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STANDARD COMMANDS for MOUNTED ORGANIZATIONS



A drill manual for riding groups, 4-H clubs, sheriffs' posses and other mounted organizations, prepared by E. L. Potter.

Federal Cooperative Extension Service
Oregon State College
Corvallis

FOREWARD

With the growing interest in saddle horses and with one or more organized riding group in each county, the Oregon Extension Service is pleased to present this manual for the use of such organizations and particularly for the newer groups, such as 4-H clubs, riding clubs, and Sheriffs' posses.

Horses mean health and fine recreation to thousands of people and the raising of good saddle horses is rapidly becoming one of Oregon's major industries.

The author of this circular is a veteran horseman, who throughout a busy life has found his relaxation from the tensions of the classroom and office in riding good horses and in working with riding groups.

Wm. A. Schoenfeld,
Dean and Director.

STANDARD COMMANDS FOR MOUNTED ORGANIZATIONS
Compiled by E. L. Potter

Mounted organizations, whether military, police, or pleasure groups are handled by means of a comparatively simple set of commands which each individual must learn thoroughly. These standard commands are "building blocks," whereby the commanding officer may put his troop into any position or through any maneuvers that he may wish. The commanding officer must not only know the commands, but he must plan ahead and know just what commands are to be given and how each command fits into what has already been done in order to accomplish a given purpose without getting his troop into some formation which he did not desire or expect.

The commands given here are essentially those used by the U. S. Cavalry, but with some modification for civilian use. It is assumed that the entire troop is handled as one unit. However, the commander may divide the troop into squads or platoons, if he wishes to do so.

In this manual the entire riding group is designated as a Company. Any other name may be used as desired. In case of Sheriff's Posse, the term Posse is generally used in giving commands.

GENERAL:

Commands are normally in three parts as for example: "(1) Fours, (2) Right, (3) MARCH." The first part calls attention to the units which are to execute the command whatever it may be. "Fours" in this case means that a command is coming up which is to be executed by each four acting as a unit, and each four remaining as a "four" that is 1, 2, 3, 4, side by side. What the relationship of each four may be to the other fours need not concern the troopers. The commander thinks that out before he gives the command.

"Column" means the entire company in whatever formation it may happen to be at the time the command is given. In this case the leading element executes the command when the command of execution is given. The other elements follow the tracks of the leading element.

The second part of the command, in this example "Right" tells what is to be done. The parts of the command so far given are known as "preparatory commands." They tell who is to do what but no actual movement is made until the command, MARCH. This is known as the "command of execution" and means "do it now." In practice the word MARCH is usually given as a loud HO. A whistle may be used as a substitute for MARCH. A hand signal may also be used. The hand signal is the right hand held vertically and then dropped to the side. Holding the hand up is to get the attention of the company. Execution comes when the hand is dropped.

Exceptions: There are a few commands which are executed without the command MARCH. These are usually self-explanatory. In this manual, the words written in capitals are in themselves commands of execution.

DOUBLE OR TRIPLE COMMANDS

The commander may give more than one preparatory command followed by just one command of execution. In this case when the command of execution is given the commands are executed in the order given. For example: Fours right and halt; MARCH. At the command of execution the company does fours right and comes to a halt immediately after the "fours right." The commander may also give one preparatory command for one platoon, or squad, and another preparatory command for another platoon, or squad; then at the one command of execution, each platoon, or squad, executes the command given to it.

STANDARD COMMANDS

Company; FALL IN: The company will form a line facing the commander. The commander may tell each trooper his position in the line or may let them choose their own position.

Company; COUNT OFF: Beginning at the right end (facing the commander) each trooper calls out a number; numbering in the following order: 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. Each trooper must remember his number together with the other members of his "four" and their positions. These numbers are, for drill purposes, his "name," regardless of the position he may occupy later in the drill. Numbers are not changed without order from the commander.

Company; ATTENTION: Each trooper assumes a soldierly position with his horse gathered and himself alert to any commands that may be given.

Company; AT EASE: Not at attention but no trooper to leave his place.

Company; FALL OUT: Troopers may leave the formation, but are to remain within hearing distance for future commands.

Company; DISMISSED: Drill over. Troopers may go home or otherwise do as they like.

Company; STAND TO HORSE: (Given only when dismounted.) Each trooper stands at the near side of his horse's head with the reins in the right hand about 12 inches from the bit. Reins which are fastened together are left over the horse's neck. If reins are divided, the right is held in the left hand. The trooper stands in the position of the soldier at attention.

