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Author(s)	Ueno, Kazushi
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# The Relationship Between the Decline of Cavalry and Development of Railway

Kazushi UENO

**Abstract:** Today, many people tend to take the development of firearms as biggest cause of fall of cavalries. However, I focused on the other point. It is development of railway. This essay consists of two parts. First part is definition of cavalry. in this essay, I basically focused on the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries British and French cavalry. Because it was easy to correct the basis. I approached it from the point of difference between the cavalry and the knight. In order to have meaningful discussion, I had three perspectives. Those were financial perspective, status, and command system. Besides that, I explained the type of cavalries. I mainly focused on the heavy cavalry. The second part is about “Supply system and Railways.” The development of firearm has changed the form of war. This change made supply line one of the biggest strategical targets. Besides that, the development of railway has increased the scale of mobilization of soldiers and labor power in home front. This change also increased the scale of war. When we focus on the characteristic of cavalry at the battlefield, they have only temporary and weak impact or attack in 19<sup>th</sup> century. From this point of view, I conclude that the cavalry has decreased its own advantage by the railway.

## Introduction

The abstract of this research is “the development of railway is one of the biggest causes of the fall of cavalry.” Many people think that the main reason for the fall of cavalries is “the development of fire arms.” Of course, I understand its impact on the fall of it. However, Christian Wolmar, who is a specialist of the history of railways says that “ The railway gave the cavalry mobility and advantage” in his book, Engine of war. There is no more details for the explanation than this. My guess is that I thought it is “the scale of war”. I will start my discussion based on this perspective.

The method of this research is completely based on books mainly written in English and Japanese. If it had not been for covid-19, I would have researched on scene. However, due to the serious condition of infection, I refrained from it.

## Discussion

Before we start the discussion of the relationship between railway and cavalry, it is necessary to define the word cavalry. People today are misunderstanding the Cavalry and Knight. For example, In Japan, due to the famous novel “Cloud above the hill”, written by Ryo taro Shiba, People tend to think knights in the middle-ages are related to the modern cavalry. He wrote the book as if Yoshi tune Minamoto, who is a middle-age warrior, had a big effect on Yoshihuru Akiyama, who is called the father of Japanese modern cavalry. You can find similar examples in western society. Without definition of “Cavalry”, I can not give you a meaningful discussion. Therefore, I would like to discuss What is a cavalry?

Cavalry has a complicated form. It varies from nation to nation, age to age. It is difficult to make the universal definition. Therefore, this research mainly focus on the british cavalry and napoleon cavalry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is because it is easy to find sources on napoleon in Japan. In addition, if we focus on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is easy to find the impact of railways on the cavalry.

Firstly, I will discuss the origin of cavalry. Generally, people think cavalries are the same as Knights, therefore, they tend to conclude that the cavalry is originated by knight. This thought is false. Of course, both have similar tactical characteristic, the biggest one is “Charging”. However, when we focus on other points, we can find that the cavalry is completely different from knights in the middle-ages.

Firstly, I will focus on the financial perspective. Knights should keep their equipment or weapon by themselves. It is because the existence of knights is based on the feudal system. They should engage in military tasks in order to prove their royalty to their owner. In contrast, the cavalry is one part of the army. They are operated by the national budget. In this context, the cavalry has a completely different financial basis from knights.

Move on to the next topic. The next perspective is “Status”. Knights consist of Nobel people. It is because the operation of horses cost a lot. In that era, infantry was composed of peasant famer. Basically, the farmers at that time were poor, so they did not have the financial power to operate horses. In contrast, cavalries consisted of soldiers including the poor, just like other branches in the army. That is a big difference in perspective of status.

Next, Let’s focus on the command system. The cavalry has a clear command system and order. It is because the cavalry is part of a standing army. The modern army has a big principle “Follow orders”, it is the same as the current army or military system. In contrast, Knights are based on the feudalism rank. The act in battle fields connect to their feudal rank directly. Sometimes, they dismiss the strategic command in order to accumulate fame. Therefore, they did not have a clear rank or command system. Besides that, the knight tends to kidnap enemies for ransom. This characteristic increased the lack of clear system.

From these points of view, the cavalry is completely different from knights.

Next, I will talk about the kind of cavalry. As I said in former part, the form of cavalry is complicated. It varies from nation to nation, and by age. I mainly focused on the British cavalry and French cavalry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When we focus on these regions and age, there are three kinds of cavalry. Heavy cavalry, Right cavalry, and artillery cavalry. In a later part, the word cavalry mainly means heavy cavalry. In this section, I mostly focus on a form of heavy cavalry.

