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One of the most obscure items ever issued by the Confederate Ordnance Department was the Spanish moss saddle blanket. Nearly every arsenal's records feature references to this cavalry item, some of them quite prominently, yet saddle historians have long been baffled as to how it may have looked and, more important, just how common it was.

In reality, Spanish moss is neither Spanish nor a true moss, nor is it a parasite to the host tree. As an epiphyte (plant that grows on another plant but is not parasitic) it draws its food and moisture directly from the air. Found commonly in the deep south hanging from oak and cypress trees, this beautiful yet gloomy plant has done much to inspire, if not shape, the mystery and romance of Southern culture. Academic application of its strong, waterproof, and resilient inner fiber has made it an excellent industrial substitute for horsehair and even wool.

The use of Spanish moss in American culture goes back at least three centuries when immigrant Europeans settling the coastal south used the green moss as a livestock feed. By early 1718, a significant commercial moss industry had appeared in the marketplace, curing and baling the green moss's black fiber end-product for use...
as a substitute for the more expensive horsehair. Its most common application was as a stuffing for mattresses, furniture, saddle-seat pads, and, mixed with mud, to make mortar and bricks. Frequent pre-war use as horse equipage included spinning and braiding or weaving moss into bridles, cinches, reins, horse collars, and saddle blankets.

The method of curing or “retting” Spanish moss, while little changed in over two hundred years, is today almost a forgotten industry. In general, the process begins by gathering the moss growing abundantly from the trees and in the swamps of the deep south. It is piled in heaps and soaked in water, then thoroughly wetted daily, and turned occasionally for two to three months while it cures. Bacterial action creates heat during this period, which serves to rot and loosen the green outer cortex. When judged sufficiently cured, the moss is hung over fences or racks to dry. The cured moss must then be separated from the chaff. Sticks, dust, and dead cortex are removed by hand by beating the moss with paddles, raking it over latticework, and finally shaking it in the wind, leaving only the wiry, black inner fiber.

The resulting shiny, horsehair-like thread may have been further treated with tallow or other greases and oils to help maintain its resiliency before being baled, like cotton, for shipment. The final step of creating saddle blankets out of the cured moss involved twisting or spinning the moss fibers, often using a small wooden device called a “tarabi,” into a cord-like thread and then hand-weaving them into blankets.

Confederate use of Spanish moss saddle blankets began at the very outset of the war when wool, felt, and moss blankets then for sale commercially were quickly bought up and put into service. As the Ordnance Bureau’s arsenal system took shape, it became their responsibility to provide saddle blankets for cavalry use. The relentless demand for sleeping blankets, however, made the wool item quite scarce. The South, having few manufacturers of blankets of any kind and at best a very volatile supply of wool, turned to imports. This, however, failed to meet the South’s demand. It fell to the Bureau to develop a reliable domestic source of saddle blankets. Spanish moss was already proven to be an excellent substitute and readily available, so various suppliers were contracted to provide moss and manufacture moss blankets. The old U.S. Arsenal at Mt. Vernon, Alabama, which had been previously abandoned and dismantled by the Confederates, was reopened by the Ordnance Bureau as a facility to gather and cure Spanish moss for saddle blankets as well as timber for use in the making of saddle trees.

What did the Confederate moss saddle blanket look like? An extensive year-long search of Confederate Ordnance Department records, manufacturers, and over sixty textile museums, libraries, associations, and experts failed to locate a specimen or even a satisfactory description. Its exact appearance remained largely speculative—until recently, when a wartime trash pit, unearthed in Nashville, Tennessee, provided the only known samples of Spanish moss saddle blankets to have survived to the present.

Excavation for a stadium—today home of the Tennessee Titans—in downtown Nashville located the trash pit twenty-one feet below the surface where its chemical composition amazingly preserved in near original condition leather boots, brogans, saddle parts, accoutrements, uniform cloth, and other civilian, Federal, and Confederate military artifacts. Most of the artifact collectors and historians attracted to the site seem to have preferred the more valuable items to the unknown items, but fortunately Shane Miles of Strawberry Plains, Tennessee, decided to keep some of the less promising unidentified mud-covered relics. I came upon Shane with some of these finds at last December’s Nashville Civil War Show, and was able to conclusively identify them as portions of Spanish moss saddle blankets. This one-of-a-kind discovery resolved many of the mysteries of the true appearance of the Confederate Spanish moss saddle blanket.

In general, the Confederate-made moss blanket was manufactured by curing moss in the aforementioned process, then shipping it to commercial contractors at whose facilities it was twisted or spun into cord, then hand woven on large looms into blankets. Thanks to Shane’s recoveries, we know that there were at least four different weave patterns, some very tightly woven and thick. Different size blankets or mats were made, but most cavalry blankets were likely 40’
Close-up of a Spanish moss saddle blanket section excavated in Nashville, Tennessee. There were four different styles of weaves in the four blanket portions recovered. Photo, Steve Sylvia; courtesy Shane Miles.

Although the moss’s wiry, coarse texture makes it more-scratching than wool, the blanket’s innate waterproof resiliency and strength make it a fine, if not excellent, substitute for the wool saddle blanket. Most importantly, the cost of these blankets was quite attractive to the Confederate Ordnance Bureau. In 1863, when blankets in some parts of the South were being impressed or selling for as much as $40, the moss blanket cost the Bureau only $2!

How common was the moss saddle blanket? In the western Confederacy, a shortage of wool and felt blankets necessitated the appearance of moss saddle blankets or mats in the records of virtually every ordnance facility—some as early as the spring of 1861. Purchased primarily from commercial suppliers, they were quite commonly issued, though by 1862 saddle blankets of all descriptions were getting difficult to obtain. One arsenal was even forced to issue “carpet” horse blankets. Imports were of little help as comparatively few English blankets or “numnahs” (British Army felt pads) were available in the west and most of those went almost exclusively to Officers.