Prepare to Mount; MOUNT: a. Being in line at the first command the ODD numbers lead out 4 yards (12 feet) directly to the front, then all take the position of prepare to mount, (left foot in stirrup, reins adjusted) and at the second command mount in unison. To reform the rank the commander directs FORM RANK, at which the EVEN numbers move into line with the odd numbers and halt.

b. Being in column of fours or twos, at the first command the troopers open out fanwise from the center sufficiently to permit mounting without interference and all take the position of PREPARE TO MOUNT. In column the preparatory command may be, and generally is, omitted and the squad mounted by the command MOUNT.

Prepare to Dismount; DISMOUNT: a. Being in line, at the first command the ODD numbers ride forward 4 yards directly to the front and halt; all then take the position of Prepare to Dismount, which is the same as Prepare to Mount, and at the second command dismount and take the position of Stand to Horse. To reform the rank the instructor directs FORM RANK, at which the even numbers lead up into the intervals and halt.

b. Being in column of fours or twos, at the preparatory command the troopers open out fanwise from the center to permit dismounting without interference and all take the position of Prepare to Dismount. At the second command all dismount, BUT INTERVALS ARE NOT CLOSED. In column the preparatory command generally is omitted and the squad dismounted by the command DISMOUNT.

In most non-military organizations troopers enter the arena mounted, or at least mount before "Falling in." Mounting and dismounting in formation require that the horse be carefully trained to stand still while being mounted or dismounted.

Right (or left) DRESS: The trooper on the right holds his position. The trooper on his left aligns himself carefully with the number one, both as the forward and lateral position. Number three then aligns with numbers one and two, and so on down the line. Smooth execution of this command requires that the horses be taught to side step. This command is usually given when the company first "falls in" but it may be given at any time that the commander thinks the alignment is faulty.

Forward; MARCH: The company moves forward at a walk without change of formation. All changes of direction given when the company is at a halt are to be executed at walk and the company is to continue at a walk until commanded to the contrary.

Backward; MARCH: The entire company moves backward.

Gallop (or At a Gallop); MARCH: The entire company takes up the gallop at the command of execution. May be combined with Forward, or other commands. For example; Forward, at a Gallop; MARCH.

Walk (or At a Walk); MARCH: The entire company comes to a walk. Used only when the company is at a faster gait than the walk. All movements are supposed to be at a walk unless otherwise indicated.

Trot (or At a Trot); MARCH: The entire company takes up the trot.

Modifications of standard speeds may be used if desired. The army uses the following: Trot, about 9 miles per hour; Slow Trot, about 6 miles per hour; Gallop, (Sometimes called the maneuvering gallop) about 12 miles per hour; Extended Gallop, about 16 miles per hour; School Gallop, about 8 miles per hour.

GUIDES

Unless commanded to the contrary the right hand rider of the leading element sets the pace and direction. The riders on his left adjust their position to him. The right hand rider of the next following element takes

his position behind the guide of the first element. The riders on his left adjust their position to him. At the command "GUIDE LEFT" the left hand rider becomes the guide. At the command "GUIDE CENTER" the center man becomes the guide. It normally is understood in advance who the center man is to be; otherwise the commander must indicate. The command "GUIDE CENTER" is normally used only when the company is in a long line.

SPACING

The standard rule is 6 inches knee to knee and 4 feet nose to tail. Spaced in this manner a group of four is assumed to occupy a space 12 feet by 12 feet. For green companies the commander may specify different spacing, but the spacing should be such that the "four" occupies the same distance side to side as front to rear, including space between fours.

CHANGES OF DIRECTION

These are usually self-explanatory. The turns commonly used are:
Right; turn right 90 degrees.
Right About; turn right 180 degrees.
Circle to the right; turn right 360 degrees (full circle).
Right Oblique; turn right 45 degrees. Applied only to troopers at the command Forward March; the troopers resume the direction they were marching before the Right Oblique command was given.
Right, Half Turn; turn right 45 degrees. Generally applied to column.

The above are, of course, all used as part of regular commands, such as: Column, right, MARCH.

On all turns at a walk the inside rider turns on a circle six feet in diameter and slowly enough that the outside rider may move at the regular speed. On turns at a gallop, the inside rider turns on a circle 18 feet in diameter. All of these commands are not used from all formations. It is the responsibility of the commander to use the proper commands in the proper places.

