
The Animal-Human Relationship in War

Cavalry Horses and Their Riders in the American Civil War

ABSTRACT *Issues germane to animal history and military history intersect in the study of cavalry horses and their riders during the American Civil War. Animal historians should understand that warfare created a very different experience for horses than was true of their peacetime experience. Military historians should understand that horses were not just tools of war but sentient creatures with needs and emotions of their own. Weaponized equines exercised a degree of agency by exerting some control over their situations. The military system and battle severely stressed horses and men. Repetitive riding affected cavalrymen and horses in ways that resulted in serious health problems. Nevertheless, the war experience fostered bonds of affection between animals and humans in many cases while leading to callous abuse in many others. It also led to an enhanced appreciation for animals among cavalrymen who had bonded with their mounts, possibly promoting awareness of animal rights after the conflict.* **KEYWORDS** cavalry, horses, Civil War, animal agency, animal-human

INTRODUCTION

In war, the animal-human relationship has been vitally important. Horses, for example, have been prime components of military machines for centuries, powering cavalry forces, affording officers a commanding position from which to control formations, and pulling field artillery for army mobility on campaign. While the civilian work horse shared some characteristics with the army horse, there were many important differences as well when equines were weaponized for armed conflict.

This article addresses a vitally important aspect of animals at war, as opposed to animals in war. The former refers to animals who have been co-opted by humans to help them wage war on the battlefield while the latter refers to the ways in which animals have been caught up in conflict and become needless sufferers of it. Both of these concepts have been evident in global military history since the earliest appearance of armed conflict. Some of the key aspects associated with animals at war include the level to which they were weaponized by humans for war purposes; the relationship between animal and man in that weaponization process; the co-embodiment of the horse-man combat team; and the level to which the horse could exercise some degree of agency within the workings of that combat team. An exploration of topics such as these can serve as a bridge between the animal historian and the military historian, fostering mutual understanding of their respective subfields.

Cavalry horses were among the most heavily weaponized animals of the American Civil War; in fact, they formed an important combat team of equine and human that

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endured weeks of training in tactical formations and maneuvers to act in conjunction with hundreds of other similar teams to form regiments, brigades, and divisions. The relationship between horse and trooper was therefore of supreme importance for the effectiveness of mounted military power in the Civil War, a matter of interest to military historians. But the relationship also was of vital importance to the horse as well as to the individual trooper in emotional, moralistic, and cultural ways. Bonds of affection developed on the part of both members of this combat team as they relied on each other in perilous situations on the battlefield. But one must be aware that the animal-human relationship among Civil War cavalryman also was characterized by a good deal of callous indifference on the part of many troopers toward their mounts. War making was dangerous for equines as well as for men, and suffering of many kinds was part of the horse's war experience.

Communication between the members of this combat team was central to the experience of war for horse and man. The trooper tried to control his mount through signals with the reins and with his knees, and the horse responded to those signals. Cavalry mounts also responded to bugle calls that denoted certain actions within the tactical regimen taught both horse and man in training. But the rigid military system allowed a certain degree of agency for cavalry horses, who had opportunities to shape their role in the combat team. Insensitive troopers often did not understand their horse's signals, interpreting their mounts as stupid, incompetent, or even crazy beasts. In that sense, agency often was gilded, indirect, and misunderstood by many soldiers while others readily picked up on the intricacies of interspecies communication.

The American Civil War of 1861–65 is a superb case study of the animal-human relationship. It was a large conflict with three million troops who were heavily dependent on equine power. In fact, a total number of three million equines, including mules, were utilized by both the Union and Confederate armies out of a population of 7,434,681 horses in the United States. Cavalry mounts were the most numerous horses in the armies. While at least 261,672 horses were used in the Union and Confederate artillery, something like 500,000 troopers served in the cavalry arms of the two belligerents. All of them needed not only an initial mount but on average also four or more replacement mounts during their service. That would total at least two million cavalry horses during four years of heavy combat. The Civil War also was fought by a highly literate soldiery that produced thousands of letters, diaries, memoirs, and regimental histories, all of which reveal aspects of the animal role in war. Historians have begun to explore the animal-centered story of this important conflict. Earlier work by Charles Ramsdell and Spencer Jones contributed to our understanding of the centrality of horses in Civil War operations, and more recent publications by Earl J. Hess, David Gerleman, and Abraham Gibson have advanced that literature further.¹

1. Earl J. Hess, *Civil War Field Artillery: Promise and Performance on the Battlefield* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2023), 210; Samuel Ringwalt, "The Horse—From Practical Experience in the Army," *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1866* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1867), 322; Thomas M'Curdy Vincent, "The Greatest of Military Nations: The Military Power of the United States as Shown

This essay will focus on cavalry horses and their relationship with riders in the Civil War.² That relationship reflected many of the concerns associated with the developing subtopic of warfare within animal history studies, concerns that are germane to the work of both military historians and animal historians. For military historians, the takeaways are that horses deserve to be considered as sentient creatures, something more than just a cog in the military machine. They had needs, preferences, and fears that should be considered when understanding cavalry effectiveness and the experience of mounted warfare. Most of all, horses could exercise some degree of agency within their army role. Despite the comparatively rigid military system and the control exercised by their riders, cavalry mounts had some latitude to shape their experience in the Union and Confederate armies. In this they were similar to their riders who also were subject to a comparatively rigid military system, but who could also exercise some agency within that system. In fact, cavalry horses should be viewed as animal warriors, although they would have to be classified as conscripts rather than volunteers.

For animal historians, the takeaways are that warfare deserves to be studied as a highly specialized subset of the animal experience and of the animal-human relationship. It produced stresses, conditions, and dangers unlike those to be found in civilian life. In fact, the animal experience of war is best studied by approaching the subject with a combination of military history know-how and animal history acumen. Knowing how cavalry horses were mobilized, trained along with their riders, utilized on campaign and on the battlefield, treated (or not treated) for disease and battle injuries, and disposed of when unfit or when the war ended are all basic aspects of a study of animals *at* war. But a study of animals *in* war brings in animal history concepts that view them as participants, not just tools, of armed conflict.

The relationship of humans with horses, in both history and contemporary times, has been studied more than for any other animal. Scholarship has taken us from the earliest uses of equines for warfare to the 20th century, although there is no comprehensive study of the subject.³ It has revealed that armies relied more heavily on horsepower than have

During the War of the Rebellion," Pt. 2, *National Tribune*, 7 May 1903; John A. Bonin, "Challenged Competency: U.S. Cavalry Before, During, and After the U.S. Civil War," in *Draughtdown: The American Way of Postwar*, ed. Jason W. Warren (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 127; Earl J. Hess, ed., "Introduction," *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022), 1–19; Charles W. Ramsdell, "General Robert E. Lee's Horse Supply, 1862–1865," *American Historical Review* 35, no. 4 (July 1930): 758–777; Spencer Jones, "The Influence of Horse Supply Upon Field Artillery in the American Civil War," *Journal of Military History* 74, no. 2 (April 2010): 357–377; David J. Gerleman, "As Much a Military Supply as a Barrel of Gunpowder: Horses and Mules as Nineteenth-Century Engines of War," in *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*, ed. Hess, 45–68; Earl J. Hess, "The Artillery Horse as Warrior," in *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*, ed. Hess, 69–83; Abraham Gibson, "War Horses: Equine Perspectives on the Confederacy," in *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*, ed. Hess, 84–98. For a general history of the Civil War to set background for the military operations, see Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-Hsieh, *A Savage War: A Military History of the Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 2016.