Records are sketchy and inconclusive, but it is clear that moss blankets were quite frequently issue items from the ordnance facilities of Macon, Augusta, Atlanta, Memphis, Nashville, Selma, and Columbus. At Atlanta, Macon, and Augusta, wool or felt blankets were scarce by 1863 and almost disappeared entirely by early 1864; the moss blankets, on the other hand, were often the only type of saddle blanket listed in the record of “Ordnance Stores on Hand.” At Macon, more than 8,470 moss blankets were issued from June 1863 to February 1864. In fact, this arsenal’s leading supplier, Junius Jordan of Eufaula, Alabama, manufactured and shipped over 15,200 moss blankets in one fourteen-month period alone! Further, it is clear that many of these western arsenals shipped moss blankets to eastern ordnance facilities, including Richmond and Charleston.

Moss blankets do not appear to have been nearly as common in the east, although they are found in the records of the Richmond Arsenal as early as summer 1861. A shortage of wool and felt blankets was here too but, unlike the west, the east’s manufacturing capacity and large numbers of imports of English blankets and numnahs served to greatly alleviate its lack of supply. In fact, of the 176 bales of blankets and numnahs imported by the Ordnance Bureau at Wilmington, North Carolina, between July 1863 and January 1865, nearly 65% went to Richmond!

Throughout the war, a significant number of moss blankets was shipped to Richmond from several western arsenals and contractors, and at least one large local supplier of horse equipment, Cottrell & Co., provided several thousand.

In August 1863 a moss blanket, obviously sent to the Richmond Ordnance Depot for official approval, was inspected by Superintendent of Armories, Major William S. Downer, who considered it well-made and durable: “It is a handsome blanket of the kind, of good dimensions and of proper thickness sufficient so to prevent any saddle from hurting the horse.”

A severe shortage of sleeping blankets later that fall necessitated that Josiah Gorgas, chief of the Ordnance Bureau, order blankets on hand in Richmond that were “serviceable to soldiers in
Just how prominent the use of the moss blanket was with Confederate cavalry may never be definitively known. However, Ordnance Department records show that tens of thousands of these blankets were manufactured and issued to troopers and artillerists in both major armies, particularly those in the west. That they were the only saddle blankets available strongly suggests that the Southern horsemen used them.

The Spanish moss saddle blanket provides yet another excellent example of necessity-driven Southern expedience overcoming lack of resources. The almost forgotten Spanish moss saddle blanket is no longer relegated to some obscure archival footnote but can now assume its rightful place among Confederate and Southern cultural history.

The business of harvesting Spanish moss as a cash crop accelerated after the war with the use of gins to speed up the commercial process. It peaked in the 1930s when moss was used primarily as stuffing for automobile seats, largely replacing, if not entirely obliterating, the horsehair business. By the 1950s it, too, was being replaced by foam rubber, and by the 1980s the business of harvesting Spanish moss had almost completely vanished. Today it is making a small comeback serving as egg-laying beds at fish hatcheries and catfish farms.

Spanish moss blankets have not been seen before in the reenacting market due to the amount of research, time and labor needed to produce them. Given the proliferation of “authentics” in Confederate cavalry and artillery re-enacting and living history many wanted Spanish moss saddle blankets to complete their impressions. Over the years, I have been aware of several people who have tried to make these blankets but without success until Dawn Klug undertook the project. Through the efforts of Karl Pepper and the incredible talent and tenacity of Dawn Klug, it became a reality and these blankets are available to historians and reenactors.

Dawn lives in the middle of Florida’s moss country. She is an expert and serious historical weaver, with just the right character, weaving knowledge, creative ingenuity and determination to recreate Spanish moss saddle blankets. Whatever obstacle was placed in her path, she found her way around it. She never shied from experimenting, spending money or doing whatever it took to figure out the enormously difficult, physically demanding, and dirty jobs of the gathering, retting, spinning and weaving process. Dawn often cajoled her family, friends and neighbors to help. She not only built several of the apparatus to rett and spin the difficult moss fibers into a weavable yarn, she spent many dozens of hours perfecting the weave (there are several weave patterns) and finally put the proper “finish” to it. She sought out one of the last surviving “moss ginners” to help her perfect this fast fading knowledge and process. Her bull dog tenacity has been incredible. No one who has not been involved in this can truly understand the magnitude of this project. However, I must add here, what is even more amazing to me is that Dawn has done this from a wheelchair! Due to an auto accident many years ago, she is a paraplegic. What an inspiration!

Today these saddle mats and blankets are the result of a long process in Florida and Louisiana which begins with nine months of retting, the

A twisted and hand-braided Spanish moss horse/mule collar with mat. Image courtesy Louisiana State University Rural Life Center.
process by which the outer portion of the Spanish moss is removed to reveal the core. This core material resembles horsehair and undergoes cleaning in a moss gin, not unlike a cotton gin. Once it is thoroughly cleaned, the next step is the spinning, followed by the actual weaving.

1. It is light weight (lighter than wool blankets)-about 2 lbs. 12 ounces
2. It tends to keep the horse’s back dry. Just as reported in experiments on the plains by the U.S. Army in the 1850’s. To quote The Prairie Traveler, the Spanish moss blanket, “is regarded by many as the perfection of this article of horse equipment. It is a mat woven into the proper shape and size from the beaten fibers of moss that hangs from the trees in our Southern States. It is cheap, does not chafe or heat the horses’ spine like the woolen blanket. Its open texture allows rapid evaporation, which tends to keep the back cool, and obviates the danger of stripping and sudden exposure of the heated parts to the sun and air. The experience of our officers who have used the mat for years in Mexico and Texas corroborates all I have said in its favor; and they are unanimous in the opinion that a horse will never get a sore back when it is placed under a good saddle.
3. Because of its thick fibers (thicker than wool) slippage of the saddle blanket under saddle is kept to a minimum.
4. While the fiber of these blankets and mats have a lot of “fuzz” when new, it tends to flatten out and wear off quickly in use.
5. The artillery mats are thick but the blankets will be thicker when properly folded (like wool blankets) to provide enough padding under the properly fitting saddle.