Company; CHANGE HANDS: This command is given when the company is marching around an arena and it is desired that the column go in the opposite direction. If the column is marching on the left hand (around the arena to the left) the guide of the leading element waits until he is around the end of the arena and about 20 feet along the long side. He then obliquely to the left across the arena so as to hit the opposite side about 20 feet from the far end. He is then on the track going in the opposite direction from that in which he was going when the command was given. If the column is marching on the right hand the command is executed in a similar manner. The idea is to reverse direction with the widest possible turn.

Right and left by twos; MARCH: This command is given only when the company is in a column of fours. The right hand pair of the leading element turns to the right and the left hand pair to the left. The other elements follow the tracks of the leading elements. This command may be given, Right and left by twos at the wall. In this case the command is executed when the leading element comes to the wall and no command of execution is needed.

Right and left by troopers; MARCH: This command is given only when the company is already in a column of twos. It is executed as above.

Extended order; fifteen feet; MARCH: The leading element spreads out until there is 15 feet from stirrup to stirrup. The commander may indicate any desired distance. Fifteen is given only for example.

Twenty feet; head to tail; MARCH: The leading element continues as before. The second element reins back until there is a 'space of 20 feet head to tail. The other elements likewise rein back. The commander may indicate any desired distance. Twenty feet is given only for example.

SPECIAL COMMANDS

Right front into line; MARCH: Form a line on the right of the leading element. The leading element will continue at the gait specified or halt if commanded. The other elements oblique to the right and come into line at the next higher speed. The commander will not ordinarily give this command with the leading element at a gallop, but if so the other must come up at a run. Left front into line; would be the same only forming on the left of the leading element. This is the command most often used.

Form fours; (or Right by Fours); MARCH: There are two situations with relation to this command: (1) If the company is in a line, your right hand will go ahead at the gait specified and the others will hold back and form fours behind the first four and in the order in which they have counted off. "Twos," or "Column of troopers" may be formed from a line or any wider formation by the same process. (2) If the company is in a column narrower than fours, that is twos or column of troopers when the command is given, the guide of the leading element will proceed at the gait specified. The others will form fours in the order as counted off. In order to do this they must speed up to the next higher speed as indicated under "Right front into line."