2. The essay covers white soldiers only because I found no useful information on the subject for Black soldiers (who comprised only half a dozen mounted regiments) or for Native Americans who served in the Union army.

3. See e.g. Robert Drews, *Early Riders: The Beginnings of Mounted Warfare in Asia and Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Philip Sidnell, *Warhorse: Cavalry in Ancient Warfare* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006);

civil societies in peacetime, and they have adopted similar methods of using equines for varied purposes. In 19th-century America, urban horses tended to have closer experiences to army horses than did rural animals because of their concentration in large numbers crammed into small spaces. In fact, military horse populations exceeded even the most heavily urbanized cityscapes in the degree of concentration and their ratio to human populations. America's urban areas had on average 1 horse per 20 people in the late 19th century. In contrast, the Army of the Potomac started the Overland campaign against Richmond in May 1864 with 1 horse for every 2.5 soldiers, and just over half of the equines were cavalry mounts. Urban horses also were subject to intense training for specific purposes to a similar degree as military equines. Police horses, for example, received six months of training and fire horses had to learn how to accept quick harnessing, engage in fast pulling of the fire engine, and then standing near the fire until it was extinguished. All of this was not unlike military training and acclimatization to battlefield conditions which were necessary to turn a raw steed into a good cavalry horse.⁴

The use of horses in the South African War of 1899–1902 offers a good comparison with the American Civil War. Historian Sandra Swart has studied the military horse in that conflict from the acquisition of new mounts, shipping them across oceans, the emotional bonds that developed between horse and trooper, and the emotional effect of animal suffering on soldiers, to the eating of horse meat and the memorialization of war horses after the conflict. The level of equine death was enormous. British horses died at the rate of 66.8 percent, which was comparable to the horse wastage of the Union and Confederate armies of the Civil War. Despite the high levels of animal death to be expected in war, as Andrew McEwen has shown for Canadians in World War I, the human-horse bond often was strong. It provided a therapeutic effect for battle-stressed soldiers and equines alike.⁵

This essay balances the perspectives of military history and animal history on the animal-human relationship. There is no doubt that many Union and Confederate troopers developed bonds of affection, caring, and love for their horses that were important aspects of their war experience. Much literature about horse care, and even the army's

Jeremiah B. McCall, *The Cavalry of the Roman Republic* (London: Routledge, 2001); Gervase Phillips, "Of Nimble Service: Technology, Equestrianism and the Cavalry Arm of Early Modern Western European Armies," *War & Society* 20, no. 2 (October 2002): 1–21; Gavin Robinson, "Equine Battering Rams? A Reassessment of Cavalry Charges in the English Civil Wars," *Journal of Military History* 75, no. 3 (July 2011): 719–731.

4. Clay McShane and Joel Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 16, 40–41; *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Vol. 36, Pt. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891), 355; Lisa Tendrich Frank and Brooks D. Simpson, "The Overland Campaign: No Turning Back," *The Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War*, ed. Lorien Foote and Earl J. Hess (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 451–467.

5. Sandra Swart, *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Wits University Press, 2010), 103–136; Sandra Swart, "Horses in the South African War, c. 1899–1902," *Society and Animals* 18 (2010): 348–366; Sandra Swart, "The World the Horses Made: A South African Case Study of Writing Animals into Social History," *International Review of Social History* 55, no. 2 (August 2010): 241–263; Andrew McEwen, "He Took Care of Me: The Human-Animal Bond in Canada's Great War," in *The Historical Animal*, ed. Susan Nance (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 273–276, 283, 287. For comparative reference to Civil War army horse losses, see McShane and Tarr, *Horse in the City*, 156.

cavalry training manual, emphasized a kind and supportive relationship by the trooper toward his mount. For many men the trials of war fostered the best of relationships between humans and animals. Horses often responded to this with devotion and caring toward their riders as well.

But it is important to recognize that many other Union and Confederate cavalrymen did not share their comrades' positive attitude toward horses. Many of them viewed their mounts as little more than tools to be used, abused, and discarded when no longer of use to them. In addition to the personal indifference felt by many men, the military system encouraged a callous attitude toward army horses, despite the sentiment in the cavalry training manual. The military system was a giant machine that mobilized animals, shipped them to units for distribution to troopers, and did not always feed them properly. It also had a serious flaw in that no effective system of professional health care was provided for cavalry horses. Although veterinarian colleges had opened in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York from 1852 to 1857, there were far too few university-trained veterinarians in the United States by the time of the war.⁶

The military system of both belligerents failed to prevent an unusually high level of horse death in the Civil War. This problem arose from many factors, including poor care by cavalrymen; the penchant for conducting long raids into enemy territory that wore out mounts; poor feeding, especially among the Confederates but even at times in the Union army; the limited results when both armies tried to create facilities for rehabilitating horses; the natural results of engaging in heated combat (horses represented larger targets on the battlefield than did humans and thus were prone to being hit by artillery and small arms fire); and finally, the biggest killer of all, rampant equine diseases such as glanders, which the home remedies of troopers could not stop. It has been estimated that 1.2 million horses and mules died in both armies during the entire Civil War. For example, only 7 of the original 1,000 mounts issued to the 5th New York Cavalry in October 1861 were still in use when the regiment mustered out in July 1865. European observers, whose governments maintained large cavalry forces supported by proper stabling, food, and veterinary care, were shocked by the Civil War's waste of good horses.⁷

In other words, the reality of the war itself, and the military machine it created, militated against the development of a supportive, emotional relationship between man and horse. Those troopers who enjoyed such a relationship did so because of their individual efforts while the mainstream cavalryman saw no need to do so for an animal likely to be replaced. Callousness toward animals was a natural result of

6. Everett B. Miller, "Private Veterinary Colleges in the United States, 1852-1927," *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 178, no. 6 (1981): 583-584. The only personal account by a Civil War veterinary to my knowledge is the collection of George F. Parry Civil War Diaries at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. But Parry provided little information about medical duties in his brief entries.

7. Gervase Phillips, "Writing Horses into American Civil War History," *War in History* 20, no. 2 (2013): 167; Louis N. Boudrye, *Historic Records of the Fifth New York Cavalry, First Ira Harris Guard* (Albany, NY: S. R. Gray, 1865), 206; J. R. Edmonds, "The Wastage of Cavalry Horses in the American Civil War, 1861-65," *Cavalry Journal* 4 (1909): 250-251.

a military system that was tightly focused on the practical and demanding need to supply horses for huge cavalry forces.

