# R.C.M.P.

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE QUARTERLY

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# *l'Esprit Cavalier*

*by* **S/Sgt. C. Walker**

SINCE 1873, the year the North West Mounted Police came into existence, much history of our Canadian West has been written, and prominent among those who first opened up the North West are certain members of that Force.

Some 300 strong, the first police personnel established a reputation which is enjoyed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police today. They brought law and order to a vast expanse of prairie—then the habitat of Indian and buffalo. With other duties of importance, the protection of the white settler was an ever-present and urgent one. That those duties were performed zealously and well in face of danger and hardship the pages of history testify.

Reg. No. 11682 S/Sgt. Cecil Walker is riding master at the main R.C.M.P. training centre, "Depot" Division, Regina, Sask. He engaged in the Force in 1932 from the former Alberta Provincial Police, of which he was a member for several years, and prior to that served seven years in the 12th Royal Lancers (Imperial Army) during which time he obtained an instructor's certificate from the Weedon School of Equitation, England. In 1927, while a member of the Salford City Constabulary in England, he was awarded championship trophy in a class for Best Mounted Constable at the Royal Horse Show, Olympia, London—a competition open to provincial and metropolitan police forces. His ability and knowledge of equitation have proved to be of a high standard, and since coming to Canada he has won wide recognition in horse shows held in the three prairie provinces.

These men had little if any training to prepare them for their duties, so that considering the highly technical subjects on today's training curriculum—and the sciences used as aids in criminal investigation—the veteran of the '70's was at a decided disadvantage. However, he did possess certain qualifications and was expected to be familiar with one basic science or art upon joining the Force—namely, horsemanship. And, surprising as it may seem today, this qualification appears to have been rated of equal importance to that of physique. A diligent study of *Rules and Regulations*, after appointment, would probably be the limit of police technique and knowledge expected.

Aged records reveal items of interest penned by officers then serving, items that convey vividly problems encountered and seemingly insurmountable difficulties that constantly presented themselves. Into those comments have gone spicy bits of humour, wit, and occasionally a modicum of veiled sarcasm.

A major difficulty was the standard of horsemanship, Commissioner French implies in his report of January, 1875:

**There is a world of truth in the old saying that the "outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man", and while in important respects the police horse has been superseded by motor vehicles in spheres where once he reigned supreme he still has a place of his own in modern law enforcement. The horse has played a long and fruitful role in the Force's activities, and as The Quarterly stressed some little time ago when the concept was circulated widely that the horse's day is done, "a final blow to live horse-power never will be struck".**

"According to the Act, all men should have been able to ride; but when put to the test, it was evident, that a good many rated their abilities in this line too highly".

The standard evidently failed to rise perceptibly within the next two years, for after recommending that the men be transported in wagons rather than on horses, Commissioner Macleod caustically writes:

"I need not go further into details of the system I have proposed but will only add that to make our men effective to fight on horseback against such enemies as we might meet in the N. West; they will have to be engaged as children and made to ride every day till they grow up".

Commissioner Irvine, too, seems to have been critical of the examination conducted when candidates were accepted for service, for at Fort Walsh in 1880, he specifies:

"Clause 6 of the Police Act reads: 'No Officer or Constable shall be appointed to the Police Force unless he be of sound

**Cavalry pattern used by the Force—1874-1883.**

**California stock saddle—1884-1922.**

constitution, able to ride, etc.' I trust the spirit of this clause will invariably be acted on. In the past this has not always been done. A man who cannot ride is useless for service in the Police; worse than useless, in fact a mere incumbrance".

Described is the stampeding of police horses during a storm, and the delay and inconvenience of rounding up some of them which had run upwards of 35 miles. How many stampedes took place with greenhorns on the backs of spirited mounts is judiciously forgotten. How often tempers of officers and N.C.O.'s became frayed at the apparent absence of horsemanship is discreetly left to the imagination.

All who have witnessed beginners undergoing the elementary lessons in equitation, especially on a chilly Monday morning, will readily appreciate the embarrassment of those would-be cavaliers when their ignorance of horses was violently demonstrated before the cynical gaze of their superiors, whose remarks probably savoured of sarcasm rather than of sympathy.

The torture of untrained muscle throughout long hours in the saddle was in itself a gruelling test of the N.W.M.P. recruits' endurance, and by no means all stood up to it. The weaker either deserted or were granted their discharge, leaving only the more willing and able to bear the many and sundry other hardships that were to follow those of the historic march west.

The loss of the failures numerically weakened the Force, but as a chain is tested by its weakest link so was the calibre of the organization in general materially strengthened. It is well that it was so. Though the standard of horsemanship may have left something to be desired the efforts of those first policemen deserve the high tribute so readily paid by Canadians since that time.