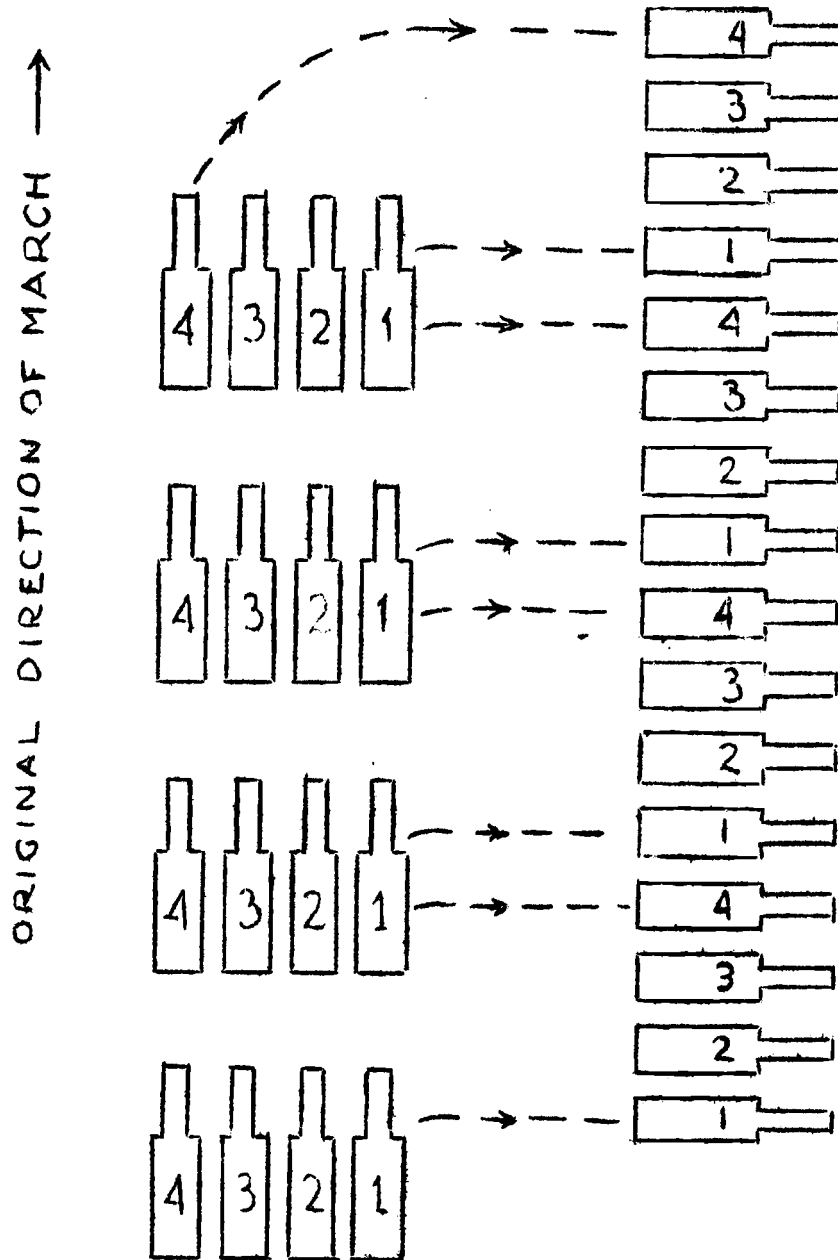
IMPROMPTU COMMANDS

In non-military organizations it is permissible for the commander to use commands of his own making. Such commands will be much simpler if they always consist of the standard three parts: 1. Who, 2. What, 3. MARCH.

