THEIRS NOT TO REASON WHY

HORSING THE BRITISH ARMY 1875-1925

Graham Winton

‘THEIRS NOT TO REASON WHY’

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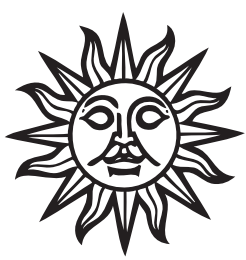
Horsing the British Army 1875-1925

Wolverhampton Military Studies No. 2

Graham Winton



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"Theirs Not To Reason Why
Theirs but to do and die"
[Lord Tennyson... *The Charge of The Light Brigade*]

DEDICATION

ELINOR
EDWIN and FRITHA

My grandfathers and great uncle who fought in, and survived the 1914-1918 war

Sgt. 47983 Charles Walter Kingdon (Winton), RFA., Regular Army
1889-1963

Gunner, 172885, Frank Ambrose Brain, RFA
1889-1950

Private, S/10415, Rifleman James Bloxham
11th Battalion Rifle Brigade, POW March 1918
1892-1954

To Catherine and my personal friends whose belief in my ability gave me the confidence to undertake this book; the knowledge, advice and support of some were all too suddenly removed.

Rose E. B. Coombs, MBE, WAAF
The expert on battlefields of the 1914-18 War
Author of *Before Endeavours Fade*
1922-1991

Richard M. Y. Shackleton, Lecturer
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1944-1990

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Life Guards
Sgt. Honourable Artillery Company (HAC) Light Cavalry
Gunner "B" Battery 1st Regiment HAC (RFA)
1936-1994

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Abbreviations

AAG	Assistant Adjutant General
ADAVS	Assistant Director Army Veterinary Service (also ADVS)
ADR	Assistant Director of Remounts
ADT	Assistant Director of Transport
AIR	Assistant Inspector of Remounts
AMSM	Army Medical Services Museum
ANVC	Australian and New Zealand Veterinary Corps
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
AOC	Army Ordnance Corps
ASC	Army Service Corps
ASCJ	*Army Service Corps Journal*
AQMG	Assistant Quartermaster General
AVC	Army Veterinary Corps
AVC (TF)	Army Veterinary Corps Territorial Force
AVD	Army Veterinary Department
AVS	Army Veterinary Service
BAF	Board of Agriculture and Fisheries
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
C-in- C	Commander in Chief
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CO	Commanding Officer
CVS	Civilian Veterinary Service
DAAG	Deputy Assistant Adjutant General
DADR	Deputy Assistant Director of Remounts
DADT	Deputy Assistant Director of Transport
DAQMG	Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General
DDAVS	Deputy Director of Army Veterinary Services (also DDVS, DDAVC)
DDMO	Deputy Director of Military Operations
DDR	Deputy Director Remounts
DG	Director General
DGAVS	Director General Army Veterinary Service (also DGAVC, DGAVD, DVS)
DMO	Director of Military Operations

DQMG	Deputy Quartermaster General
DR	Director of Remounts
EAVC	East African Veterinary Corps
EF	Expeditionary Force
EEF	Egyptian Expeditionary Force
FA	Field Artillery
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOC-in-C	General Officer Commander in Chief
GS	General Service (wagon)
Hansard (C)	Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons
Hansard (L)	Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords
HD	Heavy draught horse
HIS	Hunter Improvement Society
HTC	Horse Transport Company
IEF	Italian Expeditionary Force
IGC	Inspector General Communications
IGR	Inspector General Remounts
IQMG	Inspector Quartermaster General (Horse feeding)
IYC	Imperial Yeomanry Committee
JRAVC	*Journal of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps*
LD	Light draught horse (or LDH)
LHBS	Light Horse Breeding Society (also LHB for light horse breeding)
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
MEF	Mediterranean Expeditionary Force
MGSC	Machine Gun Squadron (Cavalry)
MT	Motor Transport
MTC	Motor Transport Company
Mtd. Inf.	Mounted Infantry
MV	Motor vehicles
MVS	Mobile Veterinary Section
NCOs	Non-commissioned Officers
NLHBS	National Light Horse Breeding Society
PP.Cd.	*Parliamentary Papers (Cd. Blue Books)*
NA.Kew	National Archives, Kew
PVO	Principal Veterinary Officer
PVS	Principal Veterinary Surgeon
QMG	Quarter Master General
QMS	Quarter Master Sergeant
RA	Royal Artillery
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RASCQ	*Royal Army Service Corps Quarterly*
RC	Royal Commission

RCHB	Royal Commission on Horse Breeding
RCT	Royal Corps Transport
RE	Royal Engineers
RPCCA	*Report of the Purchasing Commission Canada and America*
RFA	Royal Field Artillery
RHA	Royal Horse Artillery
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Protection Cruelty Animals
SA	South Africa
SAA	Small Arms Ammunition
SAVC	South African Veterinary Corps
SVO	Senior Veterinary Officer
VBD	Veterinary Base Depot
VR	*The Veterinary Record*

Glossary

For the various Points of a Horse see the diagram in Appendix II.

Administrative Services Includes: Intercommunication, Medical, Supplies, Transport, Ordnance, Railways, Works, Remounts, Veterinary and Postal.

Administrative Troops Includes: Troops combatant or otherwise, belonging to the Administrative Services, including RE other than those of field units; ASC, RAMC, AOC, AVC.

Army Troops Troops allotted to an Army, but not to any particular division

Casting Sold alive from military service; retired through age, illness, injury or no longer required.

Catarrhal Fever Applies to any of the viral conditions causing micro purulent discharge from the eyes, nose and mouth etc.

Central Powers The major protagonists against the Allies during the First World War. The Empires of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey; joined by the Kingdom of Bulgaria in 1915. So called as they were located between the Russian Empire, France and UK.

Class Military classification to indicate purpose e.g. charger, troop horse, draught.

Clipping Horses have a thicker coat in the winter. This can become a hindrance when the horse is rugged up, exercised, or standing in mud and wet conditions. Clipping, or shaving, all or part of this winter coat can prevent against loss of condition and sickness, for example through excess sweating and saving on grooming time. Minimizing sweating enables a horse to cool and dry quicker and more effectively.

Cob A horse larger than a pony standing 14.2 hands but not over 15 hands. Relatively small and compact, usually a short-legged strongly built horse. The Welsh cob is typical of the classic build of the historic cob.

Cold and hot shoeing Taking a cold shoe and shaping it to make the best fit possible, then nailing into position on the hoof. Hot shoeing is the application of hot shoes to the horses' hooves, the smith uses the anvil to make changes if necessary, cools the shoes and nails them into place.

Colic Acute equine indigestion. Sand colic is caused when a horse ingests sand, from eating off the ground, but not passing it through the system resulting in a build-up in the intestinal system, cecum, or large colon. If not alleviated, this can result in death due to intestinal rupture or large colon displacement.

Dam The female parent of a horse or mule.

Dead Loss Loss from deaths, destruction, captures, straying and casting. Does not include wastage from sickness and injury or any other animals than those paid for out of the public purse.

Dresser Assisted a Veterinary Officer in the treatment of sick animals. Checking and reporting on injuries or symptoms of illness, visiting stables, administering medicines as directed by the Veterinary Officer, responsible for the cleanliness and maintenance of the veterinary hospital as well as equipment and instruments.

Epizootics Veterinary term for an epidemic; an extensive outbreak of an infection affecting animal species and is now usually applied to things like Foot and Mouth Disease, Swine Fever, Rinderpest etc.

Establishment The strength of a unit in peacetime and wartime. The peace establishment generally lists a unit's strength by rank, numbers, employments and horses. The war establishment gave the organisation of a unit in the field, deployment of officers, soldiers, horses and transport; scale of weapons, ammunition and equipment; and arrangements for carrying equipment in the regimental transport. [Hume 2010]

Feather Hair on all four heels of a horse, of varying density and coarseness.

First Line The Regular Army with its reserves, including special reserve, liable for service anywhere.

First Line Transport That which accompanies a unit or regiment and is an integral part of its war organisation to perform its tactical function. It includes vehicles and animals: gun carriages; ammunition wagons; pack animals; limbered or GS wagons or carts carrying ammunition, tools, machine guns, technical stores, bicycles; water carts and cook's wagon or cooker.

Fistulous Withers A pocket or sinus, which discharges pus, often intermittently from the withers. It was caused by a variety of infections but classically by Brucella abortus. A condition affecting the top of the horse's head, poll evil is similar to fistulous withers.

Glanders A serious, highly infectious disease of horses and mules caused by the bacterium Pseudomonas mallei. It affects the bronchial tubes, lungs, glands and skin. Common in wartime, resulting in large number of animals having to be destroyed.

