

British and German Cavalry, August 1914:
A Reply to Spencer Jones

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In Volume 18 Number 4 of *War in History* Spencer Jones gives his evaluation of the performance of British and German cavalry reconnaissance during the Marne Campaign.¹ Jones argues that the British cavalry was superior in every regard, and that it performed all missions superbly.

Jones's sweeping judgments are thinly supported by source material, and none of it is in German. Nor does Jones go beyond generalizations to consider the actual tactical conduct of cavalry operations. The purpose of the present study will therefore be threefold: to evaluate Jones' source material; to describe the actual cavalry operations; and to consider German sources.

Jones' most frequently used source (six citations) is a history of the British 20th Hussars, self-published by the author, J. C. Darling, in 1923.² According to Darling, the British cavalry cared for their horses and patrolled well, 'playing a vital role in keeping the BEF relatively intact during the retreat from Mons', while the German cavalry patrolled badly and were held off by British rear-guard cavalry.

The experiences of 20th Hussars were a poor basis for such gross generalizations; the regiment was part of 5th Cavalry Brigade, which was operating with I Corps, which was hardly in contact until the second week of September. 20th Hussars arrived near Maubeuge on 20 August and moved forward on the 21st. They sent off two patrols on the 22nd, which were chased by superior numbers of German cavalry. The hussars were not engaged during the battle of Mons but a patrol lost an officer killed, a man wounded and two missing. On 24 August the regiment was rear-guard for the 2nd Division and had a short long-range firefight with dismounted German cavalry. On the basis of such limited experience the 20th Hussar's historian concludes that the German cavalry patrols were unenterprising and never 'got near our main position', which Jones cites verbatim.³

Since on 21 and 22 August the German left-flank unit, IX AK (*Armeekorps* – Corps), was north of I Corps but headed southwest to Mons and out of the I Corps sector, and the British I Corps was echeloned right, well south and east of Mons, I Corps was not in the area of operations of any German units. The 20th Hussar patrols made contact with HKK 2 (*Heereskavalleriekorps 2*, 2nd Cavalry Corps), heading west. The Germans did not approach I Corps not because they were 'unenterprising', but because they weren't going that way. The real lack of enterprise was demonstrated by 5th Cavalry Brigade on 23 August: while IX AK was attacking Mons, the corps left flank was being held by three squadrons of Dragoon R (regiment) 16, which 5th Cavalry Brigade outnumbered 3 to 1, but the British cavalry did nothing.⁴

Jones says that 'British cavalry reconnaissance helped identify the looming threat of the powerful German advance prior to the Battle of Mons, albeit only to have it rejected by GHQ', and cites Stephen Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880-1918*.⁵ Badsey says this occurred on 21 August. Badsey does not cite the actual reconnaissance reports, but rather page 514 of volume 1 of the British official history,⁶ which is an annex reproducing the GHQ order of 2335 21 August to the Cavalry

Division. From pages 51 and 63 of the official history (not cited by either Badsey or Jones) we learn that on 21 August the cavalry had reported that the German infantry was ‘in great force...in close support of the German cavalry’.⁷ The Cavalry Division apparently came to this opinion by talking to the local peasants (and how they would know is a good question) for there were no reports of actually seeing German infantry. The GHQ 21 August order to the Cavalry Division begins by saying that the Commander-in-Chief thought that the cavalry was exaggerating and that there were only cavalry and Jäger in the immediate vicinity.

GHQ was right and the Cavalry Division was wrong: on 21 August the closest German corps, IX and III, were near Hal, 35 kilometres away from Mons, more than a day’s march, and 25 km behind HKK 2 at Soignes, which was about 10 kilometres north of the Cavalry Division on the Canal du Centre. The German infantry was hardly ‘directly behind’ the German cavalry. To reach the German infantry corps a British patrol would have had to penetrate the German counter-reconnaissance screen, advance 25 kilometres, reconnoitre, then return 25 kilometres, and penetrate the German screen again. Not only is this unlikely, but there is no evidence that the British cavalry pulled off such a feat.

