University of Derby

Sense and Sentimentality:
The Soldier-Horse Relationship in The Great War.

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Statement of Intellectual Ownership

So far as I am aware, the connection made in this thesis between sense and sentimentality in relation to the soldier-horse relationship has not been made elsewhere. Apart from the guidance of my supervisors, I have worked entirely alone and there has been no collaboration with any other person. Where I have commented on work by published artists and authors, references have been given throughout.
Sense and Sentimentality: The Soldier-Horse Relationship in The Great War.

Abstract

During the Great War, the horse was essential to military efficiency. Horses hauled artillery guns, transported vital supplies and ammunition, and carried men into battle. The military horse was, in fact, a weapon. Many thousands of horses were purchased and supplied to the British Expeditionary Force at great expense, because without them an Army could not function. Although the British Army was the most modern of all the belligerent forces during the Great War, the horse was nevertheless favoured because of its reliability and versatility. For example, horses coped much better than motor vehicles where the going was difficult. It was horse-power that ensured the Army’s lines-of-communication were maintained. Indeed, without an adequate supply of horses it is probable that the British Army would not have achieved victory in 1918.

However, the military horse was also a weapon which quickly broke down when it was not properly maintained. The British Army had learned this to its cost during the Boer War, when more horses had been killed by bad management than by enemy action. Good horse management in the field depended upon the soldier. It was essential that he had received adequate training, and it was also essential that he take responsibility for his horse’s well-being. During the Great War, all soldiers given ‘ownership’ of a horse were taught to put their horse’s needs before their own, and to always think first of their horse. They were taught to see their horse in the same way as an infantryman would his rifle; as something he may have cause to rely upon and which it was therefore in his best interests to look after.

The soldier-horse relationship developed once the soldier’s care became one of sympathetic consideration. Soldiers and their horses spent most of their lives together when on active service, and it was this close proximity which helped to bond them into a unit. Many soldiers came to see their horses as comrades; they named them, and went to great lengths to protect their horses from harm. From the Army’s perspective, the soldier-horse relationship ensured that an expensive military asset was properly maintained.

At home, portrayals of the soldier-horse relationship extended its vital contribution to the war effort beyond the battlefield. For example, images and stories that told of the soldier’s kindness to his horse bolstered a positive illusion the British had of themselves as a people capable of both strength and compassion. Images of the soldier-horse relationship played an important part in helping the British people to imagine war. They also provided much-needed comfort and reassurance when friends and loved ones were in danger. Importantly,
by studying these portrayals dispassionately, we find that they were never entire flights of fancy, and often bore more than a passing resemblance to the soldier’s actual experience. Indeed, it becomes possible to question whether sense and sentimentality ever did entirely part company in the British imagination. Like their flesh and blood inspiration, portrayals of the soldier-horse relationship have not received the attention they merit. By rectifying this oversight, this thesis not only contributes to study of the horse-human relationship, but also to our knowledge of the Great War. Not least, because we achieve a better appreciation of what it was like to live in the War’s shadow.

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For My Husband

&

A Horse Called Toby
Introduction

The Horse, even more than Literature, is the expression of the society in which he exists. ... The history of the horse is the history of the human race; for the horse is the personification of the aristocracy of blood - the warrior caste ... I strongly advise all Professors of History to open their ears attentively. ... If we follow the fortunes of the horse, the panorama of the successive phases of the human race will unfold itself before our eyes. ... The war horse has told us of days that are past ... it will just as easily explain to us the spirit of the present time, and perhaps, if we entreat it earnestly, the spirit of the time that is yet to come.¹

History has not been particularly kind to the soldier’s horse, or the soldier-horse relationship. Rather than ‘open their ears attentively’ historians have failed to listen. Even in 1853, this oversight was apparent, but it is only recently that scholars have started to rectify it. This thesis therefore champions the soldier-horse relationship as a subject worthy of serious academic consideration. By redrawing a balance between sense and sentimentality, it reinstates the horse as an active ‘participant’ in history.² Thus, the soldier’s horse becomes more than a mere focus for nostalgia and sentimental regret.³ In doing so this work contributes to growing scholarly interest in human-animal relationships, and specifically those forged amidst the horrors of war.⁴

Scholars today increasingly embrace an interdisciplinary approach to study.⁵ This laudable inclination is particularly evident in the field of animal studies, and this thesis intends to be no exception. Here military history will work alongside social history. Modern ethological studies of non-human animal behaviour and horse-human relationships will meet their antithesis in examples of the soldier’s horse portrayed sentimentally and anthropomorphically. Similarly, modern study of war trauma (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) in the field of psychology will be considered alongside contemporary examples of individual and collective memory formation. Importantly, this thesis also examines pertinent developments in veterinary medicine and horse management at the time that reflected and also came to influence humanitarian reform, reform in the British army, and wider social

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⁴ ‘The topic of animals and war has not been ... sufficiently investigated. Shorn of anthropocentric assumptions, the history of nonhuman animals in human war reveals a great deal about the nature of human relationships with other animals and about the nature of war. ... warfare exposes the often paradoxical contours of human-animal relationships. Many have claimed that war reveals hidden dimensions of reality; this notion also applies to the fraught and crucial interactions between humans and other animals in war.’ Hediger R. ed., Animals and War, Studies of Europe and North America, Brill, Leiden, 2013, p.2-3.
change in the early twentieth century. Lastly, and by no means least, it champions the soldier’s horse by considering it, not as a periphery to military history, but as a figure as central to the Great War as the soldier. At the very least, we may hope for a more holistic and more nuanced understanding of the War and its effect upon all those who lived through it, be they human or equine.

Throughout this thesis the mutual understanding necessary for horse and human to work in partnership, and more specifically to function effectively together in a military context, is referred to as the soldier-horse relationship. This was an essential partnership of mutual reliance and respect. It came through knowing one another well enough to trust the other instinctively.\(^6\) Without it, and as anyone with any knowledge of horses will easily imagine, neither soldier or horse would have survived for long in the theatre of war. The horse is, after all, an animal that has evolved to run fast so that it might evade predators. As a prey animal, the horse is forever alert; it fears loud noises, and is deeply suspicious of what it does not recognise, or understand. As a result, horses do not cope well with sudden changes to their environment, feeding regime or routine, and all can be detrimental to their physical and mental well-being.\(^7\) Indeed, once we transfer this information to the context of the battlefield during the Great War it becomes ever more remarkable that horses and humans managed to co-exist in this terrifying environment, let alone fulfil the jobs to which they were assigned. If men themselves found the constant shelling and other ‘unexpected stimuli’ of the battlefield gruelling, and deeply stressful, we can only begin to imagine how their horses responded.\(^8\) It is testament to the complex play of trust and respect between human and horse that the soldier’s horse overcame countless unexpected stimuli on a daily basis.\(^9\) That they survived as long as they did in such conditions was largely because of the care they received from the soldiers to whom they were assigned. This thesis explores why the soldier-horse relationship was essential to military efficiency.

During the Great War horses had little to no obvious agency in terms of what they did and how they did it, but they were nevertheless individuals to the soldiers who worked with them.\(^10\) Horses may have been weapons of war, but they were not hairy motorcycles. Every

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\(^8\) Temple Grandin’s research into the minimisation of stress in animals during the slaughter process has identifies numerous ‘unexpected stimuli’ that would also alarm a horse. For example: metal clanging, reflections, clothing hung on a fence, flapping plastic, an object on the floor and people moving up ahead. Grandin T. & Johnson C., Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behaviour, Bloomsbury, London, 2005, p.35.


horse has a unique personality, has likes and dislikes and their own quirks and foibles. This thesis does not agree, therefore, with Baker’s assertion that animals can never be a ‘he’ or a ‘she’, but must be referred to only as an ‘it’. Indeed, Baker is highly critical of those who do refer to animals in this personal manner, and implies that it is self-indulgent. For example:

Regardless of delicate sensibilities … the text will not act on the proposal that ‘referring to a non-human animal as an “it” strips him or her of dignity and perpetuates the view that other animals are objects, inferior things or property’. ...the call would do little more than allow both writer and readers to feel unjustifiably self-righteous. In any case, in the present context, the continued use of ‘it’ can act as the typographic reminder … that the animal is necessarily a construction, a representation, and not an accessible essence or reality.

It is interesting to consider the animal as a ‘construct’. However, and while Baker’s Picturing the Beast was, and is, an influential text in the study of animals, any argument that refuses to accept that animals can still exist even when humans are not looking at them is inadequate in the particular context of this thesis. It is essential that we make some distinction between the ‘real’ animal and the representational animal, as this is an integral aspect of how we see other animals, other humans and, indeed, ourselves. However, as Susan Swart puts it, and this thesis is very much in agreement, ‘social history is perfectly able to contain ideology and materiality, textual discourse and corporeality without recourse to postmodernist theory’. Indeed, during the Great War, the soldier surely had no difficulty distinguishing between ‘representation’ and ‘accessible essence’ when his horse had recently trodden upon his foot, or left him lying in the dirt. In this respect this thesis allies itself with scholars such as Erica Fudge, Hilda Kean and Susan Swart who ask, not whether we should look at animals, or even why we do so, but rather how we might do so, and even more importantly, what the benefits of doing so might be.
being, we might hope, that the ‘interspecies competence’ engendered when we really look at animals in history will help us to better consider how we think about and live with animals in the present.\textsuperscript{16} As Erica Fudge explains it:

\begin{quotation}
The history of animals has the potential to be such a left-handed blow to many of the anthropocentric assumptions we have about ourselves. And by this it can become, I think, a powerful part of our revisioning of our place in the world.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quotation}

This ‘revisioning’ of our place in the world also encourages us to consider to what extent we allow, and have in the past allowed, horses agency. It is essential that we do think much more carefully about our relationship with the horse. For example, it is taken for granted that horses are usually stabled, but what does this mean for the horse? While to the human eye the stable appears to be a safe, warm and comfortable environment, from the horse’s perspective the stable can make it vulnerable by isolation. Stabling also restricts its ability to detect predators and prevents escape.\textsuperscript{18} In fact, going further, stabling denies horses access to their natural social and physical behaviours, and can cause serious stereotypic behaviours, or vices.\textsuperscript{19} Being confined in this way also has numerous physical consequences, and can even kill.\textsuperscript{20} Such knowledge is, indeed, a ‘left-handed blow’. It is necessary that we bear this in mind when considering the environment in which horses lived and worked during the Great War.

If we are to truly understand the soldier-horse relationship of the First World War, it is also a necessity that we question what factors make humans more or less willing to see the horse as an individual agent; this depending considerably upon the context in which the horse and the human encounter each other.\textsuperscript{21} There is, for example, a significant difference

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\textsuperscript{16} Fudge E., ‘A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals’, in Rothfels N. ed., \textit{Representing Animals}, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2002, p.11. ; ‘For many working on the past in the broad animal studies field, the focus of their work is not around agency or representation as such, but an attempt to show in the present the importance of animals in the past (and present) or that change has occurred or that that the lives of animals and people are (in various ways) intertwined.’, Kean H., ‘Challenges for Historians Writing Animal-Human History: What is Really Enough?’, \textit{Anthrozoos}, vol. 25, Supplement, p.64.


in the relationship between horse and human when the horse is kept solely as a ‘pet’, and when this is extended also to equestrian pursuits and competition.\textsuperscript{22} There is a difference in attitudes towards a thoroughbred produced for horseracing, a top-level eventer, show horse, or show jumper, as there is a hunter, a leisure horse, a working horse (a riding school pony for example) and a horse that is produced solely for meat.\textsuperscript{23} For example, Thierman believes that when we consider animals in relation to the different ‘apparatuses’ we place them in, we ‘provide the occasion for disruptive thoughts’ that allow us to think about our relationships with animals in different ways:

We need think only of the different space inhabited by, and discourses concerning, companion animals and livestock animals to get a sense of the vast incongruities in the ways that particular human and nonhuman animal bodies are constructed within different apparatuses.\textsuperscript{24}

In the context of the slaughterhouse, Thierman’s observations become particularly troubling. Thierman is interested in circumstances where animals are subjected to ‘certain ends’ and ‘where they are dominated and/or objectivized in some way.’ He is specifically interested in sites ‘where power relations affect/involve both humans and animals at the same time.’\textsuperscript{25} In the apparatus of the slaughterhouse, human and animal become part of its ‘technology’ and all have some form of ‘power’ exerted over them. He explains how ‘Disciplinary Power’ was Foucault’s initial focus and how this is exerted in various ways in various contexts. For example, in armies, schools, hospitals and prisons. Here, the subjects of this power are a ‘docile body’ to be ‘subjected, used, transformed and improved’ in various ways. This is achieved by distributing people (or animals) in certain ways and by enclosing them, by partitioning and ranking (e.g. in a barracks) through the control of activity (e.g. through timetables, or training) and through various forms of surveillance. In some instances, for example panopticism, the object simultaneously plays the role of watcher and watched without necessarily being aware; and thus becomes ‘the principle of his own subjection.’\textsuperscript{26}

Although discipline need not necessarily be problematic for either human or animal, Thierman believes that it does become so ‘when the individual is ontologically reduced in a way that elides their individuality/singularity.’ In the context of the slaughterhouse, animals enter the slaughterhouse where they are killed and disassembled. This carcerality is,

\textsuperscript{24} Thierman S., ‘Apparatuses of Animality: Foucault Goes to a Slaughterhouse’, \textit{Foucault Studies}, September 2010, no.9, p.93.
\textsuperscript{25} Thierman S., ‘Apparatuses of Animality: Foucault Goes to a Slaughterhouse’, \textit{Foucault Studies}, September 2010, no.9, p.96.
\textsuperscript{26} Thierman S., ‘Apparatuses of Animality: Foucault Goes to a Slaughterhouse’, \textit{Foucault Studies}, September 2010, no.9, p.95-96.
however, also shared by those who work there. It is physically difficult, repetitive and unpleasant work.

...both human and nonhuman bodies are deeply shaped by this (carceral) environment which they inhabit. In this light, a common saying from the plant is striking. It is said that, “they don’t kill pigs in the plant, they kill people.” The equivocation of the word “kill” invokes an image of a kind of death in life, a zombie-hood grounded in the tasks performed in the plant. Workers simultaneously bring home “the bacon” and find themselves transformed by their environment into the slaughterhouse body.27

Thus, and to apply this information now to the context of the soldier-horse relationship during the Great War, we may begin to draw parallels which will be central to this thesis. We may begin to question for example whether it becomes easier to cope with, or even to accept, the suffering and death of other living creatures once we see them, not as individual agents, but as a homogenous mass. Likewise, if we de-humanise an enemy in war, does it become easier to kill him? Does naming an individual (be they human or animal) bring them closer to us, and therefore make this separation more difficult?28 Naming is, after all, part of acknowledging another living creature’s somatic existence – its individuality.

Thus, while the War Office may have thought of man and horse in purely corporeal terms, as numbers recruited (or purchased) and numbers injured and killed, individual soldiers and their horses nevertheless saw each other as individual agents. Thus, we are also encouraged to consider the problematic nature of a relationship in which the horse became military property.29 In order to engage with the very nature of the soldier-horse relationship during the Great War we must also understand the physical and emotional circumstances in which it existed. Thus, the question of agency (when, where, how much, and why) becomes a very important one in any discussion of the soldier-horse relationship, and will be a recurring consideration throughout this thesis.

Despite many decades of neglect, the soldier’s horse has finally begun to re-emerge as a focus of serious academic enquiry. Its utility in warfare is now being recognised by historians, leading to ‘the emergence of a more positive view of horse soldiers’.30 Another positive trend, certainly in the field of Animal Studies, has been a growing interest in the

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30 ‘...much discussion of the cavalry over the course of the last century has been shallow and tendentious’ but ‘Revisionism regarding the capabilities of the generation of military professionals who prepared for, and waged, the First World War have ... affected perceptions of the mounted arm.’ Phillips G., ‘Scapegoat Arm: Twentieth-Century Cavalry in Anglophone Historiography, *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 71, no. 1, Jan 2007, p.38.
nature and dynamics of the soldier-horse relationship. Both Leinonen and Swart discuss the bond that was formed between many soldiers and their horses and, more importantly, succeed in doing so without giving rise to the sort of grand guignol that has tended to alienate ‘scholars of mainstream history’. Academics from a variety of disciplines are now uniting to question where the horse went, and why there was this disappearance. Susan Swart perhaps summed this up when she asked, “But where’s the bloody horse?”

There is a strange concealment when historians write about the past. It is the absence – perhaps forgivable – of the obvious. Horses have been too ubiquitous, in a way, to catch the historians’ eye. Perhaps it is the very centrality of animals to human lives that has previously rendered them invisible – at least invisible to scholars of mainstream history or the (aptly titled) humanities more generally. ... Horses are absent ... except where one detects their hoofprints in some battle, finds an allusion to the gallant exploits of a particular horse or the tragic slaughter of horses in war... Sometimes one hears a distant whinny in travellers’ descriptions, in personal letters and in diaries. Yet horses are everywhere in the primary sources.

Indeed, until relatively recently, only Corvi and Singleton had considered the soldier-horse relationship itself. Corvi, although limiting his argument to the Army Veterinary Corps, not only acknowledges the ‘reliance’ which created the soldier-horse relationship, but also military history’s failure to go beyond ‘allusions’ to it. He believes advances in veterinary treatment were indicative of wider changes throughout the British Army in the early twentieth century; a more humane approach to the treatment of the soldier being reflected in its treatment of its animals and vice versa. This is an interesting idea and, although his argument does not go as far as it might, he does acknowledge the severe lack of serious study in this area. For example:

The British soldier fighting this war could not help but rely on the horse for his very survival in combat. This reliance created a strong reciprocal bond between soldier and horse in all branches of the British Army. Some works, such as the Marquess of Anglesey’s History of the British Cavalry (volumes IV and V), and the movie The Lighthorsemen (1983) allude to the link between soldier and horse in combat. Historians have not directly addressed the importance of the army veterinarian to final victory in World War 1. The scholarly literature of military history not only fails

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to define the soldier-horse bond but also fails to link the army veterinarian to this bond. 34

Singleton, meanwhile, believes the soldier’s horse to have been neglected as a subject of subject of serious academic enquiry ‘because of our fascination with the history of technology’. 35 He notes how horses have been overlooked, even though they were ‘as indispensable to the war effort as machine guns, dreadnoughts, railways and heavy artillery’. 36 This interest in machines has been a factor in the horse’s disappearance, but it only partially explains history’s neglect of the soldier-horse relationship. Perhaps, as McShane and Tarr have identified, it is also because historians have traditionally perceived study of horses ‘as synonymous with amateur nostalgia’. 37 Historians in the field of animal studies are certainly conscious that their work may be considered self-indulgent or that it is ‘not a respectable field of study’. 38 Perhaps historians have been reluctant to engage with the soldier-horse relationship simply because traditional approaches to historical study have given precedence to ‘functional interests’ over ‘fantasy selves’. As Samuel and Thompson explain it:

Historians deal, by preference, with ‘hard’ realities … We are happier dealing with aggregates than with images, with functional interests rather than with fantasy selves. … Our whole training predisposes us to give privileged place to the factual… We look for the reality content in our documents rather than what they may tell us about the symbolic categories through which reality is perceived. 39

Evidence thus suggests that the soldier-horse relationship has been dismissed because it has come to be seen as a ‘soft’ subject. 40 This is not entirely without justification. Indeed, such attitudes are fuelled by engagements with the subject that have had a tendency to focus too much on the sentimental at the expense of ‘hard’ reality. For example, while Jilly Cooper’s Animals in War has done an admirable job in raising awareness of the historical use of animals for military purposes, it nevertheless wholeheartedly embraces the potential sentimentality inherent in its material. 41 It is interesting, for example, that Cooper associates horses with women and women with the romantic, but disassociates herself from

41 For example, a caption to an IWM photograph depicting a pack mule that has fallen from the road used to illustrate Cooper’s book emotively tells us ‘Many fell never to rise again.’, ‘Cooper J., Animals in War, Corgi, London, first ed. 1983, 2000, p.44.
military history as ‘an exclusively guts-and-glory male province.’ Ironically, while she writes about the suffering of horses in war with such feeling, her emotion further distances the war horse from the ‘hard and rational’. Unfortunately, this has a tendency to reduce the soldier-horse relationship by association. However, and as Cooper freely admits herself, her book was written ‘with tears, not ink.’

And yet, and as Swart rightly notes, ‘horses are everywhere in the primary sources.’ As this thesis will demonstrate, horses were an intrinsic part of the lives of the men who served with them. Soldiers wrote about their horses in their letters and diaries, and they sent home for things that might make their horses’ lives easier. The horse soldier’s life was almost entirely given over to ensuring that his horses were well looked after. Indeed, the pride that soldiers took in their horses is reflected in how often they were photographed with them.

Yet, and ironically, it is not until we start looking for the soldier-horse relationship that we realise the sheer extent to which it has been side-lined by mainstream history. For example, while much has been said by military historians about the *arme blanche* and the much hoped for cavalry breakthrough that (in France at least) never came until the end of the War, little has been said about the daily grind of feeding, watering, grooming and harness cleaning without which there would have been no soldier-horse relationship, and thus no *arme blanche* at all. Similarly, very little has been said about how soldiers of all ranks were taught to ride, or how artillery drivers were taught to work as a team. Such mundane matters seem not to have warranted serious consideration. We have forgotten to admire the efficiency with which horses were supplied and managed, or to recognise their vital contribution to the War’s ultimate outcome. If the soldier-horse relationship is remembered at all, it is only as a focus of sentimental regret. These are all oversights rectified in this thesis.

In the absence of ‘sense’ the soldier-horse relationship has survived almost entirely because of its sentimental appeal. Indeed, it is undoubtedly this combination of war, soldier and animal that has always brought the soldier’s horse back from the brink of obscurity. After all, and although it may be a guilty pleasure, the reason sentimentality is enjoyable is

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47 Attempts have been made to counteract this. For example, Channel Four’s 2012 documentary *War Horse: The Real Story*, reviewed in Wilson R., ‘War Horse: The Real Story – Adding Some Historical Heft to the Fable’, *The Telegraph*, 02.03.2012, www.telegraph.co.uk, accessed 08.10.2014.
because it lets us enjoy ‘the luxury of an emotion without paying for it.’ 48 Nevertheless, there is good reason to be cautious of this over-emphasis on the sentimental. For example, Gervaise Phillips has defended the horse’s anthropomorphism in Stephen Spielberg’s screen portrayal of War Horse by arguing that ‘Sentimentality was, and is, an appropriate response to animal suffering.’ 49 However, while it is heartening that the war horse has finally begun to emerge as a subject of interest after so many years of neglect, there is also very good reason to be critical of this response. Indeed this thesis, while supporting the study of emotions in history by arguing for a more critical study of the sentimental, still argues very much against a society in which sentimentality is allowed free-rein. 50 Sentimentality alone has never been ‘an appropriate response’ to the suffering of animals, although it has encouraged the sympathetic consideration and empathy with animals that persuades humans to help them. 51 This may at first seem a petty distinction, but it is a crucial one if we are to fully appreciate the emotional world of this past era and, thus, successfully champion the horse’s shared place in it. It is also essential if we are to understand what the soldier-horse relationship meant to the men and horses who experienced it.