Dawn has more than just produced this item, she has had it tested under saddle. Here are some of her notes about the Spanish Moss artillery mat

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Confederate re-enactor’s horse with Spanish moss saddle blanket


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We value your membership.
Call USCA at 405-422-6330
Brevet Major Eugene B. Beaumont
Assistant Adjutant General, Cavalry Corps,
Army of the Mississippi

Citation

At Harpeth River, Tenn., 17 December 1864; Obtained permission from the corps commander to advance upon the enemy's position with the 4th U.S. Cavalry, of which he was a lieutenant; led an attack upon a battery, dispersed the enemy, and captured the guns. At Selma, Ala., 2 April 1865 charged, at the head of his regiment, into the second and last line of the enemy's works. (www.HomeofHeros.com)

Eugene Beaumont, the son of U.S. Representative Andrew Beaumont, was born 2 August 1837 in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy on 6 May 1861 and was assigned as a second lieutenant to the 1st U.S. Cavalry Regiment, soon to be redesignated the 4th U.S. Cavalry Regiment when the War Department reorganized the 1st and 2nd Dragoons and the Mounted Rifles as the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Cavalry regiments, the 1st and 2nd Cavalry regiments as the 4th and 5th Cavalry regiments, and added the 6th Cavalry Regiment. During this time, he married his childhood sweetheart Margaret Rutter.

During the War Between the States, Beaumont initially served in the eastern theater, serving as aide-de-camp to Major General Ambrose Burnside in the first battle of Bull Run. He then served as aide-de-camp to Major General John Sedgwick and fought in the Peninsula Campaign. Following that and a bout with typhoid fever, he served as aide-de-camp to General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck. Beginning in May 1863, at his own request to return to field duty, he fought in the Gettysburg campaign as well as at Rappahannock Station, Raccoon Ford, Mine Run, and the Wilderness.

By the fall of 1864 Beaumont was a brevet major of volunteers and was serving as the Assistant Adjutant General, Cavalry Corps, Union Army of the Mississippi. On 17 December 1864 Brevet Major Beaumont took command of his old regiment, the 4th Cavalry, and attacked and captured a Confederate artillery battery. Four months later, during the campaign to capture Selma, Alabama, he successfully led his regiment in an assault of the second and last line of Confederate fortifications.

Following the Civil War, Beaumont served with the 4th Cavalry until his retirement as a lieutenant colonel (with a colonel brevet) on 6 May 1892. During this period, he led the leading battalion of the 4th Cavalry in Colonel Ranald Mackenzie's attack on the Comanche Indians in Palo Duro Canyon. He served four years as a cavalry instructor at West Point, and later commanded Forts Reno, Riley, Bowie, and Huachuca as well as the District of Lampasas, Texas. He also participated in the campaign against the Ute Indians while stationed at Fort Garland, Colorado.

Beaumont's first wife Margaret died in 1879. In 1883, he married Maria Orton. He retired on 6 May 1892, was presented with his Medal of Honor on 30 March 1898., and died 17 July 1916.
Model 1912 Feed Bag and Grain Bag
Ordnance Department Manual No. 1715, Description and Directions
for Use and Care of Cavalry Equipment, Model of 1912, October 5, 1914

The feed bag is a canvas cylinder, open at one end, suspended from the horse’s neck when in use in a horizontal position, thus spreading the grain over a considerable area. There are two web suspending straps, one over the head and one near the withers on the neck. The body of the bag is of olive-drab duck No. 9, approximately 22½ inches long. The supporting straps are of heavy 1-inch olive-drab cotton webbing, and are fitted with bronzed snaps and adjustable buckles.

The grain bag is of unbleached drilling formed into a long cylinder, 30½ by 8 inches, open at one end. There are two soft cotton binding cords sewed to the outside of the bag, one at the open end and one at the center, the first to close the bag when full and the second to equalize the loaded bag into two parts for slinging across the pommel of the saddle. The grain bag, with a capacity of 10 pounds, is used to avoid spilling grain while carrying it on the march.

To pack these items for a march, place the amount of grain desired to be carried within the grain bag, tie the choke securely, divide the grain into two approximately equal portions by the string in the middle, place the grain bag inside the feed bag, press the grain bag well over toward the side of the feed bag opposite the webbing straps, fold the elliptical end piece of the feed bag in over the end of the grain bag, turn the extra canvas on the side of the webbing straps over upon the opposite side and secure it, first by the webbing straps of the latter, taking a half hitch, with each around its own end of the roll thus formed, then turning the roll over and bringing the free ends of these web straps out from the under side of their respective ends of the roll, then up over those ends, under the half hitches, and snapping the hooks thereon into each other. Place the grain roll thus formed upon the pommel, hooks upon upper surface, and secure by the two double-buckle straps furnished for that purpose, the grain roll being attached by the buckle at the extremity, the rain coat being attached immediately in front of the grain roll by the second buckle. [Ed. The saddle is the M1912 (Trial) Service Saddle. This is not a McClellan saddle. The Feed Bag, with Grain Bag, inside, is fastened to the saddle’s pommel by the two double buckle coat straps along with the raincoat or overcoat. These are the only pommel coat straps. The left and right pommel pockets each has a strap that also secures the raincoat or overcoat to the pommel, like the lower coat straps on the McClellan Saddle pommel. Since the M1912 Service Saddle was not adopted, the M1904 McClellan Saddle remained in use with M1928 McClellan Saddles later added. The Feed Bag was attached to the pommel by the coat straps along with the raincoat or overcoat.]

To feed, take the grain roll off the pommel and remove grain bag from interior of feed bag. Untie grain bag and empty such portion of grain as desired to feed into the feed bag. Place grain bag in any desired position of safety while horse is feeding. Place the feed bag on the horse so that the opening will be immediately under his nose and the body of the bag under his neck. Snap the hooks into the corresponding D rings to
support bag in this position. Adjust by making the steadying strap across the front of the horse’s nose just sufficiently taut to allow the horse to feed easily, with a portion of his nostrils always above the opening. It is important that this adjustment be carefully made, as in the event the horse is not feeding well from the bag it will in most cases be due to the lack of adjustment of this strap. Adjust the remaining two straps by shortening them to a convenient height. The rear one should be drawn up well back on the neck about as high as comfort will permit.