The biggest characteristic of heavy cavalry is charging. The maximum speed of horse is from around 40km per hour to 50km per hour. In addition, the riders located from around 2m to 3m higher than infantries. That is big advantage of cavalry charging. Heavy cavalry prefers to use straight swords in order to increase the impact of charging. In many nations, the cavalry is armored by breast plates to protect vital parts of their body. However, the British cavalry did not have breast plate in the early 19th century. As I said there are many exceptions. So, it is hard to define the heavy cavalry. However, heavy cavalry has a big advantage, “Charging”

I will explain brief explanation about the others. The light cavalry is mainly operated for reconnaissance. They originated in the rider infantry in the middle-ages. They got a big influence from the Mongolian cavalry and the Muslim army.

The third category, Artillery cavalry, is a branch of the artillery rather than cavalry. they started riding on horses to increase their mobility.

Next part is, "Supply system."

The establishment of the standing army had a big impact on the war. The firearm is big revolution and the leading cause to the establishment of the standing army. It is easy to use a gun, even for the poor or people without much training. This change increased the scale of the army. It is hard for the army to march as a group. Therefore, the army started to march in a divided fashion and assemble at the main battle field. Its system contains large faults. The army has decrease their power when they are marching. If we took advantage of this fault, the opponent can get temporary superiority. That is called "Defeat in detail", As this change in strategy shows that the potential destruction of the supply line could be a very beneficial strategy to employ. This is big change done by the standing army.

Let's start the impact of railway on the war. The first operation of railway to war is found in 1830s, in the U.K. 1830 is, as you know, soon after invention of Railway. In this example, the railway was used for carrying soldiers in order to control the riot happen in the Ireland. The transport of soldier is one of the biggest revolutions done by railway. Let's calculate simply their impact on the transportation. If we define the range the army move 9hour in flat area per day, they can move 40km. Let's calculate one of railway. It is 400km. I define the speed of locomotive around 40km~50km. The impact of railway gives army 10 times transportation efficiency. Of course, this simple calculation does not include waste of time between expedition.

Besides that, the transportation of railway includes some faults. The locomotives can carry luggage to the station. However, it is hard to carry these substances from station to front. They still should depend on horse or man power. The symbolic example of this fault is German-French war, happen in 1870. German army was failed to transport soldier or food from station to front.

What is the impact of railway on the cavalry??

It is simple. Railway give cavalry mobility, give a new role: disruption of supply line and the decrease of feeds. The railway also can carry the horses quickly and to far area. As I said in former part, in modern war, it is important to disrupt supply system. It is the same as the transportation done by railway. Besides that, the horse should not move by themselves, so they don't consume as much food as former era.

The symbolic example of Boer war. The armored coaches are operated and railway was disrupted by the cavalry of Boer army. Armored coaches are mainly used for reconnaissance instead of horse. The locomotive can move more firstly than cavalry. On contrast, Boer army could not use the railway, so they should move by horse and disrupt the supply line. it shows us the railway has become the important target for the army.

Next focus point is the WW1. Why I pick this topic is that we can compare western front and eastern front. In western, front, there are many railways. On

contrast, there are few rails in eastern front. In western front, there are few cases of charging done by heavy cavalry. I guess that, in western front, much bigger soldiers are engaged in the war than eastern front. It is because, as I said in former part, railway increased the scale of war. Therefore, the cavalry only had a temporary impact. Even if heavy cavalry charged as like former era, the effect is so temporary, there are many infantries, they can revive the front easily. This is the fall of heavy cavalry.

On contrast we can find the example of charging in Eastern front. Besides that, in eastern front the cavalries are operated with machine-gun and armor car. We can conclude that the cavalry could coexist with armored car and machinegun if there are no railway. However, some other reference conclude that the role of cavalry has changed and, in that sense, the cavalry has declined. We can not conclude clearly.

### **Conclusion**

The railway increases the scale of war. This change longan the war front. Because of this, heavy cavalry lost their advantage of attack that is temporary impact. I think that This is the main reason of fall of cavalry.

There are some reflection points. We did not have enough research especially about western front in WW1. Besides that, we did not have research of the war happen in between napoleon war and WW1. Radically, I don't have foreign language ability, so We could not find many references. I want to continue this research.