Once we regain the balance between sense and sentimentality we come much closer to understanding the true nature of war as it was fought in the early twentieth century. In order to achieve this, however, we must also get past modern assumptions that might otherwise act as a barrier to this process. ‘Sense’ in the context of this thesis is about seeing the horse as a weapon of war, and understanding how crucial its supply and management was to military efficiency. Sentimentality is about understanding how war was imagined and how the British people reconciled themselves with it. Indeed, when the soldier-horse relationship becomes the focus of such discussion it becomes increasingly possible, as Kean explains it, to re-think history and even turn it ‘on its head’. 52

The purpose of this thesis is to champion the soldier-horse relationship and this intention is reflected in its structure; the first three chapters being primarily concerned with sense, and the latter two chapters with sentimentality. Its objective, however, is not to simply distinguish between the ‘real’ and the representational, between fact and myth, or between truth and lies. Nor does it set out to discredit the stories and legends that have been woven around the soldier and his horse. Rather, its purpose is to restore the balance between

50 ‘As an academic discipline, history began as the servant of political developments. Despite a generation’s worth of social and cultural history, the discipline has never quite lost its attraction to hard, rational things. Emotions have seemed tangential (if not fundamentally opposed) to the historical enterprise.’ Rosenwein B., ‘Worrying about Emotions in History’, The American Historical Review, vol.107, no.3, June 2002, p.821.
sense and sentimentality and, thereby, accord the soldier-horse relationship of the Great War the respect it truly merits.

The first chapter begins by considering what good horse management was, and thereby provides a benchmark for discussion of good and bad practice that will underpin discussion throughout this thesis. Similarly, it identifies an important link between sympathetic consideration and the attention-to-detail in the horse’s management that were the hallmarks of the true horseman. It finds that sympathetic consideration was what separated indifferent horse management from that which enabled horses to thrive. Likewise, the soldier-horse relationship failed when sympathetic consideration was not properly instilled in the soldier. During the Boer War, the British Army’s existing systems of horse supply and management proved wholly inadequate, and because of this the soldier-horse relationship likewise suffered a catastrophic breakdown. This chapter explores what the consequences of these failures were, the effect they had upon the soldier and his horse, and the impact they ultimately had on military efficiency. It will then discuss the public outcry that the Boer War’s horse debacle prompted, and how pressure was increasingly put upon the Army to reform. This chapter establishes to what extent the British Army’s organisation had adapted to ensure that the costly, inefficient and inhumane errors of the Boer War were not repeated in 1914. Primary material consulted in this chapter includes memoirs, official and regimental histories, horse management texts from the period, contemporary journal and periodical articles and newspaper coverage of the Boer War.

The second chapter examines how horses were supplied and managed during the Great War. It discusses how the British Army’s horses were issued in peace time, and how this methodology was stepped up during active service. It then considers the mobilization of horses in 1914. This part of the chapter includes discussion of the various categories of horses required by the Army, which horses were considered suitable, and how the Remount Service then prepared horses for active service. It is at this point that discussion shifts its focus to the role of the Army Veterinary Corps, to the minimisation of unnecessary horse wastage, and to how the British Army’s mantra of ‘humanity, efficiency and economy’ was realised in practice. It considers, for example, how horses were managed aboard ship, how the spread of contagious disease was minimised, and how horses were disposed of when they reached the end of their useful lives. It concludes with discussion of how the British Army’s management of its horses developed as the War progressed. Chapter two uses official and regimental histories and orders, handbooks, training material and other orders and texts issues by the War Office, as well as the service diaries of soldiers involved in the purchase, management and supply of horses to the British Expeditionary Force.

While the previous chapter explored the workings of the military machine, chapter three focuses upon the soldiers and horses who worked within it. It will consider how soldiers were recruited into horsed regiments, and how they were trained to ride, drive and look after their horses. It will discuss the daily routine work with horses imposed upon these
men, and how this close proximity helped to create the soldier-horse relationship. By focusing on the experiences of soldiers themselves, we gain an understanding of the relationship that was formed between soldier and horse, and what the bond meant to those who experienced it. It will, for example, consider at what point Army horses came to be seen as individuals, why some horses were prized above others, and why some soldiers went to such great lengths to protect a particular horse from harm. Chapter three’s focus on the experience of the soldier and his horse is reflected in the primary material used; this focusing largely on the letters, diaries and memoirs of soldiers written during and after the Great War, as well as upon interviews of veterans held by the Imperial War Museum and Liddle Collection. In addition, this chapter also refers to regimental orders and official publications that enable us to form a true picture of what it was like to live and work alongside horses during the First World War.

It is at this point in the thesis that its focus shifts to the soldier-horse relationship’s portrayal, and therefore also from ‘sense’ to ‘sentimentality’. Chapter four begins by exploring how the soldier-horse relationship was portrayed in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. It then follows these themes into the Great War, and discusses how these evolved as the War itself developed. It questions to what extent the British public were aware of what war was really like, and whether a line was drawn between what could and could not be shown. Having clearly emphasised the horse’s crucial place on the modern battlefield and the considerable effort that was put into its supply and management in the previous chapters of this thesis, it is now possible to discuss the soldier-horse relationship’s sentimentalisation without recourse to sentimentality. Primary material used in this chapter focuses largely upon photographs, writing and illustrations published in newspapers and illustrated newspapers of the period. This chapter also refers to material produced by the animal charities to support their fundraising on behalf of the war horses. Particular focus is given to *The War Illustrated*. This publication has been studied in its entirety, week-by-week, from 1914 to 1918. When this coverage is considered alongside other sources, and especially once the soldier’s own experiences are also brought into the process, we achieve an invaluable perspective of how the War was presented to people at home as the conflict progressed, and as public feeling also shifted.

The fifth and final chapter focuses upon the years which followed the Great War. It initially considers the British Expeditionary Force’s demobilization and the casting and disposal of its horses during 1918 to 1919. The chapter then charts the war horse’s progress from 1919 through to 1939, with particular emphasis on the effects of the Army’s mechanisation in the late 1920s. One consequence of mechanisation was that the soldier and his horse were severed from each other for the first time in British military history; not only in a practical sense, but also in the public imagination. This was an era in which the British people, first in their grief and then in their haste to move on from the War, became increasingly detached from the soldier’s horse. Images of the soldier-horse relationship did continue to provide solace, but these traditional forms increasingly found themselves at odds with those who
saw them only as relics of a past Britain was leaving behind. This was a period of remembering and forgetting. The Great War’s veterans still remembered, but many of them feared that what they had to say would be misunderstood. In their silence, mere threads held the soldier and his horse together in the public consciousness. Thus it was that the soldier-horse relationship was remembered only by a dwindling few. Primary material used in this chapter includes memoirs, diaries and letters of soldiers from the Great War. It refers to interviews conducted with its veterans. Regimental histories and journals are consulted, as well as newspaper coverage of the post-war period. This chapter also uses major literary and artistic sources. For example, Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Holtby’s *South Riding* and Spencer’s *The Resurrection of the Soldiers*.

Rather than merely ‘passing them by’, this thesis places the soldier and his horse centre stage. The soldier-horse relationship is accorded the respect that has hitherto alluded it, because the balance between sense and sentimentality is restored. In doing so this work contributes to growing scholarly interest in human-animal relationships, and specifically those forged between soldier and horse amidst the horrors of the Great War.\(^53\)

The warrior, authentic or mystical, is commemorated in history, story or song: the too frequent fate of the gallant horse who has borne him in the press of battle is oblivion. The war-horse lives for all time, it is true, in that noble picture of him in the Book of Job... But the historian, for the most part, passes him by without a word of description; to that grave person the charger is merely the incidental animal on whose back the warrior rides to glory or to death. The poets are kinder to us in this matter, if only the horses of poesy were real; they honour the war-horse by perpetuating his name, they deign to inform us of his colour, and they often furnish a suggestion, if not of pedigree, at least of race.\(^54\)

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Chapter One

“The Most Vital Question of All” The Soldier-Horse Relationship, The Boer War, Military Reform and Social Change in Britain 1900 to 1914.

It is doubtful whether the public of this country yet realise the importance of the remounts in its bearing on the war. It is not merely the case that certain sums of money were paid for certain horses and that owing to innumerable errors so many hundreds of thousands or millions of pounds were absolutely wasted. This alone would be a weighty indictment. But what we have to consider is the fact that there were occasions during the course of the war when the adequate supply of remounts would have enabled our Generals to deal a crushing and decisive blow at the enemy.¹

To say that the British Army’s horse management during the Boer War was not shambolic would be to give those responsible too much credit.² Proper management was vital, and especially when a soldier’s life might depend on his horse’s ability to do its job. Indeed, as one reader correctly remarked in a letter to The Times, ‘On horses ... trained and well fed, the gunner or squadron leader can trust his life – for they are part of it in battle.’³ During the Boer War ‘innumerable errors’ had instead conspired to ensure the exact opposite.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine what these ‘innumerable errors’ were and what effect they had on the soldier-horse relationship. It will examine how the British Army responded to demands for change following the Boer War, and to what extent its organisation was prepared by August 1914 for what was to be its greatest ever test of horse supply and management. It will begin by considering what good military horse management was and, thereby, provide a benchmark for discussion of good and bad practice in this and in later chapters. It will then move on to consider how and why a bond was formed between horse and human in civilian and in military life. It will explore what went wrong during the Boer War in terms of horse supply and management, and thus some of the factors which caused the soldier-horse relationship to break down. It will conclude by considering how public pressure was brought to bear on the British Army, and the extent to which this was effective in prompting reform before 1914.

In order to appreciate what had gone so badly wrong during the Boer War, and the effect these errors had on the soldier-horse relationship, it is first necessary to understand what good horse management was and what the benefits were for horse and human when it was practiced correctly. Colonel Frederick Fitzwygram’s Horses and Stables was the most influential and widely read horse management text of the period. Originally published in 1862, by the turn of the century Horses and Stables was in its fifth edition, and each edition

² ‘Never in the history of any British War has there been such a deliberate sacrifice of animal life and of public money. For this no one was ever called to account.’ Smith Major General Sir F., A History of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps 1796-1919, Balliere, Tindall & Cox, London, 1927, p.203.
³ Cooper J.C., ‘Cavalry Remounts’, issue 36119, The Times, 14th April 1900.
had been reprinted many times. *Horses and Stables* had evolved to reflect changing attitudes to animal welfare and the great advances being made in veterinary medicine.\(^4\) However, Fitzwygram’s ‘broad principles ... of good stable management’ remained just as sound at the turn of the century as they had in 1862. These were: a light, dry and well ventilated stable; judicious watering and feeding; good forage; good grooming; good shoeing; and sufficient and well-regulated exercise. In addition, he gave this stern advice:

> Those are no doubt simple recipes for successful stable management, - too simple perhaps for many, who believe that there is a mystery in stable management known only to a few. Yet from neglect of these common and obvious requirements, few horses look as well as they ought to do. Many become sick, or lame, and thus entail trouble, expense and loss, which might easily have been avoided. To ensure the highest development of health and strength, not one or two or even three of these essentials are sufficient, but all must be combined. You cannot have strength in a chain, if any one link be defective.\(^5\)

For Colonel Fitzwygram there was no mystery to good management, but merely the application of these six basic principles. Of course, in practice they also required some considerable knowledge, as well as a ‘sympathetic consideration’ for the horse’s well-being.\(^6\) It is, nevertheless, clearly common sense that a horse requires water if it is not to be perpetually dehydrated, or to die of thirst. Evidently, they require food if they are not to starve to death. However, what Fitzwygram considered to be quite obvious (he did of course expand on these core principles) was not always quite so self-evident to the uninitiated. Or, to the horseman who still needed to be persuaded of the benefits to be gained by treating horses with care and consideration.

The evidence of good horse and stable management, horsemastership, or horsemanship was there to be seen when a horse thrived.\(^7\) Good management was suggested by the animal itself and when it was practiced (albeit in varying degrees, in a variety of ways and with variable success) those with a consideration for its welfare were generally rewarded. As an example, in the 1901 edition of *Horses and Stables*, Fitzwygram compared the stable management of two large companies, both of which employed about four hundred horses. The first, a large coal and iron company, spent an average £50 on each horse, which then ‘lasted’, or was fit for work, for about three years. In the second example the company

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\(^7\) A large part of the horse-human relationship takes place with the feet of the human flat on the ground. ... It is from the ground that we feed and water our horses, clean their stables, groom them, load them into trailers and onto trucks, deworm them, vaccinate them and doctor them. In fact, equine husbandry is practiced exclusively from the ground and when a good rider is not also a good horseman, what is often lacking is a solid foundation built on the ground’ Miller R. & Lamb R., ‘The Revolution in Horsemanship and what it means to Mankind’, *S.A. Horseman*, February 2007.
spent £40 per horse, but although doing very similar work, their horses lasted about six years. The major difference here was not one of massive financial investment, but that the second company employed a veterinary surgeon, whose ability to identify and resolve small problems before they escalated prevented their horses from becoming unfit for work.

The total difference of cost between the two establishments for renewal of stock, food, etc., was over £6000 per annum, but the real difference was much greater, because in the first-mentioned establishment a considerable proportion of horses were constantly sick, and therefore unfit for work.\(^8\)

While the core principles of stable management were the links themselves, it was this attention-to-detail that held them together. True horsemanship was about knowing each horse individually: their feeding requirements, how often they needed to be shod, their likes and dislikes, or whether they were likely to become nervous in certain situations.\(^9\) This was not sentimental, it was (and is) what good horsemanship was all about. Thus, although there was a plethora of books in horse management and equitation to choose from, there was no real substitute for practical experience. Indeed, for the unwary, or the naive, the horse-world was fraught with potential disaster. At the very least, it was easy to be quickly relieved of considerable amounts of money.\(^10\) At worst, it was possible to end up with a broken neck.\(^11\)

What it is essential to appreciate is that working horses were not playthings. This is not to say that they were never the recipients of genuine affection, but rather that the partnership between human and horse was all too easily broken. Horses died, employers sold the horses on, and so very often the bond between horse and human survived only as long as the horse remained capable of the work required of it.\(^12\) Indeed, and now looking forward to discussion of the soldier-horse relationship in this and the following chapters, when those who worked with horses seemed hardened to animal suffering, it was perhaps because one way to avoid emotional discomfort was to avoid getting too close altogether. For example, in a 1904 article for *The Nineteenth Century*, Sir Walter Gilbey referred to British horses

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9 ‘Characteristic of all Colonel McTaggart’s dealing with horses was his emphasis upon a proper understanding of their sensitiveness as a factor of successful horsemanship.’, Dewhurst D. & S., *Lieut.-Col. M.F. McTaggart, D.S.O., An Appreciation*, Cornish & Barber Ltd., Manchester, 1937, p.44.

10 ‘When men first came from London and other large towns into the country to hunt — men who had never hunted before — they were to a very large extent dependent on their grooms for their stable management. They wanted men of smart appearance, with an intimate knowledge of everything connected with stables. ... The commercial men and their sons might be good judges of livery, but in everything connected with a hunting establishment, from the purchase of a hunter to the purchase of a curry comb, they were at the mercy of their grooms, who took a commission on every article that went into the stable.’ Underhill G.F., *A Century of English Fox-Hunting*, R.A. Everett and Co., London, 1900, p. 259-260.


12 ‘Particular horses may be viewed with great affection but simultaneously expected to work as draft animals.’ Arluke and Bogden refer to a photograph postcard of a girl who ‘had a close relationship with her colts and probably named them, stroked them, played with them, and continued to be close to them as they grew, but that close tie did not prevent the horses from becoming farm labourers.’, Arluke A. & Bogden R., *Beauty and the Beast: Human-Animal Relations as Revealed in Real Photo Postcards*, 1905-1935, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 2010.
exported to the continent for slaughter as ‘so much meat in various shapes.’ The only consolation to be had was that the horses would, or so he believed, be ‘quickly and humanely destroyed’ on reaching their destination. When this was where an ‘old friend’ may well end their days, there was perhaps good reason to be cautious when forming a bond.

These animals are included in the returns solely because they are shipped alive. And they are shipped alive because it is cheaper to transport them alive than to ship the carcasses. ... They are not to be counted horses in the proper sense at all: they merely represent so much meat in various shapes, so much bone, manure, glue, hair, and leather; the ingenious economy of our continental neighbours enabling them to turn the carcase to more profitable account than we could in England.  

When the practical and the economic tended to triumph over the humane and the sentimental, we might tentatively ascribe this to the physical and philosophical environments in which working horses were generally kept and the purposes for which they were used. Until the First World War, the mysterious arts of professional horsemanship and the ‘sacred sanctuary’ of the saddle room tended to be a male preserve. This was a situation which, as Robinson has suggested, reflected ‘the horses’ role as a work tool and the traditional placing of power and power sources under the control of men.’ It is certainly true that horses were closely associated with masculinity, and manly endeavour. Importantly, however, this did not mean that men were never sentimental about their horses. For example, Stephen Caunce describes how ‘horselads’ on Yorkshire farms became very fond of their teams; to the extent that ‘to be severed ... from them was a wrench.’ Similarly, miners were inclined to see pit ponies as ‘good friends and companions’ with whom ‘they had suffered the many agonies and problems of pit life.’ This sense of comradeship certainly foreshadows the bond that was so often formed between soldier and horse during the Great War. As we shall discover, the soldier, like the miner, often saw his horse as a friend and companion who shared his hardships, dangers and discomforts. Like the horselads, soldiers also hated to be parted from their horses.

Where there was kindness and consideration (which there often was) this was not bestowed merely for its own sake, but because there were known benefits to be had from treating an animal, which represented a significant financial investment, as well as being economically

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14 This is not to say that there were not a great many horsewomen, but rather that professional and military horsemanship was male dominated. Film of female Remount personnel from the First World War demonstrates their undoubted skill and courage. For example, Davis W., ‘Remounts at Russley Park, The Army Remount Department at Lady Birkbeck’s Stud Farm’, August 1918, Ministry of Information, Film, IWM305., Edwards, L.; Thy Servant the Horse, Country Life, London, 1952, p.77.
and practically possible. Those whose horses thrived were those who understood what horses required in order to do so. Neither should we assume, however, that whenever an employee worked a horse they did not own themselves they were less inclined to take care of it, or conversely, that the responsibilities of ownership were not a great motivator. What was important was that there was a feeling of professional pride, of responsibility, or ‘ownership’ for that particular animal. When this was repaid, because the horse thrived, or worked particularly well for that individual, what may have started out only as a duty driven by purely economic and pragmatic motives, became a form of comradeship and friendship. Paradoxically perhaps, it was not until this partnership between human and horse broke down, was absent, or was unable to thrive, that the vital part it played in good horse management became the most evident. During the Boer War this sense of responsibility was found wanting at every level of the Army’s organisation and, ultimately, the soldier and his horse suffered as a result.

Turning now to the soldier-horse relationship, both Swart and Leinonen have identified how this sense of responsibility influenced whether, and to what extent, a relationship (or bond) was formed between horse and human in war. For example, Swart points out that while the Boers rode their own horses ‘on commando’, the British soldier’s horse was military property. Thus, while a Boer commando had ultimate responsibility for his horse, the British soldier was always at the mercy of the Army’s organisation. Indeed, even though homesick soldiers talked to their horses, spent virtually every hour of every day with them and experienced the ‘shared dangers that forged close bonds’, there was also an ‘uneasy friction between the growing view of horses as comrades and their official designation as military property.’ Perhaps then, when some soldiers came to seem callous during the Boer War it was not necessarily that they did not care, or would not have cared more given the opportunity, but rather that ‘innumerable errors’ on the part of the Army’s organisation had made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to do so. Indeed, and as the British Army was to learn to its cost during the campaign in South Africa, when horses were poorly managed

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19 Leinonen describes how horses requisitioned by the Finnish Army during the Second World War remained the property of their owners, with the soldier to which it was assigned becoming a temporary custodian. This undoubtedly had an impact on the soldier’s sense of ‘ownership’ and of responsibility. When horses were taken for the army there was great worry, anxiety and sadness. “The pain and anxiety was enormous for the animals. I know that many old farmers would rather have taken that road themselves than send their own faithful workmate that they had raised from a foal, to the horrors of war.” Laakso L., Finnish Literature Society, Folklore Archives, Hevoset Sodassa Collection, volume 2, 1975, in Leinonen R.M., ‘Finnish Narratives of the Horse in World War II’, in Hediger R. ed., Animals and War: Studies of Europe and North America, Brill, Leiden, 2013.
21 Callousness see: Ross P.T., A Yeoman’s Letters, Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd., London, 1901, p 60-61. Errors see: ‘Errors are the heritage of humanity, and no army, no matter how successful its campaign, but has suffered from a bad blunder at some part of it; but without doubt the fact that a blunderer goes unpunished, or even reprimanded, has a tendency to increase error.’, Maydon J.G., French’s Cavalry Campaign, A Special Correspondent’s View of British Army Mounted Troops during the Boer War, C.A. Pearson, London, 1901, p.103.
on campaign the repercussions were severe. As Harry Neil, a private in The Household Cavalry, recalled:

...we had been galloping all morning till my horse was fairly dead beat ... our men were retiring behind another kopje two miles off, and my horse began to drop behind ‘till I was the last one of the lot. Well the poor beast was so dead beat that he dropped into a walk ... so I turned to watch the Boers following us. I saw one of them get off his horse and begin to fire at me ... his third shot hit my poor faithful horse in the hind leg and down he dropped.22

Unfortunately, Neil’s story was but one amongst many told by soldiers who, when they should have been able to rely on their horse’s strength and speed, had instead found themselves reliant upon a horse so hungry and exhausted that it ‘could hardly raise a trot’.23 Far from being able to put his trust in his horse to get him out of trouble, Neil and ‘his poor faithful horse’ had instead become an easy target for the enemy. Moreover, and significantly in terms of the soldier-horse relationship, we might also assume that any bond he had formed with his horse was killed just as decisively. No wonder then, when horses were repeatedly replaced and teams split up, there was an additional toll paid for bad management. This price, although not as easy to measure as rates of death and survival, was the morale of the soldier who directly suffered the loss of his horse. When horses constantly ‘fell out’, to be replaced and replaced again, the soldier-horse relationship could not thrive. There was not sufficient time to create the partnership that allowed human and horse to work together on campaign as they did in times of peace. More crucially perhaps, the soldier-horse relationship’s absence severely undermined the sense of responsibility upon which good horse management relied. What, after all, was the point of establishing a bond with a horse that would be dead this time next week? Why overly concern oneself with petty details when every other link in the chain was defective? For example, and although a seemingly small detail, P.T. Ross described how he had given up bothering to name his horses. Previously, and as much as the names bestowed more than hinted at his dislike of them, those horses had at least had sufficient agency in his eyes to warrant a name. There had been a soldier-horse relationship of sorts. However, the latter horse he only wished dead.