BONDS OF AFFECTION

The Civil War generation at least dimly understood that horses had a natural history—a psychology, a set of emotions, and a set of habits that made them good partners with man. As modern writers have more clearly pointed out, horses have strong bonding tendencies that facilitate the creation of herds and they understand hierarchical relationships within those herds. Horses respond to authority and obey commands; they are capable of forming bonds with trusted handlers and are responsive to cues and signals from them. All of these natural traits, conditioned through millennia of coevolution and breeding, have made them amenable to military training, although not all horses performed uniformly within the army regimen. There were individual variations among them, and some horses never became adjusted to the military system or to their trainers.⁸

The bonds of affection between horse and trooper often began to form from the beginning of their association in the army. The ideal way for a trooper to select a horse, wrote Samuel Ringwalt, a cavalry officer from Pennsylvania, was by looking “fairly and squarely into his eyes. As the eye of man is the index of his soul, so by the eye of a horse also, all other things being right, you can form a pretty good idea of his character.” But the military system of the Union army allowed little room for troopers to select their mounts. Quartermasters were responsible for purchasing them and then transporting the animals to cavalry units. Usually they were simply given to troopers with no opportunity for selection. While geldings were generally considered preferable for cavalry service, troopers did not seem to favor male versus female mounts because they were forced to accept any kind of horse available. The Confederate government followed a policy of self-mounting throughout the war. Cavalrymen were responsible for finding their own horses, and the government paid them 40 cents per day for their use, compensating them if the horse was lost due to combat but not to disease or any other cause. This system allowed for much individual selection, but even that latitude narrowed greatly as the number of horses available began to dwindle. For most Confederate cavalrymen, there were fewer and fewer choices when it came to obtaining a mount and any kind of steed would do. As James Michael Barr of the 5th South Carolina Cavalry told his wife, “all we want is a horse that will not fall down.”⁹

8. Phillips, “Writing Horses,” 165–167; Andria Pooley-Ebert, “Species Agency: A Comparative Study of Horse-Human Relationships in Chicago and Rural Illinois,” *The Historical Animal*, ed. Susan Nance (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 150–152; Natalie K. Waran and Rachel Casey, “Horse Training,” *The Domestic Horse: The Origins, Development and Management of Its Behaviour*, ed. D. S. Mills and S. M. McDonnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 186; Paul McGreevy and Andrew McLean, “Behavioural Problems with the Ridden Horse,” *The Domestic Horse: The Origins, Development and Management of Its Behaviour*, ed. D. S. Mills and S. M. McDonnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 198–199; Shelly R. Scott, “The Racehorse as Protagonist: Agency, Independence, and Improvisation,” in *Animals and Agency: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 45–65.

9. Ringwalt, “The Horse,” 326; Benjamin W. Crowninshield, *A History of the First Regiment of Massachusetts Cavalry Volunteers* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1891), 292; Thomas D. Mays, ed., *Let Us Meet in Heaven:*

If a trooper could not begin to form a bond with his horse by selecting an individual mount, he had an opportunity to do so while training. This was the first step in creating a working relationship between horse and man. All handbooks of the era stressed the gentle and compliant nature of the animal. They also stressed the need to treat the horse with understanding. Yelling, hitting, and creating an atmosphere of tension were counterproductive. It was necessary to be firm but reassuring. Unsteadiness in mounting or handling instilled a sense of unease in equines. Horses respected the pecking order of herds, and if they saw the rider as their leader they usually cooperated.¹⁰

The most important requirement of cavalry horses was the ability to learn their role in the military machine. If animals refused to listen to their riders' cues, balked at moving synchronously with other horses, or could not stand the sound of battle, they were useless as cavalry mounts. Some horses excelled in military service, most acclimated themselves pretty well to it, but some utterly failed to do so. Man and horse formed a team; both of them could fail or succeed depending on their relationship. Training separated the apt from the inept men and horses, forging some effective partnerships between humans and animals while identifying those recruits and horses that were weak links in the military chain.

In this way cavalry horses were very similar to performance animals such as race horses and dolphins at theme parks who are trained for a specific task and to respond to handlers' cues. But the performance animal varies the routines in small ways, forcing the handler to adjust to those variations. Race horses have been known to ignore the cues of their riders and conduct a race in their own fashion; dolphins have been known to change the routine of a show out of boredom. And if anyone believes that humans are supreme, consider this quote from Richard O'Barry, a trainer/performer at a theme park: "If you thought animals were machines, this show would do nothing to dissuade you. But if the dolphins were machines, so was [the trainer]. I was a trained animal as much as they were." In short, O'Barry had to respond to the cues of his employers if he expected to be paid for his work. Former jockey and current animal behaviorist Temple Grandin put it well: "A good rider and his horse are a team. It's not a one-way relationship, either; it's not just the human relating to the horse and telling him what to do. Horses are super-sensitive to their riders and are constantly responding to the rider's needs even without being asked."¹¹

The same was equally true of cavalry horses even though their training was for war. The Civil War cavalry manual was filled with pages about mounted drill in which men and horses learned the formations and maneuvers associated with cavalry tactics. Most cavalry equines learned "in a remarkably short period," thought Stanton P. Allen of the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry. They "became familiar with the bugle calls" and responded to them "without direction from their riders." Cavalry mounts were widely known to

The Civil War Letters of James Michael Barr, 5th South Carolina Cavalry (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2001), 236.

10. Robert Jennings, *The Horse and His Diseases* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, 1860), 200–201, 219.

11. Scott, "Racehorse as Protagonist," 50–55, 57–59.

respond to bugle calls even when their rider had been unhorsed by combat. They continued to keep up with the unit even though their saddles were empty. Albert Robinson Greene of the 9th Kansas Cavalry rode a horse called Lots of Water and believed he “taught me more than any drill master ever did. He knew the difference between the bugle calls of ‘right about’ and ‘left about.’”¹²

The two most difficult adjustments of the horse to cavalry service were the sight and sound of weapons and the crowded nature of mounted formations. The first was vividly demonstrated by the 7th Indiana Cavalry when it organized in the summer of 1863. The colonel held a review for Gov. Oliver P. Morton, before he had a chance to drill the men or the mounts, and when everyone drew sabers many horses bolted with fright. The second adjustment was noted by W. R. Carter when he recalled that “fretful and unruly horses had to get accustomed to the jam and pressure in wheeling and the excitement of the charge.”¹³

Henry Murray Calvert of the 11th New York Cavalry went out of his way to acclimate his horse to the sights and sounds of combat. He rode near infantry regiments that were practicing small arms firing to accustom the horse to the sound of battle. But Calvert noticed that no one else in his regiment did this or even bonded with their mounts. He criticized the army for not recognizing “the trained intelligence of army horses as a very important factor in war.” If it adopted a better training regimen, “the efficiency of army horses would be largely increased and the insecurity of the men be greatly lessened.”¹⁴

Beyond the training period, many troopers developed bonds of affection with their mounts because they admired certain traits in their character. Confederate Edward Laight Wells was very pleased with his six-year-old mount because she was “just a little vicious, & not well-broken.” George E. Flanders of the 5th Kansas Cavalry also valued spunk in his horse. “He has tried to runaway with me several times and has never succeeded till yesterday. I have a slight remembrance of his dumping me, but justly cant tell *how* it was done.” Sgt. Thomas W. Smith of the 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry also created a bond with his mount that was based on admiration for the animal’s character. “I have one of the best and most Sagacious Horses in the Company and our Officers know that I like it,” he told a comrade. Confederate artilleryman Napier Bartlett also thought that a mount’s intelligence was important. “Dull, sluggish horses can never be trained to the point requisite for efficient cavalry horses,” he wrote. “Raw recruits

12. Philip St. George Cooke, *Cavalry Tactics, Or Regulations for the Instruction, Formations, and Movements of the Cavalry of the Army and Volunteers of the United States*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1861), 17–118, 166–217; Stanton P. Allen, *Down in Dixie: Life in a Cavalry Regiment in the War Days from the Wilderness to Appomattox* (Boston: D. Lothrop, 1893), 145; John D. Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee: Or the Unwritten Story of Army Life* (Boston: George M. Smith, 1887), 186, 328–329; Albert Robinson Greene, “Campaigning in the Army of the Frontier,” *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society* 14 (1915–1918): 284.

