

Kitchener's 'Cavalry' at Searles, Fletching,

Original source Sussex County Magazine. 1931.
'The Call to Arms'

G.E.Collins. Born c1867.

Enlisted: July 29th 1914 served until discharged Sept 12th 1919.

Army career revolved around horses.

Appointed Purchasing Officer of Remounts, 18 months before the outbreak of war.

He began in Lewes when orders were issued to 'mobilise' on July 29th. Then in October joined the Royal Field Artillery and became ADC and Horse Advisor to General JW Hawkins RA commanding 22nd; a new division of artillery. He went on to command the Divisional Riding Establishment at Nutley. Passed as unfit for service he continued with special responsibility with horses.



There was a scarcity of 'gunners' (horses to haul guns) as horse-drawn buses were no longer so prolific (horses used to hauling buses, were fit and ready to serve). Cavalry chargers were not a problem as there were plenty of hunters available from private stables.

The collecting station for local horses was at the cattle market in Lewes. Mr. GM Maryon-Wison of Searles in Fletching offered his riding school for the benefit of the division stationed in Nutley. Here the recruits were to be taught equestrian rudiments. Daily the novice riders received instruction.



Divisional Riding Establishment at Nutley.

The routine was to take the recruits to the riding school at Nutley; the more advanced went to a rented field and underwent squadron drill. To ring the changes on occasion they would ride around the roads.

An 'initiative' test involved using the large open spaces of the forest and covering set ground as efficiently as they could, a packet of 'fags' being the reward for first home.

Meanwhile in the riding school at Searles beginner lessons would be underway.

First – at walk.

Proceeding to mount – from either side.

Moving on to vaulting and then the daring manoeuvres of vaulting on to a moving horse.

The equestrian education took several weeks.

A Story

Some recruits appeared at odd times and missed out on Lesson no. 1 (and maybe 2;3;4 and 5)! One morning on their way to the riding school at Searles they were trotting down the lane from Nutley when the order 'halt in front' passed down the column of riders. It reached the Divisional commander at the head of the column. It appeared that a newly arrived corporal had fallen off.

The officer made his way down the column to enquire - "Hurt, corporal?",

"All right, sir".

He then proceeded to mount with the wrong foot in the stirrup. His companions kept straight faces until one of the men dismounted and gave him a leg up.

The commanding officer trotted away to the head of the column.

"Walk; March; Tr-r-ot!"

They had not gone far when

"Halt at the front" reached the officer in charge.

Once more the corporal was helped to remount and the column moved forward.

This hapless individual was parted from his steed in a similar fashion several times on the short ride from Nutley to Searles.

On eventually arriving at their destination the officer in charge enquired with biting sarcasm

"Have you ever ridden a horse before, corporal?"

The unfortunate and somewhat bruised soldier looked at the officer in astonishment and answered in a mystified voice, "No, Sir".

Until that morning he had spent his time in an office until it occurred to someone he ought to have a bit of riding practice.

The riding school itself was a very dusty place. The officer in charge tried watering it in the morning but it soon dried up. What to do? How about sawdust?

On application to HQ in Lewes the information came back that there was none to be had anywhere in reach. The solution to this problem can be found in part 2.

Sue Ray