

Breaking Wild Horses for the Army.



From a]

A GROUP OF THE DARING ROUGH-RIDERS WHO DID THE DANGEROUS WORK.

[Photograph.

THE prevalence of warfare in South Africa and China has enabled enterprising Americans to develop a new and singular industry — the breaking of horses and mules for army service. It is conceded by military experts that the importance of having properly-trained animals is constantly increasing. Since the outbreak of the South African War the one cry of the British generals has been for horses and mules, and the lack of these has been a potent factor in prolonging the struggle. The same conditions prevail both in China and in the Philippines; without horses, cavalry, infantry, and artillery are powerless.

W. R. Grace and Co., of San Francisco, probably the greatest firm in the world in the horse-breaking business, are performing marvels in the way of rapidly fitting great numbers of wild animals for army service. It is at Baden, a small country town in the San Mateo Hills, about a dozen miles from San Francisco, that this struggle of man *versus* beast is now occurring. From all the great ranches of the West the animals are being brought in, and a series of scenes enacted such as have probably never been paralleled anywhere else.

The contract which has given the firm an international fame, and which is now being successfully filled, was placed by the German Government shortly after the outbreak of hostilities in China. According to the terms of the agreement the company was to secure four thousand horses and mules, thoroughly broken and suitable for army purposes, to be ready for shipment in three months, the animals to be inspected by a commission of German officers, and to be graded as follows:

For artillery service and officers' mounts; for cavalry, including officers' and general staff mounts; for baggage, waggon, and pack train. For the artillery the firm was limited to bays, blacks, and sorrels, while for cavalry and the waggons all colours were accepted. The horses were to weigh from 950lb. to 1,250lb.; height ranging from 14.2 to 16 hands.

It was recognised that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to secure in such a short period the required number of thoroughly broken horses and mules, sound and suitable in every respect, more particularly as the American Government had been purchasing large numbers for the Philippines.

When a man has horses which are well broken, free from vicious habits, and sound in bone, he either demands a prohibitory price for them or else is not willing to sell at all. For this reason it was necessary to get the stock from two sources: animals that had been partly broken and were not sufficiently gentle for army use and required handling and training, and those absolutely wild horses known to stockmen as "colts."

To make such animals sufficiently docile to satisfy the exactions of an army commission was the problem. Operations were commenced by building at the Baden Farm a large number of temporary stables with narrow stalls, such as the horses would be placed in aboard ship. In the course of a few weeks the firm was prepared to stable and stall 750 head. They then built circular riding corrals, snubbing-posts, haltering shutes, and other conveniences required to carry on the operation of "breaking" on a large scale. All the experienced rough-riders to be found were at once engaged, until there were in the riding crew fifty men

and upwards, the majority of whom could ride without any difficulty the hardest buckner or greatest outlaw that might come along.

In addition to the riding crew, a driving crew to handle and break the horses suitable for artillery was secured, so that they could be driven double in fours and sixes. Among the handlers and vacqueros were included some of the most noted rough-riders in the country; their services were needed, for never was a wilder set of brutes brought together in one company. The vacqueros received big money for their services, and earned it, for a dozen times a day they

7ft. high. On starting the animals in this passage the doors would be suddenly closed before and behind them, and they were then powerless to prevent a halter from readily being placed on them. After the halter was adjusted the animals were led out and tied to a snubbing-post, three or four men often being required to lead some of the horses. On being tied to the post the animals would struggle fiercely to break the halter, pulling, backing, and lying on it with full weight for hours at a time, varying the proceedings by throwing themselves on the ground and kicking violently.



GENERAL VIEW OF THE CORRAL, SHOWING HUNDREDS OF HORSES IN THE DIFFERENT INCLOSURES.