Halter A headstall of leather, rope or webbing used for tying a horse up. Sometimes made to act also as the headpiece of a bridle.

Hands A horse's height is measured in hands (4 inches) and inches. Taken from the highest part of the withers in a perpendicular line to the ground.

Haras Breeding establishment for horses.

Horse By Army Act, Section 190, the expression "Horse" includes mule, or any other beast of whatever description used for burden, or draught, or carrying persons (1912).

Horsemanship The art of riding.

Horsemastership The art of looking after horses, for example, grooming, feeding, watering and correct working use of the animal.

Hunter A horse capable of following a pack of foxhounds hunting a fox at full speed over a countryside with numerous obstacles that the horse must jump. Distinguished as heavy, medium and lightweight hunters.

Inspector-General of Communications (IGC) Has responsibility for the control and co-ordination of all traffic on the Lines of Communication. Commanded all lines of communication units (exclusive of lines of communication defence troops) and regulated the working of all administrative services and departments on the lines of communication.

Jobmaster Person who hires out horses or carriages.

Lines of Communication The logistical system of supply and communication from, base(s) of operation, to the front line(s), by for example, rail, road, navigable waterways, telegraph, telephone and visual signalling. Including the districts through which they pass, within limits determined by the C-in-C.

Lymphangitis Inflammation of the lymphatic system, typically affecting the legs of horses, the most important form being glanders. Ulcerative lymphangitis is also caused by a bacterium Corynebasterium orvis and results in permanent discharges from limbs. Epizootic lymphangitis is caused by a yeast: Histoplasma farcimniosa. It was introduced into the UK in horses coming back from the Angl-Boer War in 1902, was eradicated, briefly reappeared during the 1914-18 War and then finally eradicated from the UK.

Mallein Testing Skin test for glanders (bacterium Pseudomonas mallei).

Mange Parasitic skin disease. There are three forms of mange of which the genus sarcoptic is the worst in its devastating effects and takes longer to kill. The parasite burrows under the skin and lays eggs. Cases of mange appeared particularly in the winter when coats were heavy.

Mean Loss The addition of dead and temporary loss such as injury and sickness.

Mobilisation Process by which an armed force passes from a peace to a war footing; the completion of units for war in men, horses and material.

Mule The offspring of a donkey stallion and a mare or filly. Mules do not reproduce their own kind.

Periodic Ophthalmia A condition of the horse's eye, thought to be due to Leptospira infection; although other causes may exist. The horse is usually only affected in one eye. This becomes inflamed and painful. Relapses are very common, hence 'periodic'. It was also called 'moon blindness'.

Pony Any horse 14.2 hands or less.

Remount MacMunn, 1930 and Tylden, 1965, state it is the technical term for a horse bought for military service before issue to a unit. Hume, 2010, states a remount was an animal that has recently been, or waiting to be, issued to a unit. A regiment would continue to class a horse as a remount until it was sufficiently fit and trained to take its place in the ranks; as with The Kings Troop, RHA today. The Remount Department provided animals for the Army and replaced unit casualties.

Reserve Parks Carrying supplies for a division and Army Troops, maintained on the lines of communication for use in an emergency. They may be used for the transport of ammunition and stores. Organised into sections to carry two days

'iron' rations with groceries and two days oats for one division; plus 1/6th of a cavalry division and 1/6th of the total strength of the units designated lines of communication.

Second Line The Territorial Force, to provide a force for 'home defence' with no obligation to serve abroad.

Second Line Transport The transport trains under the ASC divided into two sections, baggage and supply.

Sickle hocked and Spavin The hock is the joint between the tarsal bones and tibia of a horses leg and takes the greatest strain when the horse is worked. Sickle hocked is due to strained tendons and ligaments, associated with soft tissue injury in the rear, limits the straightening and backward extension of hocks, which limits push-off, propulsion, and speed. The hock is flexed so that the foot is abnormally bowed far under the belly predisposing to spavin from a trauma injury. There are two forms of spavin, bone spavin and bog spavin. Bone spavin is a degenerative bone disease type of osteoarthritis that often causes lameness. Bog spavin, a swelling condition, caused by excessive fluid in the largest hock joints, caused for example by, a stress or trauma injury, uneven loading of the hocks, poor trimming or shoeing, uneven or repeated loading of the lower hock joints.

Sire The male parent of a horse or mule.

Special Reserve Men who enlist into this Reserve, and any ex-soldiers who had served three years with the Regular Army, had been discharged without a pension, and not more than 38 years of age (Army Order 23 of 1912). There were Special Reserve Battalions, one to each pair of linked battalions; on mobilisation they became the depot, training recruits etc. and furnished drafts to their linked battalions on service. There were also Extra Special Reserve Battalions which did not furnish drafts, but were available for service abroad as distinct units. Special Reserve Cavalry, the two regiments of Irish Horse. Reserve Cavalry Regiments – on mobilisation surplus reserves of cavalry were formed into 14 Reserve Regiments, one to each two of the 28 Regiments of Cavalry of the Line.

Stamp A horse's conformation, size and quality relative to intended purpose.

Strangles Severe infection caused by streptococcos equi but precipitated by viral infection or other stress. A respiratory disease including purulent nasal discharge and abcessation of glands. Very contagious. Various complications. Choking or suffocating by compressing the windpipe.

Temporary Loss Loss through sickness and injury.

Thoroughbred A horse registered in the English General Stud Book. A common term for a racehorse.

Type Horse lineage, for example Irish draught type, Hunter type.

Walers Generic name for Australasian saddle horses, in most cases bred from a thoroughbred sire and a light type of farm or ranch mare. Originally most of these remounts were shipped from New South Wales hence the name.

Withers The highest part of a horse's shoulder coming immediately under the pommel of a saddle. The top of the perpendicular where the height of a horse is measured in hands.

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Foreword

Graham Winton's study of the British Army's horse supply between the creation of its Veterinary and Remount Services in the 1870s and its last involvements in the aftershock wars that followed the First World War in the 1920s is a welcome addition to the *Wolverhampton Military Studies Series*. It adds a further perspective to recent studies of the British Army in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, filling a gap in our understanding, and providing an invaluable work of reference.

It is a truism of military history, attributed to several notable twentieth century generals (who probably all used it and agreed with it) that juniors or amateurs study and discuss tactics, while professionals and senior officers study and discuss logistics: the science and art of military supply and practical movement. More recently, it has been changed to include the point that very senior officers study and discuss not simply logistics, but force generation: the creation, training and equipping within the appropriate timescale of the armed forces needed for a war. When dealing with horses, these requirements demanded from the British Army in the period considered by Graham Winton considerable forward planning: a gun or wagon could be made in a matter of days or weeks, but a three year old horse for a cavalry troop or for heavy artillery haulage either took three years to grow, or the funds and transport had to be ready to buy them from elsewhere. This approach to military history has been routine for historians of naval or air warfare, who habitually include in their studies the civilian industrial base for building ships and aircraft, ranging from the supply of timber for masts and keels for the age of sail onwards. But until quite recently, logistics and force generation were seldom much studied by historians of land warfare, and sometimes not at all.

Partly this was due to the precedent set by the early nineteenth century founders of modern military thought, Jomini and Clausewitz, who both saw their subject as starting with generalship and with the armies in existence, trained and equipped. Clausewitz, in particular, considered peacetime supply as an entirely separate activity, irrelevant to his study of war. Partly, the neglect of logistics was due to the desire of many writers to use military history for didactic purposes, glossing over inconvenient logistical truths in their promotion of some master plan for the future, something of which both J.F.C. Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart were particularly guilty; their shared prejudice against horsed cavalry after 1919 also did much to obscure its importance and successes before that date. Partly, logistics often played at best a shadowy

and secondary role to the sheer glamour – for many writing about war from a safe distance – of tactics and battles. The links between civilian supply of equipment to the armed forces, the impact of that supply on the plans and battles of generals, and the importance of the military institutions responsible for joining the two together, first became apparent in studies of the Second World War, in which old distinctions in war had visibly broken down: this included the distinction between land warfare and sea warfare, with the added dimension of air warfare and the importance of amphibious operations; the distinction that sea and air battles were fought by machines with men to work them, whereas land battles were fought by men assisted by machines, which was changed by the growing importance of the tank; and the distinction between the civilian and military war effort, eroded by total war.