Jones continually lauds British horse maintenance and denigrates that of the Germans (and French), accusing them of exhausting the horses,⁸ and citing an article by Lieutenant-Colonel A. G. Martin in *The Cavalry Journal* to the effect that ‘[the Germans] were unable to take advantage of promising opportunities as a result’.⁹ In fact, what Martin said is that, had the Germans on 31 August massed five cavalry divisions instead of two, they might have cut off the French 5th Army ‘regardless of the cost’, but that HKK 1 was too tired to do so (and in any case, according to Martin, too weak). So instead of Jones’ gross generalization, Martin proposed a hypothetical case on one specific day.

Continual British attempts to compare tired German cavalry to fit British leave out an important fact: by 22 August the German cavalry had marched over 250 kilometres in two weeks, conducting continual patrols, fighting several lesser engagements, including a major battle (Haelen on 12 August) and an epic forced march and running battle with French Territorials on 22 August. The British cavalry had marched for two days and had not fought at all.

By the date Martin is talking about, 31 August, the German cavalry had added a smashing victory over British 4th Division at Le Cateau, covered another 200 kilometres, for a total of 450 km in three weeks, and had conducted more patrolling and rear-guard engagements. In contrast, the British Cavalry Division conducted a pointless brigade charge on 24 August and didn’t fight at Le Cateau.

If the German horses did not seem as fresh as the British, it wasn’t because of superior British horse care, but because the Germans had marched nearly three times as far, for three times as long, while engaging in serious, continual and generally successful combat.

Jones also cites the memoir of a trooper in 4th Dragoon Guards, Ben Clouting, who did see a great deal of combat.¹⁰ Of all the sources Jones uses, this one is the most interesting, with information concerning British pre-war cavalry training, a cavalry-on-cavalry action on 22 August, the charge at Audregnies on 24 August and the retreat. Jones refers to this source only once, to criticize French horse care.

Clouting's father was the head groom on a large estate and by the age of six Clouting was riding a pony in the ring and at seven could ride independently: this was a man who knew horses, and his description of the condition of the British cavalry horses during the retreat directly contradicts Jones' rosy one:

the horses began to look exhausted...many were so tired they fell asleep standing up, their legs buckling. As they stumbled forward, striving to remain upright, they lost their balance completely, falling forward and taking the skin off their knees... To ease the horses' burden the kit was dumped...The best we could do for them was to halt, dismount and lead on, a short-lived order to walk that usually lasted for no more than a mile or so...Saddles, once removed after every ride, now remained on for several days and nights...The horses became very sore, their backs raw from over-riding.

I don't know what Jones' experience with horses is, but as a young man I rode to hounds and was a whipper-in, and I know that horses are immensely strong and resilient and it takes a great deal of abuse to bring them to this state.

Jones cites Jack Sheldon in *Le Cateau* three times, giving Sheldon's estimation, in a five-page essay with no citations, of poor German horse care and the effectiveness of the British cavalry's dismounted fire in stopping German reconnaissance.¹¹ Much as I admire Jack Sheldon, this is some of his earliest work, and far from his best, and as we shall see, German sources draw entirely different conclusions.

Edward Spears's *Liaison 1914* was cited twice, to once again criticize French horse care, and once to say that the German cavalry 'showed neither initiative nor dash, seldom left the road and when attacked galloped back to their infantry supports.'¹² Jones has seriously misused this source. Spears' place of duty was the French 5th Army HQ, and Spears' observations concern only the French and German cavalry; Spears doesn't mention British cavalry at all. Moreover, while Spears says that the French cavalry were tactically superior when mounted, their firearm was 'a ridiculous little popgun', and that the German cavalry were not only 'invisible and elusive', but also that in a firefight the German machine guns trumped the French 75s.¹³

Jones' generalizations do not match the actual course of tactical events as described by the detailed German regimental histories. On 22 August, the day prior to Mons, the German cavalry developed a detailed and accurate picture of the British position on a 20 km front, practically unimpeded. The only cavalry contact occurred when a united patrol from Cuirassier R 4 and Hussar R 8 encountered C Squadron 4th Dragoon Guards at Casteau, and the massively outnumbered Germans ran for it, losing three prisoners. Nevertheless the Germans sent back a report. The Dragoon Guards soon withdrew back over the canal to bivouac, just as on a manoeuvre.¹⁴ This left the field free to the Germans, who were still near the north side of Casteau, only about 5 km from the British position on the canal. A patrol from Uhlan R 8 arrived – the countryside was swarming with German cavalry. The hussars returned to their regiment, which was 8 km north of Mons, while the cuirassiers and uhlans continued towards Mons, pushing back a British infantry outpost just north of Nimy, which was in the British defensive position, and sending back another report. Later that day patrols from Dragoon R 16, the divisional

cavalry from IX AK, reported that the bridges at Nimy and Oburg were raised and defended, but the bridges east of there intact and undefended.