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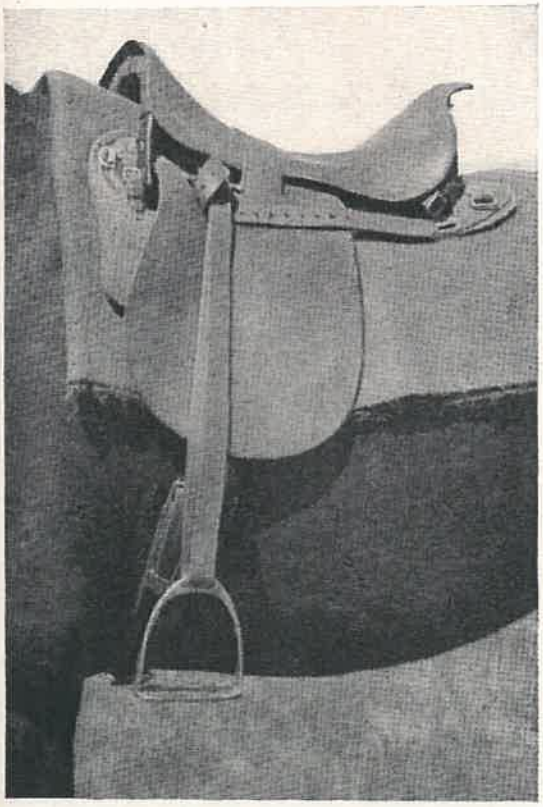
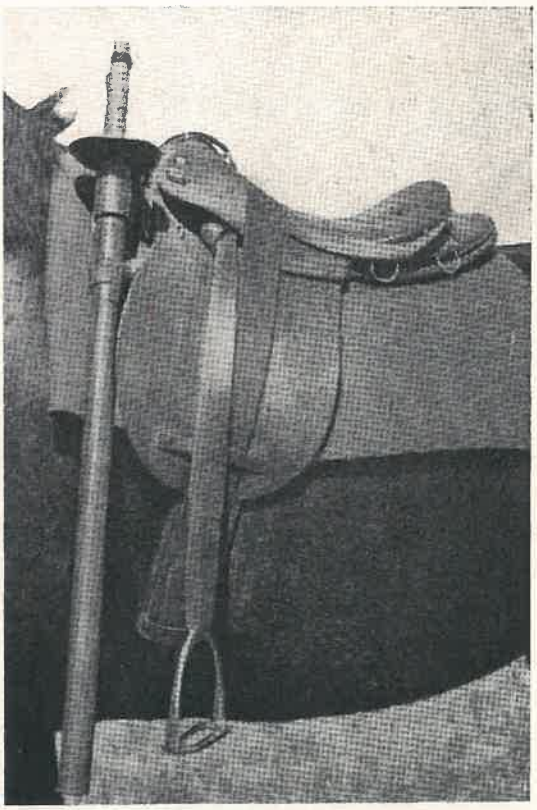


**Cavalry universal—1923-1946.**



**Colonial—1947-1948.**

***Left*: Correct method of bridling, and *below* of fitting curb chain.**

UNTIL posts were established by the N.W.M.P., opportunities for training in equitation were few—and, even then, personnel qualified to instruct were usually either not available or were engaged on more urgent duties, which ruled out any very serious attempt at drill. It is probable that the unskilled gained their knowledge of horsemanship by the slow and painful process of exploring the pitfalls, and that by so doing they unwittingly acquired the determination and fortitude demanded by their vocation.

We who serve in the R.C.M.P., with the most up-to-date machines and methods at our disposal, may well review the problems of those earlier peace officers and marvel at the tradition they established under conditions which today are considered primitive. Well might we ask ourselves the question: How much of that tradition would have been our legacy had the N.W.M.P. been a dismounted unit?

Undoubtedly the police horse helped establish our tradition, and though a modern member thinks in terms of radios, automobiles and aircraft the veteran realizes that but for the saddle horse most of the Force's appeal to youth and age alike, the romantic and the picturesque, would be missing from the pattern of our historical past.

Many long and hazardous mounted patrols were made by members of the Force. None have been recorded as spectacular feats of endurance or horsemanship, yet there can be no doubt as to the tenacity of Reg. No. 3743 Sgt. J. G. W. Biggs who in 1905 left Moose Jaw, Sask., in pursuit of a horse thief. The trail led across the international boundary into Montana, U.S.A., and the sergeant was away from his post 135 days during which he covered 2,700 miles, or an average of 20 miles a day for four and a half months. So it was throughout the prairies until the late 1920's. Mounted patrols were maintained; horse and horse-drawn vehicles were an essential part of police detachment equipment.

With the general adoption of the automobile as a means of transport the use-

fulness of the saddle horse for patrol purposes decreased until as of July 1 this year there are only 192 horses on the strength of the Force as against 846 motor vehicles on charge, while the uniformed personnel number 2,761 all ranks.

Perhaps an uninformed section of the public may doubt if any useful purpose is served by retaining the horse in the police and argue that the expense and time required to teach the novice to ride are adequate reasons for discarding the animal which gave the Force its earlier mobility. A few personal questions will reveal that the advocate of "modern methods" possesses little if any ability as a horseman. He sees the horse only as a beast of burden, views him as he would a car or other mechanical device, and so by comparison tries to justify his stand.