Once adjusted to any given horse no further adjustment will be needed until used on a horse of materially different dimensions.

By use of a second grain bag, or by carrying grain in the feed bag without a grain bag and using the regular grain bag for this purpose, an additional 10 pounds of grain can in emergencies be carried in the cantle roll.

In camp or on the march grain is fed morning, noon, and evening. The men are to remain near their horses until they have finished eating.

John Jurgens, uncle of Trooper Karen Tempero, using feed bags with mules on Pikes Peak, Colorado in 1942

Model 1912 Service Saddle packed with full equipment viewed from above
From 15 to 23 September 2018 a unique cavalry living history event will take place in Belgium and France. The “Pursuit to Mons” will follow a route from Cambrai, France to Mons, Belgium closely approximating the route taken by Allied armies in pursuit of the Central Powers forces toward the end of the First World War. The event is not a reenactment battle but rather, to quote Stanley Watts, the chairman of the event, “...a thanksgiving to celebrate the end of the war which took so many lives of the people of Europe.”

Not all nations took part in the particular operation being re-created, however there are no restrictions on the nations allowed to participate in the event. Riders must participate in proper cavalry uniform and tack. It is desirable for each nation to represent their cavalry from the First World War era but, again, this is not a requirement. Each group may choose a historical period for their nation and each member will authentically represent that period. In addition to national teams. Individual riders may also participate with the same requirements for uniform and tack.

The ride will cover 100 kilometers (63 miles) in total with each day’s bound being 15-20 km (9.5-13 miles). The goal is to have most of the ride going cross-country, only taking to paved roads when absolutely necessary. Time will be allowed
in each day’s march for riders who wish to do so to visit Great War memorials along the way. Each night’s bivouac will be pre-arranged, and each rider must care for their own mount along the way.

The marching pace will be largely a combination of walk and trot per the paces described in British (and most other nations’) cavalry manuals. Riders must therefore be skilled enough and fit enough to be in the saddle for large portions of each day and to trot in twenty-minute segments several times during the day.

The final weekend in Mons will include a mounted reception, BBQ, and use of showers and facilities at the horse showgrounds. After a horse show on Sunday, a grand banquet is planned on Sunday evening to bring the event to a close.

For further information or to register for the event contact: Stanley J Watts, President International Cavalry Association;
email: steenie43@hotmail.com
Tel: +44 (0) 7968 341 392 (UK; please be aware of time zone differences when calling)
Bill Steinkraus on Snowbound

At the Mexico City Olympics in 1968, Bill Steinkraus, riding the horse Snowbound, became the first American ever to win an Olympic individual equestrian gold medal. He told the New York Times, “I like to think of him (Snowbound, a strong-willed 9-year-old gelding) as sort of a George Bernard Shaw horse. He has his own opinion about everything.”

Born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1925, Bill Steinkraus at age 9 began riding while at a summer camp in Canada. Following that experience he received lessons from Gordon Wright and Morton W. "Cappy" Smith, two well-known horsemen. He also rode horses Smith had for sale to enhance his riding skills while riding different horses. He rode in his first National Horse Show in the junior class when he was 12 years old. In 1941 when he was 16 years old, Steinkraus won the highest level of junior equitation competition, the ASPCA Maclay Cup in Hunter Seat Equitation and the Good Hands Finals in Saddle Seat Equitation at the National Horse Show in Madison Square Garden.

Steinkraus had been a student at Yale for a year when he joined the cavalry and was in one of the last horse-training classes at the Cavalry Replacement Training Center at Fort Riley. He was assigned to the 124th Cavalry Regiment, then
preparing for deployment to the China-Burma-India (CBI) theatre of war. In Burma the 124th, which was the Army’s last horse-mounted cavalry regiment but fought dismounted as part of the Mars Task Force, fought alongside the 475th Infantry Regiment to defeat the Japanese and open the Burma Road, which was an important supply route for Allied forces. After the war he returned to Yale where he graduated in 1949 and resumed his riding career.

In 1964 Games in Tokyo when his horse pulled up lame at the last moment. In addition to winning his record-making Olympic individual gold medal in show jumping in Mexico City in 1968, he won team silver medals in Rome in 1960 and in Munich in 1972, and a team bronze in 1952 at Helsinki. His American team finished fifth in 1956 in Stockholm. During this time, he won over 100 individual international competitions as well as participated on 39 winning Nations’ Cup teams. Bill Steinkraus, one of America’s most celebrated horse-show riders, was widely considered one of the greatest riders in the history of equestrian sports.”

In 1950, before the United States Equestrian Team (USET) was formed, American equestrian riders who competed internationally came from the U.S. Cavalry. After the cavalry was fully dismounted in the late 1940s, it no longer was able to provide equestrian riders; thus, USET was formed. Steinkraus became a member of the USET in 1951.

Extracted from his personally written obituary:

Steinkraus was “a sought-after open jumper rider after World War II. He successfully competed with the jumper strings of Arthur Nardin, Raymond H. Lutz and Fairview Farms before winning a place on the first civilian Olympic Equestrian Team in 1951. After helping the team win a bronze medal at the Helsinki Olympic games in 1952, he succeeded Arthur McCashin as its riding captain, a position he retained until his retirement at the end of the 1972 season.

Steinkraus made all six United States Olympic teams from 1952 through 1972, missing only the
and was a member of the New York Sports, Madison Square Garden, National Horse Show, Washington Horse Show and Fairfield County Sports Halls of Fame.”

During his riding career he remained an amateur. “He spent several years after the war in the concert management field (New Friends of Music, Community Concerts) before working for a longer time in Wall Street as a security analyst (Value Line, Stone & Webster). His final working years were spent in the publishing industry (D. Van Nostrand, Winchester Press, where he was Editor in Chief, Simon & Schuster, and various free-lance assignments).”