Another Hussar R 8 patrol under Lt. Humann reached Tertre, 1.5 km from the British position on the canal, without encountering British cavalry, and Humann observed British troops on the skyline (!). He bivouacked in a wood near Badour about 5 km from the canal to see if the British would move north. Lt. Schoeller, with yet another patrol from Hussar R 8, bivouacked with Lt. Humann's patrol until 2400, and then set out for Mons.¹⁵ At the Mons city limits he asked two Belgians if the British occupied the town, and they replied in the affirmative, though they could not guess their strength; given the lack of security, Schoeller supposed that they could not be very strong. The patrol rode a few hundred metres further and saw 300m to their front British sentries in greatcoats, standing on the canal bridge, smoking and staring at the water, surrounded by children and oblivious of the presence of German cavalry. Schoeller had seen enough, turned his patrol around and saw that the street was black with excited people. Pistol in hand, he broke into a trot and the mass parted to let him pass, shouting curses. He sent off a detailed report. It is astounding that a German cavalry patrol could penetrate along a principal axis of approach to a key point in the British position. The British cavalry had failed utterly to establish a counter-reconnaissance screen.¹⁶

As a result of this continual and determined patrolling, the German IX and III AK were completely informed of the British dispositions when they attacked on 23 August, a fact reflected in the attack orders at all levels from corps to regiment.

Jones thinks that since the 1st Army commander, Kluck, and his chief of staff, Kuhl, believed that the British were at Lille, and sent HKK 2 northwest in that direction, then the German cavalry could have accomplished nothing. This is simplistic. 4 KD reported at 0200 23 August that there were no British forces as far as the Schelde and the British were near Maubeuge, which should have disabused 1st Army of its Lille *idée fixe*. 9 KD and Dragoon R 16, as we have seen, provided excellent reconnaissance reports to 1st Army, IX AK and III AK. Kluck and Kuhl's mistake detracts nothing from the German cavalry, which did all that could have been expected.

On 24 August the British Cavalry Division commander, Allenby, began acting as though his division was operating independently, with no responsibilities to the rest of the British Expeditionary Force. The British official history says that the Cavalry Division had begun to withdraw at dawn, but, when it was discovered that 5th Division was not moving, turned around and went back to guard its left flank.¹⁷ The Germans appeared in the sector in force, and at 0900 the Cavalry Division began to withdraw again, ordering 19th Brigade to withdraw also. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade acted as rear guard.

The 5th Division Commander now noticed that the withdrawal of the 19th Brigade and the Cavalry Division uncovered his left flank, and in haste and desperation gave the 1/Norfolks commander the order to hold the a ridge on the left flank with 1/ Norfolks and 1/Cheshires and so cover the withdrawal of the division.¹⁸ The 1/Cheshires commander ordered the company commanders to hold their ground 'at all costs'. There was no time to dig trenches, and the Germans enveloped both of the Cheshires' flanks. Of 25 officers and 952 other ranks, 18 officers and 752 other ranks were casualties; only seven officers and 200 other ranks remained, with a captain in command. There were about 100 Norfolks casualties

At 1230 the 9th Lancers and 4th Dragoon Guards conducted a ‘charge’, which, the British official history says, ‘seems to have produced some moral effect in delaying the progress of the German attack’,¹⁹ although none of the German artillery and infantry regimental histories mentions a cavalry charge at all. Before the 2nd Cavalry Brigade got anywhere near the Germans, it was stopped by a barbed wire fence and tried to escape by racing along to the right. Clouting’s description of the ‘charge’ does not help make Jones’ case for the tactical competence of British cavalry, which is probably why Jones does not mention the ‘charge’ at all.²⁰