Although this new thinking applied to the warfare of the industrialised age, it did not seem relevant to earlier ages in which armies were dependent on horse-power in the literal sense. There was also considerable neglect of practical military issues from historians studying the politics of the First World War, and even more so from historians of the heyday of the British Empire, including how issues of horse supply could impact directly on political calculations in the same way as battleship and submarine building programmes. This deficiency has only begun to be addressed with renewed interest in the Anglo-Boer War and in the transition of the British Army from its established role as a late Victorian Imperial gendarmerie to being a major industrialised continental army in the First World War. These new approaches have been accompanied by a re-investigation of the value of horsed cavalry, and their new tactics in a difficult period of transition between the steep rise of infantry and artillery firepower at the end of the nineteenth century, and the emergence in the aftermath of the First World War of practical cross-country military vehicles driven by internal combustion engines. But as Graham Winton shows, the issue goes beyond the administration of horse supply in peacetime, and the needs of the cavalry, whose requirements for horses have often been confused by historians with the needs of the Army as a whole. In wartime the Army needed a wide range of very different types of horses (including mules and donkeys) in the right numbers for infantry transport, cavalry, artillery, engineers, ambulances, and several smaller functions; it needed these horses trained, and it needed them fed and kept in good condition, which was a major logistical undertaking in itself. The successes and failures of the Army's horse supply for its two major wars of the period, the Anglo-Boer War and the First World War, were critical to its achievements and to their course and outcome. Without horses, the British Army could not have fought these wars; it really is that simple.

Professor Stephen Badsey
Series Editor, *The Wolverhampton Military Studies Series*
University of Wolverhampton

Introduction

For centuries, the horse had provided the principal means of mobility for the Arm, but the Great War of 1914-18 was to witness the beginning of the end of this partnership. Ironically, a unified system for providing the British Army with remounts had only been in existence for some 30 years, and an effective system for the veterinary care of animals for even less time. Maj-Gen Frederick Smith wrote "the evolution of our service began in 1876, reached its maturity in 1914, and the fruits of 38 years work were gathered during the Great War".[1]

By the Army Act, Section 190, the expression "horse" includes mule, and any other beast of whatever description used for burden, or draught or carrying persons.[2]

Most military histories and accounts of campaigns lack any reference to the vital importance of the horse. Yet for centuries, the horse provided the principal means of power and mobility for the supply of all army needs and was essential, for example, for infantry transport, the Artillery, Engineers, and prior to 1914 all ambulance units. The Army could not function without the horse. That the Army was horsed at all is taken for granted, with little or no understanding of whence they came, in what numbers, the type or quality. For many writers, the horse is seen purely in a cavalry role and even then with little to suggest any understanding of the importance of the actual animal to the trooper, or ability of the cavalry to perform traditional tasks. Yet, more importantly, the crucial motive power without which an army could not function, was provided by the horse and pack animals. Col. Dunlop, in his comprehensive work on Army reforms, 1899-1914, provides only two very brief references to horses and remounts (a remount is a horse purchased for military service before issue to a particular unit for training, or to replace a casualty).[3] 'The Army' was perceived only in terms of the fighting units; horses are included by inference and are virtually invisible. The Remount and Veterinary Departments should not, however, be seen in isolation from other army administrative services and the High Command, they were as integral to the military machine. Moore-Colyer concludes his paper on *Horse Supply and the British Cavalry* with only a very brief discussion of the major changes

1 Smith, 1927, p.241.
2 Public General Acts, Army Act 1912.
3 Dunlop, 1938, pp.106, 145.

from the 1880s, stating that "the ineptitude of both the Government and senior army personnel in ensuring appropriate cavalry provision and maintaining the capability of rapid cavalry mobilisation was, of course, to be further underlined in the Great War".[4] This statement is so vague as to be meaningless, but appears to perpetuate the myths of cavalry in 1914 and ignores the importance of reforms introduced between 1902 and 1914, including those of the Remount Department and horse mobilisation.

Some more recent works have attempted to redress the balance. Badsey in his book *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880-1918*, does much to dispel the conventional view of the cavalry's role during the 1914-18 war with a significant emphasis on the context and importance of the horse to the efficiency of cavalry mobility; the ability to effectively undertake the tasks required.[5] Also of importance is an article by Singleton on the military use of horses during 1914-18.[6] Although issue can be taken with a number of his findings, it is one of the very few pieces of modern research that attempts to analyse the question of horse supply and use during the First World War. Kenyon's work on British cavalry on the Western Front is an excellent reassessment dispelling many of the myths surrounding the use of cavalry, including that of the provision of fodder for cavalry and horses in general; also in highlighting the combined use of horses with motorised vehicles.[7] The one disappointing aspect of the book is that, except for the events of late 1916 and 1917, there is a lack of emphasis on the importance of horses being fit and trained to effectively undertake their allotted tasks when required to do so. Badsey covers this much more effectively. The excellent work of the late Col. R. Hume, although mostly unpublished, adds considerably to the very limited accessible material on the Remount Department prior to 1914, and is directly relevant to an understanding of the events of the 1899-1902 and 1914-18 wars.[8] Anglesey's work on British Cavalry, from 1872 to 1915,[9] and that of Tylden,[10] contain material on remounts and are useful for their bibliographies. However, the picture presented by both of these is fragmentary and often lacking in a discussion of the sources used.

Michael Morpurgo's children's novel *War Horse*, the theatre production and Steven Spielberg's film of the book, arguably poor history, have created a public awareness of the horse in the First World War.[11] Publications by Arthur and Van Emden contain

4 Moore-Colyer, 1992, p.260.
5 Badsey, 2008
6 Singleton,1993.
7 Kenyon, 2011.
8 Col. Hume, 1980 and private correspondence 1989. Col. Hume died in November 2010 before publishing his research on The Army Remount Service. I am grateful to Capt. (Retd) P.H Starling, Director of the Army Medical Services Museum for a copy of the compilation of his work *The Story of the Army Remount Service.*
9 Anglesey, Vol. 3, 1983, Vol. 4, 1986.
10 Tylden, 1965.
11 Morpurgo, 1982: Film *War Horse*, Steven Spielberg, released 2011.

useful and much needed reminiscences from veterans about their experiences of horses in warfare, as to a limited extent does the republication of General Jack Seely's *Warrior*.[12] Butler's, *The War Horses* is a lavishly illustrated with many photographs published for the first time, but the text, which does contain some useful information, is often disappointing and perpetuates old myths about cavalry, motor vehicles, and the welfare of horses during the War.[13]

In short, the Army could not function without mobility and motive power. Horse transport and mounted troops are only as effective as their animals. Strategic and tactical considerations are easily compromised without an adequate and reliable supply of fit, trained animals, in the right place at the right time. A simple question, placed in the context of the motor vehicle, highlights the importance of the horse. How useful is a motor vehicle without an engine, or one of the correct size and power to perform the task required of it? Saloon, estate, sports car, van, lorry or bus – all with different weights and power of engines to perform the tasks required of them. Cavalry, field artillery, ambulances, transport and supply services could not operate without the appropriate type of horse, of the right conformation and size; without appropriate draught animals the infantry could not be supplied with equipment, stores and ammunition. This, however, was not the only element in successfully horsing the Army during 1899-1902 and 1914-1918. On the outbreak of war the small peacetime cadres of the horse services and horse transport faced expansion on a massive scale to their wartime establishments in personnel, harness, fodder, equipment, buildings and vehicles. These crucial elements in mobilisation are usually ignored by historians. As late as 1918, with the massive expansion in the military use of motor vehicles, animals remained the major source of motive power and mobility. Cavalry remained the only arm capable of swift exploitation. That the authorities recognised the importance of an adequate supply of horses for military purposes can be seen in a number of significant developments from the 1880s onwards. What the authorities did not wish to recognise was the cost of maintaining that supply.

Primary source material from the 1880s to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899 is limited and somewhat scattered. *The Fitz-Wygram Report* of 1884 is an essential document for placing later reforms into context.[14] *The Veterinary Record* contains a wealth of information for the whole period with articles by both military and civil veterinary surgeons and extracts from other journals and newspapers. For this early period it is an invaluable source in piecing together parts of the jigsaw, as are some of the Anglo-Boer War reports. Hansard provides examples for some of the important questions of the day but often not with detailed answers.[15]

12 Arthur, 2003 and 2006; Van Emden, 2010; Gen. Jack Seely, 2011.
13 Butler, 2011.
14 NA, Kew, War Office Papers (WO), WO33/42.
15 Hansard, Parliamentary Papers (PP), Commons (C) and Lords (L).

The disasters of the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War brought forth a number of official reports and papers that relate specifically to the Remount Department. They provide a rich tapestry of material and have been quoted extensively in works on the conflict, however, they need to be used in context and their limitations as a source for the supply of remounts understood. An examination into the causes of wastage was called for and provided by the *Royal Commission* and the *Court of Enquiry*.[16] Both failed to examine the question of animal losses in the field; their investigations only related to the purchase of animals and their transport to South Africa.[17] It is to the outstanding work of Maj-Gen. Frederick Smith, AVC, that one must turn for a severe criticism of the Army system; he provides a detailed and analytical discussion of the events, sources and myriad of statistics.[18] Unlike many authors, who have accepted and quoted from the mass of information contained in the official reports and papers, and as a practitioner in the field, Smith convincingly challenges and poses vital questions for any student of the horse in war. He deserves far greater recognition and acknowledgement for his scholarly work.