Only a few days ago I received amongst my mails a letter from my sister, who inquired, “How is your horse?” Which one? “Stumbles” is not, “Ponto” is not, “Juggernaut” is not, “Diamond Jubilee” is not, “Bete Noire” is not. My present one, which I have not named, is, and I sometimes wish he wasn’t. ... Today is our first day on this fresh jaunt, and already more than half the horses dished out to us seem played out. They dragged us along at the commencement of the day, and we had to drag them along at the end, which may sound like an equal division of labour, but which, in my opinion, it is not. However, to be very serious, our lives might have to depend upon these brutes at any moment, apart from the fact of our necks being

constantly in danger of their stumbling propensities. Still apart from the inconvenience of having to bury one, I fancy there would not be much concern on that count.²⁴

When A Yeoman’s Letters was published in 1901, P.T. Ross was applauded by the Daily Telegraph for his ‘Bright, breezy and vivid ... adventures’, while The Standard praised his lively, amusing and ‘vivacious’ letters. Interestingly, however, The Scotsman suggested that ‘between the lines of voluble and entertaining talk’ his writing dealt with serious affairs of ‘substantial gravity’.²⁵ Although Ross may have appeared to make light of this catalogue of horse wastage, he in fact demonstrated a serious breakdown in the Army’s treatment of both its equine and its human resources.

So, what had actually gone wrong? Corvi believes that the British Army had displayed ‘inadequacies in proper training and care for horses in the field from the start’ and that basic principles of horse management were ‘either ignored or improperly implemented.’²⁶ However, there had been opportunity for blunder long before the horses even reached South Africa. In an arrogant belief the Boers would be easily defeated, the Army had underestimated how long the South African campaign was likely to last.²⁷ The initial cohort of horses to accompany their regiments to South Africa were not allowed sufficient time to acclimatize to their new conditions on arrival. Already exhausted from the journey by sea and by train, unaccustomed to short feed rations, and to the hardships of life on campaign, their health and fitness rapidly deteriorated.²⁸ Expected to march on very little, and carrying up to twenty stone, the big draft and hunter types favoured by the Army simply wasted away.²⁹ In response, the Remount Service’s horse purchasers, under ever greater pressure to maintain the regiments’ strength, bought thousands of horses that were unsuitable for Army work. By far the most highly criticised of the Remount Service’s purchases were those acquired in Argentina. As Denman noted in his article The War Office and Remounts in 1902:

Now, the Argentines were, as a rule, badly broken, and awkward, clumsy animals to ride; in fact, many of them had not been broken at all. Moreover, when it is borne in mind that the mounted soldier generally rode with a certain amount of kit, in addition to his rifle and bandolier, it will be realised that it required no small degree of horsemanship on his part to propel these creatures across the veldt at even a moderate rate of speed. ... I would appeal to any reader of this article to inquire of a relative or acquaintance who has served at the front in a mounted corps what he

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thought of them; or, better still, should he know a colonial trooper, to ascertain his opinion, which will probably be given in no ambiguous terms.\textsuperscript{30}

While the Remount Service became the focus of criticism, the Army Veterinary Service was also suffering its own problems of staffing and organisation. In 1899, it had seemed the A.V.S. may have been making progress in its aim to set up a Station Veterinary Hospital as an experimental measure; a move which would have brought it into line with those already established in the Medical Corps since 1866. The then Commander-in-Chief Lord Wolseley certainly supported the idea. For example:

The proposal is a step in the right direction because the new system for peace would be a preparation for war. In war we could not allow Cavalry Regiments to take seriously sick horses about with them. … All Commanding Officers protested loudly when the sick soldiers of many corps were collected into one Station Hospital, but firmness based on military knowledge carried the day, and now it is only a stray fossil here and there who would go back to the old expensive system of Regimental Hospitals.\textsuperscript{31}

Unfortunately, however, when the outbreak of war intervened, the Veterinary Service instead found itself ‘without the shadow of an organisation’.\textsuperscript{32} Indeed, far from gaining a greater autonomy, the Veterinary Service was now placed under the Remount Department. This was a situation which merely exacerbated the problems both faced, and hampered them in their complimentary, but discrete roles within the Army’s organisation. As Frederick Smith recalled in his \textit{A History of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps}:

...Veterinary Hospitals were utilized to hold healthy remounts, while Remount Depots contained both healthy and sick animals. Had it been desired to ensure the general infection of the army with contagious diseases, no better arrangement could have been devised!\textsuperscript{33}

We might now recall Fitzwygram’s, somewhat prophetic, warning that there was no strength in a chain in which any one link was defective.\textsuperscript{34} During the Boer War, those links had failed with disastrous and costly consequences. As J.M. Brereton tells us:

The final casualty figures for the four years of the Boer War were appalling: 350,000 dead out of a total of 520,000 remounts supplied from the remount departments at home and in South Africa. ... Major-General Brabazon confessed that he ‘never saw

\textsuperscript{34} Fitzwygram Colonel F., \textit{Horses and Stables}, Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869, p.108-109.
such shameful abuse of horseflesh in the course of my life ... I was shocked: I was horrified.\textsuperscript{35}

According to Whyte-Spunner, when the Household Cavalry returned to the United Kingdom in May 1902, of the 600 men who had sailed out to South Africa in 1899, 100 were either wounded or long-term sick, 58 had died from wounds and enteric fever, and ‘only six had actually been killed by the Boers’. Of the horses, only one returned. The Royals had lost 3,275 horses; ‘or six for each one they had taken out originally.’\textsuperscript{36} The 17\textsuperscript{th} Lancers also suffered heavy losses. Major G. Micholls’ history of the regiment describes how, by 1900, only 48 of the 433 horses that had originally travelled with them to South Africa now remained. Damningly, very few of these had died as the result of enemy action. Rather, he cited exhaustion as the main cause of death. With the regiment’s horse strength so reduced men were forced to march on foot, while their saddlery and equipment was carried by its transport; which ‘already laden to its full capacity, suffered much from this additional burden.’ What becomes most clear from Major Micholl’s account is how once the horses began to suffer, so too did the men.

Hot days, cold nights, no shelter, and long hours under the saddle told its tale upon horses, more especially as food and water were often hard to come by – and sometimes, indeed, absent altogether. The average weight carried by the horses was well over seventeen stone. Very few were lost in action, but the number that died or were destroyed owing to exhaustion was heavy. ... Remounts had been received from time to time, but owing to their softness in condition were soon unfit for service.\textsuperscript{37}

On March 24\textsuperscript{th} 1903 \textit{The Times} reported on the proceedings of the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. Among others questioned was Mr L.S. Amery; a reporter despatched to South Africa by \textit{The Daily Mail} at various points throughout the campaign. Amery observed that insufficient importance had been given to intelligence work, both before and during the early stages of the war. This, in his opinion, had led to an inadequate appreciation of the military situation, the result being that while men and animals had received some training, this had failed to equip them with the skills needed in a conflict where the advantage had been given to ‘skill and cleverness as against mere numbers.’\textsuperscript{38} Worse still, this training had failed to prepare man, horse, and more specifically, the soldier expected to work \textit{with} these horses, for the geographical and climatic challenges they would experience during such a campaign. Criticisms of understaffing, corruption and unpreparedness were recurring themes during the Royal Commission’s investigations.\textsuperscript{39}

Thus, at least two of Fitzwygram’s principles of good management had been mishandled. When feed and water had to be obtained in the field, officers and men (who were ignorant

\textsuperscript{38} ‘The War Commission’, \textit{The Times}, issue 37037, 25\textsuperscript{th} March 1903.
\textsuperscript{39} ‘Whitewashes British Remount Officials’, \textit{The London Times} and \textit{The New York Times}, Special Cablegrams, 10\textsuperscript{th} October 1902.
of the indigenous feeds available) became so afraid of over feeding, or feeding incorrectly, that in some cases they failed to feed their horses at all.\textsuperscript{40} It was not then so surprising to find that horses, thus rendered unable to accomplish the physical feats demanded of them, had broken down. Without an adequate Veterinary Service to deal with small matters such as galls and sores, horses who might otherwise have survived to fight another day had to be destroyed on the spot or, worse still, simply left behind.\textsuperscript{41} Mr Hall Edwards, who had served during the war at the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital at Driefontein, wrote:

Little or no rest is given to the animals after their sea voyage, and to anyone who has seen them land it must be obvious that they require much. Many of them can hardly stand, and some of them immediately fall down from sheer exhaustion. The journey up country, which frequently occupies from five to eight days, must be most trying. At least two-thirds of the poor beasts have to travel in open trucks, where, packed like sardines, they are exposed to the cruel heat of the blazing South African sun. What can be expected of horses treated in this fashion? They commence to fall out before the first mile is covered, and the column leaves in its wake a line of ghostly corpses, which poison the air and act as happy hunting grounds for unattached germs.\textsuperscript{42}

The ability of Britain to equip its military forces was a matter of hard, rational necessity, but the Army’s supply and management of its horses during the South African campaign had fallen woefully short. Importantly, however, this matter of supplying British horses for British soldiers was an issue which also connected the horse with British identity, with the country’s history, with its people and the very land itself. As the poet Lindsay Gordon put it, without ‘the stud’ and ‘the land’ and ‘the chase’ the British ‘breed’ would itself die.\textsuperscript{43} In view of the horse’s importance on the battlefield, and its real and symbolic place at the very heart of British society, it is not so surprising that when the British Army’s treatment of its horses had fallen so far short this was able to create a national scandal.\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, when Sir Arthur Conan Doyle referred to ‘the most vital question of all’ it was with a sense of bitter shame that the British people should have been so let down.

... there, at all seasons of war and in all scenes of it, is to be found the most daunting indictment against British foresight, common-sense, and power of organisation. ... From the telegram ‘Infantry preferred’ addressed to a nation of rough-riders, down to the failure to secure the excellent horses on the spot, while importing them unfit for use from the ends of the earth, there has been nothing but one long series of blunders in this, the most vital question of all. ... The chase during two years of the

\textsuperscript{44} ‘Whitewashes British Remount Officials’, \textit{The London Times} and \textit{The New York Times}, Special Cablegrams, 10th October 1902.
man with two horses by the man with one horse, has been a sight painful to ourselves and ludicrous to others.\textsuperscript{45}

It is at this point that discussion turns to the final subject of this chapter. This is to consider what public responses to the Boer War debacle were and what had changed, certainly in living memory, to mean that the wastage of horses in warfare was taken so seriously during the Great War. It will discuss how public pressure was brought to bear on the War Office and on the British Army’s organisation. This is important in that it will inform discussion of horse management, veterinary treatment and horse supply, and their impact upon the soldier-horse relationship, in the following two chapters.

The years following the Boer War saw mechanisation, humanitarian reform and social change combine to further challenge any conviction that God’s purpose in creating the horse had been solely that it might serve mankind. For a growing number of British people it was becoming difficult to accept the horse’s abuse in a society where, we must not forget, the horse was still a prime means of transport and of traction.\textsuperscript{46} Increasingly, the British populace were encouraged to treat their animals as they themselves would wish to be treated. What is interesting is the rapidity with which this change in attitudes had taken hold. For example, Harriet Ritvo believes the English would have been surprised ‘to hear themselves praised for special kindness to animals’ less than a century before. Ritvo describes how exhausted and pain-ridden horses and donkeys toiled until they ended their miserable days in London’s slaughterhouses and knackers’ yards.\textsuperscript{47} Moreover:

> Few people registered distress at the animals suffering that surrounded them, and many took pride in the doughty national character revealed by its affliction. ... Those who deplored the mistreatment of animals agreed that the English were especially inclined to inflict it.\textsuperscript{48}

By the turn of the century, however, humanitarianism, the animal charities and the British legal system had combined to make such behaviour entirely unacceptable. Instead, as Hilda Kean tells us, ‘A new humanity towards the animals who lived, worked and traversed the


\textsuperscript{46} For example, FML Thompson suggested that, because there was such demand for local transport to and from the railway stations, the ‘railway age’ was, in fact, ‘the greatest age of the horse.’ Moore-Colyer is in agreement, arguing that ‘For all the triumphant articles in the contemporary agricultural and engineering press applauding the achievements of steam and mechanization, the horse remained the fundamental unit of power in Victorian Britain and was to retain its pre-eminence into the first decade of the present century. Agriculture, the extractive and manufacturing industries, urban and rural transport systems, and the civil and military authorities all relied, to a greater or lesser extent, on the draught power or carrying capacity of the horse.’, Thompson F.M.L., \textit{Victorian England: the Horse-Drawn Society, An Inaugural Lecture}, Bedford College, University of London, October 1970, \textit{Horses in European Economic History: A Preliminary Canter}, The British Agricultural History Society, Reading, 1983, p.13-14; Moore-Colyer R.J., ‘Aspects of Horse Breeding and the Supply of Horses in Victorian Britain’, \textit{Agricultural History Review}, no. 42, 1995, p. 47.


urban domain’ had become ‘a distinctive part of modernity.’ For example, and returning to Frederick Fitzwygram’s *Horses and Stables*, it is interesting to note how a book that had been in print since 1867 had by 1901 evolved to more strongly emphasise this moral duty. Whereas in previous editions it had been implicit that there was a duty of care, this had been expressed solely through the act of managing horses appropriately and with consideration. Now, the moral and humane reasons for this good practice were spelled out very clearly. Thus, although Fitzwygram’s ‘bible’ of horsemanship had always imparted sage advice on practical matters of horse management, these new sections now focused on the humane horseman’s moral responsibility to prevent and alleviate suffering.

...surely no creature stands more in needs of this aid than the horse. His life is often one of continual slavery and in many instances of perpetual discomfort. He alone, or almost alone, of all creatures is doomed to never-ceasing labour. ...the horse seems to be haunted by the demon of labour and fatigue almost from his earliest years, and generally increasing to the hour of his death – to be haunted by a demon whose power to torment seems to increase as the horse becomes older and more worn.

Indeed, and if as Emotionology suggests society does indeed influence and shape what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and thus too the emotional life of the individual, then it would appear that Fitzwygram’s wishes had begun to be borne out. The growing influence and respectability of humane organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and especially once allied with the persistent Christian message that ‘The merciful man shows mercy to his beast’, tells us that ill-treatment of animals was becoming more than the ‘pseudo sentimentality’ of a minority. However, neither would it have required a great flight of the imagination to visualise the horrors of war when Britain still harboured every conceivable abuse of ‘the most precious of gifts which God bestowed upon man’.

Indeed, part of living in a horse-drawn age was that its realities were often all too visible. It is this distinction which, while it helped the British public to reconcile themselves with the necessary use of horses in war, also ensured they were never entirely innocent of its horrors. Indeed, when the disposal of Britain’s unwanted horses and the abuses inflicted upon them were so regularly reported on in the country’s press, when the humane societies

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52 ‘The final aid to progress was the receipt of a letter, dated 4th July 1835, from Kensington Palace, saying: ‘I have laid before the Duchess of Kent your letter of the 2nd inst. And its enclosure, relating to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Her Royal Highness very readily acceded to your request that her name and that of the Princess Victoria be placed on the list of Lady Patronesses. The Princess was to become Queen Victoria, whose encouragement of the Society’s activities, and Royal Patronage from 1840, did so much to help its progress during the next half century...’, Moss A.W., *Valiant Crusade, The History of the R.S.P.C.A.*, Cassell, London, 1961, p.29.; Bronte A., *Agnes Grey*, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, London, first ed. 1847, 1950, p.45.; Curling H., ‘A Lashing for the Lashers; being an Exposition of the Cruelties practised upon the Cab and Omnibus Horses of London’, *Ainsworth’s Magazine*, July 1851, no. 20, p.550.

campaigned for change and, all importantly, when the evidence was there to be seen with one’s own eyes, it is difficult to maintain the modern fiction that the British before 1914 were in any way naive. Perhaps they did not fully anticipate modern warfare’s capacity for destruction, but neither were they entirely ignorant of what war entailed.

Unprecedented media coverage of the war, combined with a huge increase in newspaper sales, also meant that the British public were far better informed about the South African campaign’s progress than they had ever been about past conflicts. To a large extent this was because the press was growing to meet the demands of a ‘new type of reader.’ Indeed, in addition to The Times, and The Illustrated London News, there were now a growing number of newspapers and illustrated newspapers targeted at the ‘busy man’ and woman. Unlike The Times, which was expensive and required a considerable investment to read, the new newspapers gave succinct reports of home and foreign news, broke up the columns of print with photographs and illustrations, and further stimulated the reader’s interest, and the newspapers’ appeal, by including minor items of gossip and social controversy. Not only were these newspapers more ‘accessible’ in terms of their style and content, but they were also more affordable than the established broadsheets. The Daily Mail, launched by Alfred Harmsworth in 1896, was the first of these ‘family’ newspapers. It cost one halfpenny and, by 1900, sold one million copies per day. The Daily Express came into being in 1900, to be followed three years later by the first tabloids and popular Sunday newspapers. Now a far greater proportion of the British public not only had access to written news about the War’s progress, but also to illustrated and photographic images of what it looked like. For example, on 9th June 1900, The Graphic published an illustration by John Charlton with the headline ‘The Price of a Forced March: Artillery Horses Break Down’. In the illustration the ridden horse of the centre pair in an artillery team had collapsed with fatigue during the rapid advance on Pretoria. Around the fallen horse four soldiers were gathered, one of whom was beginning to remove the horse’s harness. Another appeared to be putting a hand on the arm of another (presumably the horse’s driver) to console, or calm him. Away from this central motif the fallen horse’s pair was led away. Its distress at the other horse falling, and at having lost its working partner were

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54 ‘...the number of daily newspapers increased substantially in the period, having doubled from 1896 to 1906, and doubled again from 1906 to 1914. This degree of press expansion made the Edwardians better informed than any previous generation.’, Wilkinson G.R., Depictions and Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers, 1899-1914, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003, p.8.

55 ‘One of the main reasons for this change was that the new proprietors had discovered a new type of reader in the self-improving lower-middle classes, both male and female.’, Wilkinson G.R., Depictions and Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers, 1899-1914, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003, p.7.


60 See Appendix, Figure 1, Charlton J., from a photograph by Thiele R., ‘The Price of a Forced March: Artillery Horses Break Down’, The Graphic, 9th June 1900.
shown in its expression; its ears were flat back, its lips pulled tight and its eyes rolled back so to show the whites.\textsuperscript{61} The two wheelers stood quietly behind the fallen horse. One had a soldier at its head, but both were skeletally thin and looked so exhausted they would probably not have tried to move without coercion anyway. The two leaders, in the picture’s foreground, were equally exhausted. However, the off-horse of the pair had taken the opportunity to graze and was doing so hungrily, even with the bit still in its mouth. The consequences of this ‘vexatious delay’ were seen in the background, as countless oxen-driven transport and other limbered teams emerged out of the dust of the march. The text to accompany the illustration read:

Lord Robert’s rapidity of movement has resulted in a heavy toll being exacted in horseflesh, and vexatious delays caused by breakdowns such as this have been many. When General French’s column entered Bloemfontein the horses were fearfully overworked, and were almost ready to collapse with fatigue. ... Some 5,000 horses, it is said, are lost every month, and despite the fact that every care is taken of sick and wounded animals at the various remount stations.\textsuperscript{62}

The overall impression of the image was of the driver’s care for his team, but of his powerlessness to halt the demands that war was making of him and his horses. The toll this event had exerted on the horse, on the horse’s driver, his evident humanity, the horse’s military importance, and the fact that this scene was but one of many thousands being replayed across South Africa, only highlighted the inhumanity of such appalling wastage.

In addition, and while the text seemed to give some consolation that every care was taken of the sick and wounded, this depended upon whether these horses ever got as far as the remount station. Those who did were the fortunate few, because the majority in fact died in the traces.\textsuperscript{63} Instead, the war correspondents wrote of the horse’s terrible suffering on the march, and of the dead and wounded horses left in the Army’s wake. For example, an article originally published in the \textit{Daily Mail} in 1900, described the sorry sight ‘of hundreds upon hundreds of dead and dying horses on ... war’s promenade’.

In battle their legs are snapped off, their bodies torn, and their heads shattered... There is not time to shoot them. Let the anti-cruelty people at home rave as they may, there are other things to think of besides humanity in the heat of great battles. But of all the pitiful, heart-rending sights I have ever seen none has compared to this view of hundreds upon hundreds of dead and dying horses on this 100 miles of war’s promenade. The poor beasts had done no man any harm – in fact, each one had been a man’s reliance – and to see them shattered by shell and then ripped open by vultures often before they were dead was enough to snap the tenderest chords in one’s breast. ... My companion used to turn to look back at these dying horses, only to find that they were still straining their sad eyes after the cart. Then he would say,

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{63} Maydon J.G., \textit{French’s Cavalry Campaign, A Special Correspondent’s View of British Army Mounted Troops During the Boer War}, C.D. Pearson, London, 1901, p.28.
\end{thebibliography}
‘He is looking at us yet; oh, it makes me ill; look, he is staring at us like a guilty conscience. What can we do? I wish we did not see such things.’ For my part, I would not look behind. 64

Here, the raving of the ‘anti-cruelty people’ was described as being in direct opposition to the necessary use of horses in warfare. However, the writer was nevertheless sentimental when he recalled how the sight of their suffering ‘was enough to snap the tenderest chords in one’s breast.’ He tells us that ‘there are other things to think of besides humanity in the heat of great battles’, but he still chose to tug at his reader’s heartstrings by telling them how the dying horses watched the passing cart with ‘sad eyes’. The overall impression was almost of an article at war with itself. The British people were evidently aware that horses suffered and died in battles, but war was no longer thought an excuse to treat animals in any manner one wished.