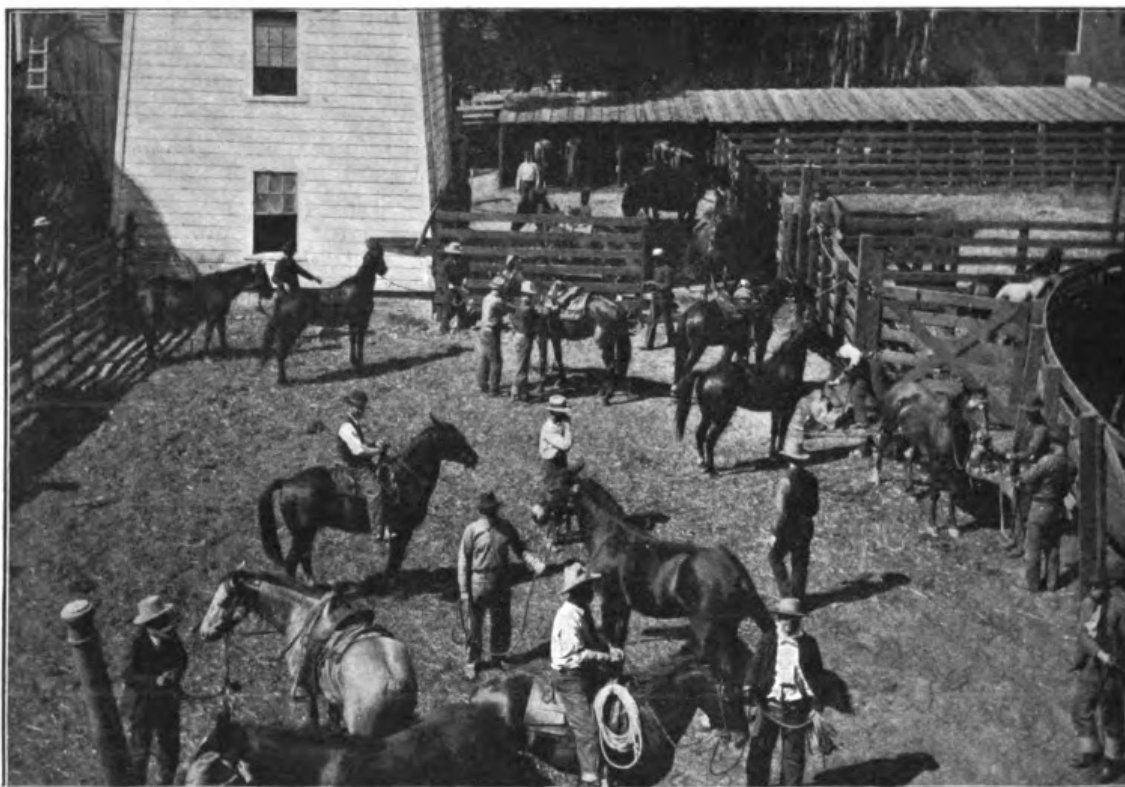
From a Photograph.

risked their lives. The total working force finally numbered about 380 men.

After things were started arrivals at the farm averaged 200 head daily; some were thoroughly broken, while others were fresh from the range, having no greater acquaintance with man than a "rodeo" occasionally furnished them. The first thing necessary was to pass the arrivals through the various grading corrals so that they might be assigned to their proper class. After the colts were taken in charge by either the riding or driving crew they were put in the bridling chute, a long, narrow, heavily-boarded partition, V-shaped, allowing very little room for foot action, with sides about

This process lasted from two to six days according to the disposition of the animals. When they would allow a man to approach without attempting to pull away, and would permit themselves to be led around by a rope, they would be considered "halter broken" and ready for the ring. The foreman would then assign such horses to various men in his crew, whose business it was to ride or drive the animal until thoroughly broken and accepted by the officers, each man riding six horses a day. The riders were assisted in saddling and bridling by men assigned for that purpose.

This operation is commenced by drawing a blind over the horse's eyes, when he will



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HALF-BROKEN HORSES RECEIVING THE SADDLE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

[Photograph.

stand quietly while the blanket and saddle are put on and the cinch drawn. After the rider has mounted the blind is taken off and the fun begins, the horse rearing and plunging around the circular corral, backing and kicking, encouraged to his best efforts by the rider, so as to "take it all out of him" as soon as possible. After ten minutes' ride in the ring, or circular corral, the horses were taken out on the road and ridden in squads of ten. Each horse was ridden once a day for one hour, say, ten or fifteen minutes in the ring and forty to forty-five minutes on the road. On returning the horse was curried and brushed, at first rather indifferently, as may be imagined, as this was done more to "gentle" them than for any other reason.

This treatment suffices for most of the horses, but there are some especially fractious brutes which require harsher measures. These are placed in a separate squad and turned into one of the largest