Officers of the Force, whose responsibility it is to see that strict efficiency is maintained with a minimum expenditure of public funds, would readily concede the point were it not that they, as students of criminology and psychology, have learned from long experience a great deal about methods of promoting and developing those characteristics considered most admirable in man. Obviously, they acknowledge, as a means of general transportation the police horse is as obsolete as the cavalry horse is amid the armour of a modern army in action. However, because it is their duty to maintain a high morale in the Force and the perpetuation in its personnel of a model for Canadian youth, in principle at least they endorse the sentiments of an unknown inspector general of French cavalry who while giving advice to French officers during the mechanization period following the 1918 Armistice sounded this caution for those in command:

"Maintain above all and at all costs *l'esprit cavalier*. This *l'esprit cavalier* is not born in a day by order, but is a result of a steady accumulation which has been going on for years, it exists in but cannot be acquired from books. The pupil can only acquire it as a result of intense practice with horses. No one who has not himself practised equitation in all its forms, knows the amount of perseverance, calmness, patience and severity tempered with gentleness, that has to be displayed by a cavalier.

"Furthermore riding generates audacity, and he who does not relish taking risks will never be any good. To be cavalier one must ignore danger, never draw back in front of an obstacle whatever it may be and one must go straight.

"This cannot be obtained at once but rather requires constant work. The ability so acquired gives to the officer, by means denied to the mass, his prestige and confers on him a physical and moral domination".

Admittedly the duties of the policeman differ widely from those of the soldier, but many of the characteristics essential in the personnel of an army are equally desirable in members of a force such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

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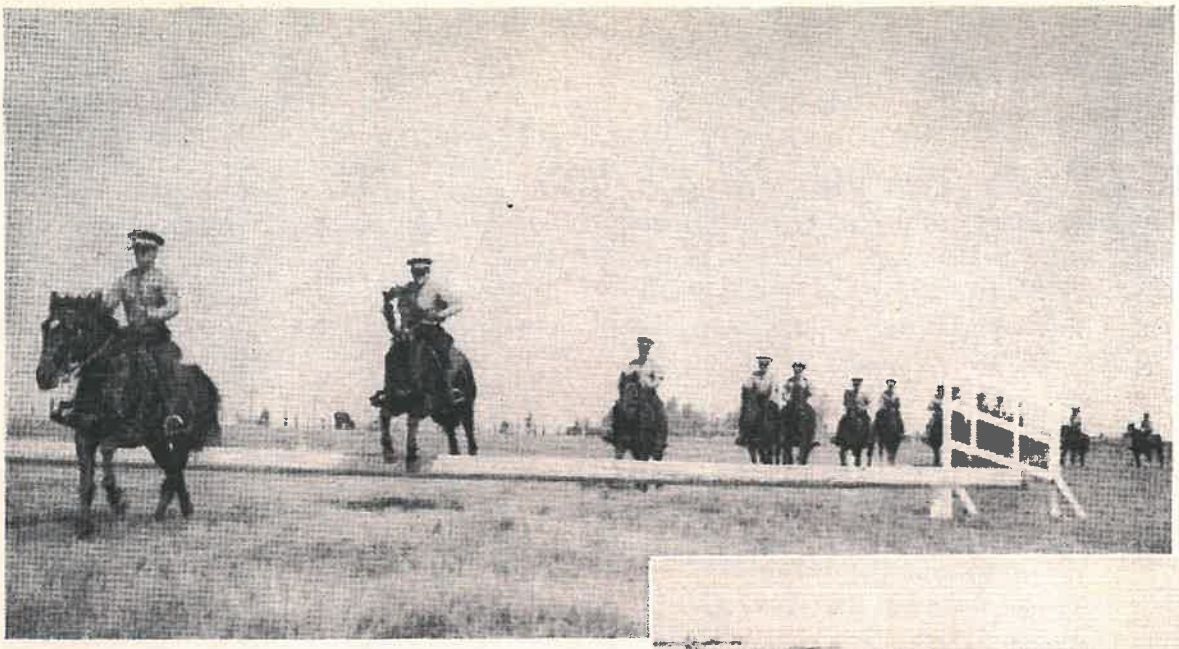
HERE then is the sphere of the Mounted Police horse today: He is the equine detector of courage, or lack of it, in police candidates. Skilled tuition in equitation will replace timidity with boldness and develop a disregard for the inevitable bodily bruises which even the most proficient must experience. Handling of a horse promotes mental alertness and rapid acceleration of muscular reflexes. It develops a sportsmanlike attitude that enables the horseman to take failure cheerfully and success modestly, and, of equal importance, does more to foster the Force's *esprit de corps* than any other phase of recruits' training. Together with foot drill and physical training, riding creates physical fitness and muscular coordination, factors in the high physical standard desired.

If the foregoing were all the virtues of the saddle horse his value to the Force would amply justify the expenditure of maintaining the few still on strength, but



**Summer dress—warming up.**

there are other important roles he alone can fill. The part he has played in the humane and successful control of public assemblies, friendly or hostile, across Canada in the past cannot be over-estimated; and, finally, it must be remembered that during our rigorous Canadian winters, when snow restricts the operation of the automobile to town or city streets or main highways, horsemanship will enable today's Mounted Policeman to abandon his machine for a slower but, on a snow-drifted prairie, surer mode of travel. If a saddle horse or team is available for hire, his versatility will help him in the interests of the Canadian public to maintain a high standard of efficiency in the execution of his duty.