There are a number of useful sources, which when combined offer an insight and understanding of the period between the Wars. The papers of the Directorate of Remounts are contained in the *Quarter Master General's (QMG) papers*.[19] These papers are somewhat limited and frustrating to use, as final decisions relating to remounts are often not recorded and official publications missing. It is to the papers of the *Board of Agriculture and Fisheries* that one must turn for clarification and copies of publications.[20] The Board's papers and those of the *Development Corporation* are a major source for the debate on light horse breeding and the supply of horses for military purposes.[21] These are fairly comprehensive but at times assume a knowledge of events for which there is no record. *Army Council Records* contain useful but limited references to horsing the Army.[22] The *Royal Corps of Transport Archive* is a most valuable source.[23] The debate over mechanisation in British and foreign armies and issues relating to horses and their future use, are well detailed; as is a new army transport system and reports on the work of the QMG's Branch. This archive with the *Cavalry Journal*

16 *Report of the Royal Commission to 'Inquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Connected with the War in South Africa.'* Parliamentary Papers (PP) Cd.1789 to 1792. '*Court of Enquiry on the Administration of the Army Remount Depot,'* PP. Cd.993 (Report) and Cd.994 (Evidence).

17 For example PP. Cd.963, Birkbeck (see Appendix I).

18 Smith, 1919 (Smith, see Appendix I).

19 NA, Kew, WO107. There are further papers, although few from the First World War period, in WO registered files, class WO32 Code 22, and WO33. The War Diaries of the Directorate are in class WO95, all but one relate to the Western Front.

20 NA, Kew, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), Class 52. For example for WO32 cross referenced with MAF52.

21 NA, Kew, Development Commission, Classes D1/2/3/4.

22 WO163.

23 The Archive is now held in Royal Logistic Corps Museum, Deepcut, Surrey.

and the *Veterinary Record* enable one to get a feel for the period and of contemporary debates between the wars.[24] The impression is not of a conservative and totally blinkered army dominated by 'horsey types'. For the period between the wars, articles and publications in military journals and of the 'horse world' throw light on the lessons to be learnt from the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War and the urgency of establishing a national system for the supply of horses for military purposes.

There is precious little material from those who actually served with the Remount Department. The writings and reports of Lt-Col. Birkbeck (Assistant Inspector of Remounts in South Africa and Director of Remounts WO during 1914-1918) and Lt-Gen. MacMunn (Assistant Director of Remounts), provide an invaluable insight into the workings of the Remount Department during both Wars.[25] In contrast, the *Royal Army Veterinary Corps* is well served by histories and articles written by members of the Corps, the most distinguished being Smith, Moore, Blenkinsop and Rainey.[26] These authors cover in great detail the activities and development of the Corps during the period, however, Smith and Moore are more questioning and provide valuable insights. The comparative success of the horse services in the 1914-18 War, unlike the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War, did not generate the wealth of official reports, therefore material is limited. The *War Diary of the Director of Remounts (BEF)* is detailed, providing insights into routine as well as major issues facing the BEF.[27] *Remount Papers* are useful for issues relating to the expansion of the BEF in 1915, but far from detailed, whereas the *Official Statistics* for the war provide valuable basic information, although the sources are not given and it is difficult, if not impossible, to relate them to other WO papers.[28] In many cases calculations given in tables do not add up. Given the crucial importance of the horse to the military effort, it is amazing that the role of the Remount Service was ignored in the 'official history' of the war; though the Veterinary Service fared somewhat better.

The origin of the successful horsing of the British Army during the 1914-18 War can be dated to the creation of a unified Army Veterinary Department in 1881, and the Remount Department and Horse Registration Scheme in 1887, providing for a reserve of horses on mobilisation.

Part One looks at these developments, highlighting the crucial elements in effectively horsing the Army: supply, care, and organisation. These developments were severely tested during the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War and found wanting. The period 1902 to 1914 was therefore critical: only if the faults of the 1899-1902 War were identified, lessons learnt and reforms implemented would disaster be avoided in the next major conflict.

24 The 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War and the First World War 1914-18.
25 Lt -Gen Mac Munn (See Appendix I).
26 Maj-Gen. Sir John Moore, Maj-Gen. Sir Layton Blenkinsop, and Lt- Col. J.W. Rainey (See Appendix I).
27 Brig. F.S.Garratt, Director of Remounts (BEF), WO69 and WO70 (see Appendix I).
28 WO107, and *Statistics,* 1922.

The crucial questions discussed in **Part Two** relate to solving the horse question, that of supplying the Army on mobilisation and sustaining it in the field. Significant alterations were required in the organisation of the horse services for rapid and effective expansion. For the Remount Department this meant creating a structure that permitted effective mobilisation of the horse reserve and recognising the impact of motor vehicles on the transport system. As Moore states, "in modern warfare a remount service could not maintain the supply of animals required by an army in the field without utilising those discharged as fit for duty from veterinary hospitals".[29] If this source of resupply had not existed during the 1914-18 War the horse population of the world would probably not have been adequate to meet the demands of the British forces alone. The civilian horse market was central to the supply of horses for military purposes. The big question was whether the home market would be sufficiently stimulated to provide the Army with peacetime requirements, the numbers required on mobilisation and replace wartime expansion and wastage. Were there sufficient horses in the country and how was the Army to obtain reliable information? Numbers alone were not the issue. The Army required sufficient numbers of fit and healthy animals of the right class, in the right place and at the right time. The war of 1914-18 provided the testing ground.[30]

Part Three looks at the implementation of mobilisation plans in 1914, the events of 1915-18 as they affected the horse services and demobilisation in 1918-19. As events unfolded, the situation became more complicated, the Army expanded beyond the scale envisaged in any pre-war planning; remounts were supplied to theatres other than the Western Front and to the armies of allied nations. The question of how demand for the vast number of animals, in all theatres, was met is discussed in chapters ten and eleven. As the war progressed there were serious questions about, supply from the UK and world horse markets and the transportation required for the vast number of animals from country of purchase to the battlefields, taking into account the submarine menace. There were vastly increased demands for remount depots, training of horses and staff for their specific tasks, veterinary hospitals, fodder, harness and horseshoes. A huge increase in horse services personnel was required including blacksmiths, saddlers, shoeing-smiths and ancillary tradesmen. These personnel had to be found, trained and their numbers maintained.

At the end of hostilities some 791,696 animals, in all theatres, had to be quickly disposed of, as humanely as possible.[31] The final section, **Demobilisation and Conclusion** examines the demobilisation process, the efficiency of the Remount and Veterinary Departments and whether the reforms in organisation met the demands of modern warfare. Crucial to success was an effective and efficient working partnership between these Departments and the High Command. In 1919, the horse remained

29 Moore, in Merillatt and Campbell, 1935, p.103.
30 Winton, 2007, *The 1914–18 War: A Horse War?*
31 *Statistics*, p.878. The figure is at 30th November 1918.

the main source of motive power, with cavalry as the main arm of exploitation, but mechanisation was firmly entrenched in the transport system. The debate between 1902 and 1914 over horse versus mechanisation for army transport had been fought and won. The Army transport system had been radically changed to accommodate mechanised vehicles, integrated with rail networks and horsed vehicles. Experiments and trials had taken place in the use of mechanical vehicles as assault weapons and although not sufficiently advanced by 1914, developments during the War were clearly acknowledged by many as signalling the end of the military reliance upon the horse. The British Army had a completely integrated horse and mechanical transport supply system with an organised reserve and mobilisation scheme on the outbreak of war in 1914.[32]

This book provides the first comprehensive study of the Army's horse services from 1878-1925, focusing on the use of horses in the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer and 1914-18 Wars, and in particular the relationship with the domestic horse breeding industry, mechanisation and an integrated military transport system.[33]

32 Winton, 2000 (b), 'The British Army, Mechanisation and a New Transport System, 1900-14'.

33 Winton, 1997, 'Horsing the British Army 1878-1923'. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University Birmingham.