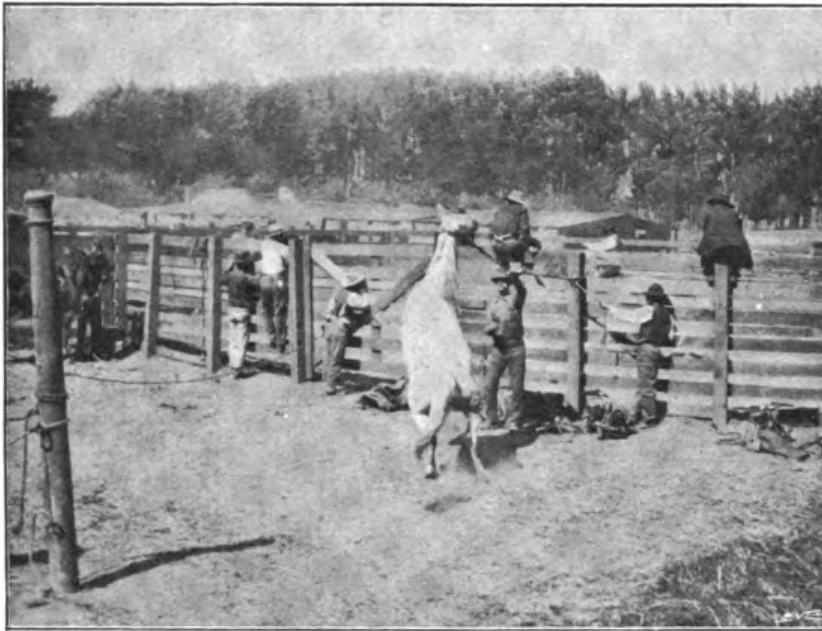
yards. Several of the cowboys on horseback with lariats then enter, and riding after the herd as they canter round the fence-line each singles out his victim, and deftly whirling the rope round his head launches it out into the air. Almost as surely as it leaves his hand it encircles the head and neck of the running horse or mule. Such treatment he has never known before, so off he goes with a dash until the slack of the rope is exhausted. He is brought up with a jerk that throws him upon his haunches, for the other end of the lariat is firmly secured to the horn of the vacquero's Mexican saddle.



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A MOUNTED VACQUERO BREAKING A WILD HORSE.

[Photograph.



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TYING A STUBBORN PLUNGER TO A POST.

[Photograph.

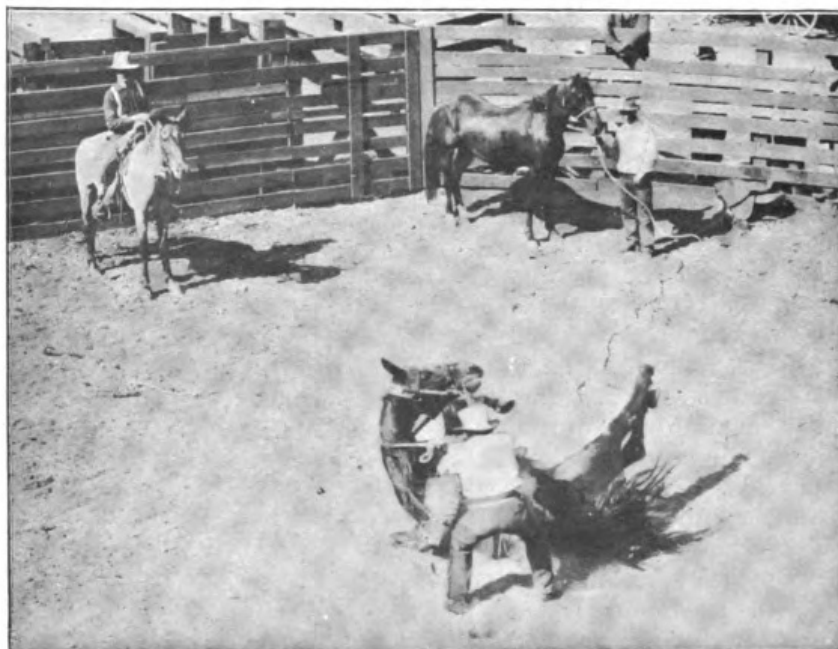
His struggles, however, have tightened the noose until he can scarcely breathe. If the fight lasts too long another vacquero lassoes him round the forelegs, and it is a pretty sight to see the skilful way the noose is dropped just where the animal's feet will be the next instant. Securely caught round neck and legs he cannot last much longer, for his breath is cut off and his fighting powers greatly curtailed by the second rope. Fight, however, he will until the very last, when, exhausted and sweating at every pore, he goes down for good in a cloud of dust.

He is then quickly haltered and led off to another corral, where he is allowed to run around for a few days, dragging his halter-rope with him to get accustomed to the idea, while his captors are busy with others of his kind. Although he may fondly imagine now and then that he is free again, he is forcibly reminded of the fact that it is only a dream whenever one of his companions in misfortune steps on his halter-rope, giving him a jerk that is very irritating. After this stage he is tied up to a strong post for a time, and this always provokes another struggle to get away

from the halter. When he has come to his senses and given up the struggle he is led to a round corral, where, without more ado, a saddle is tightly cinched upon him. This is a ticklish business and is not done in a hurry by any means. Very carefully he is approached. While gently stroking and coaxing the animal the cowboy quietly places the saddle on the creature's back, all the time keeping a careful watch; for an apparently peaceful animal may in less than a second become a very demon in his wild attempt to break

loose and shake the saddle off.