To the red man and white alike the scarlet-coated riders have become symbols of justice. And in these turbulent times, in which less fortunate peoples of older and more populous nations are subjected to the iron hand of oppression, Canada may well retain these guardians who symbolize the rights and privileges of her citizens first wrested by horsemen of the 13th century, the Knights of Magna Charta.

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EQUITATION embraces both teaching the man to ride and training the green horse.

The advantage of the mounted soldier over his adversary on foot was exploited

**In the lane.**

as early as 2627 B.C. by the Chinese. And, too, the Egyptians, Persians, Greeks and Romans had knowledge of the art of horsemanship.

Recognizing the courage and stamina of the horse in battle and in an effort to encourage and promote these factors continuously, nations scientifically developed or improved certain breeds of horses for the purpose of war and also fostered in the soldier increasingly high

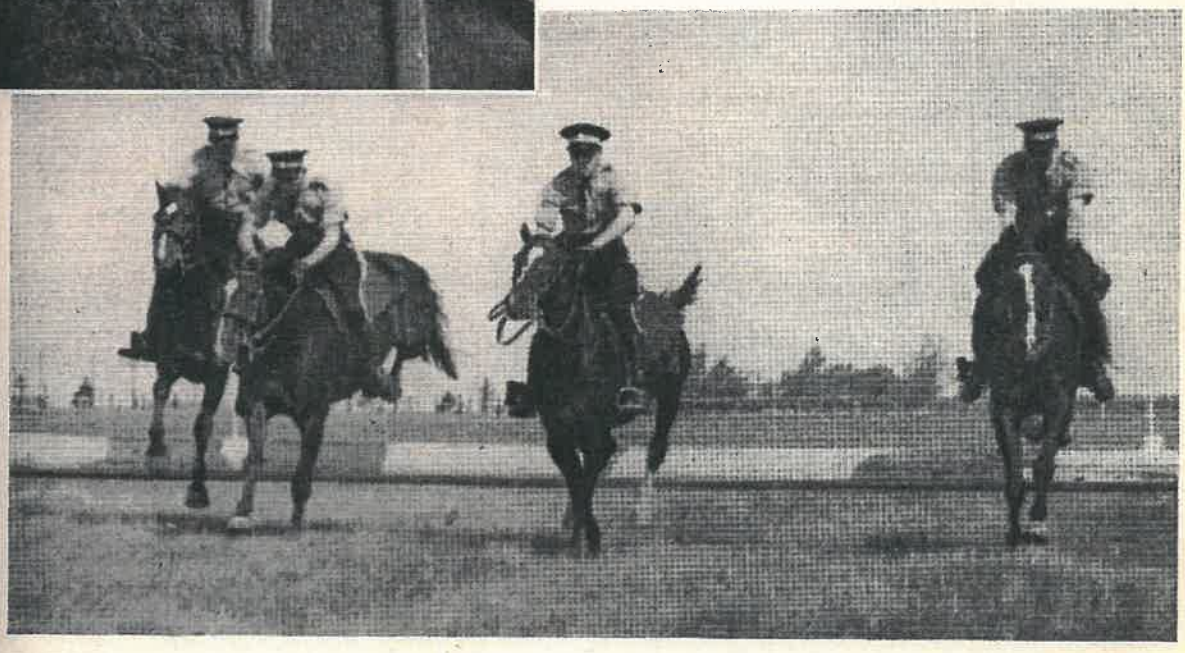
standards of skill in mounted combat. For many years before the recent world upheaval, cavalry schools were maintained at Weedon, England; Fort Riley, U.S.A.; Vienna, Austria; Saumur, France; Hanover, Germany, and Pinerola, Italy.

