarray. But the moral crisis is such that they continue on their way to their homes, remaining deaf to the

exhortations of their officers. Indeed, in this year 1813, the lack of cohesion is felt. Relations between officers and soldiers were strained. The men complained about their cadres: "they grouped themselves around me and assured me that they had good will but that their officers knew nothing [14]." General Nansouty, commander of the Imperial Guard cavalry, tells us. On the other hand, it is also true that many leaders were suspicious of their men. They are so different from those with whom they once criss-crossed Europe. They barely know them and are reluctant to show affection to these barely trained cavalymen, who have to be woken up at three o'clock in the morning to be sure of riding a horse two hours later and who have not had the opportunity to prove their worth.

When it comes to mounts, the commodity is scarce [15]. Successive requisitions have depleted the resource in France (Limousin, Normandy) [16]. In principle, the age of the horse should be between five and ten years [17], but the reality is significantly different. The horse is young too. It is thus not very docile [18]. 18] Like its rider, it must benefit from a specific training. First of all, it must be associated with noises. The mere rattling of 250 sabers (a squadron) drawn from their scabbards at the same time, can cause panic. Trumpets are sounded at meal times. They have to get used to the smells. For example, blank guns are fired and then the animals are made to sniff the basins. As for the charge itself, it's a question of pace and you have to stay in line. In principle, the mounts are even used to trampling on the entrails so that in the charge they do not try to avoid corpses, thus breaking the line and risking disrupting their riders. The aim is to avoid panic and confusion. Finally, the mount must also get used to the weight of the men and the weight of his pack. The light cavalry horse must be agile and enduring. As you can see, the man-horse relationship cannot be improvised and requires a long apprenticeship, which proves to be partly truncated for the regiments we are interested in.

The erosion of "mass" and the lack of "agility".

The squadron leader of Arbaud de Jouques (4th regiment), who left Lyon at the head of his squadron, was forced to send back twelve of his men, whose horses had been wounded, from the very first stage! When he arrived in Bourg, he left three others behind and as many in Lons-le-Saunier, then in Besançon five others, in Strasbourg seven and between Frankfurt and Gotha eight! The mounts, not used to fatigue, wear out all the more as their riders are inexperienced and themselves unaccustomed to the effort. Indeed, we walk from three o'clock in the morning, in complete darkness. The young men still asleep ride on their saddles and consequently cause injuries to their horses. They warm up their mounts by nodding left and right. On August 18, 1813, when he arrived in Leipzig, the general who commanded the honour guards told the minister: "I have many tired horses and I am afraid I will have to leave some here. From August 30, 1813, the honour guards moved around the city of Dresden. They do not take part in serious engagements, but marches and risers follow one another in the cold, in the rain, in the mud. This youth, which is moreover malnourished, suffers and its mounts are ruined. As of September 15, 1813, the Emperor and 1529 guards of honour were on duty with the Emperor. Of these, 446 were unfit for combat, which represents 31.6% of the strength. As of October 1 of the same year, 558 of the 1,524 men were unarmed. This represents 42 per cent of the total number of men unavailable for duty. On October 15, 1813, 625 men were unavailable; the figure had risen to 44%!

On 30 August 1813, the very day of the victory of Dresden, in which the guards of honour did not take part, the French sovereign expressed his desire to see his elite corps (six squadrons present) manoeuvre for the first time. "When we made a few right turns by

four, a few left half-turns by four, it didn't take more than that to confuse us [20]". After this sort of warm-up, a maneuver much appreciated by the Emperor was ordered: " ... it was by the wing platoons behind the center, pass the parade. At a command as new as it was foreign to us... we all looked at each other for a moment, and then there went off a platoon of one side, the other on another, in spite of the cries of our officers... the Emperor kept a serious chill [21]". The sovereign of the French became aware that he had shown too much optimism, hence his wise decision concerning the "second echelon" of the Guard of Honour.