Indeed, some humanitarians were so shocked by the horse wastage scandals of the Boer War that they called for the Geneva Convention to be extended to those administering aid to wounded horses on the battlefield, just as it protected those treating wounded men. 65 For example, in an article published by The Humanitarian League in 1912, Bell and Baillie-Weaver argued that, although the British were considered to be more ‘actively enlisted on the side of humaneness to animals than ... any other country of the world’, this humanity still fell short once a horse became a war horse and was thus exposed to the particular hardships of a military campaign. It may have been a pipe dream to hope the Geneva Convention could ever be extended to the war horse, but the fact that this question was raised at all shows how far attitudes to animals had come by the turn of the century. 66 It also goes some way to explaining the British Army’s much improved approach to horse supply and management during the Great War.

Whether we have the right to force these docile and confiding animals to take part in our unholy quarrels against their natures and their wills may be for some people a debatable question, but everyone must admit that if we do so, the very least that should be expected of us is to see that they shall be subjected to no more suffering than is absolutely necessary. It certainly cannot be said that this is the case now. On the contrary, it must be admitted by anyone who will take the trouble to enquire into the facts, that horses and the other animals employed in war, are treated with culpable carelessness and indifference, resulting in severe suffering, a great part of which is avoidable. 67

We may suggest, in fact, that it was not horse wastage that was unprecedented during the Boer War, but rather how well informed the British public had become. Not only was such wastage now unacceptable, but it was also becoming far more difficult to hide. For example, when debate following the Boer War’s horse wastage scandals rumbled on into 1905, Colonel Thomson, Director General of the newly formed Army Veterinary Corps, commented how ‘In Africa the waste was comparatively small when one knew the waste which resulted from the regimental system in the Afghan war.’

Not only had such appalling horse wastage been an utter waste of money, it also raised pertinent humanitarian questions. How, for example, had soldiers been affected when the soldier-horse relationship broke down? What effect had this had on the soldier’s humanity, and upon his capacity for sympathetic consideration? The Army’s appalling mismanagement of its horses pointed to a breakdown also in the treatment of its men, and the British public’s fears were not unfounded. We know, for example, that men and horses of the 17th Lancers had marched on half rations, and that ‘food and water were often hard to come by’. We also know that the Royals were not supplied with any new kit, clothing, or equipment until shortly before their return to the United Kingdom, and then only because they were to undergo an inspection. Shared privation strengthened the soldier-horse relationship up to a point. However, once the soldier became unable to concern himself with anything other than his own thirst and hunger, the soldier-horse relationship quickly deteriorated. In A Yeoman’s Letters we are able to discern how a soldier, once pushed to the brink by fatigue, soon lost all patience with a horse that he may have had more sympathy with in better circumstances.

I was getting sick of it. Everybody I accosted advised me to shoot the brute myself … so at length, to cut this part of the story short, giving up all hope of being relieved of my burden by the farrier-sergeant, who somewhere was ambling along comfortably on a good horse - having again had the sorry steed fall – I led him aside from the track of the convoy and ended his South African career with my revolver. Alas, Bete Noire! Had we but understood one another the parting would have been a sad one. The case being otherwise, I felt, it must be admitted, no regret whatever.

This direct correlation between how humans were treated themselves and how they were then inclined to treat their animals is identified by both Kean and Thierman. Kean discusses, for example, a connection between the Temperance Movement and the provision of clean drinking water, and how there was a connection between the living and working conditions of people and their tendency towards good and bad treatment of their animals. For example, slaughtermen and butchers were thought to be ‘tainted by a brutalization

endemic to the work.’

Similarly, in his study of the workers in a North American slaughterhouse, Thierman notes how the ‘carcerality’ of the slaughterhouse is shared by the pigs who are killed and the people who work there. In effect, if the very environment in which a person lived and worked had the potential to make them more or less humane, then the battlefield was more than capable of dehumanising the soldier. The Army had therefore not only failed the soldier and his horse because it had put them in unnecessary danger, but because it had caused the soldier-horse relationship to break down and, with it, the soldier’s very capacity for kindness and compassion. This was entirely unacceptable in an era where military reform had come to humanise the soldier as never before and where, as Mason and Riedi have identified, civil society had ‘rising expectations ... of the services as an employer.’ For example, flogging had been abolished in 1881, military prisons had been reformed, and ‘progressive improvements’ were being made to barrack accommodation. In the Royal Navy sailors now received better food, less brutal punishments, improved prospects of promotion and more generous leave. It is notable too that, in 1912, sailors ‘were granted the first rise in their basic pay for sixty years.’ Similarly, the appropriate management of military animals could no longer be dismissed only as the interest of ‘fanatics’.

However, bringing about the change required was not an easy process, as Brigadier J. Clabby’s History of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps will testify. Indeed it is notable that although many large-scale civilian businesses, such as the coal and iron company of Fitzwygram’s experience discussed earlier in this chapter, now employed their own veterinary surgeons with such success, the Army Veterinary Corps’ similar endeavours to prevent and alleviate unnecessary horse wastage were still met with resistance. This reluctance to change was endemic, beginning with the War Office, where it then filtered down to the General Staff, the regiments, and throughout the regiments themselves. Of course, at their mercy was the humble soldier and his horse at the very bottom of the pile. Indeed, despite damning criticism it seemed the War Office had still to act upon what it had learned. This apparent complacency was thought by some to illustrate ‘the inveterate attitude of the War Office mind.’

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The idea that an incompetent person who is doing his stupid best should be superseded, even in moments of national crisis, by a competent person is foreign to the whole scheme of military thought.\textsuperscript{79}

In matters of training there was also cause for concern. For example, in 1909, the mounted branches of the Territorial Force were likened to a man who was ‘the embarrassed recipient of a strange animal, to the habits, peculiarities and care of which he is totally ignorant.’\textsuperscript{80} The Army still opposed the creation of an effective Veterinary Service, and the Secretary of State had as yet to envisage what would happen when 130,000 animals were consigned to the care of officers and men who knew little, or nothing, about their care and management.\textsuperscript{81} In short, there would be chaos of the deadliest variety. Sir Frederick Smith’s frustration was palpable when he recalled attempts to persuade The Director General T.F. (Territorial Force) that these were no longer ‘the days of Cromwell’ when ‘everybody rode who could afford it and trained servants were to be found in abundance.’

It was stated that had the Secretary of State on the inception of the T.F. asked for an opinion on this question he would have been advised that training in horse management was the first essential, guns being of no use unless they can be got into position and dismounted cavalry never being other than a disorganised mass. To commit such a delicate mechanism as a horse to unskilled hands was like giving a child a chronometer to play with.\textsuperscript{82}

Perhaps the War Office had made the mistake of assuming horses somehow managed themselves, or that the skills involved were easily acquired. Indeed, this was (and still is) a common misconception amongst the uninitiated.\textsuperscript{83} What had not been anticipated was the rate at which mechanisation was killing the horse industry. Ironically in fact, while the horses and those who worked with them were gradually disappearing, the Army’s demand for horses and men skilled to work with them only grew.\textsuperscript{84} Indeed, despite the introduction

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\textsuperscript{79} ‘Whitewashes British Remount Officials’, \textit{The London Times} and \textit{The New York Times}, Special Cablegrams, 10\textsuperscript{th} October 1902.


\textsuperscript{83} ‘John Bourne has suggested that the notion that cavalry officers were incapable of understanding anything scientific was misleading. They were experts in horse management, a complex and technical subject involving a working knowledge of veterinary medicine, as a glance at the army’s manual of \textit{Animal Management} will confirm.’ French D., ‘The Mechanization of the British Cavalry Between the World Wars’, \textit{War in History}, vol. 3, no.10, 2003, p.297.

\textsuperscript{84} ‘It (mechanization) had enormous implications for a whole range of industries which depended upon the horse; the horse feed section of farming and those who handled sacks of grain and bales of straw between farm and stable (not to mention those who removed the thousands of tons of urban horse manure); the breeders and the knackers; the harness manufacturers and leather industry; the blacksmiths and those who produced the iron for horse shoes; the manufacturers of horse-drawn vehicles of all sorts from cheap carts to expensive carriages; and their drivers, repairers and maintainers. The livelihood of millions of people in all parts of the world was put at risk when, within a very short period of time, mechanical horsepower replaced animal strength. Many of those involved opted for early retirement and faded away with their horses. Others,
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of mechanised alternatives (a development which contrary to popular myth the Army wholeheartedly supported) its demand for horsepower continued to increase. As Mark Lockwood later emphasised in his 1915 article for *The War Illustrated*:

> Although it has been proved that motor traction can replace the horse in many ways, it must be remembered that good roads and country where the “going” is easy are essential for motor-transport; and these conveniences, of course, are not always accessible at the front. Therefore, in addition to cavalry, which still plays a great part in war, thousands of horses are necessary for drawing guns, ammunition wagons, ambulances, and for transporting food and other essential supplies for the troops over bad roads and broken country.

Thus, the problem of ensuring Britain had ‘ubiquitous horse supplies constantly ready for campaigning’ was a matter of heated debate. While it was argued by some that horses suitable for Army purposes should be bred and produced under a State-directed scheme within the United Kingdom, others argued that this would prove far too costly. Many continued to support the existing ‘hand-to-mouth’ policy of buying horses as need required in the open market. This was an answer to the problem which was eventually settled upon as the most practical.

Mr Wyndham, in his able defence in parliament ... declined to commit the War Office to any scheme of State-directed breeding in England. He did so on two grounds—first, because the British Isles were a costly place to breed in; secondly, because they were too far from the climatic centres of the Empire. Our wars, he explained, lay generally far away in tropic or sub-tropic lands, where the English-bred horse needed acclimatisation before he could be put to his full use. His first cost in England would be great, and it would be doubled by the cost of shipping him to the seats of war.

This seemed a perfect solution to the problem. As one reader commented in a letter to *The Times* in 1900, ‘to tax an over-wrought Government with the management of vast breeding establishments would be as cruel as asking them to take up the railways; and it would be, in our islands, a blunder.’ However, purchase abroad was only successful if the horses bought were of a sufficient standard for the Army’s purposes. As Denman had noted in an

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86 Lockwood M., ‘How the Horse is Cared for at the Front, The Magnificent Work accomplished at the Front for Britain’s War-horses’, *The War Illustrated*, 27th November 1915.
89 Cooper-Hill, ‘Cavalry Remounts’, *The Times*, issue 36119, 18th April 1900.
article for *The Nineteenth Century* in 1902, many horses supplied to the British Army during the South African campaign had been ‘nothing more nor less than death traps.’

This combined problem of economy, suitability and supply was not one easily remedied. While it was acceptable to purchase horses abroad in time of war, it was also necessary that the British Army have a reserve of horses within the United Kingdom sufficient to supply its immediate needs on mobilization. However, the British Army could no longer rely on its old sources. Indeed, when it came to ‘the most vital question of all’ the Army’s horse purchasers increasingly found that, while there was not a shortage of horses to choose from within the United Kingdom, these were not always of the ‘stamp’ demanded for military work. Nevertheless, the 1910 Horse Census and the Horse Registration Scheme had at least identified where suitable horses would be found on mobilisation.

With mechanisation, not only were horses disappearing, but also skilled horsemen. Indeed, the Derbyshire Yeomanry Corps Nominal Role (1892-1904) allows us to observe a shift away from recruitment amongst those employed in agriculture and in trades associated with the horse, to recruitment from the towns and cities and to much more diverse, but far less horse-dependant, sources of employment. In 1892, for example, the Yeomanry’s three sergeants and all but one of its corporals had been farmers from villages on the outskirts of Derby. Of privates, all were either farmers, or farm workers, with amongst these a number of blacksmiths, a corn merchant, a clerk and a coal merchant. All were from Derby and the villages surrounding it. However, by 1901, we begin to see a change in the trades from which those attesting had been drawn. Horse trades were still well represented; including a horse dealer, a coachman, a saddler, a cab driver, a coach builder, several grooms and a carter. However, these men had now been joined with those drawn from other skilled trades more associated with industrial Derby than its rural environs. Similarly, men were now increasingly recruited from the very hub of this bustling town. Those who brought some horse knowledge with them were joined by those who did not. Indeed, while it is feasible to imagine that a butcher, a shopkeeper, or a fishmonger might have used a horse to make deliveries around the town, it is hard to imagine the same of a cashier, or a clerk. We might surmise that the war in South Africa had some bearing on this shift in

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91 ‘When Queen Victoria came to the throne, an enormously greater number of horses of the useful class were bred in England than have been bred during the last forty years or more. ... When railways began to drive the coaches off the roads the demand for horses naturally declined, and in course of time ceased altogether... Believers in the future of automobiles predict that these vehicles will at no very distant time increase to such an extent that the light van and omnibus horse, as well as the heavy horse, will be banished not only from our streets but from the country roads.’, Gilbey W., ‘English Horse-Breeding and Army Remounts’, *Nineteenth Century and After: A Monthly Review*, 55:328, June 1904, p.976.


94 Derbyshire Yeomanry Corps Nominal Roll 1892-1904, Derby Museum and Archive.
recruitment, but it nevertheless provides us with an insight into changes that were occurring across Britain at the turn of the century.

It was the knowledgeable and sympathetic horseman who held the links in Fitzwygram’s metaphorical chain of good horse management together. When this was absent, such as during the Boer War, horses died unnecessarily and men also suffered. Supplying fit, well-trained horses was no easy task, and neither was the prevention of debility and disease. However, all the efforts of the Remount Department and the newly formed Army Veterinary Corps would be for nought if the soldier-horse relationship was absent.\(^{95}\) The importance of training could not be understated.\(^{96}\) However, as Gilbey warned in 1904, ‘the trained horse-soldier’ was not ‘made at a few days’ notice’.

Can we teach men to ride, can we teach them the secrets of horse-mastery between the hour when invasion threatens and the hour that brings the storm upon us? Can we teach troops to manoeuvre in large bodies ... in a period that may be measured in weeks, if not days? It is not enough that we have horses in the time of emergency, we must have horsemen; and the trained horse-soldier cannot, it is presumed, be made at a few days’ notice.\(^{97}\)

Nevertheless, by 1914 the British Army was a very different organisation from that whose failings had caused the soldier-horse relationship to break down with such terrible consequences during the Boer War. While it was unavoidable that men and horses would be killed in war, it was no longer acceptable that bad management should be a greater cause of death than enemy action. Most importantly, and certainly in terms of the soldier-horse relationship, all training manuals and regulations regarding horses and mounted soldiers now emphasised the soldier’s responsibility for his horse. It was made clear that a soldier must be trained to manage his horse in war and be prepared for conditions that would at times be less than ideal. It was emphasised that a mounted soldier’s chief weapon was his horse, but that this ‘was also the most difficult to keep in working order on service.’\(^{98}\) That the soldier must always think first of his horse when on campaign was now drilled into each and every horse soldier. It was from such mindfulness that the soldier-horse relationship grew. However, although this newfound concern for animal welfare was undoubtedly good for the horse and for the morale of the men involved, we must remember too that the motives behind it were in no way sentimental, but driven by purely pragmatic reasons of economy and military effectiveness.

At the end of the nineteenth century there was a growing literature on good horsemanship. It was recognised that efficiency in the horse’s care and a sympathetic consideration for its welfare contributed significantly to its well-being. However, for a variety of reasons,


‘innumerable errors’ were made in the supply and management of horses during the Boer War. Due to an increase in both media coverage and agitation from welfare organisations, as well as the financial losses caused by wastage, there was a need to make significant improvements and changes to the British Army’s organisation. However, it was not only a matter of efficiency; effective military horsemanship relied upon their being a relationship between soldier and horse. How this was developed was a significant challenge, and one the British Army needed to face.

For a man accustomed throughout his life to the care of horses … it is a matter of simple routine to provide for his horse’s wants at every possible opportunity; it becomes automatic with him to think for his horse; but the average soldier has not had such training and experience, and unless it is thoroughly drilled into him that he must think of and for his horses on all occasions, the latter is apt to suffer.99

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Chapter Two

“Humanity, Efficiency and Economy” The Remount Department and The Army Veterinary Corps during the Great War.

The reader must take a big view if the real meaning of the horsing of our Forces at home and abroad and all the organisation and cost to the nation involved is to be appreciated. You have to think not in tens of thousands but hundreds of thousands, contemplating in passing the cost of each individual horse and mule and the immense shipping tonnage which was necessary for the transport from America to the United Kingdom or the Mediterranean of, shall we say, seven or eight hundred thousand animals. An odd hundred thousand or so seems to matter so little! Think also of the tens of thousands sent from Australia and China to India for our doings east of Suez. Remember I am writing in the Autumn of 1918, when the machine of supply is still running so that the gaps created by the dreadful wastage of devastating war shall be filled and new units and new ventures properly equipped with animals.¹

When Britain entered the First World War in the summer of 1914 the British Army immediately set about mobilizing its horse reserves and purchasing additional horses for its Expeditionary Force. Before war was declared the British Army possessed 19,000 horses, but 53,000 were landed in France with the B.E.F. in August 1914.² By August the following the year the British Army’s horse strength had risen to just under 540,000; a figure which does not include horses supplied by remounts to replace those killed, destroyed, or cast from the service in the intervening period, or the many thousands of camels, oxen and donkeys also employed.³ By the end of the War just below 470,000 horses had been purchased within the United Kingdom alone, but this was as nothing when compared to the far greater numbers brought to supply the war effort from overseas.⁴ For example, North America supplied just under 689,000 horses and mules. At the War’s end, and when the authorities involved were allowed time to look back on their achievements, it became clear that this command of the world’s horse supply had been a decisive factor in the conflict’s outcome. Indeed, Sir John

¹ Galtrey Captain S., The Horse and the War, Country Life, London, 1918, p.16.
⁴ ‘...we must bear in mind the many thousands which were brought over by the early Canadian contingents, the thousands that came with the Australians and New Zealanders to Egypt, and the thousands again that accompanied the Indian divisions which landed in France in late 1914 and early in 1915 ... shiploads from the United States and Canada were destined in due course for France ... South Africa sent many thousands of horses, mules, donkeys and oxen to East Africa ... and India, drawing on Australasia, China and the Argentine, has equipped our forces in Mesopotamia.’, Galtrey Captain S., The Horse and the War, Country Life, London, 1918, p.17.

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Moore believed the British Army’s horse supply and management to have been ‘a weapon in the hands of the Allies’:

...the Allies during the late World War had the command of the majority of useful animals of the World... In a war of such long duration and such severity in respect to both human and animal participators, the practical command of the most useful war animals was a weapon in the hands of the Allies that went a long way towards the fall of the enemy.5

This reference to the military horse as a ‘weapon’ is key to understanding its importance during the First World War. Recalling errors made in South Africa during the Boer War, by 1914 mobility in the field was recognised as a key factor in the success of a campaign. Modern warfare demanded that an army’s lines-of-communication worked effectively, and although the British Army was in fact the most modern and mechanised of all the belligerent armies, the horse remained by far the most versatile and reliable means of supplying its forward troops.6 Of course, horses also had their disadvantages. They required constant feeding and considerable effort on the part of their grooms and drivers to keep them in working condition. Horses demanded a lot of hard work at each end of the working ‘day’, and imposed a gruelling regime upon the soldiers who worked with them.7 Moreover, horses could be dangerous. Indeed, horse-related accidents, incidents, injuries and fatalities were far from uncommon.8 The reason the Army prized horses so highly, despite their drawbacks, was because war could not be waged without them.

This chapter examines how the British Army got these ‘odd hundred thousand or so’ horses to where they were needed, and how it maintained them when they got there.9 It explores how the British Expeditionary Force’s insatiable demand for fit, healthy horses, of suitable type, appropriately trained and ready for military action was met. The experience of the horse and the soldier were not so dissimilar. Both were numbered, equipped, drilled for

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6 French D., ‘The Mechanization of the British Cavalry Between the World Wars’, *War in History*, 2003, vol.3, no.10, p.296-320, p.298.; ‘Warfare in the early twentieth century employed horses at least as intensively as did the economy in peacetime. Although the importance of cavalry was declining, the volume of military stores and rations required at the front was much greater than it had been in earlier conflicts. ... As war became more capital-intensive, an increasing burden was placed on the military transport services. Motorized transport was somewhat more reliable than it had been at the start of the century, but there was still an urgent demand for large numbers of draught and pack-animals.’, Singleton J., ‘Britain’s Military Use of Horses 1914-1918’, *Past and Present*, 1993, no. 139, p.202.
8 For example, ‘When returning from a tactical exercise Colonel Mc Neile’s horse fell while cantering on the flat, the Col. fractured the base of his skull, dying soon afterwards. It transpires afterwards that the Colonel’s horse did not fall, but being very fresh gave an unexpected buck when he was turning around in his saddle and shot him off. The Colonel turned a complete somersault in the air and landed on the back of his head.’, Dumbreck Brigadier S.C., C Squadron 1st Royal Dragoons, *Regimental Diary*, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS0476.
purpose and issued to their regiment; where the challenge then became one of ensuring they remained effective for as long as possible. They were both essential, but at the same time but small parts in the workings of a very big machine. The Army’s organisation brought the soldier and horse together solely for the purposes of war. However, its perpetual drive for economy and military efficiency also created an environment where the horse and the soldier were treated far more humanely than they had ever been in the Army’s past. The soldier was expected to always put his horse first, just as the officer was expected to put the needs of his men before his own.\footnote{A man’s first and last care, in camp, at sea, training in Egypt, on the march in desert or mountains, in battle or in bivouac, was his horse. Man and horse became a team, a powerful weapon in the hands of a commander who knew how to husband the energies of the horse, as much as the men, and how to spend them when the time came.’, Hill A.J., \textit{Chauvel of the Lighthorse}, Melbourne, 1978, p.48.} A soldier whose own needs were met in terms of rations, equipment, clothing, shelter and medical attention was far more inclined to take good care of his horse. Similarly, a horse that was well managed remained serviceable for longer. As S.J. Corvi explains it, this ‘economy of horseflesh’ not only represented ‘good logistical planning and tactical implementation’ but also ‘the existence and nurturing of the relationship between soldiers and horses.’\footnote{Corvi S.J., ‘Men of Mercy:The Evolution of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps and the Soldier-Horse Bond During the Great War’, \textit{Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research}, vol. 76, 1998, p.282.} Somewhat turning Corvi’s argument on its head, this chapter argues that the primary reason soldiers were encouraged to take an active interest in the welfare of their horses during the First World War was not because the British Army had some sudden humanitarian motivation, but because the soldier-horse relationship was one way of ensuring an expensive ‘weapon’ was properly maintained.