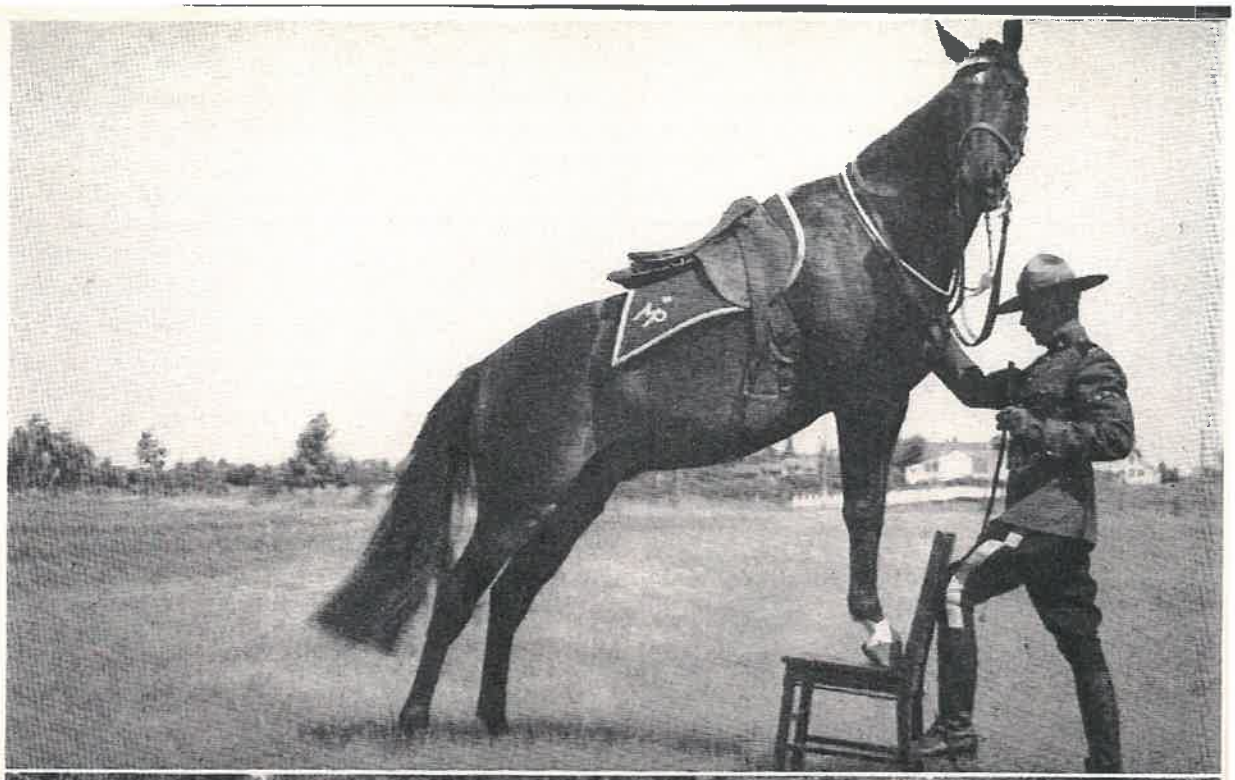
Cavalry personnel were taught the theories and principles of horsemanship and instructed in the correct methods of teaching them. Upon completing their instructional courses, students returned to their respective units as qualified instructors in equitation. Though each school developed a particular style of seat most suitable and applicable to its national requirements, all were in accord on the general basic principles of horse control. By the efforts of skilled equestrians of many nationalities the horseman's technique has thus steadily improved, and knowledge of horsemanship is more universal today than ever before among those who derive profit and pleasure from the horse.

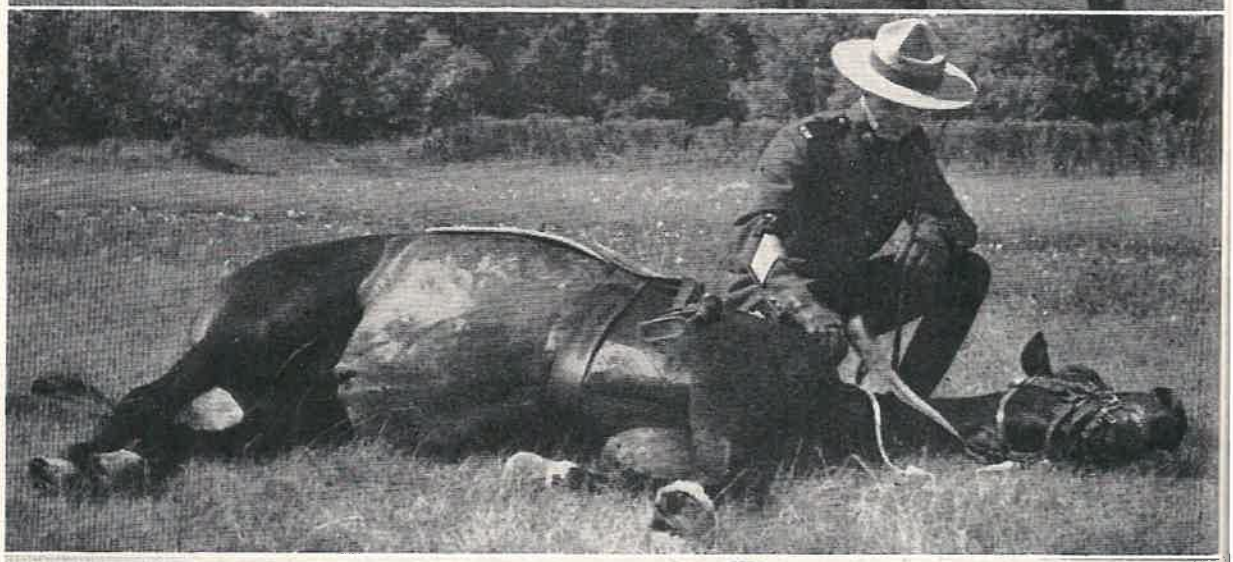
The machine, accepted today as a necessity, is such a comparatively recent innovation that many settlers of Western Canada still alive were at one time entirely dependent upon the horse for transportation. Military tacticians within living memory relied largely upon the mobile cavalry arm for rapid movement and surprise attack, therefore it is reasonable to suppose that these factors influenced the recommendations of those instrumental in the organizing in Canada of a North West Force suitably equipped and sufficiently mobile to enforce laws over a large territory with alacrity and speed.