“Steinkraus’s other sporting interests involved hunting, fishing, skiing and golf, and he was an accomplished violinist and viola player and a considerable bibliophile [book collector]. His clubs included the Camp Fire Club, The Boone & Crockett Club, the Marshepaug Forest Association., the Leash, and the Verbank Hunting & Fishing Club, and he was a director of the New York Chamber players.” [Ed. He was a U.S. Cavalry Association Life member.]

**Extracted from Bill Steinkraus’ obituary by Frank Litsky, the New York Times, December 7, 2017**

“One contemporary rider (and later a trainer and judge), George H. Morris, called him ‘the man who epitomized style on horseback.’ Another, Hugh Wiley, said: ‘He would think through a riding problem and always come up with an intelligent answer. After riding, he usually played his fiddle, read The Wall Street Journal, or went to the opera.”

“For all his Olympic medals, Steinkraus was quick to credit his horses, including Hollandia in Helsinki, Main Spring in Munich, and Riviera Wonder in Rome, in addition to Snowbound in Mexico City. Success in competition, he insisted, depended on the relationship between rider and mount. ‘A good horseman must be a good psychologist,’ he told Life magazine in 1968. ‘Horses are young, childish individuals. When you train them, they respond to the environment you create. You are the parent, manager and educator. You can be tender or brutal. But the goal is to develop the horse’s confidence in you to the point he’d think he could clear a building if you headed him for it.’ Indeed, in the equation of rider and horse, Steinkraus placed greater importance on the latter. ‘In this sport,’ he said, ‘the horse is the more the athlete. He’s the body and you’re the brain. When you need a new body, you get one.’”

“Steinkraus wrote several books on the sport, notably Reflections on Riding and Jumping: Winning Techniques for Serious Riders, published by Doubleday in 1991. He also wrote for the authoritative magazine Chronicle of the Horse, played the violin, and was an expert on old books and antique furniture.”

**Extracted from the 2016 The Horse Magazine**

“Even in Europe, Bill Steinkraus was considered a little too cultured to be an American! Bertalan de Némethy remarked that: ‘Bill was a no-nonsense man. American riders respected him for his horsemanship, and the Europeans were surprised that someone as cultured, educated, and intelligent could be an American rider!’

“Bill Steinkraus’ message was dead simple really – good style is effective style. He told me back in 1983: ‘I hear people saying that a rider is ‘crude but effective’ but that is a contradiction. If someone is effective, then they are subtle. They don’t make their aids obvious because they don’t have to. The highest praise is to have someone say, ‘It looks as if the horse was doing it all by himself. All that means is that you have reached the stage where you can put every foot exactly where you want it, right around the course, you have arrived at the jump with exactly the right amount of impulsion, at exactly the angle you wanted, in the frame you wanted, and on exactly the right spot – the jump is inevitable.’”

“Little surprise, that Mr Steinkraus expressed just one regret even then, that he ‘didn’t retire a little earlier and go into dressage but I didn’t want to leave the showjumping team when I felt I still had a contribution to make.’

**Extracted from The Chronicle of the Horse, Farewell to William C. Steinkraus, By Molly Sorge, December 6, 2017, 2:47 PM**
“During the years when the U.S. rose to prominence internationally in show jumping, his honors included the King George V Cup in 1955, followed by the German Championship in 1959. He was imperially slim and elegant and cool under pressure. His genius with horses was as much mental as physical. The ability to analyze and concentrate served him well, not only as a rider, but also during the years that he went on to lead the USET and steer its course through changing times.”

From 1957-1981 air cavalry troops served in the 1st Cavalry Division. They were the 1st, 4th, 5th, 9th, 10th, 16th, and 17th Cavalry, without regimental lineage designation and the 11th ACR (Armored Cavalry Regiment) Air Cavalry Troop.

Air cavalry troops were helicopter equipped to perform the cavalry missions of reconnaissance, security, and economy of force.

Each air cavalry troop consisted of an aero-scout platoon, an aero-weapons platoon, an aero-rifle platoon, a service platoon, and a headquarters and operations platoon. The troop was commanded by a major.

The aero-scout platoon consisted of 10 OH-6A Cayeuse or (later) 10 OH-58A Kiowa scout helicopters, nominally divided into two sections of five each. In practice the "scouts" usually operated in teams of two or mated up with a team of gunships to form a hunter-killer team.

The aero-weapons platoon consisted of nine UH-1C Iroquois "Huey" (gunships) or (later) AH-1G Huey Cobras, divided into two sections of four and the platoon commander's aircraft. The gunships operated in teams of two or three or, more often, operated with the scouts.

The aero-rifle platoon consisted of a "lift section" of five UH-1D/H "slicks" and a "rifle section" of three nine-man light infantry squads led by an infantry lieutenant. The "slicks" would transport the rifle squads to insert and extract them as they performed ground reconnaissance, manned observation/listening posts, or provided ground security as needed. A team of "lift" aircraft was as many as needed for the mission and led by at least one scout and escorted by at least one gunship.

The service platoon consisted of a headquarters, an aircraft maintenance section, and a supply section.

Finally, the headquarters and operations platoon consisted of the troop headquarters and the operations section that commanded the troop, planned operations, dispatched aircraft, provided communications support, and operated the tactical operations center (TOC) in the field.

Captain Walt Bammann, Vietnam 1967-1969
“C” Troop (Air) 7th Squadron 1st Cavalry
By Trooper Clint Goodwin

Our family owns a long, proud tradition of defending the United States of America. Grandfather, U.S. Navy Chief James (Poppy) Daugherty, battled the Germans during the Great War and Second World War. He earned the Navy Cross. Father, U.S. Navy Gunner’s Mate Third Class Russell Goodwin, fought the Japanese during WWII. He survived the Battle of Leyte Gulf. However, only one member of our family fought in Vietnam, U.S. Army Captain and pilot Walt Bammann.

Walt indeed earned his cavalry spurs in Vietnam. We are blessed he came back home to us. Our family sang his praises then and continue to keep his courageous deeds alive today. I asked Walt to look back fifty years to revisit a place where unwanted memories pervaded the soul—Vietnam. I am grateful he obliged my request: one combat veteran to another. Passage of time has helped Walt share his combat experiences. This is his story, his voice.