The previous chapter examined the cumulative effect of ‘innumerable errors’ of horse supply and management on the soldier-horse relationship during the Boer War. It introduced the basic principles of good horse management, and how there was a connection between kind and considerate treatment and the formation of a bond between horse and human. This information was then applied to the soldier-horse relationship during the Boer War. This chapter now takes this discussion forward by examining how horses were supplied and managed during the Great War. It discusses how the British Army’s horses were issued in peace time, and how this methodology was stepped up during active service. It then considers the mobilization of horses in 1914. This part of the chapter includes discussion of the various categories of horses required by the Army, which horses were considered suitable, and how the Remount Service then prepared horses for active service. It is at this point that the chapter shifts its focus to the role of the Army Veterinary Corps and to the minimisation of unnecessary horse wastage. It considers, for example, how its personnel supervised the care of horses aboard ship, and how regular inspections identified horses believed to be carrying contagious disease. It concludes with discussion of how the British Army’s management of its horses developed as the War progressed.

The financial investment each horse represented, like the work that went into preparing each and every one for active service, was considerable. Statistics compiled after the War...
suggest the Remount Department to have spent a total ‘£67.5 million on the purchase, training and delivery to the front of horses and mules’.

An article from The Times in 1916 suggests there were some cases where sums between £110 and £200 were paid per horse. Although this amount was considered extravagant, it was nevertheless still within the guidelines of what Remount Purchasers were permitted to offer. However, an article published in The Review of Reviews suggests that, by 1916, the Government ‘was giving from £38 to £51 for saddle horses, £40 for artillery horses ... and £54 to £71 for officers’ chargers.’

Although the War Office’s horse expenditure was repeatedly discussed in Parliament throughout the War, what is interesting is that a straight answer to the question of what was being paid per horse was not always forthcoming. Indeed, that the matter was so often and so deftly deflected suggests it was something of a political ‘hot potato’. For example, in 1912, Major-General John Seely had announced that ‘a fair price’ for remounts was then £40 for a cavalry horse, £42 for a light draught and £55 for a heavy draught horse.

However, during the War, an answer to this same question was either avoided, by claiming it was not ‘desirable in the public interest’, or simply sidestepped. For example, in a House of Commons Debate held on 29th April 1915, Mr. Baker (Labour) somewhat abruptly, but very effectively, put an end to Mr. T.M. Healey of the Irish Parliamentary Party’s enquiry:

Mr. T.M. Healey: Has the hon. Member any objection to telling us what prices they are paying for horses?
Mr. Baker: I must have notice of that question.

Indeed, the enormous financial investment each horse represented is brought into sharp focus once we realise that a £38 horse represented almost half a coal miner’s average yearly wage. Certainly, the War Office’s expenditure should be viewed as a direct reflection of the horse’s military importance. Efficient horse supply and management was central to the running of the military machine. As the previous chapter discovered, without an efficient horse supply chains of communication quickly broke down, and in battle precious opportunities to take the initiative were lost. The Army’s reliance upon the horse as a means


18 ‘The House will be surprised to find that the average annual wage of men engaged in the mining industry in 1913 was £82. Those are figures given in this House less than a fortnight ago by the Secretary for Mines.’, Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act (1912) Amendment Bill, House of Commons Debate, March 1933, vol. 275, p. 758-778, p. 762, Hansard.millbanksystems.com, accessed 6.12.2014.
of transport and of traction was summed up by Captain Sidney Galtrey in *The Horse and the War* when he described the many units which combined to ‘make an Army in being’:

> Each must have its own team of conditioned horses, and so when you count up the guns in a battery, the batteries in a brigade, the brigades in a division, the divisions in a Corps, and the Corps in our Armies on all the Fronts you arrive at the first calculation of the vital necessity of horse and mule in many tens of thousands. ... Then with the Artillery of every Division there must be a Divisional Ammunition Column, which means several hundred more animals, and again there is the Divisional Train Transport ... every battalion of infantry has its own transport of at least half a hundred animals. Think also of the tremendous variety of other Units (especially those connected with Machine Guns and the Royal Engineers) which go to make an Army in being... One has in mind Labour and Road Construction Companies, Railway Companies, Forestry Companies, units on Lines of Communication and the Medical Service.19

These ‘many thousands of horses’, acquired in the United Kingdom and from overseas, were crucial in ensuring the British Army achieved the ‘easy mobility’ and ‘flexibility in rapid movement’ upon which success in modern warfare relied.20 There was no sentimental, or anachronistic attachment to the horse at play here, only an entirely practical and pragmatic relationship born of sheer necessity.

How were these thousands of horses purchased and supplied? *Remount Regulations* stipulated that all horses in any unit, other than those young, or untrained, must be fit for at least one month’s service ‘in the field under continental conditions, with their own branch of the service.’21 Other than this stipulation, there was no upper age limit. Older horses, while still having to fulfil this condition, were otherwise useful for depot work and, because of their experience and steadier outlook, preferred for training brigades.22 In peacetime new horses were issued only in October each year, but in wartime this was a constant task. The process by which horses were bought, prepared for service, issued to their regiments and finally cast differed little in war. Indeed, the only major difference was the sheer scale of the operation.

When war was declared in 1914, horses on the reserve list were called up and those ‘boarded-out’ immediately recalled.23 Horses were also ‘impressed’, or compulsorily

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23 Horse Registration: Civilian owners are paid £1 per horse per year on the understanding that registered horses will be available to the Army on mobilization. ‘...if you gave a fee for registering these horses, I feel quite certain the owners would be quite ready to accept £3 for the actual training. That would only mean you would be spending £4 altogether, and the remainder of your grant of £5 per horse would pay for your remount officers and the necessary clerks to do the office work.’, Burn Colonel, ‘Army Estimates 1912-1913’, House of Commons Debate, 5th March 1912, vol.35, cc205-276, 244. Boarding-out was a system where horses owned by
purchased. Captain Sidney Galtrey suggested, for example, that 165,000 horses were obtained in the United Kingdom in the first two weeks of the War by compulsory purchase alone.\(^{24}\) This achievement is made all the more impressive because, and as we discovered in the previous chapter, a horse was not just a horse, and neither would any horse do for any task. For example, whereas an officer’s charger had its own classification (“X”) the Cavalry required a riding horse (“A”) with both ‘activity and stamina’\(^{25}\). Horse Artillery, however, preferred a light draught type (“Z” and “D”) that was strong, but also still capable of speed.\(^{26}\) Indeed, this type of horse was by far the most versatile and, thus, most widely used by the British Army during the First World War.\(^{27}\) It could be ridden, but when broken to harness, was also suitable for transport and artillery work.\(^{28}\) However, demand very quickly exceeded supply in the United Kingdom, where mechanisation of the public transport sector had prompted a decline in the breeding of this type of horse.\(^{29}\) Demand was met, therefore, by purchase from North America. These horses were widely admired for their particular combination of ‘hardiness’, ‘activity’ and ‘placidity of temper’. For example:

Let it be understood that in discussing the war-horse of to-day the individual in question is the animal officially classed as the “Light Draught.” He is the outstanding success of the war. The other conspicuous success is the mule, but he is not a horse.

... The point to bear in mind is that, though America has sent us chargers, troop horses and cobs, that country must always be gratefully remembered for the light the Army were stabled by local people under a similar arrangement. It was, however, flawed. ‘Of horses obtained by recalling those boarded-out only 50% are assumed to be fit for service, 25% for first reinforcement and other 25% surplus’, Remount Regulations 1913, HMSO, London, p.9.

\(^{24}\) ‘I am permitted to say that actually 165,000 horses were impressed in the United Kingdom in the first twelve days of the War. That was a great achievement for which the Remount Department of the War Office must be given ample credit. Its organization proved effective when thus highly tried...’ Galtrey Captain S., The Horse and the War, Country Life, London, 1918, p.16.

\(^{25}\) Jemel Lieut-Colonel H.M., Commanding the Remount Depot Romsey, Extracts from Depot Orders, Standing Orders of the Romsey Remount Depot, Southampton, 1915, p.60.

\(^{26}\) See Appendix, Figure 2. ‘60 Pounder Moving up in Support’, War Bond Campaign Post Card, From Material supplied by the Ministry of Information, A.M. Davis & Co., London, undated, Private Collection.

\(^{27}\) 158,144 Light Draught Horses and 85,038 mules were sent from the United Kingdom to France as replacements and to meet wastage and increases of establishment etc., from 1914 to the signing of the Armistice, November 11\(^{th}\) 1918. ‘In comparison, 69,323 Cavalry Horses, 46,997 Heavy Draught Horses, just under 15,500 Chargers and Officers’ Cobs and 2,422 Pack Animals were also supplied. Birkbeck Major-General Sir W.H., Director of Remounts, Interesting Facts and Figures Showing the Growth, Expansion and, and Magnitude of the Remount Service during the War, in Jessel H.M., The Story of Romsey Remount Depot, The Abbey Press, London, 1920, p.114.

\(^{28}\) ‘“Z” R.1. Artillery. Horses 15.1 hands and over, of a heavier class than “A”, and these should be chosen from the class of riding horse, which is not active enough for Cavalry and which, though riding horses, can usefully be put in draft if required.’, Jemel Lieut-Colonel H.M., Commanding the Remount Depot Romsey, Extracts from Depot Orders, Standing Orders of the Romsey Remount Depot, Southampton, 1915, p.60.

\(^{29}\) The 1912 horse census ‘disclosed the fact that the number of “light-vanners” in the country was only 28,000, while the requirements of the artillery on mobilization were 18,000. This was the class that the artillery wanted, for they would only be doing their everyday work when put into a gun team. Not only was the margin far too small, but these were just the horses that were being displaced by the movement towards motors, so that their numbers might be expected to decrease. The situation was serious...’, Headlam Major-General Sir J., The History of the Royal Artillery, From the Indian Mutiny to The Great War, Volume II (1894-1914), The Royal Artillery Institution, Woolwich, 1931, p.371.
draught. He is the horse most typical of the millions of imports. Hardiness, placidity of temper, virility of constitution, with what is called “good heart,” versatility and extraordinary activity for his size and weight – these are characteristics that have impressed themselves for all time on all who have had to do with him.\(^{30}\)

Heavy draughts (“F”) were not, however, as plentiful in the United States. The Field Artillery demanded big, powerful horses to move their guns over difficult terrain. These were the Shire, Clydesdale and other heavy breeds used in farming and by the breweries as dray horses. Such horses were relatively plentiful within the United Kingdom. However, because they were also necessary for farming and food production, there was a limit to how many could be sacrificed to the war effort. In this matter the Remount Department’s purchasers were expected to exercise a degree of discretion. \textit{Remount Regulations} suggested, for example, that ‘single horses kept for trade and agricultural purposes should be spared as far as possible’.\(^{31}\) Regulations clearly stipulated that horse purchases be conducted fairly. However, there was a degree of flexibility in its wording. As ‘equally as possible’ and unless ‘unable to find otherwise’ left much to the purchaser’s assessment of the situation:

> The classification should aim at being a complete census of horses fit for military purposes, but not more than fifty per cent of the horses in any stable are to be \textit{allotted} for impressments, unless the command is unable to find otherwise the horses required, and allotment must be distributed equally as possible among the owners of fit horses in the area.\(^{32}\)

\textit{Remount Regulations} anticipated the potential difficulties a purchaser might encounter when classifying privately owned horses prior to impressment. It warned that ‘Tact and diplomacy must be displayed towards owners’ and instructed purchasers not to ‘enter the stable without the owner’s permission.’\(^{33}\) However, and as one might anticipate, compulsory purchase created ample opportunity for error, for grievance, and for dishonesty.\(^{34}\) There were instances where the horses’ owners felt they had been treated unfairly by the purchasers.\(^{35}\) On other occasions the roles were entirely reversed, and it was the purchase officers who fell victim to wily sellers, who employed numerous techniques to make lame horses appear sound, older horses appear younger, and sick horses appear

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\textsuperscript{30} Galtrey Capt.S., \textit{The Horse and the War}, Country Life, London, 1918, p.22. \\
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Remount Regulations 1913}, HMSO, London, p.5-6. \\
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Remount Regulations 1913}, HMSO, London, p.8-9. \\
\textsuperscript{33} ‘Dissatisfied owners may appeal to the County or Sheriff’s Court for arbitration as to the price to be paid, but cannot hinder the impressment of the horse.’, \textit{Remount Regulations 1913}, HMSO, London, p.8-9. \\
\textsuperscript{34} ‘John Sewell Rigg was committed for trial to the January Sessions at Kendal. It was alleged that he had obtained two horses by false pretences, pretending that he was buying remounts on behalf of the Government, when, in fact, he was buying on his own account’, ‘Magistrate Charged with Fraud’, \textit{The Times}, issue 40756, 20\textsuperscript{th} January 1915. \\
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well. In other cases, purchasers were duped into buying the same horse multiple times. For example:

The horse was led or ridden in and if passed sound the man (its owner) was given a chit and told to go on to the Remount Board. All particulars were taken and a receipt given to the man, who was instructed where to leave the horse. The unscrupulous went off, put the receipt in his pocket, and led the horse out of the exit gate, probably saying the animal had not been passed. Next day the ‘owner’ was changed, also the horse’s appearance, and again led in and passed. It took two or three days before this was realized...

However, measures were swiftly put into place to prevent such deception. For example, once a horse had been purchased, it was immediately branded with a ‘broad arrow’ high on the near hind quarter. This identified the horse as Army property, and was thus applied even before the horse had left the place of purchase. The horse was then delivered to the nearest Collecting Centre by its old owner, or ‘fetched by collecting parties to these centres.’ From there, horses were ‘despatched to the stations at which they were required.’ The Remount Depot to which they had been sent would then arrange for their collection from the station. On arrival, they immediately underwent a veterinary inspection and mallein test for Glanders. Squadron Commanders meanwhile had their Squadron’s letter stencilled onto the off (right) rump, then after the veterinary inspection, the classification letter onto the near (left) rump. In wartime, horses were not given Army numbers, but once issued ‘the usual serial regimental number and letterings’ were branded into the forefeet for identification.

Inevitably, errors were made. For example, F.C. O’Rourke, an Executive Veterinary Officer, noted in his military service diary on the 7th August 1914 how some horses he had inspected at the Central Remount Depot had been ‘very bad’. Both of the ponies O’Rourke describes were problematic. The first, having mange, was already carrying a highly infectious and debilitating skin condition the Army was at great pains to eradicate. Indeed, mange was a

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36 ‘Sponges for instance are placed up the nostrils to hide unsoundness of wind; animals are “set” in various ways for the purpose of cloaking broken wind; teeth are scientifically “bishoped”; ice is placed in the rectum to hide high temperature; and various dopes are given to stimulate sick animals to temporary activity.’, Blenkinsop Maj.-Gen Sir L.J. & Rainey Lieut.-Col. J.W., History of the Great War Based on Official Documents: Veterinary Services, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1925, p.461.


40 ‘Mallein is a diagnostic agent which, when injected under the skin of the horse or mule affected with glanders, causes a reaction resulting in a rise in temperature and swelling at the seat of injection. ... By using mallein for periodic testing of army horses it is possible to detect the disease in the early stages before symptoms of the disease are shown.’, Animal Management 1933, HMSO, London, p.326.


very serious problem, and as such will be discussed later in the chapter. The second had a splay foot, meaning it would be unlikely to stay sound once submitted to the rigours of life on campaign. In short, both had already failed Remount Regulations’ first stipulation. Again, a horse was not just a horse, and not every horse was suitable for Army work. Like human recruits, some were turned away because they were unsuitable for active service.

Some very bad horses were sent in … especially from the Pyle district – 2 little pit ponies and one with mange and sores on shoulder and a dun with a splay foot. Am not certain of the date of purchase. Chutes purchases were very bad with few exceptions.

Ultimately, Remounts’ job was made easier if purchasers bought suitable horses. If a horse was to all intents and purposes a good one to start with, was sound, free from disease and of the type required, then all the better. However, what was purchased often bore little, or no resemblance to what was eventually issued to its regiment. Galtrey described the transformation that American horses and mules underwent on their arrival in the United Kingdom. It was the Remount Department’s task to turn these horses into Army materiel.

He would not have impressed you then as he moved softly and quietly off the “brow”. You would perhaps have laughed at anything less beautiful and inspiring, and you might have wondered at the boldness and seeming incompetence of our buyers on the other side. He was shoeless, long-haired, tousele-maned, ragged-hipped, and he almost dragged his tail on the ground, so long and full and caked with dirt was it. His neck had gone light and mean, his backbone stuck up like a knifeboard, and his ribs were pushing through his neglected hide. Such was our war-horse in the rough, a true and faithful representation of the raw material rendered thus unpresentable by the flesh-weariness of his irksome and exacting existence aboard ship.

Although we could be misled into believing that this was a matter merely of improving their appearance, there was in fact a great deal more at stake. As we discovered in the previous chapter, horses needed time and good management following their voyage in which to acclimatise to their new environment, and to recover from the physical deterioration caused by several weeks aboard ship. Without this, horses did not last long once exposed to the hardships of life on active service. Given the enormous financial investment each horse represented, it made sound economic sense to protect them from unnecessary harm. Put

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43 ‘Conformation is the manner in which the horse is formed or put together. Bad conformation may not be unsoundness in itself, but it may often lead to unsoundness.’, Horace Hayes Capt. M., Rossdale P.D. ed., Veterinary Notes for Horse Owners, Ebury, London, first ed. 1877, 2000, p.602.
44 O’Rorke Lieut.-Col. F.C., Executive Veterinary Officer Army Veterinary Corps, MS Diary, IWM 11985.
45 See Appendix, Figure 3. Edwards L., Illustration in Galtrey Capt.S., The Horse and the War, Country Life, London, 1918, p.25.
quite simply, the War Office wanted their money’s worth, and one way of achieving this was to ensure every horse issued survived for as long as was practically possible.

An important feature of their preparation for war was a physical ‘fittening’ and ‘hardening’. Getting a horse fit enough to withstand the work required of it was essential. Animal Management 1908 (reprinted in 1914) likened the type of fitness required of the war horse to that of a ‘well-regulated’ hunter during the ‘first part of the season’. This was not the taut, defined, ‘strung up’ fitness of the racehorse, but a level of fitness which, once achieved, allowed ‘some reserve of flesh and animal spirits’ to draw upon even when the ‘pinch of hardship’ came. Not only was this level of fitness desirable in that it extended the horse’s working life on campaign, it also meant the horse was a far safer one for the soldier to ride and handle. For example:

Such a high strung, nervous state is not required in workaday horses, such as the soldier’s, and although fitness is absolutely essential, the standard to be aimed at is not that of the five-furlong sprinter. ...blood, power and good looks are of little value without it; its value in war is not to be estimated in money and cannot be purchased for it, whilst unless the animals of an army possess it they are valueless as weapons, and may even be a danger to their owners.48

In addition to fittening, horses also underwent a ‘hardening’ of constitution in preparation for life in ‘the lines’ on active service; when horses would be exposed to harsh weather, and to periods of very hard work, in circumstances where feed was also not always plentiful.49 Much of this hardening occurred under active service conditions. However, some horses took longer to acclimatise than others and quickly lost condition as a result. Hardening prior to issue helped to minimise such problems and, thus, extended the horse’s useful working life.50 Recalling discussion in the previous chapter, we must remember too that the horse’s ability to “keep a-going” was essential when lives might depend upon its ability to do so:

...the Remount rapidly becomes hard and fit, and when his time comes he is far better able to “keep a-going” under active service conditions than when he was apparently fit before the hardening process had been entered upon.51

The Remount Depot at Romsey in Hampshire was just one of several depots located within the United Kingdom tasked with the training of horses in preparation for active service. Throughout the War, Romsey never had less than 3,831 horses in its charge at any one time. Between 1915 and October 1918 it received and issued 114,636 horses. H.M. Jessel, writing in The Story of Romsey Remount Depot in 1920, attributed the depot’s ‘great strength’ and efficiency to its personnel and to ‘the cooperation of officers and men in working together

49 Davis W., ‘Remounts at Russley Park, The Army Remounts Depot at Lady Birkbeck’s Stud Farm’, August 1918, Ministry of Information, Film, IWM305.
for a common end. Certainly, the Earl of Derby was delighted with what he saw during his visit to the depot in August 1917:

I want to write you a line ... to congratulate, as I do with all sincerity, you and all ranks connected with that Camp. I never saw anything better organised and more thoroughly efficient, and what struck me more than anything else was the pride that everybody took in the horses under their charge. This is all the more remarkable, because the short time they stay at your camp must make it rather heart-breaking both to officers and men to be continually having to start training and conditioning new lots of horses. ... I thank you all for the way in which you have tackled a difficult job and made a complete success of it...

The horse’s effectiveness in war relied upon the Remount Service as the providers and finishers of the Army’s horse-supply and upon the Veterinary Corps as its menders and disposers. Both services, although subtly different in their aims, were united in a belief that ‘prevention was better than cure’. Indeed, recalling Sir Frederick Fitzwygram’s chain of horse management, by the First World War ‘humanity, efficiency and economy’ permeated every level of the British Army’s organisation. However, as John Singleton tells us, military horses were treated humanely on active service largely because it made sound economic sense to do so. Indeed, Singleton takes this further by arguing that had ‘the imperatives of accountancy and compassion’ not been in harmony during the First World War then ‘the army would have given accountancy the higher priority’. Certainly, although the welfare of the Army’s horses did have an impact upon the morale and well-being of its men, the War Office’s priority was to extract as much work as possible from each horse before it became ‘worn out’. Timely attention to small matters kept horses in the front line for longer, while veterinary treatment meant the injured could be ‘mended’ and returned to the front to ‘do their bit’ for a little while more. While this degree of pragmatism may seem to border on the utterly callous, we must remember too that the horse, like the soldier, was a living weapon that remained serviceable only when it was well-maintained. This was an ethos expressed in Romsey Remount Depot’s motto:

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52 It is certainly worth noting that, although 1,476 men were transferred to the depot in September 1917, within three months 440 had been ‘found to be unsuitable for remount work and were, in consequence, reposted to their units.’ Remount work was skilled and required an eye for detail. Neither was it a soft option. After all, an uninterrupted supply of horses, suitably trained, fit, sound and free from disease had the potential to tip the War in the Allies’ favour., Jessel H.M., The Story of Romsey Remount Depot, The Abbey Press, London, 1920, foreword.
57 Hart F., The Animals Do Their Bit In The Great War, 1918, Blackie & Son, London.
“For want of a nail, the shoe was lost;  
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost;  
For want of a horse; the rider was lost;  
And for want of a rider, the battle was lost.”
“A stitch in time saves nine.”

