


Civil War Reenactment: A Union Cavalry Officer

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A reenactor portraying a Union cavalry officer explains the weapons and equipment carried by cavalry in the Civil War.

Video:  Civil War reenactment- A Union cavalry officer

Duration: 4:21

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Transcript:

Video Transcript

(00:03)

The cavalrymen wanted to have no more than 200 pounds on the back of a horse because they figured the more weight the horse had to carry, the quicker the horse would wear out. But cavalrymen had to carry everything on the back of a horse. And he had to take care of his horse first because if his horse — if something happened to his horse, he was walking. So you want to take care of him.

(00:23)

This is a bed roll, rubber blanket with a wool blanket rolled up in it. This is a feed bag. This pouch here carried the combs and brushes and stuff for the horse care. You had a pouch for carrying extra horseshoes, in case he threw a shoe or something. All his personal effects would go back here in the valise. The canteen would be attached to the saddle. On the other side is an extra pistol. You have a breast wrap which kept the saddle from sliding too far back. And you had a crupper which kept the saddle from going over the neck — head of the horse. One of the things I like about a military saddle over a current civilian saddle is you had a safety belt. This kept the saddle from sliding under the horse. And a lot of times when you saddle up a horse, a horse knows what's coming, so they'll puff up their stomach, so that means it won't be as tight around them. Well, you cinch up the girth strap, and then later you come back and tighten this up and you can take out some of that slack.

(01:36)

Now in the front of the horse, you have a leather halter, which the lead strap is attached to it, so you can lead the horse around. You don't want to lead him by the reins. The — you got the bridle. There's a watering bit here. This is a lead line, lasso. One of the major problems they had with — during the Civil War was the different weapons. Not so much with infantry, but cavalry, which you had, you could have a 36-caliber, or a 44-caliber, this is a 44 Army. May have a 36-caliber as a back-up weapon. Well you've got to have ammunition for all of it. There's documented cases where regiments were pulled off the field because they didn't have enough ammunition for their weapons.

(02:36)

Here's a typical wool blanket. Like I said, the strap. Also, too, the cavalry weapon of choice was a carbine. You could load — this was a black powder weapon, you load it from the breach, instead of the muzzle. You still have a cap you can load on — you have to load onto it, ignition, and you have your sight. With these — this, you could fire off the back of a horse much easier than you could a typical infantry weapon. The drawback with this, it doesn't have far — quite as far a range.

(03:18)

The saber, has the other strap here, which you would wrap around your wrist, and that way if you dropped it, you still had control of it, and didn't have to get off your horse to get it. The most dangerous part of this is the sharp point here. There was no real edge here. You didn't want it to stick. So basically what this was designed to do, if you're on the back of a horse, swinging down, break a man's collarbone. Breaks the collarbone, takes him out.

(03:58)

Everything's set up, in this time period, for right-handed. So, you figure you need your sword in your right hand, and the pistol, you could shoot with your left hand. And you wanted to cross it, because on the back of a horse, that was the easiest way to get it. Because if you had the pistol here, then you could drop it, because it's just not as natural.

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