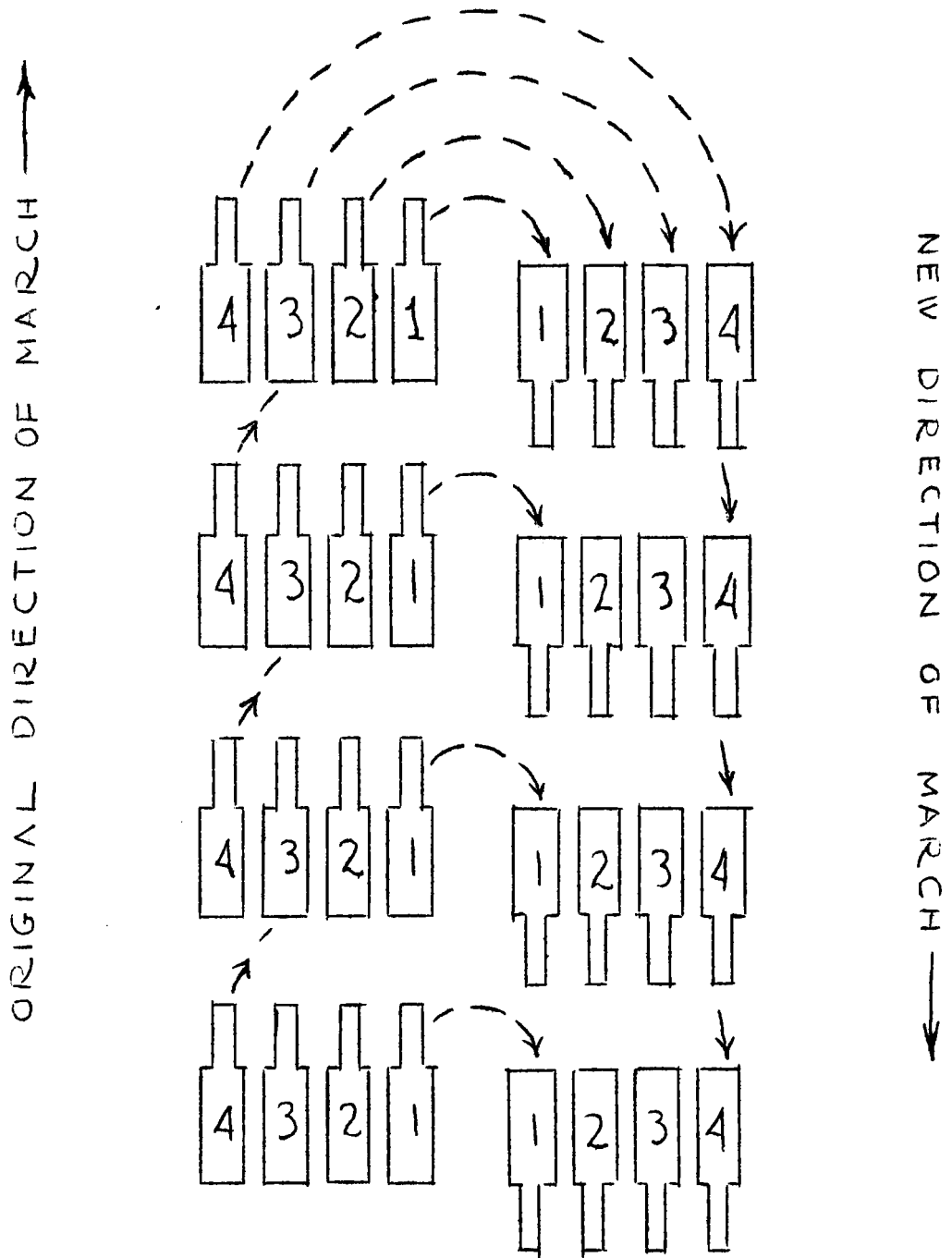
DISPLAY DRILLS

Display drills are usually invented by the commander or his assistants and there is no limit to their kind or type. If the company can drill well according to the commands already given, there will be no great difficulty in executing any display drill that may be designed. The commander may have to invent some new commands for the display drill.