Buck up! 58

Achieving military efficiency as economically and humanely as was possible amidst the hardships of war was a considerable challenge. Like the Remount Department, on mobilisation the Army Veterinary Corps quickly grew into a very large organisation with a huge influx of new personnel. Unlike the Remount Department, however, the Army Veterinary Corps had the added challenge of being ‘practically untried’ in 1914. 59 Having only come into being in 1903, it had as yet to deliver veterinary treatment on active service. 60 How rapidly the Army Veterinary Corps’ organisation grew was in direct proportion to the increasing number of animals on the British Army’s strength. For example, when the British Expeditionary Force landed in France in August 1914 with 53,000 horses the Army Veterinary Corps comprised: 6 Veterinary Hospitals (each for 250 patients), 11 Mobile Veterinary Sections and 2 Base Depots of Veterinary Stores. Its personnel numbered 122 officers and 797 other ranks. However, as the Army grew so too did the Army Veterinary Corps, and in a little over three years it had increased to such an extent as to employ 765 officers and 16,446 other ranks. Its organisation then stood as follows:

18 Veterinary Hospitals and 4 Convalescent Horse Depots – with accommodation for 39800 sick animals.
17 Veterinary Evacuating Stations.
66 Mobile Veterinary Sections.
5 Depots of Veterinary Stores.
1 Bacteriological Laboratory.
7 Horse Carcase Economisers (for by-products).

In addition, Overseas and Dominion Governments supplied:

2 Veterinary Hospitals (each for 1250 patients).
2 Veterinary Evacuating Stations.
11 Mobile Veterinary Sections. 61

60 Although the AVC was formed in 1903 its structure did not come to resemble that used during the War until 1913. ‘In 1913 sanction was given for the creation of Mobile Veterinary Sections, one to each cavalry brigade and infantry division, to serve as connecting links for sick and lame animals evacuated from field units to veterinary hospitals on their lines of communication. … About the same time the Veterinary Directorate was freed from the Remount Directorate and made an independent department responsible only to the Quartermaster General.’, Clabby Brigadier J., The History of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps 1919-1961, J.A. Allen & Co., London, 1963, p.15-16.
The Army Veterinary Corps had a threefold purpose: to prevent the introduction and spread of contagious disease, to reduce wastage amongst animals by prompt application of first aid, and to relieve the field army of the care of sick and inefficient animals. So that veterinary officers could carry out these duties, many were detailed to ‘the various portions of the field army’. Here their responsibility was to ‘bring to the notice of commanders of units any points which might bear upon the health and condition of the animals under their professional care.’ An emphasis on the prevention of wastage meant that the Veterinary Corps’ role thus extended beyond medicine and surgery. When attached to a unit, the Corps’ personnel were expected to ensure unnecessary wastage was avoided by providing valuable veterinary assistance and advice to its men. Serjeants A.V.C. were reminded that ‘The motto “Prevention is better than cure” should always be in his mind and always in his actions.’ For example, a technical pamphlet issued during the war described his role as follows:

Serjeants A.V.C. … will bear in mind at all times that the keeping of animals of a field unit efficient and in good hard-working condition is of greater value than waiting until they become sick or injured and then treating them. Their aim must be to assist in every way in their power and with the greatest tact in eliminating stable management errors, in preventing the introduction and spread of contagious disease and in promptly relieving fighting troops of the hindrance of sick and lame (ineffective) animals. This aim can only be achieved by constant watchfulness. … The serjeant, A.V.C., can render great assistance … in advising as regards watering, feeding etc., matters of more importance than veterinary duties of a medical or surgical nature.

When thus attached to a unit, the Veterinary Corps’ personnel became responsible for its sick and injured animals, and for deciding which animals should be transferred to a mobile section for conveyance to veterinary hospital. As Sir John Moore explained, the ability to evacuate sick and injured horses significantly reduced unnecessary horse wastage:

Only minor cases – say those that would be fit again within seven days, should remain on the fighting strength of units, others should be evacuated to Veterinary Hospitals on Lines of Communication where conditions are more favourable for treatment and rest. The adoption of this policy has resulted in unparalleled

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reduction of wastage over that of previous wars, and the hard lot of animals under war conditions has been greatly mitigated by the measure.\textsuperscript{66}

Thus humanity, when viewed as part of the workings of the military machine, was both economical and efficient. Disease was quickly identified by veterinarians attached to units, and thus its spread was controlled. This kept animals healthy and in the field where they were most needed. Prompt attention to small injuries and problems, and the swift identification of those that may be more serious, meant that horses evacuated were more likely to recover and be returned to their original unit. This prolonged the working life of an expensive military asset, and eased pressure on the Remount Department.

The Army Veterinary Corps’ role was to alleviate and prevent animal suffering wherever and whenever it was practically possible in the theatre of war. However, this aim was also allied with the greater demands of the battlefield. Wounded horses, like wounded men, hampered the progress of an Army. Thus, while ‘humanity’ may have been the Army Veterinary Corps’ first priority, ‘efficiency’ and ‘economy’ followed closely behind. For example:

The reasons for the evacuation of sick and wounded animals are the same as those for the evacuation of sick and wounded men; briefly they are: 1. Humanity. 2. Efficiency. 3. Economy. It is essential that fighting formations should not be hindered and impeded by retaining accumulations of sick animals and it is equally essential that sick animals should receive modern scientific attention so as to ensure as few as possible are lost.\textsuperscript{67}

Military service placed great demands upon the veterinarian. Not only was he challenged in terms of his veterinary training, his skills and his initiative, but also upon how he applied these in terms of ‘humanity, efficiency and economy’.\textsuperscript{68} It was, for example, essential that an Army Veterinary Officer be able to make swift diagnoses in an emergency, and quickly ascertain which animals were beyond help. On the battlefield, the exigencies of warfare notwithstanding, this matter was clear cut. Leaving an animal to suffer unnecessarily was simply inhumane.\textsuperscript{69} However, once horses were evacuated from the battlefield, the veterinarian’s role became one of deciding which animals were most likely to return to

\textsuperscript{67} Blenkinsop L.J. and Rainey J.W., History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, Veterinary Services, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1925, p.87.
\textsuperscript{69} ‘Their actual disposal was a thing of itself, very carefully considered – and quite rightly so, and I am in a position to affirm that humane thought and fellow-feeling reigned supreme in their disposal, even though the best economic considerations were necessary.’, Moore Major General Sir J., Army Veterinary Service in War, H&W Brown, London, 1921, p.162.
active service, and how long their recovery was likely to take.\textsuperscript{70} Again, this was a matter of ‘humanity, efficiency and economy’. For example:

> Before any major surgical treatment was undertaken every individual case had to be considered on its own merits; firstly on grounds of humanity, and secondly with regard to the present and future economic value of the animal and its future military usefulness, the probable length of time before convalescence would be complete being taken specially into account.\textsuperscript{71}

When horses were to be ‘cast’ from the service as unfit, they were categorised as either: a. Veterinary Cases, b. Remount Cases, or c. ‘Worn Out’. Veterinary Cases were horses deemed to have a ‘chronic disability’ from which they would never recover. This may not have been life threatening, but if it ensured the horse did not meet Remount Regulations’ stipulation that it be fit for at least one month’s active service, then it was cast either from that branch of the service, or from the Army entirely.\textsuperscript{72} Remount Cases were deemed unfit for military service ‘by reason of being prematurely worn out’, or because they possessed undesirable habits (known as vices) such as wind-sucking and crib-biting.\textsuperscript{73} A horse would also be cast if it had physical shortcomings (confirmation faults) that made it unsuitable for active service. For example, speed-cutting, brushing, or stumbling.\textsuperscript{74} Added to this list of misfits were those too ‘dangerous or unsafe to ride’ and those that failed ‘to develop suitably’.\textsuperscript{75} In the latter instance, these were horses not suited to military service. Worn Out horses were those over 15 years of age that no longer met the standard required. Once the decision to cast a horse had been made, it was not ‘kept a day longer than avoidable.’

> Cast horses will be immediately disposed of under the orders of the command headquarters, and should not be kept a day longer than avoidable. “Remount” cases

\textsuperscript{70} ‘Very few animals were permitted to reside in hospital beyond three months. ... In addition to those palpably worthless, which were speedily disposed of, and animals resident six weeks and over were shown to the D.D.V.S., L. of C., for consideration of further retention or for casting.’, Moore Major General Sir J., Army Veterinary Service in War, H&W Brown, London, 1921, p.29.


\textsuperscript{72} Remount Regulations 1913, HMSO, London, p.5-6.

\textsuperscript{73} Both ‘vices’ involve the horse gulping in air, either by arching its neck, or by biting on to a surface such as a stable door. It was then thought that these were habits caused solely by boredom, or learned from other horses. While this is to some extent the case, there may also be a connection with the relief of stress and poor digestion. For example, Houpt K.A., ‘Equine Behaviour Problems in Relation to Humane Management’, The Institute for the Study of Animal Problems, Washington, 2(6), 1981, p.331, ‘These are incurable vices which usually increase with age. Causes unknown.’ Manual for Stable Sergeants 1917, Document No. 611, War Department, Washington Government Printing Office, p.71.

\textsuperscript{74} All are injuries caused by conformation faults that prevent the horse’s action from being straight, thereby making it susceptible to lameness and injury. ‘Horses who stand with either front or hind feet pointing outwards usually brush their legs, knocking the inside of their fetlock joint with the opposite foot. Evidence of this is an enlarged joint from constant bruising and/or rubbing off of the hair above the joint. It is a serious fault.’, Auty I. ed., The British Horse Society Complete Manual of Horse and Stable Management, Kenilworth Press, Shrewsbury, p.23-24.

\textsuperscript{75} Remount Regulations, HMSO, London, 1913, p. 2 -4.
will be disposed of directly instructions are received from the War Office regarding them. In all cases Army Form B164 will be sent to the War Office for records after casting.\textsuperscript{76}

Casting in peacetime was a matter of transferring the horse to another branch of the service, or of selling it at public auction. At each stage in its military career each horse was accompanied by a paper-trail that only ended once it had been branded with the “C” to indicate it had been cast and had, therefore, left the service. Authorisation always had to be sought and approved for everything pertaining to each and every horse, and every eventuality was accompanied by a form, or receipt, completed in triplicate, or quadruplicate.\textsuperscript{77} For example, when it was decided that a cast horse was to be sold at public auction it was the War Office that decided what reserve price would be put on it, and it was Command who arranged for its destruction if the reserve was not met. While this may seem somewhat hard, it did at least ensure the horse would not be sold to any purchaser for any price, and that its future was thus assured.

A reserve price which is fixed by the War Office will be placed on all animals put up for sale at public auction. If an animal fails to reach the reserve price it will be withdrawn from sale and destroyed under Command arrangements.\textsuperscript{78}

During the First World War, casting for sale, or destruction was a task which primarily fell to the Army Veterinary Corps. On arrival at the Reception Hospital, all horses were inspected, malleined and immediately despatched to adjacent hospitals. Medical cases and animals requiring surgery were treated at the Reception Hospital. Those with Mange were transferred to a Mange Hospital, where specialist treatment could be applied.\textsuperscript{79} Cases of debility, who required only rest and feeding up, were despatched direct to Convalescent Horse Depots.\textsuperscript{80} However, horses it was felt would require too lengthy a stay in hospital, those considered too badly injured, sick, or lame, and those ‘worn out’ beyond the likelihood of a satisfactory recovery were cast for destruction.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{76} Remount Regulations, HMSO, London, 1913, p. 2 -4.
\textsuperscript{77} Circular Letter No.56, Issued on 24.8.1918, Addressed to Military Governors at Jerusalem, Jaffa, Gaza, Beersheba and Hebron, ‘When an animal which has been purchased by O.E.T.A. from the Army is evacuated to a Veterinary Hospital, A.F.O.1680 in quadruplicate will be prepared by the Military Governor concerned, and forwarded together with the receipt of the O.C. the Veterinary Hospital to the R & A.G. who will forward them to the Command Paymaster. If the claim is in order, credit will be allowed for at the rate prevailing. Which is at present 80%.’, Miller G.M., Director of Remounts, Ludd, “Miller Papers”, EP049, Liddle Collection, Leeds.
\textsuperscript{78} Remount Regulations, HMSO, London, 1924, p.10.
\textsuperscript{79} ‘Mange is produced by small insects which live in or on the skin; it is found in all animals; and each class of animal has its own particular variety of itch insects. On service this disease is a constant source of trouble and loss, and deserves particular attention, as it is very easily spread and often cured with difficulty.’, Animal Management 1908, reprinted 1914, HMSO, London, p.316-317.
\textsuperscript{80} Moore Major General Sir J., Army Veterinary Service in War, H&W Brown, London, 1921, p.28.
\textsuperscript{81} See Appendix, Figure 4. Loudon Lieutenant Colonel A.W.B., ‘Worn Out French Horses Going for Slaughter’, Fismes, September 1914, photograph, IWMQS0286.
If any cases were considered hopeless or economically not worth treatment, they were put aside for inspection of the Deputy Director of Veterinary Services, L. of C., and his orders taken as to their disposal for purposes of food or otherwise.  

In most cases it was not a particular illness, or injury which lead to the decision to destroy a horse, but the cumulative effect of several problems. A horse that was exhausted, but otherwise sound was treated. Similarly, a lameness, or injury was treated if it was thought the horse would recover active fitness in the given time. However, a horse that was exhausted and severely injured was immediately cast. J.G. Wright, who at time of writing was Emeritus Professor of Veterinary Surgery at the University of Liverpool, recalled this accumulation of problems and how such horses thus became ‘useless’ for the Army’s purposes.

My memory is that the greatest wastage among horses was due to debility and exhaustion, the outcome of exposure, and inadequate and imbalanced diet and overwork. Once an animal commenced to go back in condition it rapidly became cumulative and what with sore withers and sore backs they soon became useless for our purpose.

As the First World War progressed existing systems for the disposal of military animals were found to be insufficient. Horses continued to be cast through the usual channels: by transfer to another branch of the Army’s service, through disposal sales, and by sale for human consumption to local butchers and abattoirs. However, realising that there was money to be made if carcasses were more efficiently processed, in December 1916 the Army Council appointed Mr H.A. Crowe, Secretary of the London horse slaughtering company Messrs. Harrison, Barber & Co., to advise on the development of an improved system of disposal. His advice was to prove particularly valuable in France, where there had not previously been a method by which to process the carcasses of horses unfit for human consumption. While hides had been removed and salted ready for tanning, it was possible to realise a far greater return from each carcass with the correct equipment and facilities. Thus, the Disposal of Animals Branch was set up in 1917 to manage the economic and efficient disposal of Army animals wasted by war. The branch, which was under the Director of Veterinary Services, consisted of eight Horse Carcass Economiser Detachments, two butchery detachments, and

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83 ‘Very few animals were permitted to reside in hospital beyond three months.’, Moore Major General Sir J., *Army Veterinary Service in War*, H&W Brown, London, 1921, p.29.
a Paris sales detachment. Between its formation and the Armistice in November 2018 it destroyed, butchered and processed just under 65,000 horses and mules.

However, a great proportion of this disposal was also still dealt with by the Army Veterinary Corps directly. For example, documents for the week ended 28\textsuperscript{th} February 1918, provide us with a valuable insight into the workings of a Veterinary Hospital in the latter months of the War. No.7 Veterinary Hospital was located at Forges-les-Eaux, on the British Army’s Lines-of-Communication between the docks at Le Havre and Dieppe and the front line to the North East. We must assume that the intake of animals and the number cast for destruction was usual procedure by 1918. However, and given the wider picture of what was happening at the time, we might assume there may also have been a degree of preparation in anticipation of the spring offensive. Certainly, and although commentators appear not to have been entirely sure where ‘the last blow’ would fall, there was no doubt that the British Army needed to be ready.

Of course, coming out of the winter, this was also a period of the year when we might anticipate more horses to be cast through debility. Certainly, units would not wish to keep animals on their strength that would not stand up to work when fighting began in earnest, and wanted time to ensure Remounts had brought them up to strength before the time came. For example, by the week’s end, No.7 Veterinary Hospital had on its strength: 1,118 sick animals, 61 horses and mules of its own section transport, and 5 Remount Casters awaiting disposal. Horses remaining under treatment included cases of Debility and Exhaustion, Mange and Lice, Quittor and Picked-up-Nail, Wounds, Eye Injuries and Blindness, Lameness, Galls, and Sores. The injuries and diseases of those cast for disposal were meticulously recorded, with a detailed description of each animal, its type, and any identification numbers it may have. A record was also kept of how much Monsieur

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90 Fraser L., ‘Where Will the Last Blow Fall?’, *The War Illustrated*, 23\textsuperscript{rd} February, 1918, p.22.
91 ‘Return of Sick and Injured Animals during the Week Ending 28\textsuperscript{th} Feb 1918’, Hughes H.V., Liddle Collection, Leeds, GA/VWO/1.
92 ‘Remaining Under Treatment’, Hughes H.V., Liddle Collection, Leeds, GA/VWO/1.; Much blindness was caused by Periodic Ophthalmia, ‘It ruined the eyes of hundreds of otherwise perfectly sound horses ... The treatment at No. 1 Canadian Veterinary Hospital was directed towards keeping the animal in the dark ... and lessening the pain by means of atropine or cocaine ointment’, French C., *A History of the Canadian Army Veterinary Corps in the Great World War 1914-1919*, Barker C.A.V. & Barker I.K. eds., University of Guelph Pr, reprinted 2000, p.117.; Quittor is described as ‘A chronic inflammation of the cartilages of the foot and their surrounding structures, characterized by the presence of one or more small openings (fistulas) from which there is a continuous discharge of pus. ... Causes – Treads on the coronet, suppurating corns, and bruised and punctured wounds of the sole. ... Treatment – Rest.’, *Manual for Stable Sergeants 1917*, Document No. 611, War Department, Washington Government Printing Office, p.155.
Croutel, the local butcher, had paid per horse.\textsuperscript{93} For example, five horses were sold on 24\textsuperscript{th} February 1918:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Markings</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Cause of Unfitness for Military Service</th>
<th>Amount for Which Sold (Francs)</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B.</td>
<td>M.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>N. Blaze, N.F. &amp; B.H. Stockings, 225 N.F.</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Picked Up Nail N.Hind &amp; Debility.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brn.</td>
<td>M.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Crest Marks, N.F.135, O.F. 83.</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Injury to O.Stifle &amp; Debility.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Star, Race, Snip, N.F. &amp; O.H. Pasterns, N.H. Sock.</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>H.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fractured Jaw &amp; Debility.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B.</td>
<td>M.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Star, Faint Race, N.F. Pastern, O.F. &amp; B.H. Stockings.</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contused Wd. N. Knee &amp; Debility.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brn.</td>
<td>G.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Saddle Marks, O.H. Pastern. Mange &amp; Debility.</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The War Office’s perpetual drive for economy and military efficiency meant that the veterinary officer made decisions about an animal’s future that he may not have made in times of peace, or in civilian life. For example, Sir John Moore described how he had found himself torn between his desire to protect the animals in his charge and the hard-headed decisions that warfare forced upon him.

...it was no easy task during the wet and muddy times of winter to clean and groom the majority of animals, foul of skin and caked with mud as they arrived from the front. The disposal of these animals wasted by war, their death at times from absolute exhaustion, their destruction whether for food or otherwise represents the saddest side to the Service whose rightful mission is to cure not to kill; but we are cheered by the fact that never in the history of war were sick, wounded, and enfeebled animals, tended with more care and sympathetic consideration in hardships which are inseparable from war.\textsuperscript{94}

In just this short passage we again see how humanity, efficiency and economy pervaded every aspect of the Army’s organisation.\textsuperscript{95} As veterinarians were trained to ‘cure not to kill’\textsuperscript{96} then this trinity undoubtedly presented the Veterinary Corps’ personnel with some difficult moral dilemmas. However, and perhaps paradoxically, humanity very often went hand-in-hand with both economy and efficiency. The key to this connection lies in Moore’s point

\textsuperscript{93} ‘Return of Horses and Mules Authorized to be Sold by War Office’, Hughes H.V., Liddle Collection, Leeds, GA/VWO/1.


\textsuperscript{95} Blenkinsop L.J. and Rainey J.W., History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, Veterinary Services, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1925, p.87.

later in this example, when he argued that animals were still treated with as much ‘sympathetic consideration’ as was possible amidst the ‘hardships’ of war. What we encounter here is a highly complex relationship between horse and human made all the more fraught because of the environment in which it existed. The very nature of war forced those who were part of it to make unique decisions and, therefore, any answer to the question of what was humane, what was efficient, or what was economic were not always the same as they may have been in times of peace, or in civilian life.

Throughout their military career, all horses were inspected regularly and watched closely for any sign of contagious diseases, such as Glanders, Equine Influenza, Strangles, Ringworm and Mange. In the absence of the antibiotics and other drugs and medicines we take for granted today, treatment options were limited. However, a great deal was still achieved with comparatively little. For example, Private R.C. Bird, when serving in the Royal Field Artillery, was detailed to look after the battery’s horses during their journey to Gallipoli aboard the Manitou. He recalled what it had been like to nurse these horses when they contracted influenza.

“Catarrh. One or two of them died with this catarrh. They were so ill. We were continually going round wiping their noses because there was mucous coming down. It was a rotten job. We had a bit of tow and we had to keep going round. They were suffering. Was a rough job too, because sometimes they sneezed and you got it all in your face.”

Fortunately for Private Bird, while Equine Influenza may have been life-threatening to horses, it was not transmitted to humans. However, Glanders and Ringworm were. The implications should both the human and equine personnel of the Army become riddled with any of these diseases was serious, but control of Glanders was vital. Not just because it was fatal to horses, but because it was equally fatal to humans and other animal species. In addition, its symptoms could go unnoticed for weeks, or even months.