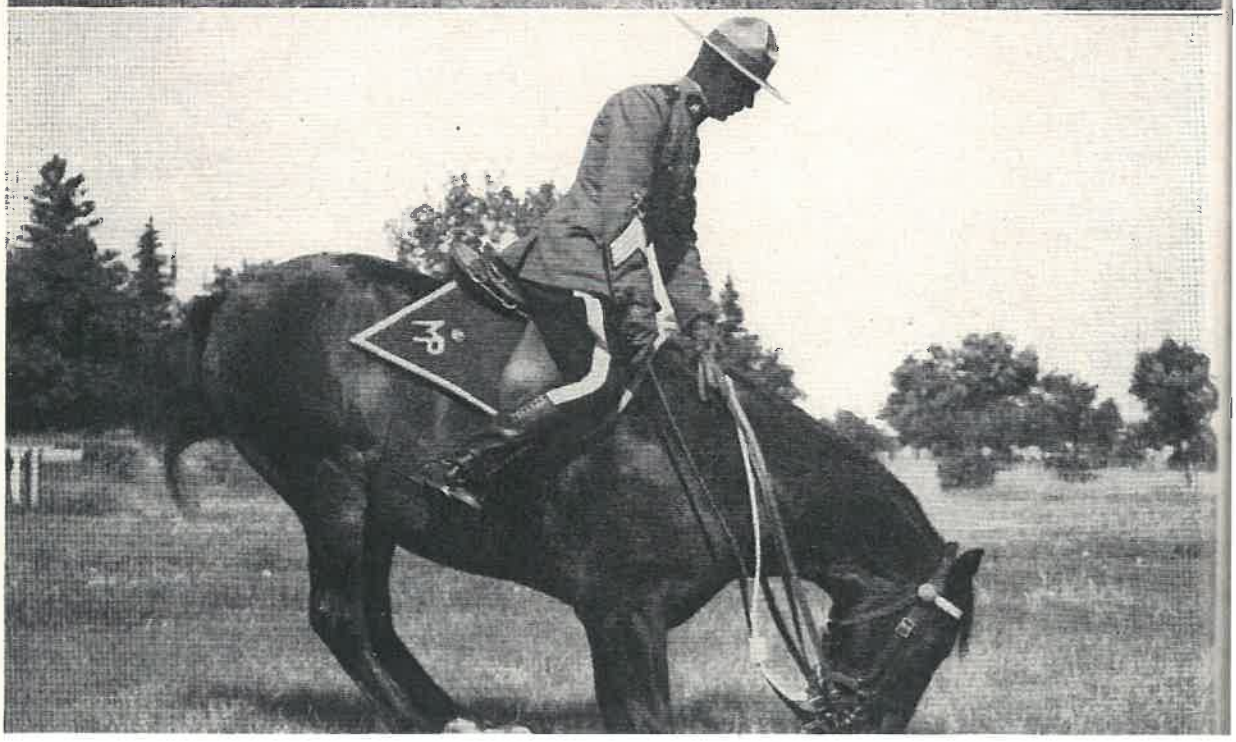
British Army cavalry manuals on drill, adopted by the N.W.M.P. during its

**Section jumping.**









formative period for the training of its members, have promoted a style of riding that may be said to be necessarily military and characteristically British.

Position in the saddle, or "seat", to use the horseman's terminology, has changed radically since the turn of the century. Military manuals on cavalry drill of that time favoured a rigid body position and straight leg with foot held parallel to the horse's side.

Motion pictures provided means for making a closer scientific study of the action of horse and rider and resulted in the general adoption of new theories on balance and pace, according to the type of work and the country with which the rider must contend, until gradually the seat has acquired its present variations—flat-racing seat, steeple-chase seat, Western or cowboy seat and the military seats of Italy, France, Britain, United States, and so forth.

To fit him for the multifarious duties he will be called upon to perform, whether in a crowded urban centre or at a lonely Northern post, the Mounted Police recruit is taught numerous academic subjects through many lecture periods. Physical training, swimming, foot drill, small-arms drill and equitation combine with this course to provide a well-balanced training curriculum from both the mental and physical standpoints, and though horsemanship may no longer be the most vital knowledge the recruit can assimilate, it is safe to say he would remain a less wise and less efficient public servant without it.

The primary object of instruction in equitation is to teach the pupil to acquire a secure and well-balanced seat and to apply correctly the aids so that he will be capable of using his horse to advantage in the control of crowds; the mounted man should be able, without conscious effort, to retain complete control of his horse while concentrating his energy on the effective use of his weapons.

The methods of teaching equitation have changed as drastically as has the seat. The cracking of long whips and resulting wild melees, often purposely created by the instructor, belong to bygone days and are no longer considered necessary or desirable. Quietness dispels nervousness in both horses and riders and is more effective than the old "Hit 'em and hold 'em" method.