...nobody knew what we were supposed to be doing and there was utter confusion from the start...it was days before the Regiment was anything like back together again...In a little more than ten minutes, the Brigade had lost 234 men killed, wounded and missing...at a roll call later that day 400 Dragoons were missing...the regiment had lost around 300 thoroughbred horses, many of which had come from the Rothschild stables on mobilization

Clouting’s description also makes it clear that the 4th Dragoons did not reach the German infantry or guns. Clouting’s editor, Emden, quotes Major Levinson of B Squadron, 18th Hussars, who watched the charge ‘with a grandstand view’: ‘they were being exposed to a terrific shell and machine-gun fire – a dozen shells bursting over them at a time – and I could distinctly see men falling off their horses – others evidently wounded and just clinging on’. Another observer said that the Germans were ‘blazing away at our rather desperate and rather objectiveless cavalymen’.

Between the destruction of 1/Cheshires and his own 2nd Cavalry Brigade, Allenby was personally responsible for about 40% of the British casualties on 24 August: Jones’ contention that the British cavalry had improved tactically since the Boer War has no foundation. But the Cavalry Division’s performance was just beginning its tactical free-fall.

Since HKK 2 was still returning from its wild goose chase to Lille, the comparison of cavalry forces on 25 August was Dragoon R 3 (divisional cavalry, III AK) and Hussar R 10 (divisional cavalry, IV AK), with 12 squadrons total, against the British Cavalry Division with 45 squadrons. In spite of outnumbering the German cavalry nearly 4-1, the British cavalry did not delay either German corps in the slightest; the histories of both German cavalry regiments hardly mention contact with British cavalry, and no serious contact whatsoever. Ben Clouting’s description of the British cavalry’s delaying tactics gives an indication why this was so:

The squadron became involved in a series of brief actions, firing on distant German infantry, or, just as likely, shooting in a given direction:

‘Dismount! Three rounds rapid! Cease fire, remount!’

On other occasions, we would line up behind a hedgerow and wait for ten, twenty perhaps thirty minutes before pushing on. I’m not even sure if our officers had a clue where we were, I don’t even know if they had any maps [they didn’t – TZ]²¹...I well remember spending most of one day in a wood, only to ride over a crossroads we had passed some five hours earlier. We had ridden in one enormous circle.²²

The mission of a rear guard is to delay by putting up so much resistance that the enemy advance guard, and if possible the main body, have to deploy. Firing 'three rounds rapid' would at most make the advance guard take cover for a few minutes, and if the range was long the fire might not be accurate enough to accomplish even that.

On 24 August the BEF had got a good head start on the German army, but by the evening of 25 August the German 8 ID advance guard (IR 153) and flank guard (IR 72) had closed to within 7 km of the British position at Le Cateau.

On 24 August at 1145 1st Army received operational control over HKK 2 and ordered it to turn south and find the left flank of the BEF. HKK 2 was a fearsome combination of operational mobility and tactical combat power: three cavalry divisions (72 squadrons), five 1,500-man Jäger battalions, nine batteries of horse artillery (36 guns) and eight machine gun companies (48 machine guns). The Jäger battalions were formidable in themselves: a bicycle company, four companies of high-morale, modern light infantry and a machine gun company. HKK 2 now pounded south with a speed and tactical skill that would have made George Patton envious. It cut through French Territorial divisions like a hot knife through butter, in attacks that featured speed and violence: one mounted charge captured 4 officers, 353 other ranks and four machine guns. By 0500 on 26 August HKK 2 had covered 100 kilometres in a fighting advance, Jäger and cavalry alike, an accomplishment that even mechanized units could be proud of.²³ The lead Jäger battalions were now 5 km from the British front line.

The British cavalry failed to slow the German advance, allowing the Germans to march until they were right on top of II Corps. The Cavalry Division then withdrew behind II Corps, leaving no security force of any kind north of the II Corps infantry pickets. Early on the morning of 26 August the Germans would attack II Corps like a bolt from the blue.²⁴

The Cavalry Division did not get the orders that stipulated that it cover the II Corps withdrawal until 2300. It is the cavalry's job to cover a retreat; but the Cavalry Division commander pretended that he had no inkling, until he received the order at 2300, that his division would have to cover the retreat on 26 August. This is absurd.