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97 Bird R.C., Private Royal Field Artillery, Taped Interview, IWM10656.
98 Glanders was a virulent disease fatal to both animal and human. Its symptoms were similar to those of Tuberculosis. Once chronic the horse died from suffocation, or exhaustion if not humanely destroyed. The last case of Glanders was seen in the United Kingdom in 1928. However, it remains a notifiable disease. Sinclair J. ed., Light Horses: Breeds and Management, Vinton & Company Ltd., London, 1898, p.196-198.; Horace Hayes Capt. M., Rossdale P.D. ed., Veterinary Notes for Horse Owners, Ebury, London, first ed. 1877, 2000, p. 404 – 405.; Document of Registration, issued by ‘The Horse Passport Agency’, 2003, Section 7.
99 ‘Flood’s illness began on July 7th. He was suffering from a severe headache and the witness treated him for sunstroke. A week later he developed blisters on the body and a very high temperature. When death took place the witness certified that it was due to neuritis and acute pemphigus. Subsequently he learnt of the outbreak of Glanders at the pit. Flood’s symptoms were exactly those of Glanders... Mr. Dennis Bayley, the managing director of the colliery, said the first case of Glanders was discovered a week ago. ... The infected horse was destroyed and since then 40 more ponies have been certified with the disease and are to be destroyed.’ ‘Groom’s Death from Glanders, Serious Outbreak at Nottingham’, The Times, issue 40581, 21st July 1914.
A horse may live for a considerable time when affected with chronic glanders, and even perform hard work, as the constitutional symptoms are comparatively slight. But this form always terminates in acute glanders if the horse is not destroyed. ... Glanders is practically incurable, and owing to its dangerous character its cure should not be attempted. Diseased horses should be at once destroyed, and those with which they have been in contact, or which have stood in the same stable with them, ought to be considered suspected and consequently kept apart from the others. Stalls and places which have been occupied by diseased and suspected horses, should be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected.¹⁰⁰

Thus, horses with such diseases were immediately isolated from the others and, especially in the case of Glanders, immediately destroyed. In addition, their headcollars, rugs and any other equipment was burnt. Stalls, stables and stable fittings were disinfected. Horses with whom they may have had contact also became suspect. J.C. O’Rorke’s diary gives us an impression of the efficiency with which Glanders was managed. For example, a gun horse with suspected Farcy was malleined, found to be infected with Glanders, destroyed and cremated.¹⁰¹ In less than 24 hours, a further 60 suspected ‘in contacts’ had been identified and tested.

30.08.1914: In the morning I found a case of Farcy amongst cases in the slight catarrh paddock. Detailed symptoms. Draught mare. Aged. S.R.S. N4 fetlock. Branded with arrow and 1844 on NF hoof and 113 OH. Probably 113th Battery. Tested with mallein. Temp 101 degrees.

31.08.1914: Horse reacted to mallein. Reported in writing to Officer Commanding Base Veterinary Hospital and suggested destruction and post-mortem and cremation of carcase and left the matter in his hands.

01.09.1914: Townsend and I malleined 60 horses that were probable ‘in contacts’ with the Glanders case.¹⁰²

Glanders was dealt with very effectively by the British Army during the Great War. To a large extent because existing systems proved able to identify and isolate cases, even when horses were being moved in such great numbers. The only outbreak of ‘serious importance’ occurred amongst horses of the Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade in Egypt during 1915. There were also some small outbreaks in France, but these were quickly dealt with. The only extensive outbreak in the United Kingdom occurred at a remount depot near Taunton in 1915. Interestingly, and although never proven, this outbreak was suspected to have been the result of ‘artificial infection by an enemy agency’.

¹⁰¹ ‘Farcy (skin glanders) ...is most commonly seen as a symptom of acute glanders.’, Manual for Stable Sergeants 1917, War Department, Document No. 611, Washington, p.168.
¹⁰² O’Rorke Lieut.-Col. F.C., Executive Veterinary Officer Army Veterinary Corps, MS Diary, IWM11985.
The disease was introduced by an infected shipload from California. It is interesting to observe that this was the only occasion when serious suspicion was directed to artificial infection by enemy agency, a suggestion to which colour was lent by the simultaneous appearance of the disease in many of the animals soon after landing. No proof, however, was ever obtained. ... The outbreak was stamped out in an unexpectedly short space of time by means of frequent inspections and immediate destruction of all animals developing clinical symptoms.\textsuperscript{103}

However, and somewhat ironically given the Army’s attention to Glanders, it was Mange that proved the greater challenge.\textsuperscript{104} Not least because treatment, certainly at the beginning of the War, was very limited. J.C. Clarke, for example, described his work at an isolation hospital near Uxbridge, where his duties involved ‘feeding the horses and washing them in a yellow lotion.’\textsuperscript{105} Affected areas were continuously washed and dressed with a mixture of paraffin, sulphur and oil; horse fat in the latter case being found to be the most effective. This treatment was, however, far from ideal. For example, The Official History described its results as a ‘more or less severe blistering of the skin and grave loss of condition.’\textsuperscript{106} Indeed, so serious was the spread of Mange that it increased steadily until the March of 1917, at which point no less than 3.8% of the Army’s animal strength in France was affected by it.\textsuperscript{107}

As discussed earlier in the chapter, veterinary officers routinely inspected all animals on purchase, on arrival at the collecting centres, at remount depots and prior to, during and following transportation. Horses were particularly at risk from disease when transported by ship, where cramped conditions and poor ventilation, combined with the fatiguing and stressful nature of such travel, created a perfect environment for illness and disease. Horse wastage during shipment was prevented by inspecting horses and ensuring they were fit for travel prior to embarkation. However, it was nevertheless expected that a greater or lesser percentage of the horses embarked in any one shipment would not survive the voyage.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{103} Blenkinsop L.J. and Rainey J.W., History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, Veterinary Services, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1925, p.520.
\textsuperscript{104} Blenkinsop L.J. and Rainey J.W., History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, Veterinary Services, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1925, p.519-520.
\textsuperscript{105} Clarke J.C., Transport Driver attached to 1/9th Battalion London Regiment, IWM06701.
\textsuperscript{108} Unnecessary wastage was avoided through a combination of supervision and financial incentive. ‘The conducting officer is reminded that he is personally responsible that the best possible care is taken of the animals on board. ...the head foreman should be a thoroughly competent and experienced cattleman, as energetic supervision is required. ...the foremen should be interested in the cleanliness and disinfection of their ship be it full or empty. They should be paid a small bonus “per capita” on horses landed in condition.’, Remount Regulations 1913, HMSO, London, p.39-43.; Bonus paid to crew on shipments from New York to France. Sliding scale according to number of fatalities: Captains £60 if mortality does not exceed 3%, £50 if 4%, down to £10 for 6%; Conducting Officer, Engineer, Vet and Foreman all receive £20 for 3% down to £5 for 6%;
An article from *The Journal of Zoophily* in 1916, quoting a correspondent of the *Washington Post*, claimed that more than four hundred horses had died in one hour during a storm. The correspondent’s description was one of ‘absolute chaos’ as frightened horses fell on top of one another and then panicked as they tried to get free.

It was a pitiful sight – big, strong horses snorting in agony and terror; with a sudden lurch of the ship one would lose his footing and fall down, carrying with him his neighbour, for the horses were placed so close together that it was impossible for them to lie down, the intention being that they should remain standing during the whole voyage. The two horses being on the floor, kicking violently in terror, bring down a third one, and sometimes a fourth, frequently falling on top of one another to such an extent that within an hour or so there were scores of piles of dead horses all over the ship. Many lay three deep, one on top of the other, kicking and biting, smothering themselves or strangling to death with their halter-ropes, the whole producing an absolute chaos of powerful, strong half-mad animals, frantically kicking and struggling to get free.\(^\text{109}\)

This description comes into even greater focus once we consider the recollections of soldiers who had been involved in the care of horses aboard ship, who had witnessed their deaths and been involved in the disposal of their carcasses. For example, Thomas Kirkby, a driver in the Royal Field Artillery, described the transport of ‘hundreds of horses’ aboard the *Ionian* during his division’s transport to Marseilles in 1915, when many horses died or had to be destroyed because of ‘seasickness’:

...they were close stalls just the width of the horse so as they wouldn’t fall down. Stalls like pens on every deck. And of course the horses were dying with seasickness. We had a hold, a big hold up to the sky ... some had to be put to sleep and then we’d hoist them up on a derrick, swing it out overboard, cut the rope and down went the horse. Dozens and dozens of porpoises following us. It were all the refuse going over the boat you know.\(^\text{110}\)

Private R.C. Bird also recalled how difficult it became to feed and muck out the horses when space was so limited and, like Kirkby, also remembered the death of horses, their disposal and the ‘floating carcasses’ left in the ship’s wake.

You had to get behind the horses to muck them out aboard ship. Bar between each one. On sand. Tied up short. Go down long passage to give feeds – nose bags. You had to watch them as you’d get a smack round the ‘ear ’ole as they tried to get all

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the feed out. (Laughs) Good old fun. One or two died ... the hell of a job getting ‘em out, had to pull them along and sling ‘em overboard.111

The scenes Thomas Kirkby and R.C. Bird described illustrate how difficult it was to transport horses in this way. Indeed, E.G. Barrett’s military service diary provides a valuable overview of the factors which contributed to the sort of horse wastage Thomas Kirkby and R.C. Bird had experienced first-hand. Barrett’s diary records, with methodical detail, his notes on the condition of horses received by him upon their arrival in France from New York.112 From his diary we learn that the journey usually took about two weeks, depending on weather conditions, and that it could take up to three days before horses were unloaded. How many horses survived was dependent on a number of factors. For example, how well the ship had been fitted to accommodate horses, the quality and quantity of hay available, the regularity and thoroughness of inspections, staffing and staff supervision aboard ship, and how well the horses were generally looked after during the journey.113 For example:

Servian Prince. Departed New York 5.11.15 with 1098 horses. Arrived Brest 20.11.15. Disembarked 21st and 22nd. Arrival estimated as the 19th. 88 horses died en route. Another 14 within 14 days of arrival. 35 deaths expected. 1010 landed. 996 delivered. Executive Veterinary Officer’s Notes: 1 man to 50 horses. Not sufficient attention and feed. Night men negligent. 60 bales of hay thrown overboard as mouldy. Horses not such good quality. Mucking out had not been done because of being short staffed.114

The weather also played an important part, because a rough crossing or excessive heat significantly added to horse wastage. In June 1915, the war diary of the Director of Divisional Veterinary Services to the B.E.F., described how the less-than-satisfactory conditions aboard an Australian transport ship, the H2, had been exacerbated by hot weather and ‘stuffy’ conditions. As a result, 195 horses were lost out of the 600 that had left Australia three months earlier.

The passage was calm Maximum temperature by the log 90˚ at noon. There was a following wind in the Indian Ocean, which made the decks very stuffy, and during these days 50 per cent of the deaths occurred. ... In hold No.4 the horses stood on the coal, and this had not been changed since the Calcutta trip. During the hot weather this became very foul, and 100 horses died in this hold. The boat was a good

111 Bird R.C., Private Royal Field Artillery, Taped Interview, IWM10656.
112 See Appendix, Figure 5. Table of horse shipment information compiled from, Barrett E.G., Military Service Diary, France 1915-1916, IWM7707.
113 ‘Several poll injuries occurred, through insufficient room for bringing horses up. One horse fell through 3 holds on to a wagon and was only bruised. One case of bad fractures in Scots Greys. Several officers complained that the battens were improperly nailed to the decks and came loose exposing nails,’ O’Rorke Lieut.-Col. F.C., Executive Veterinary Officer Army Veterinary Corps, IWM11985.; Transportation of Animals by Sea, Official Pamphlet issued in January 1916, in Blenkinsop L.J. and Rainey J.W., History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, Veterinary Services, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1925, p.723-725.
114 Barrett E.G., Military Service Diary, France 1915-1916, IWM7707.
one, but had not been properly equipped for such a long voyage. There was an electric plant, but not one fan, and there was no means of pumping out the urine from the decks. The horses were in the charge of one head groom and sixteen men, assisted by six of the crew.  

Returning to humanity, economy and efficiency, we are reminded again of the financial investment each of these horses represented. Not only was there the initial purchase to be taken into account, but also the cost of preparing each for service, of equipping them with tack and harness, of transporting them to the docks, and then of shipping itself. An article published in The Times in 1917 suggested, for example, that the total cost of supplying each horse brought from Australia was £600. Recalling discussion in the previous chapter, we must remember too that each dead horse represented a supply waggon that now had nothing to pull it, or a trooper who had no horse to ride.

The Servian Prince and the H2 were just two of over two hundred ships used for the conveyance of remounts during the First World War. However, fortunately for the horses and mules involved, wastage was significantly reduced from 1916 onwards. Once Conducting Officers were appointed, and given honorary temporary commissions as Lieutenants A.V.C., the supervision of civilian and military personnel was significantly improved. Recalling the appalling scenes of horse wastage described in the Washington Post, individual stalls were also abandoned. Indeed, at the end of the War it became Admiralty regulation for all remount ships to be fitted with pens designed to hold four horses. It was found that animals transported in pens ‘stood up better’ to heavy weather and consequently landed in better condition. Moreover, and recalling the War Office’s perpetual drive for economy and military efficiency, fitting ships out in this way was also less expensive.

Several other factors were also identified as significant in reducing horse wastage. One was to ensure that ships were thoroughly cleansed and disinfected. Again this was overseen by the Conducting Officer, who would ensure this was carried out during the ship’s return journey. Also, a more stringent attention to the health of animals before embarkation.

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ensured that horses unfit for the journey were not loaded, significantly reducing wastage.\textsuperscript{121} In addition, when basic principles of good horse management were routinely applied horses arrived in better condition. For example, attention to the quantity and quality of feed and forage, methods of feeding, regular watering, to exercise, and to improved ventilation all combined to reduce wastage during transport.\textsuperscript{122} Indeed, \textit{The Official History} tells us that ‘in the later stages of the war, ship after ship arrived with no loss whatever, or only one or two deaths out of cargoes of 800 to 1,200 animals.’\textsuperscript{123}

As the War progressed, so too had discipline, training and experience throughout the British Army. By 1917, the Army Veterinary Service, the Remount Department and the personnel of the New Army had become much more efficient at avoiding unnecessary horse wastage. This is not to say that the Army had entirely failed to foresee where the potential for error lay in 1914, but rather that its existing systems of supply and management had been put under unprecedented strain. \textit{The Official History} suggests, for example, that Mange became prevalent in 1915 and 1916 because efficient systems of ‘veterinary supervision and animal management’ had failed to ‘keep pace with the rapid increase in the strength of the army’:

\begin{quote}
During the first twelve months of the war it was found possible to keep mange well under control; but, as in other matters affecting military efficiency, veterinary supervision and animal management could not altogether keep pace with the rapid increase in the strength of the army which took place in the years 1915 and 1916.\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

In the case of Mange, methods of control were relatively simple, but highly effective once practiced throughout the Army’s organisation. Frequent veterinary and regimental inspections identified cases early, while the immediate segregation and working isolation of suspected cases and the disinfection of equipment, trucks, and horse transport that had

\textsuperscript{121} As a comparison, ‘The French and Italian authorities held that it was less costly to ship animals as soon as they were bought and let them take their chance of living, than to provide the necessary accommodation and labour for their being conditioned and “salted” prior to shipment. ... Their losses at sea and after landing were considerably greater than ours. Some of the losses on Italian ships were truly appalling.’, Blenkinsop L.J. and Rainey J.W., \textit{History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, Veterinary Services}, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1925, p.644-645.

\textsuperscript{122} Perhaps not surprisingly, horses arrived in much better condition when they were properly watered. However, because this was difficult to accomplish aboard ship, it was sometimes neglected. ‘It is safe to assume that consignments of animals arriving at a port of disembarkation in markedly poor condition have been neglected as regards watering.’ However, ‘If water is freely given, if no horse is ever allowed to suffer for a moment from thirst, the good condition of horses on that ship is assured.’, Feeding particularly required some considerable skill on the part of the Conducting Officer, as feed (type and amount) had to be adjusted throughout the journey, as well as according to the type of animal carried and ‘the meteorological conditions prevailing on the voyage’. For example, ‘The consequences of over-feeding grain on board ship are disastrous. Colic and its complications, heart failure, ship staggers, are certain to ensue.’ \textit{Transportation of Animals by Sea, Official Pamphlet issued in January 1916}, in Blenkinsop L.J. and Rainey J.W., \textit{History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, Veterinary Services}, His Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1925, p.724.


come into contact with affected animals prevented its spread to unaffected animals. Once treatment was improved, through the use of sulphide dipping baths, the disease was virtually eradicated with incidence of mange in the British Expeditionary Force falling to 0.4% by the end of the War. Indeed, much was learned by the British Army and its Remount and Veterinary Services during the First World War. For example, Sir John Moore believed the British Army’s experience to have made it an ‘authority’ when it came to avoiding horse wastage in the field.

No Nation or Army has probably had more experience of animals in the Field than our own, and such experience gained in respect to the different classes of animals employed should constitute us authorities in ways and means of avoiding wastage.125

Moore’s proud boast was not a hollow one. The Official History tells us, for example, that in all theatres of the War between August 1914 and March 1919 just over 2.5 million horses were admitted to Army Veterinary Service hospitals and convalescent depots. Of these, 78% were returned to duty, while the ‘majority of the remainder’ were ‘humanely destroyed.’126

In addition, Major-General Sir W.H. Birkbeck’s Interesting Facts and Figures demonstrates how favourably the B.E.F.’s wastage figures in France and the Remount Department’s U.K. levels of horse wastage had compared with average losses in civilian use. For example:

The average wastage per annum of army animals in the United Kingdom has been 12%. ... Compare also with horses in civilian use. ... The average wastage of commercial firms may be put at 20% per annum. The highest total of animals in France with the British Armies was reached in June 1917 - 460,000. The loss from all causes that year was also the highest recorded, namely 28%, which was largely the result of the Somme offensive and a very trying cold Spring.127

As a means of comparison, it is interesting to note to what extent the American Expeditionary Force learned from the British Army’s methods of horse management, supply and veterinary treatment. For example, in an article written for the American Journal of Veterinary Medicine in 1915, Garrison Steele unfavourably compared the American Army’s Veterinary Service with that of the British Expeditionary Force. Steele saw the British Army Veterinary Service’s work as an exemplar to which the American Army should aspire. He was concerned that, should the American Army find itself at war, its Veterinary Service would be entirely unprepared.

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Let it (the War Department) take cognizance of the British Army Veterinary Corps and compare the means it employs, its skilful handling of wounded and sick horses, in short, its team work for animal conservation, with the disunity and spinelessness of the United States veterinary service which courts animal waste and encourages infernal barbarities on animals which shock the sense of mercy. The War Department should see the value of such plans ... as the British are carrying out successfully ... and should launch, at least elementally, a plan for the same economic and merciful ends.128

The purpose of the article was to rouse support for reform which, at time of writing, had not in Garrison Steele’s opinion ‘made the indelible impression it ought.’129 His accusations of ‘disunity and spinelessness’ may seem alarmist, but there is some evidence to suggest his fears were borne out. For example, according to information sent to the American First Army’s GHQ by wire on 13th September 1918, problems in the supply and timely evacuation of horses had become sufficiently serious that they posed ‘a grave problem’ where active operations were considered.

Horse situation most serious in this corps. All divisions badly in need of animals. Divisions are placed in the situation of not being able to properly evacuate animals in view of fact that no replacements are available; consequently the animals, which are only partially fit for duty are retained by organizations rather than evacuate them due to fact that the unit will be without proper facilities for movement. ... With motor transportation short and animal transportation so reduced on account of shortage and unfit condition of animals, supply presents a grave problem where active operations are considered.130

In fact, the American experience in 1916 was not so dissimilar from that the B.E.F. had found itself in during the winter of 1914, when the British Army’s Veterinary and Remount Services had not performed with perfect efficiency either. Moore admits, for example, that wastage was exacerbated during the first winter of the War by ‘conditions and circumstances’ that proved ‘exceedingly hard on animals.’131 Covered accommodation for the sick and for newly landed remounts was scarce and, as a result, ‘catarrhal and respiratory sickness of an infectious nature’ brought inefficiency up to 15.8% of the BEF’s strength. The Official History is in agreement on this point. For example, in November 1914, the Officer Commanding No. 1 Mobile Veterinary Section in France described how his section had been requested to ‘take charge of 609 spare horses of the Indian Cavalry

Brigade.’ All the regiments were very short of men owing to casualties and, as a result, could spare only one man to every six horses. His section, although presumably sent in to attend to the animals from a veterinary perspective, now found themselves dealing with a chaotic situation that was only exacerbated by a lack of shelter in exceedingly wet and very cold weather conditions.

Very short of picketing gear; not enough nosebags; and many loose horses with no means of securing them. The section was now unable to carry out its normal duties because every man was required to assist in watering, feeding, and exercising the animals. Finally, owing to a shortage of men, we had to work very hard to be able to water once daily, feed three times, and exercise. During this period the weather was most unfavourable for animals in the open. It was raining or freezing nearly the whole time.¹³²

According to Moore, this level of inefficiency was not surpassed and never rose above 12%; even in the War’s later stages when animals increasingly suffered from ‘the strain of constant service.’¹³³ Indeed, given the comparative combatant experience of the British Army, the recent reform it had undergone in response to the Boer War’s horse debacle, and the valuable lessons it had learned during four years of war, it would have been a shocking state of affairs had it not been more of an ‘authority’ than its ally.

The British Army of 1914–1918 had learned a great deal from errors made during the Boer War. By 1914, its Remount Department and Veterinary Corps had been separated so that both might concentrate on their discrete but complimentary roles. The Remount Department’s primary function was to ensure that the British Army was at all times properly supplied with suitable horses, while the Army Veterinary Corps’ role was to ensure these animals remained serviceable for as long as possible. In both cases their work was driven by ‘humanity, efficiency and economy’ and the principle that it was always better to prevent injury and disease than to deal with the consequences. During the First World War the mantra ‘horses first’ was one that permeated every level of its organisation. The British Army’s drive for economy and military efficiency demanded that its soldiers develop a sympathetic consideration for the horse’s welfare. For some soldiers, this became a working relationship of reliance and trust akin to that experienced between men.

All sorts of petty little details and orders, mixed with oaths, came stinging from the mouth of the Sergeant Major. Once a man slipped while mounting his wagon – and hurt his leg. No attempt was made to help him until drill was over. “Lay him aside there by that tree” shouted the Sergeant Major, “and get on with it. Men are cheaper than ‘orses.” ... The inexorable routine of the British Army was instilled into all –day in, day out – complaints and appeals were quite useless. ... The horses were

always much better cared for than the men. The usual taunt flung at a man when showing signs of exhaustion and dead-tired after work was: - “Look after that ‘orse driver. ‘Orses are expensive , men can be got for nothing!”\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{134} Pratchett W., Private Royal Army Service Corps Horse Transport, Memoir, Liddle Collection, Leeds, P14.
Chapter Three

“Humanity, Efficiency, Economy” The British Army’s Drive for Military Efficiency, Sympathetic Consideration, and The Soldier-Horse Relationship during the Great War.