The vacquero, watching his chance, leaps to his seat in the saddle. Bucking, kicking, rearing and bucking again, the horse tries to shake his tormentor off. But bucking like this is very tiresome. Soon the horse gives it up and quits, then the gate is opened and he is taken to the main road. His spirits rise at once. Now or never is the time, for surely nothing can withstand him on open ground. A frantic dash down the road follows, with all his old tactics repeated, but this is again in vain, for the cowboy keeps his seat, smoking a cigarette and apparently



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A DANGEROUS MOMENT.

[Photograph.



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CONQUERED!

[Photograph.

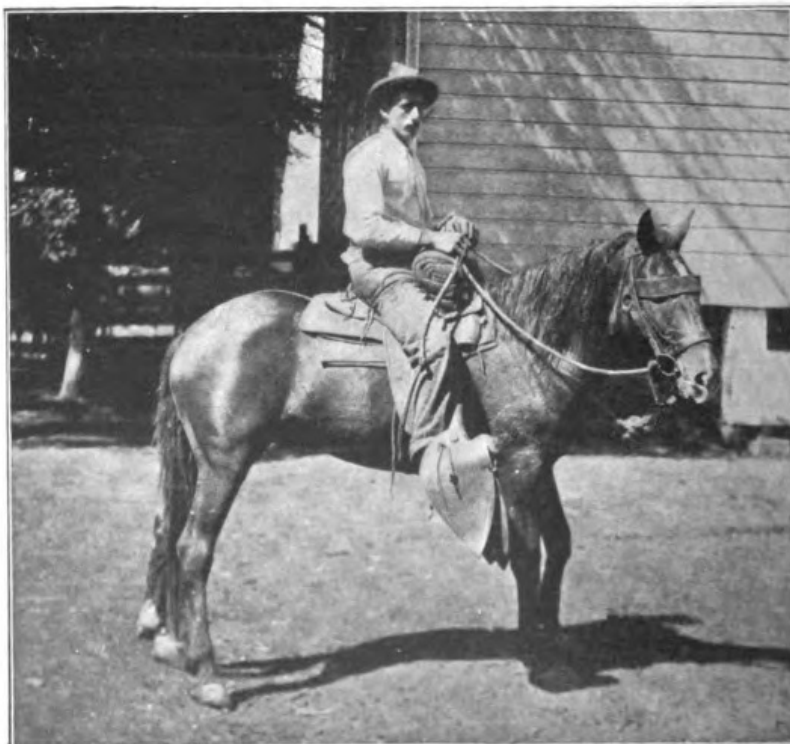
much at home. Soon horse and rider come back along the road, the former with the starch out of him, and the breaking of a cavalry horse is finished.

This process would have to be continued for from two to four weeks, according to the disposition and breeding of the animal. Well-bred animals are handled more readily than "half-bred." With fifty men in the riding crew it will be seen that 300 colts are ridden daily. In the driving crew the process is much the same; in place of saddling the horses are harnessed to a waggon and driven on the road: first with a well-broken, experienced horse to make a team, and then, after a few days, two colts are driven together. These "breaking horses" are very interesting, exerting quite as much effort to handle a colt as the men who do the driving. When a colt is fractious the old breaking horse will pull him around, and if he is inclined to hold back drag him along into a trot or run.

Generally speaking Mexicans and half-breed Indians have been the best rough-riders, although the most graceful, fearless, and capable of the crew is an American of Irish descent, the chief vacquero. In the

driving crew coloured men were found to be the best hands at conquering and gentling the animals, more particularly the mules. Every day these men give splendid exhibitions of rough-riding and reckless nerve. Danger lurks on every hand and is not confined to flying hoofs, but so great has been the skill of the vacqueros that the total casualties only number a few broken arms.

Within three months the company has had 4,500 animals accepted and branded by the commission from 6,000 head handled and shown. After the animals were examined by the commissioners for age, soundness, and eyesight, they were shown at walk, trot, and gallop, under saddle and in harness, and when accepted were branded on the left side of the neck with a letter to indicate class—R, for cavalry; Z, for artillery; and T, for transport; the mules having no designation.



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THE CHIEF VACQUERO ON A CONQUERED MOUNT.

[Photograph.