Part One

1878-1902

Port Elizabeth Horse Memorial, South Africa

1

The Creation of Central Remount and Veterinary Services and a Horse Registration Scheme 1878-1899

The Philosophy of war knows no middle course between success and disaster; either the Army is to be properly mounted or it is not; if it is not properly mounted, it will not be efficient, and it will not win battles; and if the Army is not intended to win battles, it is surely a useless expense to the nation to keep up at all.[1]

With the massive rearmament programmes of the principal European powers in the late nineteenth century the British government was forced to review the Army's ability to mobilise in the event of an emergency, especially for the defence of the United Kingdom. With the greater destructiveness of firearms and the necessity for more rapid movement than in previous wars, the mortality rate among horses was likely to be considerably greater, therefore a larger reserve of horses would be required by the Army. As the horse was the principal means of power and mobility it is no surprise that the supply and care of suitable remounts for mobilisation was a matter of some importance. Unfortunately, this importance did not extend to accepting changes that necessitated an increase in expenditure. Maj-Gen. Frederick Smith, AVC, commenting on the lack of War Office (WO) spending, also noted that no scheme for mobilising the Army existed until 1886, it took a further four years to evolve; by the fifth year, regulations for mobilisation were issued on the basis of what was available not what was needed.[2]

In 1887 a central Army Remount Department was formed with responsibility for the purchase of all army horses. Prior to this date regiments purchased their own horses, usually through civilian agents. This regimental system of purchasing did not provide for the Army as a whole, a reserve of horses on mobilisation, or a coherent competitive method of supply during emergencies. Without a central system and trained staff, for the purchase of remounts, the Commander in Chief (C-in-C) had to

1 Birkbeck, 1908, p.342.
2 PP. Cd.1789, p.30; Smith, 1919, p.3.

make his own arrangements for supply. The exception, was the Royal Artillery which had maintained a centralised corporate identity that enabled many functions, common to the regiment as a whole, such as remounts, to be undertaken centrally. During the nineteenth century a Royal Artillery Riding Troop was based at Woolwich, later called the Riding Establishment Royal Horse Artillery, concerned with equestrian training for the artillery. Army Distribution Lists, introduced in 1856, show that from time to time a senior Royal Artillery officer held the appointment of 'Inspector and Purchaser of Horses,' for example, Col. F.G. Ravenhill from April 1881. In 1885 the Establishment had 138 personnel of all ranks and 100 horses. Also listed is a Remount Establishment with the Garrison Artillery, with 86 personnel of all ranks and 32 horses.[3] From April 1882 until March 1887, the Royal Artillery Distribution Lists, show a Remount Establishment, Woolwich (Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers Remount Establishment), with a Captain Royal Artillery on its strength. The Establishment is not listed after April 1887 as a Royal Artillery unit, possibly because of plans to create a central Remount Department. In 1887 the Remount Establishment, Woolwich had an establishment of three officers (including the Inspector and Veterinary Surgeon) and 87 other ranks under the command of an Inspector of Horses (Col. Ravenhill, between 1884-94). The Inspector held responsibility for training and distributing all horses required by the Artillery and Engineers (the latter holding very few horses in peacetime) stationed at home.[4]

Prior to the establishment of the Royal Veterinary College in 1792, there was no veterinary service in the Army. Regimental farriers (sometimes assisted by veterinary surgeons) held a government contract to shoe army horses, supply medicines and attend sick, or injured horses. In 1796, owing to heavy losses among army horses in various campaigns, veterinary surgeons were appointed to cavalry regiments, the Royal Artillery and Royal Waggon Train. The first graduate and therefore qualified veterinary surgeon to join the Army in 1796 was John Shipp, 11th Light Dragoons.[5] Developments in the 1790s and early 1800s provided an embryo veterinary service organised entirely on a regimental basis, veterinary surgeons were recruited directly into regiments, but with no provision for the care of sick, or lame horses when on active service. Sir Henry Evelyn Wood (Adjutant General to the Forces 1897-1901), wrote in 1914, "it is sad to reflect that from 1856 to 1900 practically nothing was done to provide for the care and feeding of our animals with an army in the field".[6] In 1859 the two separate veterinary services of Ordnance and Cavalry were amalgamated under one Principal Veterinary Surgeon (PVS) with, until 1890, a civilian surgeon at its head;

3 British Parliamentary Papers (BPP), 1884-5, Vol.XLVI, 19th Feb. 1885, pp.10-11; see Appendix I for Ravenhill.

4 I am indebted to the late Col. Hume, 1989, for information on the Remount Service; also K.A. Timbers, Secretary of the Royal Artillery Historical Trust, 1989; Hansard (C), 1887, 29th July, column (c) 494; Sessions, 1903, pp.14-15.

5 Gray, 1985, biography of Shipp.

6 Foreword to Smith, 1919, p.iv. Field Marshal Sir H. E. Wood.

also in 1859 the Army Veterinary Department (AVD) appeared in Army Lists for the first time.[7] The regimental system for the care of horses was abolished in 1878, except for the cavalry, and a more unified Army Veterinary Service (AVS) created. In 1879, a general list of non-regimental veterinary officers was available for any unit, under the newly created and centralised AVS and in 1880 an Army Veterinary School was formed in Aldershot. In April 1881, the regimental system was abolished in the cavalry, when all veterinary officers, except those of the Household Brigade, were transferred to one list, unifying for the first time all veterinary services into the AVD. The treatment of horses for practical reasons however remained on a regimental basis.

The Fitz-Wygram Committee

In 1883 the WO established a Committee under the chairmanship of Lt-Gen. Sir Frederick FitzWygram to investigate the supply of additional horses required on the mobilisation of two Army Corps.[8] According to a return presented to the Committee by the QMG's Department, an Army Corps on active service required about 12,000 horses. The peacetime establishment of I Army Corps was about 8,000 horses, of which about one-third (2,600) could be deducted for horses under, or over age, or otherwise unsuitable for active service; leaving a deficit of 6,600 horses to bring the Corps up to active service requirements, to be procured within one month of mobilisation. The Committee questioned the validity of retaining horses unfit for active service within the peacetime establishment. The peace establishment of the II Army Corps was smaller, requiring approximately an additional 9,300 horses for active service, to be purchased within two, or three months of mobilisation. The total requirement to bring the two Corps up to strength for active service was 15,900 horses. Calculations in the Return show that of the required active service strength of the two Corps (24,000 horses), an additional 40% (9,600) would be required as reinforcements, to be obtained within about six months of mobilisation. The total number required, to be purchased within a few months of the outbreak of war, for the two Corps, in addition to their peacetime establishments, was 25,500 (15,900 plus 9,600). The Committee noted that 40% might not be sufficient, as losses in the first year of the Crimean War were 80%.[9]

Horses in Great Britain and Ireland were divided into two categories, agricultural and trade/private. The total number of horses registered in the UK for the Horse Tax in 1873 (the last year the tax was collected), was 2,762,000, of which about one third were employed privately, or in trade. It was possible that about one million of these were available, without disrupting trade, of which about 20,000, would be of the right type, fit and healthy and therefore suitable for army purposes. Board of Trade Agricultural

7 Forgrave, 1987, p.5; Smith, 1927; *VR*, 1893, Vol.6, 30th December, p.363.
8 WO33/42, Fitz-Wygram. The four committee members included: Col. Ravenhill and Dr G. Fleming, PVO (see Appendix I).
9 WO33/42, p.1.

Statistics for 1881 record about two million horses employed in agriculture, including young horses and foals; of this number, about 50,000 were considered probably fit for active military use. Of the original nearly three million horses from trade and agriculture about 70,000 suitable horses were therefore available in the UK for military service, of which the Army would require about 36%. The majority being excluded as too heavy for army purposes, under five or over 12 years of age, or generally unfit. [10]

The question for the Army was, how many of the 70,000 suitable horses could they purchase? Probably in excess of 4,500 were in dealers' hands and thus on the open market, and of these some 500 were possibly suitable for army purposes; the remainder would have to be purchased from private owners. The Committee considered that owners kept few horses other than those required for their own use or trade, so even if they were offered a price above the normal value of a horse, they would probably part with their inferior animals, but not with their really serviceable ones. This situation would be exacerbated by a draining of the market so that replacements would be unobtainable. If horses became scarce some in the Army thought they might be replaced by mechanical draught, especially if the supply of horses permanently failed. This is an interesting early reference to the possible use of mechanical vehicles by the Army, in that senior officers of the "horsey world" were making the recommendation. The supply of traction engines could not, however, be increased in time to supply the immediate requirements of a campaign. Large employers might possibly dispense with 30% of their horses, but none would be available from the far more numerous small businesses. On the assumption therefore that a maximum of 15% of the 70,000 (10,500) could be purchased, this provided 11,000 (10,500 plus the 500 in dealers' yards). Ravenhill considered that 15% would be far beyond the number obtainable by purchase without compulsory powers, as even large owners, such as the London General Omnibus Company with 8,000 horses, could not afford to sell more than 2%, or 3% of their animals. He also believed the number of horses bred in the country had decreased, as illustrated by Board of Trade Returns between 1881 and 1882, which indicated a decrease of 18,000. Custom House Returns showed an average of 15,000 horses imported annually into the country possibly compensating for the decrease in breeding. The Committee reported that of the 25,500 required within the first year of war by the two Army Corps, a total of 11,000 could be met from the home market without recourse to compulsory purchase, at a rate of about 2,400 per month, leaving the deficit of 14,500 to be provided from other sources such as overseas purchases. These figures were based on experiences of the 1882 Egyptian War when 1,700 horses were purchased in 17 weeks, and the Russian scare of 1878 when 2,250 were purchased, by the greatest exertions, in four weeks.