13. Thomas S. Cogley, *History of the Seventh Indiana Cavalry Volunteers* (La Porte, IN: Herald, 1876), 65; W. R. Carter, *History of the First Regiment of Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry in the Great War of the Rebellion, With the Armies of the Ohio and Cumberland, Under Generals Morgan, Rosecrans, Thomas, Stanley and Wilson, 1862–1865* (Knoxville, TN: Gaut-Ogden, 1902), 61.

14. Henry Murray Calvert, *Reminiscences of a Boy in Blue, 1862–1865* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1920), 92–93, 232–233.

mounted on well-drilled horses, are more serviceable than veteran troops mounted on clumsy, low-spirited animals.”¹⁵

Officers in the Union and Confederate armies purchased their own mounts and thus had many opportunities to select them. Col. Andrew T. McReynolds of the 1st New York (Lincoln) Cavalry owned a horse that was “clean-limbed, perfectly formed, powerful, intelligent and gentle.” In contrast, W. W. Blackford, adjutant of the 1st Virginia Cavalry, possessed a mount that James E. B. Stuart called “a perfect model of a war horse.” Named Cornet, “he was compactly and powerfully built,” recalled Blackford, “head and tail carried high in the air and he had a way of tossing his head and chomping his bit, and tossing the foam over his breast that set your blood to tingling in sympathy with his spirit.”¹⁶

Bonds of affection also grew from admiration for the animal’s willingness to cooperate with the rider. “You know what an attachment one forms for a good horse,” James H. Kidd of the 6th Michigan Cavalry told his father. “He will stand until I get on & tell him to go. He learns faster than the men.” John E. Brown of the 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry also had a smart horse. “He . . . seemed to know what I said to him and at my command would lie down. It was a mutual love affair between us.” Many cavalrymen sacrificed their own comfort to provide for their mounts. On long marches they walked on foot part of the day to spare their horses from fatigue. They spent time with their horses when not on duty, petting and playing with them. When Julius E. Thomas of the 1st Tennessee Cavalry (US) had to give up his mount to another regiment, he shed a tear and prayed that the new man would take good care of his beloved animal. When William E. Meyer’s horse Billy was fatally hit by two bullets, he “boohooed like a child; I cried as if I had lost a brother; he had been my most faithful, playful friend, my good reliable carrier and companion for many months, and to care and feed him with the best and with my own rations when nothing else was left, had been my pleasure.”¹⁷

15. Edward Laight Wells to Sabina, 21 January 1864, Smith and Wells Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Flanders to mother, 25 March 1864, George E. Flanders Civil War Letters, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka; Eric J. Wittenberg, ed., “*We Have It Damn Hard Out Here*”: *The Civil War Letters of Sergeant Thomas W. Smith, 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1999), 41; Henry Norton, *Deeds of Daring: Or, History of the Eighth N.Y. Volunteer Cavalry* (Norwich, NY: Chenango Telegraph, 1889), 37; [Napier Bartlett], *A Soldier’s Story of the War: Including the Marches and Battles of the Washington Artillery, and Other Louisiana Troops* (New Orleans: Clark and Hofeline, 1874), 74; Crowninshield, *History of the First Regiment of Massachusetts Cavalry*, 292.

16. William H. Beach, *The First New York (Lincoln) Cavalry from April 9, 1861 to July 7, 1865* (Milwaukee, WI: Burdick and Allen, 1902), 40; W. W. Blackford, *War Years with Jeb Stuart* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 21–22.

17. Eric J. Wittenberg, ed., *One of Custer’s Wolverines: The Civil War Letters of Brevet Brigadier General James H. Kidd, 6th Michigan Cavalry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2000), 20; Charles H. Kirk, ed., *History of the Fifteenth Pennsylvania Volunteer Cavalry, Which Was Recruited and Known as The Anderson Cavalry in the Rebellion of 1861–1865* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1906), 244–245; William Gardiner, “Incidents of Cavalry Experiences During General Pope’s Campaign,” *Personal Narratives of Events in the War of the Rebellion: Being Papers Read Before the Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society*, Vol. 3 (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot, 1993), 424; Alonzo Foster, *Reminiscences and Record of the 6th New York V. V. Cavalry* ([Brooklyn]: n.p., 1892), 83; *OR* Vol. 49, Pt. 1, 499; Richard M. McMurry, ed., *An Uncompromising Secessionist: The Civil War of George Knox Miller, Eighth (Wade’s) Confederate Cavalry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 44; Calvert, *Reminiscences*, 233;

REBELLION

Horses were “very much like men,” recalled Union Maj. Gen. Richard W. Johnson, “either brave or cowardly, sensible or foolish.” That was true enough, but when a cavalry mount persistently acted badly something more than just character was at play. Lt. Charles P. Bowditch found that his mount became “blind crazy from fear of my sabre which was dangling against his side and from the spurs.” The horse ran away in a frenzy, hit the barracks building, and went down in a heap with Bowditch. This was not a momentary fear or a bad episode in the acclimation process, for his mount “was always ready to run away.”¹⁸

The stress of constantly living in packed masses with other horses often resulted in mounts lashing out to relieve tension. They bit and kicked cavalrymen and other horses alike. Although herd animals, horses also value close social relations with a handful of other horses. The huge accumulation of equines in army camps, as historian Gervase Phillips has suggested, could have been overwhelming to some individuals.¹⁹ Perhaps the only reaction a horse could make in such a situation was rebellion that often took the form of violence.

Edward Wall of the 3rd New Jersey Cavalry rode a black mare named Bessy who was very particular about being crowded by other horses. If any came too near, “like a flash her little hoof would be flung out.” But army horses also fought each other to establish a pecking order in crowded conditions. Benjamin Crowninshield noted that when a new mount was added to the picket rope, one could expect a fight. His mount, called Old Man, got into a severe fight with Old Tom, who belonged to another officer of the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry. Old Tom suffered a fractured skull but lived.²⁰

A handful of cavalrymen recorded how viciously their horses acted, but they usually ascribed this to a mean or stubborn streak in the animal. John N. Opie of the 6th Virginia Cavalry purchased a black mare and the first time he rode her, she took off at full speed and ran into a barn. Some weeks later, while leading her to water, he gave her too much halter. The mare “wheeled, and kicked me with both feet in the face.” Opie was knocked out but regained consciousness the next day. On another occasion while he was riding through woods, the horse ran uncontrollably. Opie lay flat on her back to avoid the many limbs she ran under, in what was an obvious attempt to knock him off, until she entered open ground. There, Opie used his spur to make her run even faster and tire her out as

Langhorne to Mama, 19 May 1863, Jacob Kent Langhorne Papers, Archives, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington; Speer Morgan, [ed.], “For Our Beloved Country: The Diary of a Bugler,” *Missouri Review* 12, no. 3 (1989): 82–83; Julius E. Thomas Diary and Daybook, 31 January 1865, Special Collections, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; William E. Meyer, “The Sailor on Horseback,” *Personal Narratives of Events in the War of the Rebellion, Being Papers Read Before the Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society*, Vol. 10 (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot, 1993), 208, 212.