* * *

N.c.o.'s employed as riding instructors must be experienced horsemen, able to demonstrate not only the correct methods but the results of their incorrect application. They must aim at instilling confidence in the recruit, by avoiding accidents or injuries and encouraging in him a desire to emulate their skill and technique. They must display patience both with pupils and horses, boldness and determination, severity tempered with sympathy, and be liberal in reward for a job well done.

Police horses are gentle, well broken and reliable, but due to an exuberance of energy and spirit will often, through a collective breach of good manners, create havoc by emptying saddles of unwary amateurs who invariably pick themselves up, surprised at both the rapidity of their involuntary dismount and total absence of bodily injury. When pupils display spontaneous amusement at the discomfiture of their companions and show the sportsman's attitude if they themselves suffer the indignity of a toss their confidence is established and nervousness eliminated.

As experience is gained and a reasonable degree of control acquired, horses sense the hand of restraint on rein and the equine dictatorial attitude subsides; no longer passive, riders are now taking an active part in the proceedings.

**OPPOSITE—**

***Top:*** **This is awfully boring.**
***Middle:*** **Siesta.**
***Bottom:*** **Definitely undignified.**

The seat as taught in the R.C.M.P. today is an easy workmanlike position with stirrup length suitable for the maximum leg pressure, yet providing for the necessary thigh leverage to ensure gripping ability. Without alteration of stirrup length, the rider may collect or extend his paces, ride up or down steep grades, jump obstacles of reasonable height or nature and use arms with ease and efficiency under all conditions.

Balance and grip are developed by periods of riding without stirrups. Mounted physical exercises, usually termed "balance exercises", are practised to break down the tendency in all beginners to contract muscles of the shoulders, back and abdomen. Introduced at the halt at first, progress permits the use of these exercises at faster paces.

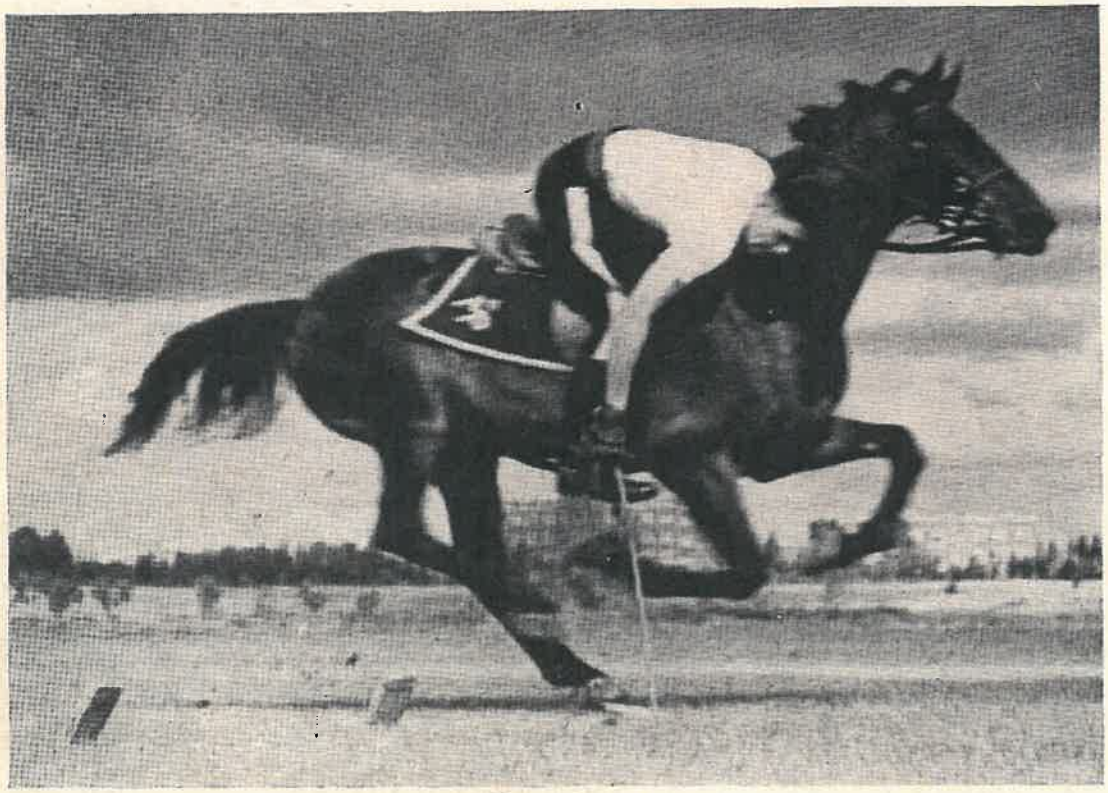
Jumping is an essential exercise and is practised extensively, not specifically to train students to become expert in this form of horsemanship but to promote balance and generally to develop security of seat.

School figures and exercises such as turns, circles and figure-of-eight, with passaging and reining back, demand co-ordination of aids if prompt and smooth execution is to be attained.