The Committee concluded that:

- the total number of horses required to complete I Army Corps could be maintained in peacetime. It would not be possible, within one month, to provide the

10 Ibid., p.2.

4,200 (6,600 less the 2,400 purchased in the home market) required to bring the Corps up to wartime establishment as the timing was too short for foreign markets to respond, as Commissions would have to be sent out, horses collected, examined, purchased, shipped, sorted and transferred to units.

- II Army Corps required 9,300 horses to be purchased within three months. As I Corps would take all purchases from the home market during the first month; during the next two months it surmised II Corps could purchase at the rate of 1,200 per month i.e. 2,400 horses. The balance, about 6,900, would then be obtained from foreign markets.
- foreign markets would also have to supply the balance of 3,400 horses required as reinforcements within the first six months, but it was considered doubtful that any one country could supply a large number. Some countries would be closed to the UK in time of war and other countries would close markets when they chose to, for example in the Egyptian War of 1882 there was a banning of exports by Turkey. In countries such as France, Germany, Spain and Turkey all horses were registered and in time of war exportation was forbidden.[11]

The table below shows how II Corps and reinforcements could be supplied.[12] The left column gives a total of 7,100 for II Corps, which after deducting those unfit, sick and accidents, leaves hardly enough to meet the 6,900 required. The right column gives a total of 6,300 against the requirement of 3,400.

	II Corps	*Reinforcements*
Draught Horses:		
France	500	500
Belgium	550	500
N. Europe	700	–
United States	750	500
Canada	1,000	1,500
South America	600	
Totals	3,500	3,600
Riding Horses:		
Hungary	1,200	750
United States	700	500
Canada	1,100	1,000
Syria, Asia Minor, Morocco	350	250
Spain	250	200
Totals	3,600	2,700

11 WO33/42, pp.3, 5.
12 Ibid., based on tables p.5.

Comments were made on the various foreign breeds and prices, for example, French, Belgium and North European draught breeds were considered inferior to English ones. Few of the other countries supplied riding horses; the small Syrian, Spanish and Moroccan breeds were suitable for staff and departmental officers. Canadian horses were considered to be of good quality; a West End jobmaster (hired out horses) imported them for his London customers. The 7th Hussars in 1837 and the 13th Hussars in 1861 thought very favourably of Canadian horses as troop horses as also did all the officers of the Royal Artillery who had commanded batteries in Canada. The cost of importing would increase with shipping and the fitting out of ships specifically as horse transports. The number of horses imported from the US into Liverpool had declined but numbers were still available. Mr Erskin (US Vice-Consul), stated they exported 20,000 to 30,000 horses annually to England, dealers sending their buyers to Chicago. Small Hungarian horses were thought useful, with good reports of their work in the Egyptian War, but experience suggested large numbers were not available; the War Department sent a Commission to Hungary in about 1880 to purchase some 700 horses, but only succeeded in obtaining 350 as many were under 15 hands high. The Committee recommended that agencies be established in each of the horse-producing countries (Canada, USA, Hungary, Asia Minor, Spain, Northern Europe, France), and a limited number, about 25%, purchased from them annually; a practice that would also provide detailed knowledge on the supply, class and quality in each country. Having tried and trusted agents in each country would also speed up supply in the event of increased demand.[13]

In Great Britain the difficulty was in purchasing riding horses, numbers of which had declined, whereas draught horses existed in very much larger numbers. With improvements in roads and development of railways, fewer farmers used riding horses for work and it did not pay them to breed the light horses suitable for cavalry. However, in Ireland, which supplied horses for line cavalry regiments, the light horse was in greater demand than the draught horse.

It was not thought possible to adopt the system used by foreign countries of supplying their military horses by registration in peacetime and requisition in wartime. Instead, the system used during the Egyptian War was considered appropriate, whereby, a Central Committee was appointed by the WO, consisting of the Inspector-General of Cavalry, PVS, the Artillery Remount Agent and a selected cavalry officer. The Central Committee then selected sub-committees to be located in likely purchasing districts and communicated to them their opinions on the horses purchased; exactly the same structure applied to Ireland. Each sub-committee, on purchasing a truckload of six or seven horses, sent them to London, or Aldershot, for inspection by the Central Committee, they were then sorted and sent off to appropriate units; the assumption being that the next Army Corps to be mobilised for active service would be from Aldershot.[14]

13 WO33/42, p.8.
14 Ibid.

The Fitz-Wygram Committee reported on 29th January 1884, but little in the report appears to have been acted upon. Although from 1879 the Government purchased small numbers of remounts from overseas, it was opposed to such purchases at a time when the UK horse breeding industry was in need of stimulation. The Committee's suggestion for an increase in the permanent peacetime establishment contradicted the purpose of army reforms, that sought to produce a small standing army supported by effective resources.[15] The proposals were too expensive for consideration, as they increased the number of army animals in the UK by half; thereby increasing the cost of procuring and keeping additional horses. Stables would have to be extended, other facilities provided in cavalry barracks and the number of personnel increased to look after the additional animals.

The opportunity to establish an effective structure for mobilisation in the event of war had been lost. In just 15 years, the country would be engaged in a major colonial conflict in South Africa, the financial cost of which, in remount terms, was to be far higher than had the Committee's recommendations been implemented. Failure to obtain reliable information on potential remounts from foreign markets and in particular, the failure to establish trusted agents with local knowledge would prove costly in monetary terms and in appalling animal wastage.

A Remount Commission was sent to Canada in 1886 to purchase 300 horses and assess potential markets, but proposals to purchase a limited number of remounts each successive year as a strategy for keeping in touch with this source of supply were turned down. The Commission was subsequently criticised by the Exchequer and Audit Department of the Treasury for exceeding the authorised price for remounts by £16. The Secretary of State ordered that all future purchases should be made in the UK, however, several thousand cobs were purchased in Hungary and in South America (1896-8) for mounted infantry and shipped directly to the garrison in South Africa; horses were also purchased from Syria (1898) for the Army in Egypt.[16]

Horse Registration Scheme

The problem of providing adequate horses for the Army on mobilisation remained. A number of schemes were put forward as alternatives to those of the Fitz-Wygram Commission one of which, suggested by Ravenhill met with approval, as it avoided any significant increase in peacetime expenditure and tackled the difficulties of providing horses on mobilisation.[17] Ravenhill suggested that the War Department invite owners of large numbers of horses to place some of them, voluntarily, at the

15 WO33/42, p.4; Hume, 1989, p.4-44.
16 Hume, 1989, p.4-5; Page, 1976, p.299, from Truman's evidence to Royal Commission, Cd.1791, p35, Q12880; Cd.994, p.2; Smith, 1919, p.323; *VR*, 1897, Vol.9, 8th May, p.639 and 1898, Vol.10, 18th June, p.739 and 1894, 16th April, p.616 and 1894, Vol.7, 12th January, p.390; Hansard (C), 1887, 19th July; Amery, 1909, Vol.VI, p.415.
17 Lecture given to the Royal Service Institute, 1886; *VR*, 1888, Vol.1, 11th August, p.56.

disposal of the government in case of an emergency. This Horse Registration Scheme gained the support of Lord Harris, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, WO, who saw that it could provide the much-needed stimulus to the country's horse breeding industry. The Scheme met with approval, as it avoided any significant increase in peacetime expenditure and tackled the difficulties of providing horses on mobilisation. The Scheme was introduced in 1887, apparently with some hesitation, as an experiment, appearing in Army Estimates for 1888-9, which suggests that the WO did not believe the problem of providing horses for the Army, in an emergency, was considered solved.[18] Authorisation was given to register 7,000 horses immediately, the number progressively increased, so that by 1890 some 14,558 horses were registered.[19]

The Army (Annual) Act of 1881 allowed for the impressment of carriages and horses for the transport of baggage in an emergency, but lacked any system for implementation. The Registration Scheme provided the system and acted as the catalyst for the National Defence Act of 1888, which extended the powers of Section 115, of the 1881 Act, by adding sub-sections 7 and 8, giving the government power to requisition all horses and means of transport in the country, at a time of national danger, or when militia was being mobilised.[20]