Shortly thereafter the commander of the 5th Dragoon Guards, which had been with the 4th Division rear guard at Solesmes, 7 km from the British line, came to the Cavalry Division HQ to report that the 4th Division had withdrawn to the left of II Corps and that the Germans were at Solesmes. The Cavalry Division commander went to the II Corps HQ and expressed the opinion that, unless II Corps and the 4th Division could march before dawn, they would have to fight where they stood. The Cavalry Division commander then said that his division was so tired that it could not cover the retreat on 26 August. By now, the British Cavalry Division had completely abdicated its responsibilities.²⁵

Allenby's truly remarkable statement must be compared against HKK 2's marching and combat performance over the last three weeks in general and the last three days in particular; on 26 August HKK 2 would cap it all off by taking on an entire British infantry division and a good part of a second division.

Dragoon R 2 and Jäger 4, the HKK 2 advance guard, moved out an hour before dawn at 0400.²⁶ The cavalry patrols saw the British infantry entrenching, dense columns of infantry and supply columns. The machine gun section of 2 KD went forward at a gallop, along with the horse artillery section of 2 KD. The machine gun company commander of

Jäger 4 saw this and also brought his guns forward at a gallop. The 2 KD machine gun section was in action first, at 600m range, firing its seven guns directly from its wagons, a trick reserved only for German cavalry machine guns. They were soon joined by Jäger 4's machine guns and the horse artillery.

The only security 12th Brigade had established was an outpost at the rail crossing at Wambaix, which did not observe the German approach, probably because of the poor light, intervening high ground and the town of Cattenières. The machine guns fire caught the King's Own in an administrative, non-tactical, formation: battalion mass, each company on line, one company behind the other, arms stacked. The King's Own regimental history says:²⁷ 'In the first burst eighty-three men were killed, including the C.O., and over 200 wounded. Men rushed to unpile arms, ammunition was searched for and general mass chaos prevailed.' The machine gun fire was followed by shrapnel, but the second in command rallied the battalion and brought it under cover on the reverse slope of the hill. The battalion was then withdrawn to Harcourt; the battalion had been smashed in minutes.

1/Warwickshires had only stopped movement at 0600, in a cornfield just east of Harcourt.²⁸

[The Warwickshires] presently saw another British regiment [the King's Own] attacked and driven from the opposite ridge. Spontaneously extending, they dashed forward under Major Christie to the rescue. The attack was thus made without orders and was ill-advised; though a few reached the hedge which marked the crest of the ridge, they were met by so hot a fire that they were forced to fall back with the loss of seven officers and forty men, to a position on the Haucourt-Ligny road below the hill, where they held out throughout the day under an increasing artillery bombardment. The battalion was now split up and out of touch with what was going on around it.

Later, the Warwickshire battalion commander left for Ligny with a small party. The rest of the Warwickshire battalion, plus groups from other regiments, exfiltrated for two days, avoiding German forces, until it chanced upon Sordet's Cavalry Corps on 28 August. The wounded, including three company commanders, had to be left behind and were captured. Most of the battalion was reunited at Compiègne, it was judged no longer capable of combat operations, and was sent to Rouen and Le Mans to refit. It did not rejoin the brigade until 5 September.

It would have taken some time for the Jäger to catch up with the mounted machine guns and horse artillery. Jäger 7 deployed on the right, then Uhlan R 3, Jäger 4 in the centre, then Dragoon R 2, Jäger 9, Hussar R 12, Cuirassier R 7 with the Lifeguard Hussars on the left.

The ensuing battle involved a brigade of British infantry, now two battalions, but backed up by a reserve brigade with four more, against two Jäger battalions and three regiments of dismounted cavalry that had already seen hard service, who were at about half strength and together might optimistically have dismounted the equivalent of two companies of infantry: the British had more than twice as much infantry. The Germans had one cavalry machine gun section and two Jäger machine gun companies for a total of 19 machine guns against (eventually) perhaps 12-14 British machine guns. 2 KD had

three batteries of artillery; 12th Brigade would not receive the direct support of three batteries of artillery until about 0930.

