## SOCIAL MILITARY and POLITICAL ASPECTS of ROHAN

Peter Burley.

This is a greatly shortened version of a paper first given to University College London Hobbitsoc on May 18th. I have entirely omitted a long introduction on methodology, and some quotations from Montgomery's "History of Warfare" illustrating various cavalries.

The traditional view of Rohan is of grassy plains, inhabited by a nomadic population devoted in their life style to horses. This view is substantially false; the geographical limitations of Rohan - extensive marshes along the Entwash, and the unnavigability of its rivers - has forced its people to live for the most part not on the plains but in the valleys of the White Mountains. These valleys have the two advantages of being easily defensible, and of having a climate similar to that of the Rohirrim's homeland at the head of the Anduin.

The Rohirrim living in the plains would do so in small, isolated, but fortified farmsteads, with larger settlements around the Marshalls' seats. They would drive their horses southwards across the Entwade in the early spring to be collected and sold in the South. Those living in the valleys would live in villages (e.g. Upbourn and Underharrow) and raise crops; agriculture would be confined to what women could maintain should the men be away all summer. It is unlikely that this way of life could support more than 250,000 people - calculating population from the 3019 weapontake produces a figure of of approximately 150,000.

While tribal organisation had disintegrated, Rohan did not yet possess a centralised government or anything more than the most rudimentary feudalism. There was a military aristocracy from whose ranks the Marshalls, officers of State, and leaders of the army, were drawn. The Riddermark was divided up into three Marches; the most sizeable, though not neccessarily the most populous, was the Eastmarch, which was governed by the powerful Eastfold dynasty, who reached their zenith under Eomund the chief Marshall of the Mark, when he married Theodwyn in 2989; his son Eomer succeeded not only to his father's power and position, but also to the throne. Within each March were demesnes of local magnates - Dunhere, for example, is described as lord and as chieftain of Harrowdale. The most powerful of the aristocratic families held the hereditary tenure of such offices as Marshall. It was the Marshall's responsibility to protect his March against such enemies as marauding orc bands trying to rustle horses; in this context the exploits of the Marshalls of the Eastern Marches at the close of the Third Age were particularly noted. Should the local defences be insufficient—as when Saruman defeated Erkenbrand at the Fords of Isen, 3019—the King's éored, which was stationed at Edoras, would be called out. At times of national disaster, such as the Long Winter 2758-9, the Rohirrim evacuated the plains altogether and retreated to their strongholds in the White Mountains, while help was awaited from Gondor.

On the battlefield, the Eotheod were masters of the art of offence on horse and defence on foot. While every man had to provide his own horse, weapons and equipment were standardised and provided by the King or Marshall. When an eored met an enemy force, they first softened it up with the bow and arrow; then attacked with the lance, encircling it if it was small enough; and finally moved in with the sword. When fighting in a larger force as part of a set piece battle, the Eotheod charged in waves; they seem to have overcome the problem of one wave piling into the back of the previous one, or impeding its retreat, by the first wave penetrating

in wedges. They achieved a combination of mobile fire power with mobile shock power. On foot they fought using the shild-wall technique; in this, each man is so positioned as to present the enemy with an impenetrable wall of alternate shields and spears. Only bad luck, treachery, or incompetence, and in the case of Middleearth wizardry, can break a shield wall.

The Long Winter 2758-9 may well have drastically altered the face of Rohan. The depopulation of the plain, and loss of livestock in 2758, followed by the flooding of much of Calenardhon in the spring of 2759 must have left the plains permanently depopulated at the expense of the mountain valleys; the political power of the lowlands as demonstrated by Freca in 2754 - would have been destroyed, and possibly the Marches may have been reduced to three by amalgamating those of the now empty plains with the more populous mountains.



The Rohirrim maintained themselves in Calenardhon for 500 years The Rohirrim maintained themselves in Calenaranon for Doo years without losing their cultural or genetic identity for a number of reasons. Firstly because of their relative isolation - begun by the unnavigability of the rivers and completed by the disuse of the Minas Tirith-Fornost road - and secondly it was in Gondor's interest to maintain the situation. Rohan was an exploited an underdeveloped country - the price she paid for living within Gondor's boundaries - and the high-men of Gondor were also loathe to risk the diluting of their Flyor-blood by intermarriage with ordinary men. By the reign their Elven-blood by intermarriage with ordinary men. By the reign of Thengel (2953-80) however, there were signs of an increasing Westernisation starting at Edoras.

The outlook for the Fourth Age is initially bright under the new dynasty, but deep seated divisions in Rohan, which began to emerge in the council in 2754, but were retarded by the disaster of 2758-9 could re-emerge soon, as the incipient cultural conflict heralded by Thengel's reign shows.

## -:-:-:-:-:-:-:-:-:-:-:-:-:-:-:-

S is for His Stronghold down in Mordor,

A is for the Armies at His call,

U is for the Uruks in His forces, R is for the Ring that rules them all; O is for His Forge in Orodruin,

N is for the Nazgul at His beck;

Put them all together, they spell S-A-U-R-O-N And you're lucky if He doesn't wring your neck!