NEW DIRECTION OF MARCH →

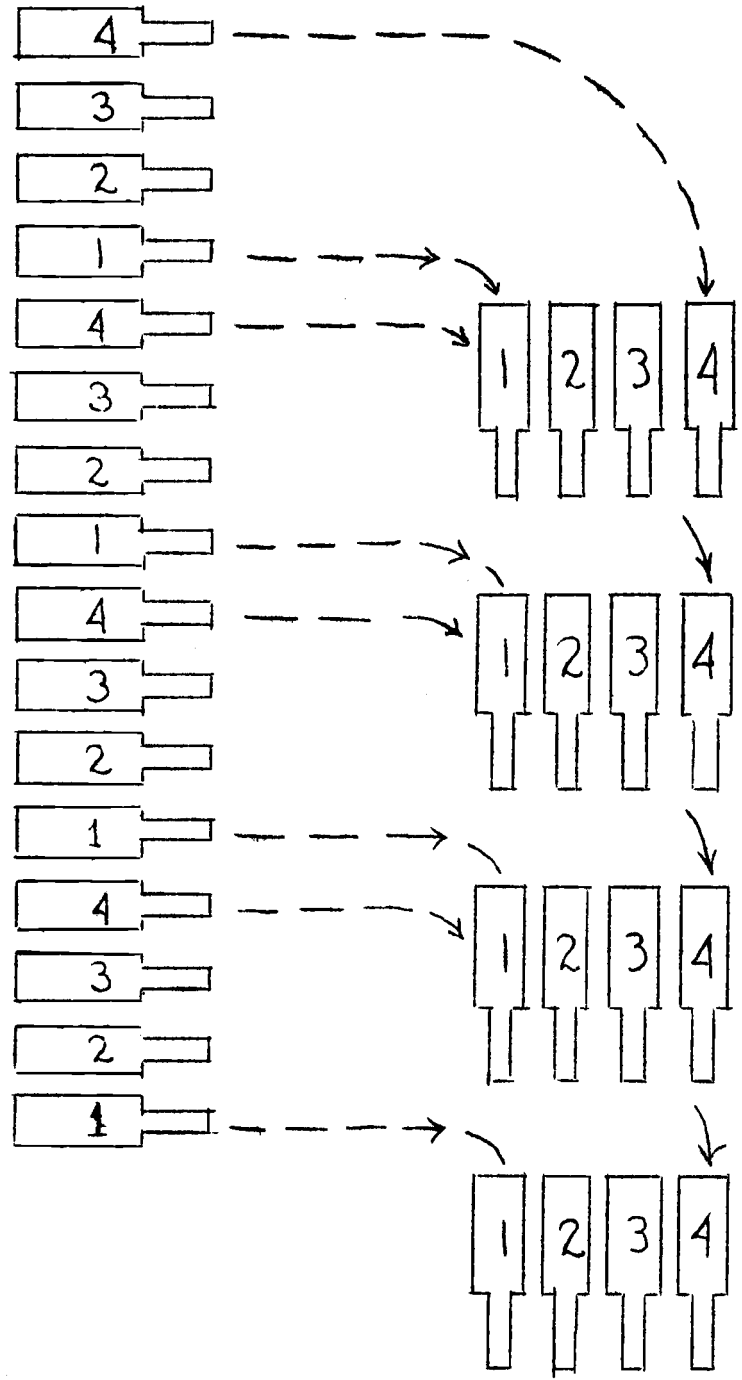


POSSE EXECUTING "FOURS RIGHT" FROM A COLUMN OF FOURS



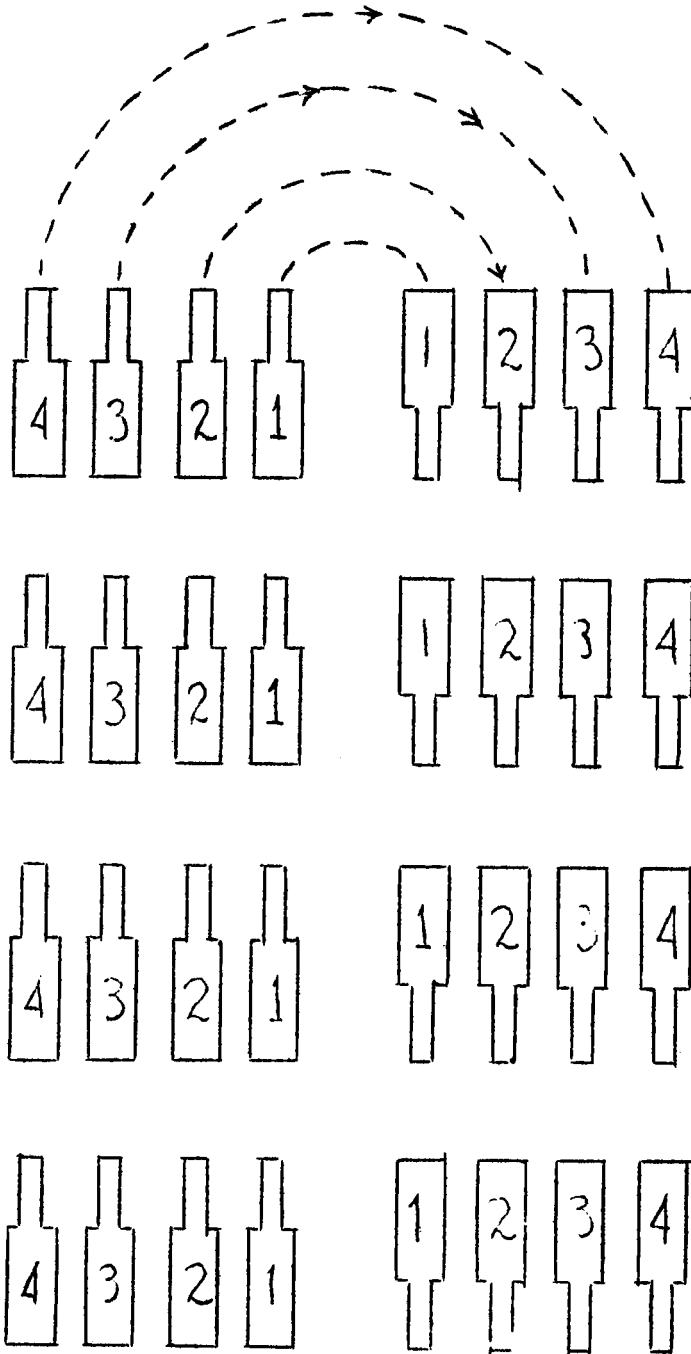
POSSE EXECUTING "FOURS RIGHT ABOUT"
FROM A COLUMN OF FOURS

ORIGINAL DIRECTION →



NEW DIRECTION OF MARCH ↓

POSSE EXECUTING "FOURS RIGHT" FROM A LINE



POSSE EXECUTING "COLUMN RIGHT ABOUT"
WHILE IN COLUMN OF FOURS

RIDING SUGGESTIONS

Aids

In horse language, the term "aids" is used to indicate all of the various means that are used to control the horse and to cause him to move with the rider. These include reins, legs (including heels and spurs), and weight. Most riders know how to guide the front end of the horse with the reins and in a rough way how to start and stop. Many, however, do not know how to control the haunches independently of the forehand. Many more do not know how to use their weight, or balance.