Jäger 7 deployed two companies in the first line, one echeloned to the right rear.²⁹ The commander of the 3rd Company of Jäger 7 on the right flank was killed and two officers wounded. A platoon of the machine gun company found an 'exceptionally favourable' position on the left flank. Jäger 7 forced the Lancashire Fusiliers to withdraw, 'which offered the [Jäger 7] machine guns an extraordinarily good target.' Jäger 7 was then ordered to defend in place.³⁰

The Jäger 4 history said that German machine gun, artillery and rifle fire had caused such heavy enemy casualties that the attack order was soon given.³¹ The enemy position was overrun with little loss, numerous prisoners were taken and the British were driven to the south side of the Waremme stream. Further advance was impossible because the British had brought up reinforcements (10th Brigade) and superior artillery.

Dragoon R 2 crossed the railway embankment and advanced in long bounds to close in to effective rifle range.³² The 2 KD machine gun section had already suffered 'serious casualties' by the time the cavalymen arrived. At 1,200m the dragoons began firing kneeling, so that they could see above the sugar beets. The advance was continuous and gathered speed. When the left flank got to within 150m the British disappeared over the hill in long bounds. The dragoons delivered their pursuit fire standing, 'which allowed few to get down the slope alive'. The dragoons were ordered to defend in place. The British 10th Brigade had entered the fight, and British artillery had begun to fire. 'Further advance was out of the question, the enemy counterattacked and there were increasing casualties'³³. Ammunition began to run low and could not be replenished because the horses were four km to the rear. The cavalymen fell back to Cattenières, but the British followed only with artillery fire.

Cuirassier R 7 deployed half of the two available squadrons as dismounts and opened the firefight at 700m. At 0830 Jäger 9 passed through it, moving left.³⁴ The cuirassiers then took fire in the left flank that increased in intensity and caused several casualties, including a squadron commander. At 1530, with the prospect of IV RK arriving, the regiment pulled back to its horses and was held in reserve at Cattenières.

In less than two hours the cavalry and Jäger had smashed the King's Own, inflicted heavy losses on the Warwickshires and Lancastershires and forced the 11th Brigade to retreat. The King's Own lost six officers killed, four wounded, two missing and had 431 other ranks casualties. The 2/Lancashire Fusiliers lost 'six officers and an uncertain number of NCOs and men killed, three officers and 86 other ranks wounded, six officers and 402 other ranks missing'. The battalion also lost both machine guns, which were not replaced until the end of September. Both battalions had effectively been destroyed. 2/Essex lost 141 casualties.³⁵ Becke says the 12th Brigade as a whole took 1,000 casualties, which is clearly a gross underestimate – the figures from the regimental histories, which do not include Warwickshires, come to 1,081. Becke says 10th Brigade also lost 1,000 more.³⁶

Jäger 4 lost 28 killed and presumably about 90 wounded, Hussar R 12 three killed and 7 wounded, Jäger 7 lost two officers and 22 other ranks killed, two officers, an officer candidate and 58 other ranks wounded, 35 EM missing. Dragoon R 2 lost three officers and two other ranks killed, two officers, three officer candidates and 22 other ranks wounded, two of which died of their wounds. Uhlan R 3's casualties were probably

comparable to those of Dragoon R 2, 32 men. The total German casualties were around 310, or one-third of those of the 12th Brigade alone, or one-seventh of the two brigades combined.

To the east, three battalions of Jäger gained complete tactical surprise and defeated the 11th Brigade, inflicting 1,150 casualties at a cost of 350 German.³⁷ The British official history makes it clear that the 4th Division was happy to be able hold its positions and then withdraw.

According to Becke, the British 4th Division took 3,150 casualties; HKK 2 in this sector lost around 700.³⁸ This more than 4-1 casualty ratio can be explained in the most part by the complete absence of British cavalry security, which led to disasters such as the destruction of the King's Own and the defeat of 11th Brigade.

On the right of the I Corps line the German IR 72 marched from Solesmes straight into Le Cateau and out the east side without encountering either cavalry or infantry security whatsoever, and engaged six British infantry companies forming up into column of march.