In the event of an emergency, private owners involved in the Scheme were invited to sell their horses to the Army at a price agreed at the time of registration; in return, the Army paid an annual retaining fee of 10/- per horse. It was the owner and his stables, not individual horses, which were registered. Under the terms of agreement, an owner was required to produce on mobilisation, a specified number of horses of a particular class, 'serviceably sound and suitable', between the ages of six and ten, within 48 hours of notification. Horses had to be available for an annual inspection; a fine of £50 was payable if any were missing and the Army had the right to demand the actual horses inspected at the time of registration. The Scheme did not unduly restrict owners and the Army acquired a reserve of horses at a modest annual cost. On the outbreak of war in 1899, prices previously agreed under the Scheme were seen to be excessive; horses could be obtained more cheaply on the open market as developments in transport and changes in horse breeding had depressed purchase prices.[21] The initial response of horse owners was considered satisfactory, especially from the large railway companies, some provincial tram companies and carriers, and metropolitan firms; demonstrating that by a simple and easy process of organisation, it was possible for the War Department to obtain a sufficient number of serviceable horses to place an Army Corps in the field, within a few days of an order for mobilisation.[22]

18 Hansard (L), 1887, 8th September.
19 Page, 1976, p.298, unpublished PhD thesis; Hume, 1989, p.4-6.
20 Public General Acts, 1888.
21 Page, p.28; Hume, 1989, p.4-6; Tylden, 1965, p.25; Cd.993, p.2; WO33/271, 1903, pp.A3, A6.
22 *VR*, 1888, Vol.1, 11th August, p.56.

The most significant effect of the new scheme was in preparing the way for abolition of the regimental remounting system. The Fitz-Wygram Committee had recommended that on any future mobilisation, a central remount committee be formed to manage purchasing arrangements.[23] If, from the outbreak of war, the supply of remounts was to be placed under central control, a similar system operating in peacetime, would hold the same advantages, and therefore, in the interests of economy and efficiency the Registration Scheme should be administered by a central staff. Once a central administration was created it could easily assume responsibility for purchasing the 2,500 remounts required annually by the Army at home.

Army Remount Service

Army Order 172, November 1887, announced the establishment of the Army Remount Department, located in the QMG's Department, appearing in Army Estimates for the first time in 1888-89; based on the Scheme proposed by Col. Ravenhill, who was appointed the first Inspector General of Remounts (IGR) with the temporary rank of Major General.[24] For the first time in its history, the Army, based at home, had a unified structure for the provision of remounts. Maj. Tylden commented that this was the most important event in the history of remounts in the British Army, as from that time onward there was only one policy.[25] The Department was responsible for registering reserve horses for the Army and purchasing remounts for regiments stationed at home, except for Household Cavalry Regiments; units based overseas continued to purchase their own horses locally. In India remounts were provided by the Indian Government. The annual peacetime requirement for the Army at home ranged from 1,400 to 2,500 remounts, in addition, the Department was to prepare for the mobilisation requirements of up to two army corps.

The small Remount Establishment of 1887 consisted of an IGR, based at the WO, and three Assistant Inspectors of Remounts (AIR), all to be included in the General Staff of the Army. Two remount depots were created at Woolwich and Dublin, commanded by staff-captains and manned by soldiers drawn from the Artillery and Cavalry. Depots smaller than the Royal Artillery Establishment at Woolwich (which ceased to exist on creation of the Remount Department), were to receive and hold animals until fit for issue to regiments, which then trained, or schooled them for their own requirements. Each of the depots was under the control of an AIR, who undertook the purchasing of horses in England and Ireland; Woolwich remained the centre for the Artillery, which preferred English horses, with the new depot in Ireland

23 WO33/42, p.8; Hansard (L), 1887, 8th September, (c)1626.
24 *London Gazette*, 18th October 1887, p.3598. Col. Ravenhill, RA, was promoted from Lt-Gen, half pay, to IGR with the temporary rank of Maj-Gen whilst employed in this post, dated 1st October 1887.
25 Army General Orders, 1887; Tylden, 1965, p.25; Hume, 1989, pp.4-7, 4-8.

handling mainly cavalry remounts. Eventually, arrangements were formalised and the AIR, Woolwich, purchased all remounts for the Artillery, Engineers and transport service in Ireland and England. The third AIR was to operate the Horse Registration Scheme in its experimental form.

In July 1891 responsibility for the personnel of remount depots was transferred to the Army Service Corps (ASC), forming a remount company at each remount depot.[26] These companies, officered by an ASC quartermaster, were placed under the IGR at the WO and took the place of personnel previously seconded from the Artillery and Cavalry. They first appeared in the Army List for September 1891 as 'A' and 'B' Remount Companies, each consisting of 66 soldiers including, one company sergeant major, quartermaster and farrier sergeant; three sergeants, corporals and lance-corporals; four shoeing smiths and 50 privates.[27]

The Army purchased horses on the open market, from dealers who had been accustomed to procuring the classes required, this was considered the cheaper way of purchasing and encouraged the breeding of good equine stock within the country; unlike foreign armies who received government support.[28] The question of army purchases remained very much a concern for the horse breeding world with questions frequently raised in Parliament. For example, in 1895 Viscount Valentia asked whether any, and if so how many, horses had been purchased from breeders or farmers in country districts, during the last year (1894-5), for army purposes.[29] Mr W. St John Brodrick (Financial Secretary to the WO 1886-92, Under Secretary of State for War 1895-98, Secretary of State for War from November 1900), replied that during the year 1894-5, 503 remounts were purchased from 87 private owners and 1,116 remounts from dealers. During 1888-9 the Army purchased 1,381 horses from dealers and in 1889-90, 1,153; a total of 3,034. Of these 1,231 were purchased in London, 1,706 in Ireland (in Dublin 1,011, Navan 245, Waterford 232 and Castlenock 218), and small numbers in other places. Between 1888-90, 46 horses were purchased from breeders. In 1897, Maj. Rasch asked whether the WO would encourage horse breeding in the country districts by advertising the fact that they would be given £40 for a horse. He was informed that from April 1887 to March 1897, a total of 15,018 horses were purchased of which 61% (9,139) were from Ireland. In making these purchases many hundreds of horses, offered by agriculturists, were

26 *Royal Corps of Transport*, 1981; the ASC was created in 1888, technically this was a recreation. The ASC was fully combatant with its Horse Transport Depot at Woolwich and Supply and Regimental depot at Aldershot. From 1888 Supply and Transport were in one Corps; Army Orders No. 202, 1888 and No. 149, 1891; Tylden, p.2; Hume, 1989, p.4-8.

27 Beadon, 1931, pp.11-12.

28 Hansard (L), 1887, 8th September, (c)1624.

29 *VR*, 1895, Vol.7, 7th Sept., p.127; Hansard (C), 1895, Vol.XXXVI, 26th August, (c)798-9. (Valentia see Appendix I).

examined by remount officers. In addition to purchases, 7,000 horses were registered as a reserve for the Army in 1888-9, the number more than doubling during 1889-90.[30]

The annual AVD Report, 1891, records the strength of army animals as 13,327 troop horses, 1,721 chargers and 226 mules, figures that remained relatively constant throughout the 1890s. The 1896 Army General Report gives 14,603 total effective horses and mules on the British Establishment; for 1897 a further increase of 1,685 and in 1898, 690 with a total of 16,978.[31] In 1896-7 there were 14,550 registered horses of which 10,000 were draught, a large number coming from Canada. These were considered excellent for Field Artillery and horsed many Canadian batteries. Other Canadian horses were purchased for the London omnibus companies. Most of the animals purchased in Britain were now increasingly imported, other than those obtained from Ireland. Truly indigenous horses of the types required by the Army became very scarce; Anglesey states that every week about 1,200 foreign horses were landed at London, Liverpool and Glasgow docks. It was horses such as these, very few of them branded at their place of origin, which formed the majority of 'English' remounts towards the end of the nineteenth century. A view supported by Col. Hotham writing in 1906.[32]

The creation of the Remount Department and Horse Registration Scheme in 1887 did not, however, solve the problems of remount supply, or of creating a large enough reserve of horses for mobilisation. The Registration Scheme created a reserve to meet the immediate requirements of mobilisation, at a fixed price, and without risking the unpopular measure of impressment. There were, however, inherent weaknesses with the Scheme, for example, by specifying the ages of six and ten, it sought to provide the Army with horses in the prime of their working life, but it could not guarantee horses would be in hard condition (fit, not carrying fat and with muscles toned from regular working), when mobilised. If mobilisation was in the summer, hunters would probably still be at grass, mares might be in foal and even if fit, would not militarily be trained. The question of supply was not simply one of quantity, but also one of quality and suitability.[33] The situation on mobilisation was unlike that of peacetime remount supply. On mobilisation there was no certainty that the exact numbers of each type or stamp (conformation) of horse procured would reflect the different requirements of the various branches of the Army; those supplied might not be fit for service, not militarily trained, and the horse equipment available might not be adequate for military

30 Rasch see Appendix I; Hansard (C), 1897, Vol.XLVI, 4th March, (c)1597; *VR*, 1890, Vol.3, 16th August, p.91. *VR*, 1891, Vol.4, 26th September, p.174 gives the total registered horses by 1890 as 21,000 (4,212 riding and 16,788 draught); this is the only reference I have found to such a large number being registered and cannot therefore confirm its accuracy.

