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Group E $\frac{505}{510}$ Remounts, Acclimatization, and Breeds

In the heat and dust, cold and snow, rain and mud of the Russian campaign, the horses performed excellently both in combat and on the march. At times, such as during a heavy snow and in the muddy season, it was they to an overwhelming extent who did not buckle under the elements of nature. Horses had to be used to an ever greater extent, as the shortages in supply trucks and gasoline increased. As the campaign continued, no fully motorized force was able to function without horses.

As a result of these extensive and often exceedingly difficult demands on the horses, losses and sicknesses were correspondingly high. Losses were incurred chiefly in combat through air raids, over-exertion, - often in connection with insufficient feeding - through insufficient feeding exclusively, and acute and chronic diseases and epidemics. A considerable number of horses was incurably sick because of the aforementioned facts. Others fell into the hands of the enemy during withdrawals. Injuries and diseases of both infectious and non-infectious types, made it necessary to have continuous recourse to veterinary hospitals and veterinary companies at home and in the theater of operations far in excess of their highest estimates. Such total losses and temporary casualties had to be counterbalanced by remounts.

Remounts were furnished through requisitioning in the Reich and to a small extent in occupied territories. Remuneration was made for requisitioned horses in accordance to standard prices. It was directed that

the establishments whose horses were requisitioned were not to be weakened in their ability to function in so far as their productive capacity as well as breeding of horses was concerned. These establishments were aided through the privilege of buying horses which were still capable of performing work but were no longer fit for military service from veterinary hospitals and remount depots. Horses under 4 and above 15 years of age or stud stock and pregnant mares were not requisitioned, and naturally, neither was such stock which was unfit for military service because of a physical or health condition.

The remount service was controlled and checked by the Commander of the Replacement Army. For this task he availed himself of the Horse Requisitioning Commissions. For the most part, requisitioned and captured horses were sent to the remount depots in the zone of the interior, and to a lesser extent, to the remount depots of the armies, where they were conditioned so that they would be delivered to the troops as fit for general service. An examination by the veterinary service was necessary since in requisitioning the horses it was not possible to avoid purchasing some who might be in the incubation stage of an infectious disease and if delivered directly to the unit might carry this infectious disease to the unit. Principally, it was "contagious catarrh of the respiratory tract" which occurred among the purchased horses. Frequently, mange was discovered among captured horses. Captured horses, also, were permitted to be sent to units only after having passed through a conditioning process.

-2- By means of these measures, it was possible to keep the units practically free of infectious horse diseases so that the battleworthiness of units

would not be jeopardized. In this connection during certain particularly difficult situations, such as during the withdrawal from STALINGRAD, only mangle was an exception to the extent that it was not possible to transfer and replace forwith all sick horses and those which were suspected of being affected. Consequently, in these cases mangle took an enormous toll and it lead among other things to the transfer of nearly all horses as soon as the situation permitted. Almost the entire effective strength of horses had to be replaced at that time.

Movement of replacement horses to the remount depots of the Armies was usually effected by rail transportation and occasionally also by road march. These replacements were moved to the corps and divisions in most cases by road march and in rare instances by rail and motor transport. Horses captured in large numbers were received at special veterinary collecting stations.

In spite of all the losses - they were estimated at somewhat more than one and a half million - it was possible up to the very end of the war to furnish the required number of horses without impairing to any considerable degree the economy in Germany or the occupied territories. This was due to the efforts of breeding farms and the veterniary service. By exterminating epidemics, healing sick and wounded horses, conditioning in recuperation centers for horses, and giving instruction in the care, feeding, employment and utilization of horses, the veterniary service relieved the remount service to a great extent.

Acclimatization

The horses from Germany and also those from occupied territories soon became inured to the Russian climate. Sickneses, caused by climatic

peculiarities, occurred rarely. Forage requirements increased in proportion to the size and weight of the horses. Forage and, especially, the roughage which was necessary could not be procured everywhere in the East. The need was greatest in the central and northern sectors where especially during the winter of 1941 - 42 large numbers of horses perished because of exhaustion and hunger. In this connection, it may be noted that our horse-drawn vehicles and weapons, particularly field kitchens and steel baggage wagons, were in general too heavy for conditions in Russia. The heavy field howitzers in particular caused great losses.

Breeds

As a rule the light and medium weight horses of western Europe performed satisfactorily in the East. With regard to the heavy, cold-blooded horses, the matter of forage was also a prime consideration. This, however, called for correspondingly lighter weight vehicles and weapons than those used by the German Army. Normally prime movers would have to be used to pull heavier equipment.

The mountain divisions usually used mule and mountain horses (Haflinger, Bosier, etc.) as pack animals which to some extent were purchased abroad. They became accustomed to the Russian climate without much difficulty and they were less susceptible to external and internal diseases as well as infectious diseases than horses. They are more easily satisfied and less particular about their feed than horses. One of their chief characteristics is that they will not permit themselves to be driven beyond that extent of effort and pace which they can easily endure. The phrase "die in harness" can only be applied to the horse and not to the mule. Because of these

-3- characteristics the mule suffered from fewer privations and the losses sustained from over-exertion and exhaustion were lower. They certainly would also have been very useful to other type units. However, mule breeding in Germany did not exist to the extent whereby the demands could have been met. Attempts were still in the initial stages.

Comparatively few horses were captured in Russia. Almost without exception, the ones captured were small horses of 1.2- to 1.5-meters in height. There were also many animals smaller in size than 1.2-meters, but these could not be used to pull our vehicles or serve our purposes. The available "Panje-horses"* proved to be extremely tractable and had a great amount of endurance. Their feed and shelter requirements were quite simple. They are not too well-suited for climbing steep mountain-paths. The harness for Panje horses is conceivably simple and consequently easily replaced. Panje horses, generally, have very hard hoofs and rarely require horseshoes while working on soft ground. As first requirement, however, our vehicles had to be adjusted to the Russian roads and this type of horse. Until that was accomplished, that is as long as Panje horses were being harnessed to the heavy German vehicles, over-exertion took a heavy toll. The vehicles, used by the natives, were built for small and light-weight horses and since they were drawn by only one horse, they had only a light loading capacity, at the utmost 500 kg. and in most instances only half that amount. In adequate numbers, however, they could be very useful and to some extent could be put to even better use by a simple change in construction. The

*Ed: Panje horses - horses of small stature, indigenous to Russia.

Panje horses lacked sufficient strength to pull light howitzers, the common field piece of the German Army, even when used in multiple teams. Even the sled which played such a great part - one might say a decisive part - in Russia during the winter also had to be constructed correspondingly light in weight. German sleds were too heavy. The light field wagon model 96, placed on runners, served well as an adequate improvisation.

Horses of other Russian breeds were limited in number and of widely different species. The breed appeared to be tough throughout, for all Russian horses were able to withstand climatic conditions to a great degree. Real heavy horses did not exist.