On October 18, 1813, the third day of the "battle of the nations", 2600 Guards of Honour were in battle with the Imperial Guard [22] (last line). Their leaders expressed their concern to General Nansouty, who commanded the Imperial Guard. "The lack of knowledge of their maneuvers and their overall lack of knowledge can lead to disorder in their ranks and their loss," they reported. [23] Moreover, the Emperor, himself, made them retreat twice during the battle. One guard of honour [24] wrote in his recollections: "Napoleon, who was generally very skilful and who knew perfectly well the art of disposing his army before the battle, made the best possible use of the Guard of Honour. He had it placed in reserve supported on all sides by the Old Guard. He placed it in such a way that it could be seen clearly by the enemy army... Some of the senior officers of the Allies told me at Frankfurt that the sight of a cavalry corps which looked formidable and which was believed to be in a condition to make a decisive charge caused some uncertainty in the movements of the part of the Allied forces which was opposed to them". At the end of the day, the corps accompanied the Imperial Guard in its offensive movement, but there was no question of a charge.

Twelve days later, in Hanau (October 30), the young phalanx behaved admirably, bearing a charge from the Bavarians that had just repelled that of the mounted grenadiers of the Imperial Guard. vrier), in Château-Thierry (12 February), in Meaux (27-28 February), in Reims (13 March), in Arcis-sur-Aube (20 March), in Saint-Dizier (22 March) and in Paris (30 March). But these regiments do not adopt any statutory formation: neither that of formations in column by four (four front mounted cavalrymen), in column by platoons or in columns by companies, nor any formation in line (the squadron is in two ranks). They know only loose order, i.e. as fodder or skirmishers (formation adapted for reconnaissance missions, to harass the enemy), and irregular order, unable to adopt any formation whatsoever. The aspect they offer is that of a swarm of horsemen, in a mess.

It is the principle of the massive, tight charge from which the effect of the shock is expected. But the consequences are also severe losses. The charge is large, but so is the retreat. It must be done in good order and quickly carried out in the midst of enemy infantrymen. It is also a movement that must be worked on. Our regiments are obviously unaware of it. Thus, in Rheims, after a victorious charge, one against eight, the 3rd Regiment of Honor Guards, cornered under the city walls, was unable to withdraw in good order and was shot from the ramparts held by the enemy. They were shot from the enemy-held ramparts.

Conclusion

In 1813, Napoleon no longer had any real freedom of action. Our young men, who had left their depots, riding horses they did not know and sometimes even feared, were sent to the war squadrons, just after learning the basics of their new trade. There is no time for methodical training. Soon, they came into contact with their fellow gunners who were

serving pieces they did not know exactly how to handle and for which they had no affection, and with infantrymen who carried rifles but used them little and had no respect for them.

In the preceding narrative, the lack of training influences several factors of operational superiority, disrupting their efficiency in the role they are supposed to play in the conquest and maintenance of ascendancy over the adversary. The problem is that the operational superiority factors are more or less driving each other, and their interaction causes a mutual decrease in their effectiveness. On closer inspection, it is probably the case of the "mass", which erodes over time, that is of most concern. And yet, even then, it is the mass that makes it possible to obtain the break...and we know how the story ends. By affecting the "power" of friendly forces, lack of training reduces the effect of "destroying the enemy", making it more difficult to dominate the opponent. The demonstration is made: "Difficult training, lost war".

[13] One cannot help but note, with the exception of two centuries, the similarities between these soldiers and those of today.

[14] Archives of Vincennes XAB 47. Nansouty at Clarke, December 7, 1813.

[15] By January 1813, 15,000 horses had already been requisitioned.

[16] They will be picked up in Bavaria, Switzerland, Friesland or the Grand Duchy of Würzburg.

[17] "... under any pretext whatsoever, I don't want horses that are not five years old..." orders the Emperor. "Precepts and Judgments of Napoleon", Paris, Nancy, Berger-Levrault, 1913.

[18] At least a dozen guards have been killed or maimed for life as a result of a bad horse kick.

[19] Archives of Vincennes C₂ 154.

[20] Depréaux (A.), "Itinerary of a brigadier of the 2^e regiment of honour guards during the Saxony campaign", sabretache book, 1924.

[21] Depréaux (A.), "Itinerary of a brigadier of the 2^e regiment of honour guards during the Saxony campaign", sabretache booklet, op. cit.

[22] The increase in personnel is due to the arrival in Saxony of squadrons from France.

[23] Archives of Vincennes 1 M 2331.

[24] Boymans (J.A.), " Le garde d'honneur ou épisode du règne de Napoléon Buonaparte ", Bruxelles, Weisenbruck, 1822.

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Release date 20/11/2019

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