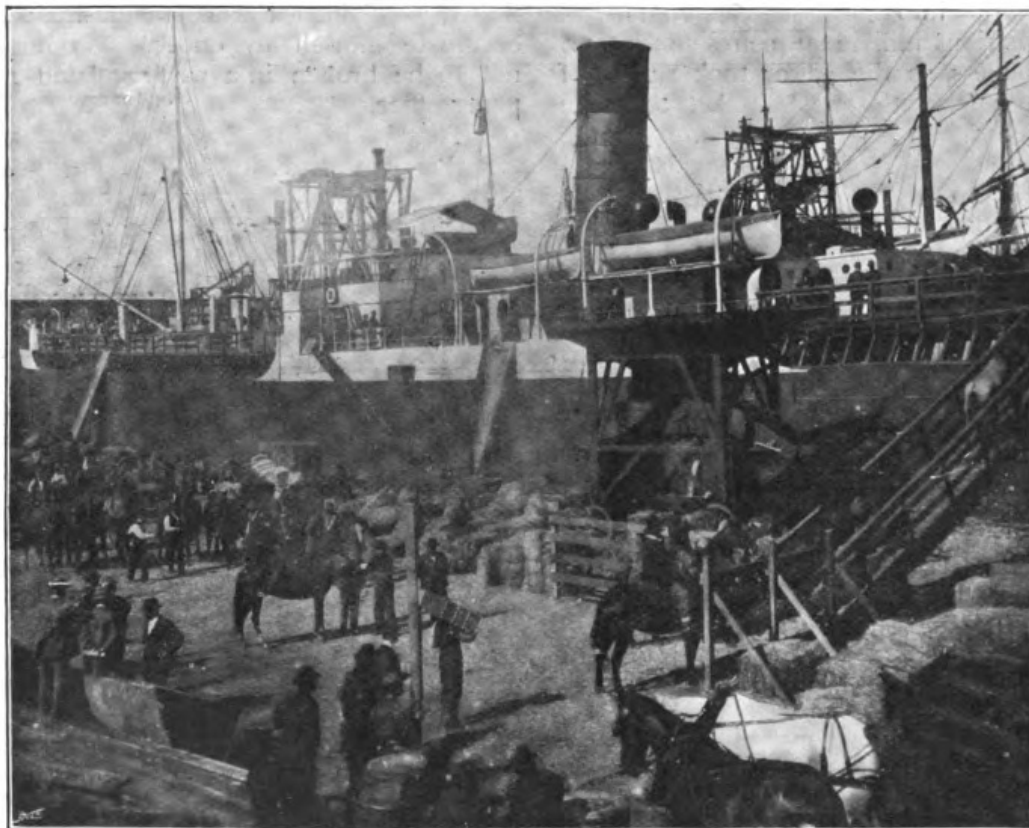
Each animal was also numbered consecutively, as "Z 100," etc.

The transporting vessels were fitted at a very heavy expense with stalls, ventilating plant, water supply, and other conveniences to guarantee safe passage of the animals on the long voyage to China. The cost of fittings varied from 40,000dols. to 75,000dols., according to the size of the vessel. This will give some idea of the amount of work that was done. The stalls were built in rows on the three decks of the steamer, the full

thirty days. Bolts were fitted over every stall, so that animals showing any weakness on their feet might occasionally be supported in canvas slings.

Every known precaution for safe transportation having been adopted, regardless of expense, it was gratifying to land safely at Taku something over 95 per cent. of the stock shipped, which is in itself a new record. In this business the company made several new records:—

First: In securing that number of animals



From a]

A BUSY SCENE ON THE WHARF—SHIPPING FIVE HUNDRED BROKEN HORSES.

[Photograph.

length of the ship. In this way the horses would stand thwart ships, with heads toward the centre of the vessel. The stalls were 2ft. 6in. between perpendiculars, or 2ft. 3in. clear, and 7ft. deep. The stalls were built so narrow in order to keep the animals steady in case the ship encountered heavy weather, and with cleats on the floor to enable them to keep a safe footing. Each stall was padded at the front to prevent injury to the animal if thrown forward. Of course, while in such small stalls the animals could not lie down, and had to stand on their feet throughout the voyage of

in such a short space of time. Second: The class and appearance of the stock. Third: The large numbers shipped per *Samoa* and *Bosnia*. Fourth: Largest percentage safely transported.

In loading the horses by far the greater number were walked aboard on a gang-plank from the dock to the main deck of the ship, and were then led down gangways built in the hatches to the lower decks. However, some of the animals had to be loaded into portable stalls from the dock and lowered into the hold, as it was not possible to reach some sections of the ship in any other way.