My Cayuse OH-6A, Light Observation Helicopter [LOH] affectionately called a “Loach”, circled a VC [Viet Cong] camp near Chi Lang southwest of Saigon as part of our mission for May 6, 1968. My Scout Platoon wingman, Sandpiper 15, was close behind. Two Cobra gunships, Sandpiper 36 and 33, circled 500 feet above, along with the C and C (Command and Control) Huey, Sandpiper 6.

We always flew with no doors on the LOH. This gave us a better view and allowed the observer to fire an automatic weapon and to drop various grenades, from smoke to the real thing. The LOH was also armed with a 6000 round-per-minute mini-gun. This area of the Mekong Delta is a giant swamp with small pockets of brush and scrub trees. The VC infiltrated the area by pushing and paddling small supply-filled sampans through the narrow canal-like openings in the reeds. Flying twenty feet off the ground at about 10 mph, my observer and I easily spotted poorly-hidden huts built out of scrub wood with thatched roofs and many piles of boxes covered with tarps. We didn’t see anyone, but all the signs indicated a quick departure.

We dropped a smoke grenade in the middle of the camp and asked the gunships to fire into the area to see what they could stir up. Moving off to the side, we watched all hell break loose, as several rockets from the Cobras tore the camp apart. We warily moved back in, and immediately my observer and I spotted movement. Assured this had to be a VC, I put the ship in a tight circle about thirty feet up and told my observer to shoot him. Just before pulling the trigger, we both did a double-take as the guy had red hair and was very pale. We radioed that we had what appeared to be an American sitting in an opening. I ordered, “Don’t anyone shoot!”

The guy was waving for us to come to him and land, but the spot was too brushy. As we hovered above him, we motioned at him to move in a direction to an open area about fifty yards away. We watched as he crawled and limped through the brush and thigh-deep water on what
appeared to be an injured leg. Suddenly, we heard gunfire, and my wingman radioed that he was taking fire, and his ship had been hit.

Luckily, it was still flyable with just a hole in the windshield and one round in the self-sealing fuel cell. The VC obviously decided that laying low was not going to work and us taking their prisoner was unacceptable. Not sure of the depth of the water, I cautiously lowered the helicopter into a weedy spot taking care not to get too deep. Immediately, the heat and decomposing smell of the swamp hit us as we anxiously watched the man scramble toward us. We were too occupied with him to worry if we were getting shot at.

The Cayuse is a Hughes 500, four-person helicopter, with a small backseat area we kept open to keep the load weight down for maximum maneuverability. We pointed to the back seat, and he lunged up into it. I slowly came to a hover to be sure the skids were clear of the weeds and got moving out of the area. We soon noticed a strong odor (body) emanating from our happy guy in the back. The VC continued firing at our ships as we flew out of range.

The “C” Troop gunships, scouts, and the C & C ship continued to work the area throughout the day. A small infantry unit was inserted in the afternoon. During their sweep they captured or killed many VC and recovered numerous weapons, documents and medical supplies.

We talked with the man for a few minutes when dropping him off at the hospital. The VC captured him on March 6. He said they shot down his Bird Dog, a fixed-wing Army observation plane. He was just riding as an observer (not his regular job). Sadly, the plane’s pilot was killed in the crash.

Secured in chains, he said the VC carted him around the delta in a cage showing him off. They had not bothered to treat his broken leg; he was very dirty and malnourished. He explained that our initial rocket attack caused the guards to jump into a nearby bunker. At that time, he was able to scramble to escape the other way. They shot at him but missed. That’s when we saw him.

I was awarded the Silver Star for the rescue. The awards ceremony took place on 11 August 1968, in Vinh Long where the troop was stationed. My notes are incomplete about whether others in the operation received awards. If not, they should have.

####

The Purple Heart. There are lots of ways to be awarded one, all the way from getting injured falling out of bed during a rocket attack to falling on an exploding grenade or similar catastrophic event. Our unit certainly earned many Purple Hearts (none from falling on a grenade, but one from falling out of bed). Mine falls into more of the “lucky” category, as I was not seriously injured. Nevertheless, it is an unusual story:

Most of Blackhawk squadron was shipped from California to Vietnam on the USS Upshur troop ship. We had trained in Air Cav tactics as a unit for about four months, beginning in the summer of 1967 at Ft Knox, Kentucky. I arrived in mid-August with quite a few classmates from our just-completed helicopter flight school. We sailed out of Long Beach, California on 1 February. We arrived on 26 February at our outpost in Dian, about 15 miles north of Saigon and pronounced “Zeon”. Our helicopters were shipped ahead and were waiting for us in Dian.

Before we could fly any combat missions, we needed a check ride and some warm-up time to
get the rust out. Because most of the pilots did not have any combat experience, we were farmed out to similar Air Cav units that had preceded us in-country. The goal being for us to observe their “do’s and don’ts” and to minimize rookie mistakes.

On March 1, I traveled to Cu Chi, northwest of Saigon, to fly my first combat mission with the 3/17 Air Cav Squadron. Early on 2 March, I attended a mission orientation for my day as an observer in their Scout Platoon. For optimum safety, Cav pilots carried pistols, donned flight helmets and wore fire-resistant Nomex flight suits. Blackhawk Squadron, however, had not yet received the latest item in personal protection – “chicken plates”. These heavy armor plates supplemented the Cayuse’s armored seats which provided some protection on our butts, backs, and sides, but not the front. The “chicken plate” sat on our laps under the seat belts to protect the chest area. The 3/17 Scout Captain said I could not fly without one, so he loaned me his. You can see where this is going—the plates were about to get a test.

The unit took off and headed down the Mekong River towards Saigon. The scout team’s mission was to locate the enemy, and then let the commander decide how to deal with the situation. More on that later.