18. R. W. Johnson, *A Soldier's Reminiscences in Peace and War* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1886), 190; “War Letters of Charles P. Bowditch,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 57 (May 1924): 472–473.

19. Jennings, *The Horse and His Diseases*, 203–205; Phillips, “Writing Horses,” 167.

20. Wall, “Raids in Southeastern Virginia,” 72; Crowninshield, *History of the First*, 289–290, 292.

the only way to stop her. In the end, Opie's black mare literally ran herself to death at the battle of Brandy Station. Participating in a mounted attack, she ran a good distance farther than all the other horses. This brought Opie to the Union position all alone. The Federals fired when he was only 20 yards away, hitting his horse four times and placing another bullet in the sole of Opie's right boot. He fell with her and the troubled life of his black mare ended with this bizarre incident.²¹

While not necessarily vicious, a horse called Old Sorrel greatly annoyed his Confederate trooper. While other horses cantered easily, he preferred to trot, bouncing the rider. Old Sorrel also had "a mouth so tough that no mortal could hold him when he took a notion to run away," recalled the trooper. He had a "total lack of discretion—being as apt to run towards or into the enemy's lines as away from them." The animal was killed at the battle of Chickamauga in September 1863 and "no tears were shed at his loss," wrote the rider.²²

When describing Bessy's effort to keep other horses at arm's length, Edward Wall called it one of her "peculiarities," but animal historians could well refer to it as agency. The act was a deliberate effort by Bessy to control her space in the military machine. Agency can be defined as any sort of behavior in which animals exercise some degree of control over their relationship with humans or with other animals.²³ I believe that actions such as those by Opie's black mare and Old Sorrel also should be considered attempts at exercising agency. The questions are to what extent were cavalry mounts able to exercise choice and *how* did they exert it.

Agency often was gilded, disguised as something else, and thus unrecognized. For example, most horses disliked the tightness of the girth around the abdomen and learned to "swell out when we buckled the saddle girths," recalled Stanton P. Allen. "Then, after we had mounted, the horses would materially reduce their circumferences, so much so at times that the saddle would turn when the rider was jolted to one side on the trot or gallop."²⁴

Animals who refused the urging of their riders to do something exhibited another example of agency that was blatant, rather than disguised. In this they shared a common reaction to combat among many human soldiers who decided against obeying orders, for example, to conduct an assault that they believed had little chance of success and huge chances of heavy losses. Troopers and their horses often reached the limits of their combat morale and ignored orders to push on beyond those limits.²⁵

21. John N. Opie, *A Rebel Cavalryman with Lee, Stuart, and Jackson* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey, 1899), 94, 115–116, 145–148.

22. W. C. Dodson, *Campaigns of Wheeler and His Cavalry, 1862–1865* (Atlanta: Hudgins, 1899), 310–312; Andrew S. Bledsoe, "The Tullahoma and Chickamauga Campaigns: Discord, Disruption, and Defeat," *Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War*, ed. Foote and Hess, 421–436.

23. Wall, "Raids in Southeastern Virginia," 72. For good explorations of animal agency, consult the essays in Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger, eds., *Animals and Agency: An Interdisciplinary Exploration* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009).

24. Jennings, *The Horse and His Diseases*, 214–215; Allen, *Down in Dixie*, 146.

25. Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 82–93.

John N. Opie noticed this at the battle of Upperville, a prelude to the Gettysburg campaign, on June 21, 1863, when a column was stopped in its tracks because the horses in the front rank refused to jump a stone fence. Edward Wall also noted an instance of agency. One evening when Bessy set out at a rapid pace, he tried to get her to slow down. She refused and even “turned and bit at my leg. It was, I thought, more a remonstrance than viciousness. Her means of appealing to me were few, and she used the one that came handy.”²⁶

The difficulties inherent in interspecies communication, as well as a stubborn anthropocentric tradition in Western human-equine relations, limited the trooper’s awareness that his horse was a sentient creature with likes, needs, and requests of his own. Insensitive cavalymen often were treated to violent means of communication because they had no ability or desire to tune in to the animal’s means of conveying their needs and desires. Thus in discussing their horses many troopers simply believed that they were odd or dangerous without realizing that most of the horse’s actions had good reasons behind them.

For example, Uriah N. Parmelee’s mare, “an honest old brute,” never seemed to give him a decent ride. Even when walking, “she would jar my system into tremulousness; she would half stumble every five to six feet and fetch down her fore locks.” At each step, she bounced Parmelee high in the saddle. He soon exchanged her for a more congenial horse. Whether Parmelee’s mount was doing this deliberately as an act of protest or simply was a clumsy animal is hard to say, but the persistence with which she gave him an uncomfortable ride implies a planned strategy to get rid of him and it worked.²⁷

There were, in fact, many actions that could not be mistaken for anything other than deliberate attempts to foil the rider’s intent. When Charles Francis Adams Jr. dismounted to place a picket line for the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry, his horse “turned round, kicked up his heels and ran away. The last I saw of him he was pelting over a distant hill and my man was laboring after him.” The horse was later recovered, but he obviously enjoyed his short vacation from Adams’s control. In another example, a horse called Old Bob in the 4th Iowa Cavalry was notorious for “rubbing his master against trees, lying down with him in the water, and other disagreeable pranks,” wrote William F. Scott. He called Old Bob “an erratic beast.”²⁸ But really all those actions imply efforts by the horse to get the rider off his back.

Even more obvious were those mounts that battled with their riders. As Isaac Gause noted of cavalry horses, there was “an occasional desperado that has to be subjugated; a process which usually breaks his constitution to an extent that renders him worthless.” Old Squeezer was such an animal. When issued to a man in the 3rd US Cavalry, he became “a terror to recruits,” according to J. A. Arkle. “I had a fight with him in March,

26. Opie, *A Rebel Cavalryman*, 160, 162; Wall, “Raids in Southeastern Virginia,” 72.

27. Parmelee to Sammy, 2 August 1862, Samuel Spencer Parmelee Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

28. Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *A Cycle of Adams Letters*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 24; Scott, *Story of a Cavalry Regiment*, 392.