Weight

Horses are sensitive to slight shifts in the weight or balance of the rider. This fact is a great aid in horsemanship. On the other hand, if the rider throws his weight around without purpose the horse finally learns to ignore these shifts and to go his own way, perhaps awkwardly and sullenly.

Good riders do not "go with the horse." On the contrary the horse goes with the rider, just as in dancing the man leads and the woman follows. As with dancing, it is done primarily through rhythm and balance and to the minimum by main strength or signals.

If the rider's weight shifts to the left it is easier for the horse to turn to the left than to go straight ahead. The balance is for the turn and not for straight ahead. On the other hand, if the rider's weight is not shifted it is easier for the horse to go straight ahead, and if he is forced to turn it will be with the handicap of an unbalanced weight on his back. Likewise in stopping, a slight shift of weight backwards helps the horse to stop. A slight shift forward makes it easier for him to start.

The various niceties of balance cannot be described in words, but once the rider gets an idea of the possibilities of rhythm and balance, skill will come from practice. The reins will then be used more and more lightly. The horse's mouth will become more responsive and finally we arrive at that "finger tip control" which is the ideal of every good horseman. Finger tip control, however, is only about 10% reins. The other 90% is in the balance of the rider.

Proper use of weight also changes the whole problem of "staying on top of the horse." If given a free rein and not taught to do something else the horse will stay under the rider. He will stay under because it is easier for him to keep his balance if he yields to the shifts in the rider's weight.

Control of the Haunches

The forehand of a horse may be controlled by the reins. The haunches cannot be controlled by the reins, but can be controlled by pushing the haunches to the right or left with the spur (heel or leg) placed somewhat back of the cinch. Since either spur may be used, the haunches may be moved in either direction or may be prevented from moving, just as the rider may desire.

An untrained horse will not ordinarily move his haunches to the right when he is pushed with the left spur. He may kick, run forward, or more commonly will move toward the spur instead of away from it. The horse must, therefore, be taught to "Yield to the Spur"; that is to move away from it. This can be most easily taught, or at least started, with the rider on foot. The horse is taught to "step over." We usually do this by pushing him on the hip, but for the purpose in hand the horse should be taught to move over when he is pushed at a point about a foot behind the cinch and about where the spur or heel would strike. He may be pushed with the fist, the point of the thumb, or with a spur held in the hand. Once the horse learns what is wanted the training may continue mounted. If he is taught to move his haunches over when at a halt he may then be worked on at a walk and at a trot.

Once the horse is trained to yield to the spur he can be made to do many things that would otherwise be impossible; side step, turn on the forehand, turn on the haunches, or take the desired lead at the gallop.

Gallop Leads

When a horse gallops with his right forefoot forward of the left we say that he is galloping "with the right lead" or that he is "Leading Right," or that he is on the "right lead." Likewise when he gallops with the left forefoot in front of the right.

When at a gallop a horse does not move in exactly the direction in which his body is pointed. If galloping "right" his body will be pointed slightly to the left, and vice versa. In galloping with the right lead the feet are put down in the following order: (1) left hind; (2) right hind and left fore together; (3) right fore. With the left lead the order is reversed.

When a horse is galloping in a circle he moves more easily and with surer footing if he is leading with the inside foot. Colts that are worked extensively in small circles will generally form the habit of leading with the inside foot and will gallop as easily on one lead as the other. On the other hand colts that are not worked on circles and are broken without attention to gallop leads will commonly form the habit of leading almost entirely with just one foot.

A horse that has galloped with just one lead for a number of years will find it difficult to gallop on the other lead. He will be very awkward, will tire easily, and his gait will be very rough for the rider. This awkwardness may be overcome by continued practice.

When a horse starts to gallop he sets himself in a slightly sidewise position; that is, his body will point slightly to the left if he is taking the right lead and vice versa. If the rider is to choose which lead the horse is to take he must start the horse into the gallop when the horse's body is in this diagonal position with reference to the line of motion. This is done by reining him slightly to the left (if the right lead is wanted) and pushing his haunches to the right with the left spur placed somewhat behind the cinch. The movement is also aided if the rider shifts his weight slightly to the left and to the rear. The horse will take the right lead much more readily if he is put into the gallop from a trot just as he is coming into a corner where he must turn to the right.