We flew low and slow in our two-ship scout team looking over a village hit by artillery the previous night. We found many wrecked houses, dead cattle, and one dead man. The artillery had hit a few houses, but spared others. I observed villagers moving around, fixing their homes or working their fields. There were no signs of VC, so we moved to another area and immediately found sampans, bunkers and ammo boxes, but no people. About twenty minutes before needing to return for fuel, we got a radio call from an American on a boat requesting us to scout along the river to see if it was safe to move to a nearby canal.

For nineteen minutes we didn’t find a thing. I radioed back that it looked secure. As soon as I released the mic button, all hell broke loose. An unknown number of VC opened up on us with automatic weapons. I remember hearing a “pop-pop-pop” and metal tearing as the ship took a hit near the engine. Simultaneously, I felt a hard slap in the chest and a burning sensation. Looking down, I was shocked to see a big crater in the upper-right corner of my formerly pristine “chicken plate.” The edge of the crater was about a half-inch wide from the edge. Hoping the ship would stay in the air, we headed back and alerted everyone that it was a “hot” area and that our ship had unknown damage.

While returning to the base, I gingerly pulled the plate away from my shirt, expecting to see blood and guts and was surprised to find my fatigue intact. It stung kind of like getting snapped with a wet towel. On landing, we found that the impact had broken my mechanical pencil in my shirt pocket and given me a small cut. In the dispensary the doctor put a band-aid on it and gave me a tetanus shot. Hence, the Purple Heart award. We were never sure how the bullet angled across the ship to hit me, but suspect it might have glanced off the door jam before imbedding in the “chicken plate.” I’m sure the plate either saved my life or, at minimum, prevented a very serious injury. The Purple Heart was awarded on 21 July at a ceremony in Vinh Long.

With most of the year’s tour still to go, it was a bit unnerving to come so close to “buying the farm” (so much for being “farmed out”). As it turned out for the rest of the year, I like to say, I was shot up, but not shot down.

While serving in Vietnam from 26 February 1968 until flying home on 28 January 1969, I was promoted from 1st Lieutenant to Captain (7 September). Flying scouts was considered kind of extreme, so scout pilots were rotated out after a few months or as needed elsewhere. In late July I moved out of the Scout Platoon to the Aviation Section and began flying in the C & C Huey to assist the operations commander with flying, navigation and the radios, etc. This was a good introduction to eventually being in charge which my notes show began in mid-August. We did not fly every day, whether in Scouts or in the C & C ship.

When not flying, I often had duty in the TOC (Tactical Operations Center) where we helped coordinate the mission as needed by the operations commander in the field.

“C” Troop went to Vietnam with the
“Sandpiper” call sign. Sometime in 1969 that was changed to “Comanche”. “A” Troop was “Apache”, “B” Troop was “Dutch Master” and “D” Troop was “Powder Valley”. Not sure who came up with the call signs, but I can guess why “Sandpiper” was changed. The squadron moved from Dian to Vinh Long, south of Saigon, on 16 April, although one of the troops remained at Dian for a while afterwards to work areas closer to Saigon.

Other awards earned included the Vietnam Service Medal with three Bronze Service Stars, the Air Medal with thirty Oak Leaf Clusters, a National Defense Service Medal, an Army Commendation Medal, and the Army Aviation Badge.

Presented the Vietnam Gallantry Medal

It is interesting to note that Blackhawk history dates to March 2, 1833 when Company G of the U.S. 1st Regiment of Dragoons was formed. The original members called themselves the Black Hawks since most of them were veterans of the Black Hawk Indian wars of 1830-1832. The unit was re-designated the 7th Squadron when it was re-organized under the airmobile concept at Ft Knox, KY in April 1967. The mission was to provide reconnaissance and security for major subordinate combat elements and to engage in combat with a somewhat limited scope. Our mission was never to move large numbers of infantry like a true airmobile unit. The squadron was organized into four troops. Each consisted of a well-balanced combination of aviation and infantry. “A”, “B”, and “C” Troops are air cavalry units and “D” Troop is a ground reconnaissance unit. The three aviation troops are the main killing force of the operation. Each had the ability to search for the enemy with its OH-6A Cayuse helicopters and soften him up with the rocket and mini-gun power of the AH-1G Huey Cobra gunships. Each unit was capable of inserting a small force of infantry with its UH-1D Huey slicks.

The Black Hawks were stationed in Vietnam in support of IV Corps in early 1968. The IV Corps area ranged from the tree-lined canals of the Mekong Delta towards the gulf of Thailand far to the south. The squadron was split at times with troops often working far apart as operations dictated. Missions were coordinated with Vietnamese operations to utilize the best intelligence sources, to get us where we could utilize our mobility and speed.

This article was pieced together using a combination of resources, particularly the 300+ letters I had mailed from Vietnam to my wife, Jody, which she had saved all these years. I also have some newsletters from the squadron that helped with the history of the Blackhawks. We were married on 5 August 1967 in between my graduation from flight school a few days earlier and my assignment to the Blackhawks. She outdid my letter-writing, but unlike her,
I didn’t save them. Ah, newlyweds!

The letters are a real “trip” and corrected many incorrect memories of events. Each letter included a summary of the day’s events in the field and around the Vinh Long base. In hindsight I wish I’d included more names and details, as my summaries often have some holes.

Jody and I do get to the occasional unit reunions around the country, and it is wonderful to renew past acquaintances and share stories from that era and our post-war lives. I did have the opportunity to visit the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington D.C. It was an extremely moving experience for me and, I think, for everyone affected by this controversial war. I salute the designer for creating this amazing tribute.

Walt Bammann’s distinguished service represents generations of servicemen and women deserving of our Nation’s enduring respect and honor; they earned it. Myself, a disabled combat veteran, avows to four men in our family who fought. “I fully understand the heartaches and unwanted feelings you experienced. We can talk now.”

[Ed. Trooper Clint Goodwin, a retired Navy Commander, is a book author and a new life member of USCA. He served during the Iraq War. He submitted this narrative to honor Vietnam Veteran, Captain Walt Bammann, U.S. Army, a living hero whose story must be told.]