1863, in which he nearly killed me at the picket-line one evening at ‘stables,’ but I got him down at last on the ground and sat on his neck.”²⁹

Benjamin Crowninshield recalled two horses in the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry who never adjusted to army life. One of them, “a light chestnut sorrel” called White Eye, had a habit of suddenly doing dangerous things. One day White Eye jumped into a loaded coal wagon with the rider. The horse wound up in Company H with a trooper who had been a jockey, and the man was able to control him most of the time. But one day the horse bolted from the ranks and “ran for miles” before the former jockey could stop him. White Eye met his end during the Maryland campaign in the late summer of 1862. While being led with other horses along the towpath of a canal, he suddenly jumped into a canal boat, and then plunged into the Potomac River and drowned. Crowninshield believed White Eye might have been insane, but it is also possible that the animal was so traumatized by his enforced servitude in the army that he wanted to escape at any cost. Another horse in Company F absolutely refused to be ridden despite tedious efforts by many men to break him, using a variety of horse training methods. But nothing worked. That “horse was victorious over his enemy, man,” concluded Crowninshield.³⁰

It has to be emphasized that the majority of cavalry horses submitted to human control while exercising some degree of agency. Most of them became good animal warriors. But it is equally true that a minority of them would not submit to the army regimen. Fighting back was the only recourse and perhaps self-destruction, as in the case of White Eye, was the last option. Persistently stubborn horses should have been released from cavalry service for they communicated their deep resistance to army life and posed a threat to their riders. But this was never done; such animals remained with their unit until the officers found a way to palm them off to other units or until they perished.

BATTLE

The ultimate requirement that the military system imposed on cavalry horses was participation in battle. The horse and rider were a combat team; both were trained for this deadly work and both were equally exposed to flying bullets and exploding shells, although the horse represented a much bigger target. Reactions to combat by horses mirrored those of their riders in many ways.

Isaac Gause vividly described a typical cavalry horse’s reaction to combat: “When heavy battles are raging, if standing in line, he becomes nervous with the suspense, and will tremble and sweat and grow apprehensive. At any sound that indicates a move, the rider can feel him working the bit with his tongue. As he moves out he seeks to go faster, and when restrained shows his disapproval by feigning to bolt. He will then grasp the bit afresh, and dash ahead as if to brave the worst and have it over as quickly as possible.”

29. Isaac Gause, *Four Years with Five Armies: Army of the Frontier, Army of the Potomac, Army of the Missouri, Army of the Ohio, Army of the Shenandoah* (New York: Neale, 1908), 383; J. A. Arkle, “Old ‘Squeezer,” *National Tribune*, 24 May 1888.

30. Crowninshield, *History of the First*, 287–289; D. Scott Hartwig, “The Maryland Campaign: Carnage and Emancipation,” *Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War*, ed. Foote and Hess, 300–316.

In Gause's view the horse became a warrior reacting to battle much as did the trooper, representing an interesting case of the kind of shared embodiment that literary scholar Karen Raber discusses in Renaissance culture. Gause understood the equine experience of battle as well as he understood his own combat experience because it was expressed explicitly and in a way easy for Gause, who was especially sensitive to his horse's reactions, to comprehend.³¹

Combat losses of horses could be severe. The 8th Texas Cavalry took 450 men into the battle of Shiloh and lost 66 killed, wounded, and missing on April 6–7, 1862. But the loss of horses was greater: 52 killed and 40 badly wounded. It has been estimated that at Gettysburg, July 1–3, 1863, some 5,000 horses perished, weighing about 2.5 million tons in all.³² We can only approximate an understanding of animal death in war, what it meant to the nonhuman sentient beings killed on the battlefield, their suffering, and their awareness of approaching death. As animal studies scholar Teya Brooks Pribac has noted, “*anthropodenial*, or blindness to the humanlike characteristics of other animals,” has hindered our ability to embrace “the possibility of the existence of human-comparable subjective dimensions in other animals.” Some individuals, like psychologist Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson and his coauthor Susan McCarthy, argue forcefully for a full range of animal emotions that are detectable by humans. Isaac Gause, the experienced trooper who was unusually sensitive to his horses, would have largely agreed with Masson and McCarthy. “It has been asserted that the horse has no reasoning powers, and lacks discretion,” Gause wrote in 1908, “but my experience teaches me that he is in possession of both, and in many cases to a marked degree.”³³ We can assume that many if not most cavalry mounts were highly aware of death on the battlefield and had to deal with its approach in emotional ways similar to humans when they were badly wounded.

Col. Charles Russell Lowell, scion of a reformist family from New England and commander of a cavalry brigade, recorded what happened to his mounts during operations in the Shenandoah Valley in the summer and fall of 1864. One horse named Ruksh was hit in the foreleg, and it seemed possible to save his life but he could not be used anymore. Another mount named Dick also was hit in the leg, so Lowell “left him” somewhere. “Berold is so foolish about bullets and shell now,” he told his wife about a third mount, “that I really can't ride him under fire.” Lowell could not train his gray horse, which meant that the only mount he could rely on was Billy, a true equine warrior

31. Gause, *Four Years*, 383–384; Karen Raber, *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 4–6, 9, 21.

32. Thomas W. Cutrer, ed., *Our Trust Is in the God of Battles: The Civil War Letters of Robert Franklin Bunting, Chaplain, Terry's Texas Rangers, C. S. A.* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 57; J. K. P. Blackburn, “Reminiscences of the Terry Rangers,” Pt. 2, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (October 1918): 146; Stephen D. Engle, “Shiloh and Corinth,” *Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War*, ed. Foote and Hess, 203–218; Ann Norton Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 161; Carol Reardon, “The Gettysburg Campaign: War Comes to Free Soil,” *Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War*, ed. Foote and Hess, 391–404.

33. Teya Brooks Pribac, *Enter the Animal: Cross-Species Perspectives on Grief and Spirituality* (Sydney, Australia: Sydney University Press, 2021), 16–17; Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson and Susan McCarthy, *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals* (New York: Delta, 1995); Gause, *Four Years with Five Armies*, 383.

who seemed never to be intimidated by combat. In late August, a bullet went through the upper part of Billy's thick neck, which Lowell counted as "not at all serious." In early September, two more bullets caused flesh wounds, one of them "making an ugly cut near the throat" and the other "cutting the bridle rein and piercing the edge of the blanket, but bullet passing quite above all bones." According to Lowell, this last ball did not bother Billy; the wound it created and the previous wounds closed quickly. Whenever Lowell tried other horses, Billy teased him until the colonel gave up and returned to him. But this fruitful relationship ended at the battle of Third Winchester, September 19, when Billy was mortally wounded by three bullets. Exactly one month later Lowell himself was mortally wounded at the battle of Cedar Creek on October 19. According to one report, he had a total of 12 horses shot under him during the war.³⁴

Horses were capable, as were troopers, of surviving gunshot wounds depending on many factors such as the type of weapon, the characteristics of the bullet, and the distance at which it was fired. Gunshot wounds to the skin and the skeletal muscles tend to be the most commonly seen by veterinarians today, and they are the easiest to survive for horses. Much the same would have been true of Civil War cavalry mounts, as was evidenced by the combat experience of Lowell's Billy.³⁵

Did horses respect the dead and wounded that littered the battlefields of the Civil War? Many commentators asserted that they were careful not to step on a man or another horse lying on the ground. But that was not always true. In a mounted charge by the 5th US Cavalry at the June 27, 1862, battle of Gaines' Mill, during the Seven Days campaign, Lt. Louis D. Watkins was "severely wounded and also trampled on by several horses of the regiment" as he lay on the ground. Also, at the battle of Cedar Mountain, a prelude to the Second Bull Run campaign on August 9, 1862, some men in the 1st Pennsylvania Cavalry were injured "by their horses falling over other killed or wounded" animals.³⁶ If given the opportunity, horses did not step on prone figures, but in the congestion of battle formations they sometimes could not avoid it.