From 24 to 26 August HKK 2 conducted one of the most effective cavalry operations in modern military history. Operating as a combined-arms team, uniting cavalry, light infantry, horse artillery and machine guns, it put on a dazzling display of operational mobility and offensive tactical combat power, culminating in the stunning defeat of an infantry division twice its strength.

On 26 August II Corps got serious about retreating, marching all night and the next day, and the BEF thereafter had little contact with the Germans. On 29 August the French 5th Army interposed itself between the BEF and the Germans, and the British and Germans were not again heavily engaged until 8 September. During this time the most significant action occurred at Nery, where at 0600 on 1 September 4 KD was able to approach undetected to within 600m of the 1st Cavalry Brigade bivouac and then open fire. As Poseck noted, British cavalry security had 'failed completely'.³⁹

In reconnaissance, counter-reconnaissance and rear-guard operations the British cavalry from 21 to 27 August was utterly ineffectual. Whether the British cavalry was superior fighting dismounted, as Jones contends, is a moot point, because it didn't fight dismounted, but made a practice of withdrawing before the Germans could make contact. Compared to the 2nd Cavalry Brigade fiasco at Audregnies, the Light Brigade's charge at Balaclava was a signal success – at least some of the Light Brigade got to the Russian guns.

Before Mons the British Cavalry Division failed to perform its reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance missions. On 24 August it left the II Corps left flank floating in the air. On 25 August it failed to delay HKK 2 and IV AK. At Le Cateau it failed to provide even local security and, citing exhaustion, did nothing. The British Cavalry Division in August 1914 was an operational liability.

¹ Spencer Jones, 'Scouting for Soldiers: Reconnaissance and the British Cavalry, 1899-1914' in: *War in History* 18(4), pp. 495-513, esp. 510-513.

² J. C. Darling, *20th Hussars in the Great War* (Hampshire: Lyndhurst, 1923).

³ Jones, 'Scouting' p. 512. 20th Hussars retreated on 25 August, and thought that it had been sniped at while moving during the night by a German patrol, which 'heightened the feeling of anxiety' occasioned that day by the obviously poor condition of the French troops they had passed. On 26 August the regiment continued the withdrawal. On 27 August the German cavalry patrols caught up with the regiment and two

squadrons took casualties. One patrol lost an officer and a man prisoner. On 28 August it was peripherally involved with a rear-guard action conducted by 5th Cavalry Brigade against HKK 1. 29 and 30 August were uneventful; 31 August was a ‘peace march’. To 5 September there were occasional minor contacts. This is very thin support for Jones’ sweeping generalizations.

⁴ W. Dietze, *Das 2. hannoverische Dragoner-Regiment Nr. 16 im Weltkriege 1914-1918* (Stalling: Paderborn, 1927), pp. 55-6.

⁵ Stephen Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880-1918* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 244.

⁶ J. E. Edmonds (ed.) *Military Operations, France and Belgium 1914 I* (London: Imperial War Museum, 3rd ed. 1933,) p. 514

⁷ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, pp. 51, 63.

⁸ Jones, ‘Scouting’, pp. 510-1.

⁹ Lieutenant-Colonel A. G. Martin, ‘Cavalry in the Great War: A Brief Retrospect’ in: *The Cavalry Journal* XXIV (1934) p. 136.

¹⁰ Richard van Emden, ed., *Tickled to Death to Go: Memoirs of a Cavalryman in the First World War* (Staplehurst: Spellmont, 1996).

¹¹ Nigel Cave and Jack Sheldon, *Le Cateau*, (Barnsley,: Pen and Sword Military, 2008), pp. 14-15.

¹² Edward Spears, *Liaison 1914* (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1968), p. 101. This is a reprint; it was first published in 1930.

¹³ Spears, *Liaison*, pp. 100-101

¹⁴ Ben Clouting was a participant: Emden, *Tickled to Death to Go*, pp. 39-45.

¹⁵ M. von Oetzen, *Geschichte des 1. Westfälischen Husaren-Regiment 8*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1939), pp. 101-3.

¹⁶ T. Zuber, *The Mons Myth*, (Stroud: History Press, 2010), pp. 119-120, 132.