If a horse is so in the habit of leading with just one foot that he gallops awkwardly on the other lead, it is almost impossible to make him take the awkward lead on a straightaway. He will have to be put into the awkward lead when making a turn. In the absence of a riding ring he may be forced into the turn by putting him toward a fence at about a 45 degree angle. Once on the awkward lead he should be galloped on that lead for awhile, and if possible on a circle. This may be repeated until the awkward lead ceases to be awkward, or at least markedly so. This may take several months. Once the horse can gallop freely and easily on either lead, he will quickly learn to take the desired lead whenever the proper aids are applied. Colts usually take one lead almost as readily as the other. If galloped in a small circle a colt will usually lead with the inside foot.

While the training is in progress it will help if the rider does not attempt to put the horse into the awkward lead except when conditions are favorable and where the horse can be taken back and started over if he does not respond. In all other cases the rider should start the horse on the easy lead by giving him the proper aids and not by just kicking him into a run.

A horse can be put into the desired lead most easily from a trot. It is more difficult from a walk and still more difficult from a halt, but not impossible. Excitable horses are most difficult since they tend to go sideways when excited, but sideways to take their accustomed lead and not to take the unaccustomed lead.

If a horse has the confirmed habit of leading with just one foot and the rider does not care to train him out of that habit, the horse will take the gallop on his accustomed lead more easily and smoothly and with less rushing or jumping if put into the gallop with the proper aids for that lead than if given the wrong aids or merely kicked into the gallop. He may also be put into the gallop or kept in the gallop at a much slower speed than would otherwise be possible.

Holding Reins

Cavalry regulations require that the reins, when in one hand, be brought into the hand from below with the little finger separating the two reins. However, the reins can be handled a great deal more lightly, especially with a curb bit, if the reins are brought into the hand from the top with the first finger separating the two reins. Lightness of hand is further promoted by the use of rein chains and light soft reins of the proper length, that are long enough that there is about as much weight of rein behind the hand as in front.

Reins may be properly held in either hand unless it is desired that the company follow a uniform practice.

In western riding it should not be necessary to hold the reins in both hands except in some emergency. In some cases, however, the free hand may be used to assist the rein hand, as in side stepping, or changing leads at the gallop.

DRILL HORSES

In addition to what is usually expected of a good saddle horse there are certain special qualifications for a horse to be used in organized drill. These are:

Temperament

A good drill horse must be steady and reliable and must not prance or rare around. Prancing horses appeal to the amateurs who do not know any better, but they are a nuisance in any form of organized drill. A slow horse can be stirred up with the spur, but there is nothing you can do about the horse that wants to prance. Most horses used in organized drill do not get enough exercise and if they have any tendency to nervousness it will grow worse under those conditions.

Gaits

A good drill horse should be plain gaited. If he can singlefoot or pace it should be kept a dark secret. The walk should be flatfooted, steady and straight. He must be able to adjust his speed at the walk to the speed set by the company leader. It is assumed that the leader will set a reasonable speed, not extremely fast nor extremely slow, but each horse in the company must go at exactly that speed whatever it is.

Trot

The trot should be steady and true and never a pace. As with the walk, the horse must be able to adjust his speed at the trot to whatever speed is set by the leader. This may be anything from a slow jog trot to a spanking road trot.

Gallop, or Canter

The canter (slow gallop, or lope) is not quite a natural gait. All horses run or gallop by nature, but they do not ordinarily take the slow easy canter that is expected in drill without training. A good drill horse must canter smoothly and easily at all reasonable speeds, and he must not shift to a trot if the speed is slow. He must take up the gallop upon use of the proper aids and without having to be run into it. Frequently in drill there is no difference in speed between the trot and the canter. Any good drill horse should be able to change from a trot to a canter or from a canter to a trot without changing speed. A top notch drill horse must gallop on the right lead when circling to the right, and on the left lead when circling to the left. (See section on changing leads)

Standing still

It would seem that any horse should stand still, but many refuse to do so at the critical moment. The horse should stand still while being mounted and dismounted. After mounting he should not start until given

the signal to start. Many mounted organizations cannot mount or dismount in formation because too many of the horses will not stand. In addition to standing while being mounted a good drill horse must be willing to gallop up to a predetermined mark, stop on that mark, and stand still exactly where the rider wishes. He should not only stand still on the spot desired but he should face in exactly the direction desired.

These qualifications depend in part upon training, but the horse must be naturally of good temperament and he must be able and willing to travel smoothly and easily at any gait or speed that may normally be required in mounted organization work. The good drill horse adds to the appearance and performance of the company, but he does not attract attention to himself.

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