Another chilling result of participation in military operations was troopers' deliberate killing of their own horses. This took place during long raids behind enemy lines when hard riding exhausted mounts. It was common to replace them with horses taken from farms along the line of march, but there was a risk in allowing the fatigued animals to roam free. The enemy could round them up, then rehabilitate and use them. Commander of the Army of the Potomac's Cavalry Corps Philip Sheridan thus ordered exhausted

34. Edward Waldo Emerson, [ed.], *Life and Letters of Charles Russell Lowell* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 325–326, 338, 347–348; Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 285; James Marten, "Petersburg Besieged and the Shenandoah Valley," *Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War*, ed. Foote and Hess, 565–584.

35. Amelia Munsterman and R. Reid Hanson, "Trauma and Wound Management: Gunshot Wounds in Horses," *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Equine Practice* 30, no. 2 (August 2014): 453–466.

36. Gause, *Four Years*, 383; *OR*, Vol. 11, Pt. 2, 46–47; *OR*, Vol. 12, Pt. 2, 141. For Gaines' Mill, see Timothy J. Orr, "The Seven Days' Battles and Public Opinion," *Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War*, ed. Foote and Hess, 254–269. For Cedar Mountain, see John H. Matsui, "Second Bull Run/Manassas: Clash of Partisan Armies," *Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War*, ed. Foote and Hess, 286–299.

mounts killed on these raids. “The horses which failed were shot by the rear guard, as they could have been easily recuperated and made serviceable to the enemy,” he reported. Sheridan estimated that from 150 to 300 were killed in this way during his first raid as corps commander, toward Richmond, from May 9 to 24, 1864. Sheridan did the same on the many other raids he conducted during the last year of the war.³⁷

It does not appear that any other cavalry commander made a habit of killing his own horses but they did so on occasion. During William T. Sherman’s March to the Sea through Georgia in November and December 1864, the Federal cavalry was hard pressed by the Confederates and found that hundreds of captured horses were “a great incumbrance.” During a fearful night’s work, each cavalryman selected the best animal he could find and the rest were deliberately and cruelly slaughtered. One brigade alone killed 500 of them. The men covered the doomed animals’ heads with blankets and then used an axe to strike them between the ears, fearing the sound of gunfire would be noticed by nearby Confederates. The next morning their carcasses were lined up in ranks where they fell.³⁸ No witnesses addressed the question of the horses’ emotions during this horrible experience. Whether they screamed or remained silent because the blankets and the darkness muffled their awareness of what was happening we cannot know for sure, but of course as sentient beings one can assume a certain level of traumatic awareness that something bad was taking place.

Such things may have been seen as a necessity of war, but they also were wasteful of valuable animals and cruel to the victims who, despite the blankets, surely knew something dreadful was happening. Acts such as these could only create callousness toward animals rather than appreciation for them as partners in the war effort. In a handful of instances military operations also produced examples of hippophagy, or human consumption of equine meat. The most famous instance was during the siege of Vicksburg when mule meat was eaten by starving Confederate soldiers. But even some Southern civilians ate horse meat in starvation times during the war.³⁹

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE EQUATION

The horse-human combination was fraught with potential danger to the trooper. From the beginning both had to learn how to accommodate the needs of the other, which often led to difficulties. “I had had some experience with horses on a farm,” recalled Stanton P. Allen, “but I had never struggled for the mastery with a fiery, untamed

37. *OR*, Vol. 36, Pt. 1, 792; *SOR*, Pt. 1, Vol. 6, 802; Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern, May 7–12, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

38. Smith D. Atkins, “With Sherman’s Cavalry,” *Military Essays and Recollections: Papers Read Before the Commandery of the State of Illinois, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1894), 389–390; Anne J. Bailey, “Sherman’s March to the Sea: Home Front Becomes Battlefield,” *Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War*, ed. Foote and Hess, 534–550.

39. Gene C. Armstrong, *Horses and Mules in the Civil War: A Complete History with a Roster of More Than 700 War Horses* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013), 82–85; Joan E. Cashin, “Hungry People in the Wartime South: Civilians, Armies, and the Food Supply,” *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War’s Ragged Edges*, ed. Stephen Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 167.

war-horse.” When he and his comrades tried to groom their mounts, they “kicked us around the stables *ad libitum*. One recruit had all his front teeth knocked out.” Nervous, severely stressed animals caused “quite a number” of injuries in the 8th Illinois Cavalry, usually kicks that landed 4 to 6 inches below the knee, “frequently laying bare the bone” as Surg. Abner Hard put it. A kick in the head killed a man in the 9th Pennsylvania Cavalry, and a fall from his mount led to the death of another in the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry. “In the cavalry regiments,” wrote Surg. Charles S. Tripler, medical director of the Army of the Potomac, “the sick report is swollen considerably in consequence of injuries to the men received from the horses.”⁴⁰

Kicks were only the most visible form of danger to the trooper; more obscure were a number of health-threatening adjuncts to repeated horse riding that applied to every horseman whether in or out of the army. Constant, intense riding produced an array of medical conditions on the human body that raise the question as to whether the horse-human combination was natural. William F. Scott of the 4th Iowa Cavalry described the effect of long forced marches on the frame of the trooper: “A cavalryman suffers a slowly increasing pain, from his cramped position and the unceasing motion of his horse, a pain that is often very hard to bear hour after hour. It is an indescribably general keen ache and rasping of the nerves.” Because it built up gradually, most men were able to deal with this condition until they had a chance to rest. But on restarting the march, “his sensations are exquisite tortures. Every bone aches fiercely and seems ready to crack with pain, and every muscle feels as sore and tender as if it had been separately scourged.” Abner Hard treated many men for “chafing or excoriations on the inside of thighs or legs, caused by riding.” During long, relentless marches, troopers’ legs often swelled up so badly that they could not remove their boots or shoes until the swelling subsided. In his book *Hints on Health in Armies: For the Use of Volunteer Officers*, medical professor John Ordranax of Columbia Law School warned cavalrymen to expect serious health effects from long, hard riding: “Hernias, and inflammations of the testicles often testify to the effects of incessant jolting in the saddle, and it is advisable for all horsemen to protect themselves against these accidents by wearing a suspensory bandage.”⁴¹

The Civil War generation knew about the superficial effects on the rider’s body that resulted from repeated horseback riding, but later generations became aware of the internal effect it had on the spine and other bone structures. All riders have to absorb

40. Allen, *Down In Dixie*, 92–93; Abner Hard, *History of the Eighth Cavalry Regiment, Illinois Volunteers, During the Great Rebellion* (Aurora, IL: n.p., 1868), 47, 122; John W. Rowell, *Yankee Cavalrymen: Through the Civil War with the Ninth Pennsylvania Cavalry* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 185; Ford, ed., *Cycle of Adams Letters*, Vol. 1, 247. Although close to half of all cavalrymen grew up on farms, their experience with horses did not necessarily prepare them for cavalry service. There was a military way to mount and handle horses, the latter by knee action more than reins, and all this had to be learned after enlistment. Cooke, *Cavalry Tactics*, Vol. 1, 24–25, 31.