¹⁷ Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium 1914*, pp. 103-4.

¹⁸ Arthur Crookenden, *The History of the Cheshire Regiment in the Great War* (1939), pp. 5-16. F. Loraine Petre, *The History of the Norfolk Regiment 1685-1918. Vol. II 4th August 1914 to 31st December 1918* (Norwich, n.d.), pp. 4-5. Petre was a distinguished historian of the Napoleonic Wars.

¹⁹ *Military Operations, France and Belgium 1914*, pp. 108-9. Ben Clouting was again a participant: Emden, *Tickled to Death to Go*, pp. 49-58.

²⁰ Emden, *Tickled to Death to Go*, pp. 52-7.

²¹ For just one of many references to the British lack of maps of France, see N. Cave and J. Shelton, *Le Cateau* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2008), p. 180. 2/Lancashire Fusiliers “were well laden with maps of the area east of Mons, [but] there was only one copy in the Brigade of the map of the country traversed by the Retreat – and that a hachured, uncountured French map on a 1:80000 scale” [i.e., on too large a scale]

²² Emden, *Tickled to Death to Go*, pp. 59.

²³ Zuber, *Mons Myth*, pp. 194-7, 207-9

²⁴ Zuber, *Mons Myth*, p. 210.

²⁵ *Military Operations. France and Belgium 1914*, pp. 140-1.

²⁶ M von Poseck, *The German Cavalry 1914 in France and Belgium*, J. W. Howe, (ed.) (Berlin: Mittler, 1923), pp. 57-61. E. Neumann, *Das Magdeburgische Jäger-Battalion Nr. 4 im Weltkriege* (Zeulenroda: Sporn, 1935), pp. 64-9. Poseck, *Das 1. Brandenburgische Dragoner-Regiment 2 im Weltkriege* (Neudamm: Neumann, 1933), pp. 23-4.

²⁷ Howard Green, *The King’s Own Regiment (The 4th Regiment of Foot)* (London, 1972), p. 109.

²⁸ C. L. Kingsford, *The Story of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment* (London, 1921), pp. 130-2.

²⁹ Anon., *Das Königlich Preussische (Westfälische) Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 7 im Weltkrieg 1914-18* (Oldenburg: Stalling, 1929), pp. 38-41.

³⁰ Verein der Offiziere, *Das Kgl. Preußische (Westfälische) Jäger-Battlaion Nr. 7 (Feldbattalion) imk Weltkrieg 1914-1918* (Stalling: Oldenburg, 1929), pp. 39-40. Cave/Sheldon, *Le Cateau*, pp. 178-181.

³¹ B von Studnitz, *Geschichte des Thüringschen Husaren-Regiments Nr. 12...im Weltkriege 1914-1918*, (Weimar, 1930), pp. 22-3.

³² Poseck, *Dragoner-Regiment 2*, pp. 23-4.

³³ *Ibid.* pp. 23-4.

³⁴ V. Köhler, *Das Kürassier-Regiment von Seydlitz (Magdeburgisches) 7 und seine Geschichte*, (Halberstadt: Offiziersverein, 1935), pp. 109-10.

³⁵ Cave/Shelton, *Le Cateau*, pp. 178, 181,189.

³⁶ A. F. Becke, *The Royal Regiment of Artillery at Le Cateau*, (Woolwich, 1919), p. 85.

³⁷ Zuber, *Mons Myth*, pp. 221-226.

³⁸ Zuber, *Mons Myth*, p. 230.

³⁹ Poseck, *German Cavalry*, p. 81. Martin sees Nery as ‘a bright little feather in the cap of the British cavalry’ and draws about a page of lessons learned from the battle, none of which mentions the complete failure of British distant and even local security. Martin ‘Cavalry in the Great War’ p. 136-7.

Correction Notes

Added footnote 4, 21, 33 to give sources

Page 2, line 6 down: In the actual document, the reference is to ‘C-in-C’. I capitalized ‘Commander-in-Chief’

Concerning your questions:

Page 2, line 12 down: ‘Canal du Centre’.

Page 3, line 18 up: the French were tactically superior.

Page 8, last line: DOW means died of wounds.