31 *VR*, 1891, Vol.4, 14th November, pp.269-70; Annual Report 31st March 1891; Cd.1496, Part IX, pp.65-70, for 1896, 1897, 1898.

32 Hotham, 1906, p.190; Anglesey, 1986, Vol.4, p.281.

33 Hume, 1989, p.4-6.

purposes at a time of rapid expansion and immediate action. The question was, how, on mobilisation, were the various branches of the Army to be supplied with horses of the appropriate class, and how effective would the Registration Scheme be in achieving this? This question encouraged wide ranging discussion among military personnel and the horse world generally, in particular over questions of quality and the relationship between the domestic horse breeding industry and military requirements.

Dr Fleming (1833-1901), who retired in 1890 as Colonel, Principal Veterinary Surgeon (PVS), considered that keeping the mounted men and horses, of either one or two army corps, at wartime establishment was too heavy an expense for the country, yet he saw no other way out of the difficulty. In peacetime he thought there was no difficulty in finding all the horses required, as the total for all arms of the Army barely exceeded 1,500 annually and could be picked up at leisure. This figure is usually given as 2,500 annually, only Fleming gives 1,500. The problem was how to meet requirements in the event of war and for Fleming this question had been the subject of grave discussion for several years. He saw the Government's attempt at solving the problem, by registering a few thousand horses, as being only partially successful; many were draught animals, which were most abundant in the country and could only be utilised for artillery, or transport. The greatest demand was for the light, active horse of the cavalry type that was also the scarcest. By a great effort, if the mobilisation of one or two army corps were ever necessary, sufficient draught horses might be obtained, but the required number of cavalry horses, fit to go into the field in a short time, would not be available. The issue was, therefore, how to complete, with suitable horses, the establishment of cavalry regiments. Until such provision was made, it would not have been possible to put an army of 20,000 or 30,000 men into the field with the required number of mounted troops.[34]

Considerable efforts were made during 1888 to increase the reserve of horses, but concerns remained over the shortage of trained animals to meet military requirements. For example, during 1887, 1,000 horses were added to cavalry regiments. However, the stock of trained animals (including those in training) was still insufficient to mount two thirds of troopers, about 19,100 officers and men, in the 31 cavalry regiments of the British Regular Army. When the officers (who provided their own horses) were deducted, there were 18,300 Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and troopers for 11,800 available horses, leaving 6,500 dismounted (equal to 13 regiments of 500 each). The nine regiments on the Indian Establishment had about 4,100 for 5,900 men and the Inniskilling Dragoons, quartered in Natal, had about 350 horses for 470 men. The three regiments of Household Cavalry (which had to provide a regiment between them for the I Army Corps) had 800 horses for more than 1,200 men. The eight regiments at home, not belonging to I or II Army Corps, or depots of regiments abroad, had amongst them 2,700 horses for 4,700 men The Cavalry Depot Staff at Canterbury

34 Dr G. Fleming, *VR*, 1889, Vol.1, 16th February, pp.393-4; Smith, 1927, pp.177-8 for Fleming's career.

and the Military Mounted Police (principally at Aldershot, the Curragh in Ireland and Egypt), accounted for about 130 horses to mount as many men. If these figures are accurate, 'official' calculations for the number of remounts required on mobilisation were based on 'paper' establishments, not the number physically in existence and highlight the extent of under-strength peacetime establishments. [35]

Fleming gives the number of horses required to furnish the full establishments of cavalry regiments, batteries of artillery, engineer troops, infantry and general transport of the I Army Corps as 11,483 (exclusive of 1,571 officers' chargers). The same number applied to the II Corps. A total of 22,966 horses was therefore required before the two Corps could take to the field. The total number of effective horses with the Army was only 10,371 (calculation made in 1886, but Fleming believed the situation had not changed in 1889), about 1,100 less than the number required for one army corps, and 12,600 less than for the two Corps (exclusive of officers' chargers, requiring an additional 3,142 horses). Where lines of communication would have to be maintained, an additional 2,773 horses were required for each Corps. The total deficit for the two Corps was 18,100, and even if this deficit could have been found, Fleming considered that mortality during a war would be heavy due to more rapid movements and the increased destructiveness of firearms. He suggested a large reserve of 50% to 60% should be planned for.[36] According to Tylden, in 1896-7 a cavalry division within an army corps required:[37]

	3,720	for the eight regiments composing the Division
	720	for the four batteries RHA
	1,950	for the 15 batteries RFA
	7,316	for details such as regimental transport
Total	13,706	

The breeding of saddle horses, unless they were of good quality, was not a profitable business. In England, the price allowed for cavalry remounts (about £40) was not sufficient to encourage farmers to breed and even if it were, the demand was not large enough, in peacetime, to secure a ready market for them. Simply to improve the breed

35 *VR*, 1889, Vol.1, 12th January, p.324; figures taken from returns made by the WO at the beginning of 1889.

36 Ibid.

37 Tylden, p.27. Cavalry brigades within the division each had their own RHA battery for support they weren't deemed divisional artillery. The Royal Field Artillery ran a confusing Brigade-Division support, where they were supporting individual infantry brigades of the same division and were considered integral to both, but also self-sufficient and therefore independent. It didn't work properly and was changed in favour of the pre-war system, so by 1914 the cavalry division did not have RFA batteries under its command, only RHA batteries. My thanks to Brian Hill and Paul Evans of the Royal Artillery Institution for this information.

of light horses for military purposes was not to increase the supply and unless breeders could find a market they would not produce them. The demand for light horse breeds, for commercial and equestrian purposes declined annually, so to provide an adequate reserve of this type would have meant an expense, which according to Fleming, would have startled the taxpayer. In addition to the original cost of the animals, there was also the cost of their keep. Cavalry horses had to be of the best quality; a good troop horse was a weight carrying hunter and could not be bred and reared at the price then being paid by the government; if inferior animals were purchased they would not meet the requirements of modern warfare. As the Army was supplied with the best possible weapons the same care was required in supplying the best horses the country could produce, with measures adopted to secure an ample supply for the demands of war. This issue Fleming considered should be settled without delay.[38]

Even for those who saw the Registration Scheme as successfully supplying the quality of horses required, the problem of supplying the numbers of light horses remained. One school of thought was that some owners would pocket their annual registration fee and not produce a serviceable animal; others questioned the fitness of the horses for military work when required. Lord Methuen's view on the Scheme (Maj-Gen. Commanding Brigade of Guards and GOC Home District, 1892-1897), was that such fears were unfounded as owners of horses had taken a pride in producing the best stamp of animals at their disposal. He appears to be commenting on a trial use of the Scheme, "the first time any attempt had been made to parade registered horses", when stating that "so good were they, that all Corps had reported favourably of them". Those sent for draught purposes were ready for wagon work almost immediately and "for gun drill at a pinch", although there were complaints that some were too heavy. In the 8th Hussars no fewer than 75% were found suitable for light cavalry duties, and the remainder suitable for transport, or mounted infantry. If such experiences were typical, Methuen thought the difficulty of providing a supply of reserve cavalry horses might not be so great. He comments that the Army Remount Staff had noted any short-comings of the trial and would take steps to prevent, as far as possible, any recurrence, "we cannot expect to run before we can walk." Remount staff who had previously been asked to work more or less in the dark, under difficult circumstances, were to be credited with their successes. Much was expected from the new Remount Department, which was therefore "evidently deserving of confidence and support."[39]

Dr Fleming wrote scathingly about the plans for horsing the Army in the event of an emergency, believing them to be woefully inadequate both in numbers and type of remount required.[40] Although details might have been prepared on paper, he considered it was questionable as to how far the actual state of readiness would allow the prompt mobilisation of even one army corps, especially the mounted sections. The

38 *VR*, 1889, Vol.1, 16th February, pp.394.
39 *VR*, 1895, Vol.8, 19th October, p.199.
40 *VR*, 1889, Vol.1, 16th February, p.393.