41. Scott, *Story of a Cavalry Regiment*, 266–267; Hard, *History of the Eighth Cavalry*, 47–48; Gilbert C. Kniffin, “General Capron’s Narrative of Stoneman’s Raid South of Atlanta,” *War Papers: Being Papers Read Before the Commandery of the District of Columbia, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, Vol. 2 (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot, 1993), 125; John Ordranax, *Hints on Health in Armies: For the Use of Volunteer Officers*, 2nd ed. (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1863), 31.

a good deal of shock from virtually all movements of the mount. It resonates from the horse and through the stirrup, foot, knee, and hip. “Horseback riding is one of the most dangerous recreational sports,” conclude the authors of a study published in 2009 that focused on 58 frequent riders, including those who ride performance animals. Magnetic resonance imaging revealed that 88 percent of them had “lumbar disk degeneration,” whereas only 33 percent of the control group of non-riders exhibited those conditions. Competitive riders “frequently complain of orthopaedic problems, possibly related to unspecific musculoskeletal stress reactions. Lower back, hip joint, and hamstring muscle pain are the most common symptoms.” They have a 73 percent greater chance of back pain than non-riders. Nor are these conditions exclusive to modern riders. Osteoarchaeologists, when examining skeletal remains found in a Scythian royal burial mound of about 325 BCE, found the same type of bone deformation one sees in riders today.⁴²

Habitual riding, especially from an early age, alters the skeletal structure of riders. It changes how the gluteus muscle is attached and leads to intervertebral disk degeneration, mostly in the middle and lower back, and osteoarthritis at the base of the skull from the head shaking with the mount’s jolting movement. Schmorl nodes, “small depressions in the vertebral bodies indicating disk problems,” are more frequently seen in habitual riders. Riding with the toes higher than the heels in the stirrups causes hyperflexion of the hips and ankles. In addition to the reins and verbal coaxing, riders use their legs to control their mounts. Hip and thigh adductors are the muscles employed in this. They “squeeze the rider’s thighs and knees against the animal’s back,” which leads to alterations detectable by osteoarchaeologists. They have found a range of skeletal evidence in the remains of Civil War cavalrymen and those recovered on the Little Bighorn battlefield to confirm these effects of habitual riding on cavalrymen. Skeletal alterations that arise from habitual riding are not uniform for all riders. Some of the effects seem to depend on whether the individual rides properly or improperly, as in the hyperflexion of hips and ankles, whereas others, such as degenerative disk effects, seem to be universal.⁴³

The effect on horses of prolonged riding also has to be considered. The most immediate effect was the rubbing of the saddle and blanket on the back, which produced sores, a very common experience of cavalry mounts during the Civil War. Many long campaigns and raids led to horses being saddled for hours, even days without relief. If not unsaddled and the wounds cared for, these saddle sores produced serious health problems.

42. R. K. Wentz and N. T. De Grummond, “Life on Horseback: Palaeopathology of Two Scythian Skeletons from Alexandropol, Ukraine,” *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 19 (2009): 112; Clayton N. Kraft, Peter H. Pennekamp, Ute Becker, Mei Young, Oliver Diedrich, Christian Lüring, and Makus von Falkenhausen, “Magnetic Resonance Imaging Findings of the Lumbar Spine in Elite Horseback Riders,” *American Journal of Sports Medicine* 37 (2009): 2205–2206.

43. Douglas W. Owsley, Karin S. Bruwelheide, Larry W. Cartmell Sr., Laurie E. Burgess, Shelly J. Foote, Skye M. Chang, and Nick Fielder, “The Man in the Iron Coffin: An Interdisciplinary Effort to Name the Past,” *Historical Archaeology* 40, no. 3 (2006): 89, 92, 94; Douglas Scott and P. Willey, “Little Bighorn: Human Remains from the Custer National Cemetery,” in *In Remembrance: Archaeology and Death*, ed. David A. Poirier and Nicholas F. Bellanton (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1997), 155–158, 162–163; Douglas D. Scott, P. Willey, and Melissa A. Connor, *They Died with Custer: Soldiers’ Bones from the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 275–279.

“Imagine a horse with his withers swollen to three times the natural size, and with a volcanic, running sore pouring matter down each side,” Capt. Charles Francis Adams Jr. wrote his mother.⁴⁴

SAYING GOODBYE

Despite the pain of exhausting hours spent in the saddle, many Civil War cavalrymen who had bonded with their mounts found it hard to part with them at war’s end. “Some of the men were visibly affected when they took final leave” of their mounts, wrote Chauncey S. Norton. Lt. Thaddeus Packard of the 5th Illinois Cavalry was certain he would “*always like a horse better than Ever* after [my] army life is Over. They have more intelligence than Some Men.” Edward Wall of the 3rd New York Cavalry thought the intelligence and goodwill of most horses shamed “the unreasonableness of their riders.”⁴⁵

This parting attitude toward their horses may have carried over in the postwar lives of some Civil War veterans and helped to spur a rise in animal welfare movements. The impact of the Civil War, which forced tens of thousands of Northern and Southern men into a relationship with horses that was more intense and widespread than anything they experienced in civilian life, could have been a springboard for the expansion of animal welfare efforts after 1865, although more research is needed to verify that hypothesis. Reform movements of all kinds, including human attitudes toward nonhuman animals, increased in strength during the decades following the Civil War. Henry Bergh founded the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals a year after the end of the conflict, and by 1879, 33 of the 38 states had instituted animal anti-cruelty laws. Historian Janet Davis argues that the Civil War played a significant role in the postwar rise in sympathy for animal suffering while historians Katherine Grier and Diane Beers downplay the war’s role. They see the rise of animal sensitivity as a larger cultural trend in mid-19th-century America that had little to do with the Civil War and which visibly grew on its own by the 1870s.⁴⁶

The animal-human relationship in the Civil War was a give-and-take relationship that grew out of the forced involvement of horses in war making and the volunteer nature of human army service. For some animals and men, it was a comforting, supportive relationship, but for most it was only mechanical, utilitarian, and exploitative. For others it was brutal, torturous, and deadly. Throughout, that relationship was astonishing in how

44. Donald F. Carmony, ed., “Jacob W. Bartmess Civil War Letters.” [Pt. 1.] *Indiana Magazine of History* 54, no. 1 (March 1956): 65; Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *A Cycle of Adams Letters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), Vol. 1, 287, 295, Vol. 2, 4–5.

45. Chauncey S. Norton, *The Red Neck Ties, Or History of the Fifteenth New York Volunteer Cavalry* (Ithaca, NY: Journal, 1891), 85; Packard quoted in Rhonda M. Kohl, *The Prairie Boys Go to War: The Fifth Illinois Cavalry, 1861–1865* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 158; Edward Wall, “Raids in Southeastern Virginia Fifty Years Ago,” *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* 3, no. 1 (1918): 81.

46. Janet M. Davis, *Gospel of Kindness: Animal Welfare and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 14; Diane L. Beers, *For the Prevention of Cruelty: The History and Legacy of Animal Rights Activism in the United States* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 40–44; Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 182.

much the experience of being a cavalry horse mirrored that of being a cavalryman despite the undeniable differences between man's and mount's situations. In their personal accounts, cavalrymen of the Civil War offer us our best insight into the animal-human relationship, when horses were turned into weapons of war. That relationship was a two-way street, with horse and man dependent on each other for survival and effectiveness on the battlefield. ■

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