Book Review

The Last Cavalryman: The Life of General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr.
Harvey Ferguson, University of Oklahoma Press, 2015
Reviewed by Trooper William McKern

Many military professionals and historians can name George Patton as the commander of the Third Army in Europe during World War II. On the surface, this makes sense as individuals who are larger than life, who behave like showmen, are the most likely to attract attention. As a result of the figurative limelight that shines on Patton and others like him, other prominent figures of the time, including Lucian Truscott and Jacob Devers, who took pains not to attract attention to themselves and went about their jobs with quiet professionalism, are close to forgotten.

Ferguson is not a professional writer; a career law enforcement professional and a 1960s veteran of the Army’s 3rd Infantry Division, The Last Cavalryman is his first book. He provides interesting details on Truscott’s early life and the start of his career. Born in Texas and raised in Oklahoma, Truscott was 16 when he pretended to be an 18-year-old high school graduate so he could attend a summer semester at Oklahoma’s State Normal School and receive his certification as a school teacher. When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Truscott joined the Army and his summer semester suddenly expanded into a full year of college, which enabled him to qualify for attendance at officer candidate school. As a second lieutenant of Cavalry, Truscott served on the U.S.-Mexico border during the war, part of an effort to ensure that neither Mexican revolutionaries nor Germans attempted to enter the United States as the war progressed.

In addition to providing useful details on Truscott’s formative years, Ferguson does well in chronicling his post-World War I career, often a little-studied period of Army history. Truscott, the poor boy from Oklahoma, married a well-connected descendant of Thomas Jefferson, learned to play polo as the “Sport of Kings” took on increasing prominence in Army social and athletic life, and slowly but surely began to rise through the ranks on the strength of his abilities as a planner and Cavalry leader.

By 1942 Truscott had attained the rank of colonel, and served in England as a member of the Allied Combined Staff (ACS). After observing the success of British Commando units, Truscott advocated for a similar capability for the U.S. Army, which led to the creation of the 1st Ranger Battalion. His success on the ACS brought him to the attention of Dwight Eisenhower, and he was promoted to brigadier general in June and major general in December. He led a task force in combat in Morocco during Operation Torch, and commanded the 3rd Infantry Division during the invasions of Sicily and Italy. As he rose through the ranks, he continued to eschew
publicity, frequently declining media interviews and leaving his name out of press releases about the activities of the organizations he led.

By mid-1944 Truscott was commanding the VI Corps in Italy which subsequently took part in August 1944’s Operation Dragoon, the invasion of southern France. Promoted to lieutenant general in September 1944, Truscott successively commanded Fifteenth Army, a training command, and then Fifth Army during continued combat in Italy. The war ended in the spring of 1945, and Truscott remained in Italy until assuming command of Third Army in Germany in October 1945, succeeding Patton.

Truscott commanded Third Army until April 1946. He retired in 1947, and in 1954 he was promoted to general (four stars) on the Army’s retired list. After retiring, Truscott worked as a consultant for the Army as it developed new training and doctrine for amphibious operations. From 1951 to 1958 he served with the Central Intelligence Agency. The details of this service did not become fully known until the declassification of a CIA memo in 1994. Initially given cover employment as a special assistant to the U.S. Commissioner on the Allied board which oversaw West Germany’s post-war administration, Truscott was in fact the CIA’s senior representative for activities in Germany. He later served as Deputy Director for Coordination, responsible for directing the activities of the agency’s expanding network of agents. Truscott left the agency in 1958. In retirement he was a resident of Alexandria, Virginia, where he died in 1965. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Lucian Truscott was admired as someone who preferred going about his job with competent professionalism. Cartoonist Bill Mauldin called him “One of the really tough generals.” Though written by an amateur historian, Harvey Ferguson’s biography of Truscott is detailed and thorough. Overall, it’s a very good and probably overdue portrait of one of the U.S. Army’s best generals – a cavalryman who quietly and capably rose through hard work and demonstrated success to become one of the top battlefield commanders of World War II.

Editor’s Notes

Have you ever visited Boonesborough, KY? Finally, after traveling past it many times in over 50 years, we stopped this past October. We spent three very enjoyable hours there and plan to return. It is exceptionally educational and the living historians were excited about sharing. We chatted with the weaver who was weaving a beautiful rug. While telling her what we do as living historians at Fort Larned National Historic Site and what I do as the editor of The Cavalry Journal, she asked if I had heard of Spanish moss saddle blankets. When she saw the “deer-in-the-headlights” look on my face, she shared some information about them and how we could learn more; thus the lead article in this issue.

Then came: (1) a request for information on the Model 1912 feed and grain bags; (2) the obituary of an Olympic horseman; (3) an article about a cavalry living history event; (4) a link from Trooper Raqui Ramsey to an author, and now USCA member, who said yes to writing an article on his Vietnam veteran/cavalryman brother-in-law; (5) the unexpected, but much-appreciated book review on The Last Cavalryman; and (6) a new book, Masters of the Field: The Fourth U.S. Cavalry in the Civil War in which I found a Medal of Honor story. You now see the excitement I have when I receive material from members and prospective members that can be published in The Cavalry Journal.

Enjoy this Journal, and please send your letters and article ideas to me at journaleditor@uscavalry.org or to my home address: Samuel Young, 712 Englewood Street, Lansing, KS 66043.

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Colonel George “Sandy” Alexander Forsyth, Brevet Brigadier General

Born 7 November 1837 in Pennsylvania, George A. Forsyth served as a commissioned officer in the 8th Illinois Cavalry during the Civil War and fought in all the major battles fought by the Army of the Potomac. He served as Maj. Gen. Sheridan’s aide-de-camp during the Shenandoah Valley campaign and was appointed a brevet brigadier general of volunteers at the end of the war.

In September 1868 then Maj. Forsyth, 9th U.S. Cavalry, earned his brevet as a brigadier general while commanding fifty volunteer frontier scouts during the Battle of Beecher’s island.

From 1869-1873 he served as Lt. Gen. Sheridan’s military secretary, and from 1878-1881 again served as his aide-de-camp.


Forsyth retired from the Army in March 1890 and died 12 September 1915. He authored the book Thrilling Days in Army Life.
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