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WEST AFRICANS "INVENT" PACK BULLOCKS

BATTLE COURSE TEST PASSED

The first pack bullock company to be seen in India was "invented" and put through a successful battle course by the West African Force. It will ultimately proceed to the forward battle areas in Burma. The bullocks' performance under the most arduous conditions shows them to be almost as sure-footed as the more famous mules and to be capable of carrying far heavier loads.

The idea was that of a Sierra Leone senior officer. A Service Corps officer, Lt. A.J. Mills, was given a dozen bullocks with which to carry out preliminary tests.

Specially bred in the Southern Punjab for Service Corps bullock cart transport the animals, magnificent 15 cwt. snow white beasts, went through all battle course tests with their tails up. "Thunder flashes" were exploded near them, gas rattles and raid sirens were sounded, red rags were literally waved in front of them, they went on long night marches over rough hilly country loaded with 200 pounds of supplies, they swam rivers and "tightroped" narrow specially-built brick walls. There was not a single mishap.

At the conclusion of the course Lt. Mills compiled a report on the "training, care and management of the Indian bullock to be used as a military pack animal." Copies were printed for the information of West African Headquarters in India and the report will be used as the textbook. It is freely illustrated and deals with such subjects as diseases, stabling, selection, effect of war gasses, embussing and debussing.

Lt. Mills knew nothing about cattle in civilian life. He is a London University B.Sc. and was in the food trade before the war.

As I drive to the unit's camp near the Burma front, I saw the strangest sight I have met so far in India, writes a West African Force observer. Twentyfive massive white bullocks, each ridden by an African, lunged towards me in single file. Each bullock had a "saddle" of green or brown strong canvas and a khaki fly fringe over its eyes. A number of the riders grinned cheerfully and shouted "Fine" in answer to my greeting. The sight was as astonishing as a pair of bullocks in the shafts of a bullock cart would be unnoticeable.

/The officer

The officer commanding the unit, Lt. Neil McLeod, a Southern Rhodesian farmer, showed me round the cattle stalls and vied with Lt. Mills in pride in the bullocks. "George" and "Billy" were pointed out as was the "sergeant major", so-called because he was "a bit of a terror at first but with training became a real leader". "George" answered his name and ate from Lt. Mills' hand. Away at the end of one stable were the awkward squad-bullocks which were still averse to training but were gradually being broken in through patience and perseverance.

Each African soldier has his own bullock for which he is responsible. He grooms, waters, feeds it and when it is off colour takes it on sick parade to his O.C.

The Africans were obviously taking a pride in their charges and have given them many African names. Some were a little nervous of them at first, particularly in the very early stages when the bullocks had to be persuaded that their loads were to be carried on their sides in packs and not on carts behind them. Some of them tried bucking and rearing to shake off the strange loads. There were occasional tossings and to prevent this two inches were sawn off the horns.

But they are battle-worthy today and when they become front line cattle each will plod its way up the line with its regimental number branded on its horns. I fed an apple to "No. 121 Pte. John Bullock". He looked to be chewing a lot of things over.

There is a postscript to this story. With all, except two, pure white, a serious camouflage problem has presented itself. So each bullock, before it leaves for the jungle, will be dyed with coffee.

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