Troop drill and arms drill (mostly confined to the use of truncheon and rifle) is taught, though for mounted sports events instruction in the use of sword and lance is necessary in order that the ancient Indian sport of tent-pegging may test the eye and judgment of galloping contestants.

The musical ride, famous since the early days of the Force, is to appear again before the public at wide-spread points across the North American continent this year. Consisting of 32 constables on matched black horses, this ride will be the culmination of intense training of both man and mount. Intricate figures calling for precision and keen

**Gymkhana—speed, power, an eye, and a trusty blade.**



**Ring and peg.**

judgment demand a skill and co-ordination that comes only with hard work and strict attention to detail.

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FORT Walsh, built in 1875 by "B" Troop N.W.M.P. and named after the commanding officer, Inspr. J. M. Walsh, was situated in a picturesque valley in the heart of the Cypress Hills of Southern Saskatchewan. Straight tall pine trees, growing in abundance on the surrounding slopes, provided the logs for the buildings and stockade. Here Commissioner Irvine established his headquarters in 1878.

Late in 1882 the fort was abandoned and early in the following year headquarters was moved to Regina. In the course of time the buildings were destroyed or dismantled by settlers or Indians until the small and somewhat neglected cemetery, marking the last resting place of certain early members, was the only visible reminder of a once busy police post. Fort Walsh became an historic name only.

In 1943 the R.C.M.P. acquired 3,000 acres of land including the original site of the fort for the dual purpose of establishing a remount breeding station and preserving an historic landmark.

Today, buildings are erected anew, precisely as were the originals. The Union Jack flutters from the flag pole, and though the trumpeter's notes fail to echo again across the hills, prospective police horses spend their early years grazing alongside trails now grown dim —trails first indented by earlier equine members proceeding on sometimes long and hazardous patrols, or returning therefrom to a well-earned rest and the comforts of a warm log stable.

**Did you say "Anybody's game"?**

***Above:*** **"We're members too—we haul the rations".**

***Below:*** **At historic Fort Walsh "foals range with the dams" until "they are weaned".**

Fort Walsh exists again. The visitor will hear sounds which were familiar to those pioneer peace officers—an axe hitting into pine log, shrill neighs of horses echoing across miles of valley, and the falling of water over the old ford. The romanticism of helmet and sabretache, covered wagon and camp fire pervades the spot. Then suddenly newer, mechanical noises will be detected—a snorting gasoline engine supplying energy to electric batteries, the whining of an automobile in "low" on a steep grade and perhaps the drone of a plane overhead.

The old fort exists again, but modern science has invaded the valley.

Only horses black or brown in colour are suitable for police purposes, and in order that uniformity may be preserved, the foundation stock of selected mares and thoroughbred stallions at Fort Walsh are necessarily black. Remounts must stand over 15.2 and possess the necessary bone to carry men of 150 to 190 lbs. in weight.

Brood mares are brought off the range into home pastures in March and foals arrive in April or May. Foals range with the dams until autumn at which time they are weaned, taken on strength, allotted a name and regimental number, branded with the registered brand MP on the near shoulder, and halter broken.

Halter breaking is the first step in the foal's education. He is tied in stables, led about and handled until his natural fear of man is dispelled. All foals return to the open range as yearlings and except for castration and hoof branding, remain at liberty with the remainder of the herd. Stallions are kept in stables or stallion paddocks.

At four years of age, remounts are transferred to Regina, Sask., or Rockcliffe, Ont., where serious training begins. Only experienced members of the riding staff handle these youngsters and several weeks' training is required before they become steady and reliable enough for less-experienced riders to handle and control them.

The trainer strives for his pupils' confidence by gentleness and quietness, though with firmness he demands obedience throughout all phases of training. Leading lunging and long-rein driving prepare the young horse for saddle and rider. Noise-makers are operated, well-inflated automobile tubes are thrown round and over him until he finally disregards these routine antics of his trainer. Quietly mounting while the remount

**All very amusing.**

is securely snubbed to the saddle horn of a well-trained horse, the trainer invariably finds that his pupil will obediently walk alongside his leader without protest. Quickly becoming accustomed to the process of being mounted and dismounted and to the weight of rider, he eventually is turned loose to experience and obey the demands of his rider under whose tuition he learns to respond to the aids.

Snaffle-bits are used in the early stages of training, until balance and head-carriage is attained. The Portsmouth Pelham then replaces the snaffle and from its curb action, and the judicious use of hand and leg, flexions of lower jaw are obtained.

Suppleness, balance and obedience are demanded and obtained by prolonged schooling until the remount becomes the safe and reliable police horse, well balanced and mannerly on a busy city street, yet showing animation and style in the ranks of the musical ride he will surely be called upon to execute.

From the peaceful serenity of his native Cypress Hills, the R.C.M.P. remount is brought, schooled and groomed for his debut and the tumultuous ovation of an admiring public. Beauty, elegance and courage, all three of which are his, will continue to hold secure his place in the hearts of police and public alike.

**R.C.M.P. Musical Ride detail on Treasure Island, Golden Gate Exposition, San Francisco, Cal., July, 1939.**