Hundreds of mules were detrained, beautiful, well-bred, silk-coated, stepping daintily down the gangways, with raised heads and pricked ears. I thought sadly what they would soon become, standing shivering in the slush, ungroomed, galled, beaten and jobbed in the mouth by evil-tempered, mud-plastered drivers. Already some Divisional Ammunition column drivers were dragging away two or three newly acquired mules, bellowing furiously, ‘Come on, you _ _ _ s, you!’ Dumb animals can convulse a man with impotent fury, if he be lacking in sympathy for them.¹

By the First World War, the British Army could no longer depend on recruiting men who brought a knowledge of horses with them from civilian life, and now recognised that it would have to train them. Horses were expensive military assets that only remained serviceable as long as they were properly maintained, and military efficiency depended heavily upon their health and fitness. It was, therefore, essential that some rudiments of horsemanship be instilled in its personnel, and then enforced through a combination of routine and discipline. Ideally, the British Army wanted soldiers to develop a sympathetic consideration for the welfare of the horses in their charge, and many men did do so. However, there were also those who did not. While there were those who believed that a soldier could ‘trust his life’ in a good horse, there were a great many others who would not have bothered with their horses at all if they thought they might get away with it.²

Nevertheless, just as a rifle required training to use it effectively and maintenance to ensure it functioned, so did a horse. Like a gun, a horse worked much better when it was properly maintained and handled with skill and care. Thus, although the British Army of 1914-1918 may have had little room for sentiment, it did appreciate the numerous benefits to be gained by properly managing its equine resources. The most effective, and economical way of achieving this was by encouraging soldiers to develop a sense of responsibility for their horse and its well-being.

While the previous chapter explored the workings of the military machine, this chapter now focuses upon the soldiers and horses who worked within it. It will consider how soldiers were recruited into horsed regiments, how they were trained to ride, drive and manage their horses, and how horsemanship came more easily to some men than others. It will discuss the daily routine work with horses imposed upon these men, and how this close

² Cooper-Hill, ‘Cavalry Remounts’, The Times, issue 36119, 18th April 1900.
proximity helped to create the soldier-horse relationship. By focusing on the experiences of soldiers themselves, we will gain an understanding of the relationship that was formed between soldier and horse, and what the bond meant to those who experienced it. It will, for example, consider at what point Army horses came to be seen as individuals, why some horses were prized above others, and why some soldiers went to such great lengths to protect a particular horse from harm. Why, for instance, were horses given the names bestowed upon them by their drivers? Certainly, soldiers often thought of their horses as they would a comrade, or a friend, and this was also reflected in the names that were bestowed upon them. However, and especially when driven to ‘impotent fury’, other soldiers came to like their equine charges somewhat less. Indeed, there were certainly a great many soldiers who bitterly resented the hard work and relentless routine horses imposed upon them, and who would have happily swapped them for a mechanical alternative. Nevertheless, love them or hate them, it was inescapable that some sort of relationship was formed.

The British Army’s perpetual drive for economy and military efficiency created an environment in which sympathetic consideration was highly valued. Indeed, soldiers who managed their horses well were a great asset to the Army, if only because ‘prevention’ was always more economical and efficient than ‘cure’. As the *Official History Veterinary Services* explained it:

> The commander of field artillery or a cavalry regiment, who is by nature and inclination a good and keen horse-master, is of greater economic value to the State in this respect than an executive veterinary officer who is merely a physician and surgeon. ... It is better by active interference and thick-skinned insistence to keep one horse in good condition, and therefore to fortify the resistance of that horse to disease, than to restore to health two evacuated to veterinary hospital.3

Indeed, by the First World War this ethos was to be found throughout the Army’s organisation. Humanity, efficiency and economy ruled all things, including how its men and horses were managed. Just as the Royal Army Medical Corps prevented illness and disease amongst the Army’s men, so the Army Veterinary Corps believed likewise that antisepsis should give place to asepsis, and ‘the care of horses in health supersede their treatment in disease.’4 This emphasis on prevention meant that Army Veterinary Corps personnel were expected to take an ‘active management in horse management in garrison, in camp, and in the field’ and to ‘practise the simple principles of horse management’.5 Indeed, given the

British Army’s perpetual drive for humanity, efficiency and economy, it is not surprising that it approached the well-being of its human and equine materiel with a very similar pragmatism. For example, *The Field Service Pocket Book* gave the following advice on how to take care of horses while on the march:

22. Nothing should be carried beyond the authorized articles. Rise in the stirrups, do not lean on the rifle (if carried), see that the load is evenly distributed on both sides of the saddle. If possible, at some halts off-saddle or loosen girths and shift the saddle. When saddles are removed slap the backs to promote circulation and allow the horses to roll. On a night march, when hard work is expected, halt, water and feed an hour before dawn.6

It was through such consideration that unnecessary horse wastage was significantly reduced. For example, horses maintained condition during the march much better once it was recognised that each horse carried or pulled a heavy burden and that they therefore needed some opportunity to rest and recover.7 Like men, horses became thirsty and hungry, and a long march similarly took its toll in the form of sores and galls.8 Sympathetic consideration was not sentimental, but entirely practical. By paying close attention to the soldier on the march unnecessary human wastage was similarly avoided and military efficiency thus maintained. For example, Ian Whitehead describes the role of the Regimental Medical Orderly when on the march.

…it was the RMO’s job to keep up morale, enforce strict water discipline and prevent serious cases of exhaustion. He had to be firm with men dropping out, but also ready to give assistance to those in genuine difficulties.9

If there was a difference, it was that horses had even less agency than the soldier, and were even more dependent upon the Army’s organisation. Moreover, and although the British Army certainly had clear opinions as to how its horses should be managed, the horse was ultimately at the mercy of the individual soldier to whom it was assigned. Sir John Moore believed that it was only through a proper system of education, by ensuring soldiers were

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7 The quantity of equipment carried by cavalry horses by 1916 was described in the *History of the 17th Lancers* as the “Christmas Tree Effect”. ‘About this time “tin hats” were first issued; though heavy and unsightly they were invaluable as head protection. This, with the improvised gas mask, was the last addition to be imposed upon the already overweighted man and horse, and the Christmas tree effect was complete. … Much as the White Knight in Alice in Wonderland carried on himself or his horse a mouse-trap lest a mouse should run over his horse’s back, the best sort of beehive so that he might get honey, anklets on his horse’s feet in case he should meet a shark, and a dish lest he should meet a plum cake, so the trooper of 1916 was armed against all conceivable eventualities.’, Micholls Major G., *The History of the 17th Lancers, Vol. 2, 1895-1924*, Macmillan & Co., London, 1931, p.107.
8 It is notable that ‘Care of the Feet’ was given priority for infantrymen, along with some advice as to preventing sore feet and blisters, and methods of treatment when they occurred., *Field Service Pocket Book 1914*, HMSO, London, p.35.
properly supervised, and by applying ‘stern disciplinary measures’ in cases of neglect that unnecessary horse wastage was prevented.

Poverty and its accompanying exhaustion is the hall-mark or evidence of indifferent supervision and care of animals, or a bad system in respect to their management. It is always in inverse ratio to the standard of animal management attained. There is no getting away from the fact, and until this result is realised to the full, this class of wastage will always figure very largely in the annals of our Army. To keep it down, an educative policy in practical animal management is absolutely indispensable both in peace and war; moreover, history points to the necessity for the enforcement of stern disciplinary measures when neglect is apparent.\textsuperscript{10}

Writing in his memoir, \textit{Into Battle}, John Glubb recalled his experiences when serving as an officer in the Royal Engineers during the Great War. As a horseman, he was evidently saddened by what he observed, and critical of the ‘evil-tempered, mud-plastered drivers’ who had been put to the task of collecting new mules for their ammunition column. Recalling discussion in the previous chapter, we must remember the great expense and hard work that had gone into delivering these remounts to France ‘silk-coated ... with raised heads and pricked ears’.\textsuperscript{11} Their ‘heart-breaking’ deterioration was inevitable, but it was slowed by good management. For example, Sir John Moore’s \textit{Veterinary Service in War} compared the ‘\textit{bon camaraderie}’ and ‘spirit of faithfulness’ that had reduced wastage in the Infantry, but which had apparently been lacking (or impossible to attain) in the Artillery. Sympathetic consideration did reduce horse wastage, but it only thrived where there was a structure in place to support it.

A very bright feature of the late war was the splendid manner in which Infantry looked after their horses, and it is certainly a matter deserving of the highest commendation and record in the annals of our Infantry in war. Apart from that spirit of faithfulness and \textit{bon camaraderie} which battalions showed to their animals, their success was a matter of organisation, and lay in the appointment of Battalion Transport Officers. I wish that Artillery, in which Arm the heaviest work and greatest wastage lay, could have been similarly provided. Even a Brigade Transport Officer of Artillery, and appointment part of Artillery organization, to watch the interests of horses in their wagon lines while Artillery Officers were forward with their guns, would have been much better than the “horsemasters” and “wagon line officers” who were appointed, and who were nobody’s children.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} Moore Major General Sir J., \textit{Army Veterinary Service in War}, H&W Brown, London, 1921, p.56.
Thus it was that when officers like Glubb actively encouraged sympathetic consideration they were in fact instilling in their drivers the spirit of good horsemanship which underpinned humanity, efficiency and economy. Indeed, Glubb’s memoir demonstrates the attention-to-detail which dramatically reduced horse wastage:


All units in the army when on the march halt for ten minutes in every hour – from ten minutes in every hour til the hour. I have arranged for all vehicles to carry 2-gallon petrol cans full of water, so that, as soon as the column halts, every driver can slip out his horse’s bits, and water them from a bucket. He also eases the girths, and inspects his horses all over for sores and galls. If there is grass on the verge of the road, he will allow his horses to graze, or possibly he will tear up handfuls of grass and give it to them.\(^{13}\)

In fact, Glubb was delighted to report later in his memoir how his drivers had started to become true ‘horsemasters’. No longer needing to be prompted to attend to their horse’s well-being, they actively sought out opportunities to demonstrate their sympathetic consideration and certainly appeared to have taken Glubb’s instructions to heart:


On 16 May, we marched to Monchy-au-Bois. It is a great joy seeing men and horses improving under one’s hand, so to speak. At a ten minutes halt just through Bienvillers, I saw Driver Gowan dash into a field beside the road and feverishly pick dandelions and carry them to his horse. These are supposed to be much valued by horses, and to bring out and improve their summer coats. This is the real spirit of horsemastership - think first of your horses.\(^{14}\)

Driver Gowan’s selfless devotion to his horse was by no means an isolated case. Lieutenant-Colonel A.W. Walmsley recalled how, when serving as an officer with the Army Service Corps on the Somme in 1916, one of the biggest problems he encountered was that his ‘troops’ were inclined to put their own blankets on their horses. Indeed, it is interesting to note his comment that soldier and horse ‘came together’, suggesting a working partnership and, given the soldiers’ sacrifice for their horses’ well-being, evidence of the sympathetic consideration which was the human contribution to the soldier-horse relationship. For example:


Well, my work was entirely concerned with the welfare of the troops under my command and the horses. They came together and I did find by experience that one


of my troubles keeping my troops fit during the winter months was that they would put their own blankets over their horses.\textsuperscript{15}

Bird too described an attention to his horse’s welfare which went far beyond the mere application of training. When his mare started to suffer with mud fever he sent home for a pot of Vaseline which, once the legs were thoroughly cleaned and dried, would act as a barrier to the mud. If a horse was merely a machine, why would he have gone to such great lengths to help her?

“Mud was a problem. One horse, I had, I sent home for a pot of Vaseline. And I rubbed it on my horse’s legs, because she was losing her hair. Coming off her legs. I used to massage her legs with this Vaseline. You tried to keep them as dry as possible, but the Germans always had the higher ground for their cattle. We were always on the low ground. Wipe them down, wash them down, or if they dried we’d rub it off with straw.”\textsuperscript{16}

Sadly, however, and as heart-warming as these examples are, it would be incorrect to believe that all soldiers took to horse work with quite the same devotion. For example, in his memoir \textit{A Quiet Conscience}, J. Carrier recalled being ordered to take over the horses and harness of another driver. Unfortunately for Carrier, Driver Cole’s harness was filthy and his horses ‘had not been properly groomed for weeks’. Some soldiers were clearly inclined to cut corners if they thought they might get away with it.

It seemed to tickle the drivers to death when they knew that I had to take over those two horses. Poor devils! They apparently had not been properly groomed for weeks. The mud was caked on their hocks, and plastered on their bellies. One little devil of a driver put his hand on one of the pair, and in a twinkling of an eye brought off a louse. ... In fairness to Cole, I must say he was no shirker in action, not the slightest bit ‘windy’, but he could not stick harness cleaning and parades. He had a flair for smelling these things out and going sick in advance. I looked on the wall above his bed, and saw harness, red rust, hanging there.\textsuperscript{17}

Fortunately, incidents of soldiers deliberately mistreating their horses are rare, and we might presume because the consequences of doing so were so severe that the majority of soldiers would not have risked it. Nevertheless, the private diary of R.G. Flowerdew, a sergeant in the Machine Gun Corps, provides us with just such an example. Throughout his diary his main concern was always for his men and his horses, even though the strain of constant shelling and aerial bombing of their lines was clearly telling on him too. On 14\textsuperscript{th} December 1917 he wrote:

\textsuperscript{15} Walmsley Lieutenant-Colonel A.W., Royal Army Transport Corps, Transcript of Taped Interview, Liddle Collection, Leeds, Tape 513.
\textsuperscript{16} Bird R.C., Private Royal Field Artillery, Taped Interview, IWM10656.
\textsuperscript{17} Carrier J., \textit{A Quiet Conscience}, privately published by R.J. Carrier, Ilkeston, Derbyshire, 1978, p.113 to 115.
I am anxious to get out of this, half my men are sick, partly from fright. It is either shells or bombs and I expect we shall get all the animals wiped out as yet. ... I think I have said quite enough, to see all the dead animals is enough to break one’s heart.¹⁸

By the time of writing this particular entry Flowerdew had become increasingly disillusioned with his life in the Army, and particularly with the way men of the ranks were treated. He felt that a private was nothing more than a ‘slave’ and that some of the punishments meted out were disproportionate and unfair. The impression overall is of a humane man, concerned only for the well-being of his men and his horses, who just wanted to go home. His diary entry on 16th July read as follows:

I get more disgusted with the Army every day, one fellow got 7 days for leaving his steel helmet on the ground for five minutes, another has to go up for hitting a mule with his hand, and the officer who is ruining him hit a horse with the farrier’s file enough to kill it, it all makes my blood boil it is so unfair.¹⁹

Two days later he wrote:

That boy got 4 days Field Punishment No.2 for hitting the mule with his hand, a private is nothing but a slave in the Army.

Clearly in this instance it was the officer who had lost his temper and beaten the mule who seemed to have been the one truly at fault. However, we must be mindful too of the drivers described by Glubb at the beginning of this chapter, and of the constant physical and mental strain all soldiers were under. No matter how long a driver may have ‘been out’ bringing up supplies or ammunition the previous night, the horses still came first. For example, H.A. Seipman, an officer in the Royal Field Artillery, described how the horses had to be fed regardless of ‘circumstances’ and regardless of how many men there were on duty.

Horses make no allowance for the vagaries of geography and tactics, but have to be watered and fed three or four times a day, whatever the circumstances. The routine in day-time is unaffected, even if the night is going to be busier still; but the number of men available for duty remains the same.²⁰

Similarly, J.T. Capron, wondered at how the drivers had actually kept going. When in camp, Stables was an invariable part of their routine. However, when ‘out’ not only was their work physically hard, but also ‘nerve wracking’. The driver and his horse presented a ‘large and vulnerable target’ and so, as well as having difficult terrain to negotiate, they were ‘under

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²⁰ Seipman H.A., Officer Royal Field Artillery, Draft of memoir Riding with the Guns: The Recollections of a British Army Artillery Officer in the First World War, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS1469.
constant risk from spasmodic harassing shell fire.’ This does not, of course, excuse the mistreatment of animals, but it does remind us of the demands war made of the soldier upon whom the horse relied. For example, on 19th May 1918, the war diary of S.F. Hopwood, kept during his service in the Royal Field Artillery on the Western Front, documented the arrest of Gunner Wright for insubordination. Wright’s reasoning, that he should not have to cut grass for the horses when he was not fed properly himself, echoes the soldier-horse relationship’s disastrous breakdown during the Boer War.

In the afternoon Gunner Wright was ordered to cut grass for the horses. He refused and was put under arrest. He was brought up before Martin in the evening, who first ordered him to cut sacks tomorrow. Martin then asked him whether he realised what was the penalty for refusing to obey a command. He replied, “Yes, it is better than slavery.” Asked what he meant he said he didn’t get enough to eat himself, let alone getting the horses’ grass. He was placed under close arrest.

It is here that the Orders Books of the Twelfth Lancers provide us with a valuable insight into the day-to-day workings of a horsed regiment; a particularly interesting feature being how often orders were reiterated and punishments given for very similar offences. This repetition suggests that, as attractive as the idea of a soldier utterly devoted to his horse may be to us, the smooth running of a horsed regiment was instead the result of training, supervision and swift punishment for misdemeanour. On the 15th of February 1916, for example, it was noted that there had been a serious accident caused when a train met a loose mule on ‘the permanent way’. Orders subsequently urged that particular attention be paid to ensuring that animals were properly secured at all times. However, on the 18th of April 1916, two soldiers were praised for two separate acts of gallantry in very similar circumstances. In both cases, serious accidents involving runaway horses had been avoided by their bravery and quick thinking. The first, Corporal N. Edwards of the Royal Engineers, had managed to prevent a collision between a bolting farm horse and two G.S. wagons when he seized the reins ‘at considerable personal risk’. The second soldier, Private E. McDonald of the 5th Battalion Cameron Highlanders, had managed to stop a bolting horse when he grabbed it by the nose and eventually brought it to a standstill.

A horse harnessed to a trap, broke away from the owner and galloped away down the road. The horse had neither bridle nor head-collar and inside the trap was a woman, who was powerless to do anything. Private McDonald dashed out from the

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21 Capron J.T., 2nd Lieutenant Royal Field Artillery, Transcribed Interview, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS0268.
22 Hopwood S.F., Royal Field Artillery, War Diary 1916-1918, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS0796.
23 Orders Books of the Twelfth Lancers 1916 to 1917, Derby Museum and Archive.
24 ‘The men only did what was absolutely necessary in the lines. Fed and hayed up. Then fell out. Several men tried to sneak out into town, but I caught them and put them on duty.’ O’Rorke Lieut.-Col. F.C., Executive Veterinary Officer Army Veterinary Corps, MS Diary, IWM11985.
transport lines, and seized the horse by the nose. He held on and brought the animal to a standstill, after being dragged 500 yards.\textsuperscript{25}

However, on the 30\textsuperscript{th} August 1916 another similar incident occurred:

III DISCIPLINE (D.R.O. 1405) It was recently reported that a G.S. Wagon with forage was left unattended, and, as a consequence a serious collision nearly took place. It is strictly forbidden to leave horse vehicles with no one to look after them.\textsuperscript{26}

The potential consequences of such an incident explain the attention that was made to matters of road discipline and the punishments soldiers received. As an example, on the 27\textsuperscript{th} of January 1917, Lance-Corporal Farmer was ‘deprived of his Lance stripe for neglect of duty whilst in charge of a section’, while in May of the same year 426 Private Hansom was deprived of seven days’ pay because he had allowed three horses to stray. Indeed, the Orders read as a catalogue of narrowly avoided accidents and incidents:

4 DISCIPLINE. It has come to notice that damage has been done to horse troughs, by slackness in looking after the animals while watering. It has also been reported that men belonging to watering parties have climbed upon the troughs to mount their animals. All ranks are warned that irregularities of this nature are to cease. Horses must be led down bitted to water, but the bits not left hanging while at water, so as to cause damage to the troughs.\textsuperscript{27}

Of course such misdemeanours were by no means limited only to the Twelfth Lancers. For example, on the 18\textsuperscript{th} March 1915, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Lieutenant H.C. Cowan made this entry in his service diary; where it became but one case amidst a daily catalogue of straying horses and other equine-related incidents:

Found one Country Cart that had previously been transferred to 2\textsuperscript{nd} Corps for road making in a damaged condition in the ditch outside billet – investigated matter and found that damage was caused by a horse taking fright and backing into steam lorry No.63. No blame could be attached to anyone.\textsuperscript{28}

When so many men, horses and motor vehicles were constantly on the move it was difficult to avoid accidents entirely. Indeed, the diary of William Rigden, a Sergeant in the Royal Garrison Artillery, paints a vivid picture of the lines-of-communication that supported the men in the trenches and fed the guns. The most striking impression one is given is perhaps of the frenetic energy of the operation, bordering on chaos, as traffic moved to and from the lines. For example:

\textsuperscript{25} Orders Books of the Twelfth Lancers 1916 to 1917, Derby Museum and Archive.  
\textsuperscript{26} Orders Books of the Twelfth Lancers 1916 to 1917, Derby Museum and Archive.  
\textsuperscript{27} Orders Books of the Twelfth Lancers 1916 to 1917, Derby Museum and Archive.  
\textsuperscript{28} Cowan 2\textsuperscript{nd} Lieutenant H.C., Commanding Officer of C Company, General Staff Council 5\textsuperscript{th} Divisional Train, IWM14999.
There was a constant stream of traffic in both directions – motor lorries, horse waggons, limbers loaded with 18 pdr. shells going up the line and some trotting back, their loads discharged. Troops on the march and an occasional motor despatch rider slipping from side to side, his feet scarcely ever on the footrest. In the fields adjoining the road were thousands upon thousands of small tents ... again there were seemingly endless horse lines ... Then there were the gun parks – chiefly 18pdrs., ammunition dumps of all classes of shell stacked in great piles, thousands of them. Big small-arm ammunition dumps, great dumps of petrol cans, fodder, cases of bully and biscuits, cases of tinned fruit and foods and tons of whole carcasses of meat. As we got nearer the line all this was multiplied again and the going became very slow owing to the traffic and the awful state of the roads.  

As we have seen, it was impossible to avoid unnecessary horse wastage entirely, but it was significantly reduced when soldiers fully assimilated the Army’s mantra of ‘horses first’. Reiterating earlier discussion, this began with training and was then enforced through routine and discipline. During training, soldiers were taught basic horse management skills such as grooming, tacking up, cleaning equipment and handling the horse on the ground. They were also taught how to ride, and where applicable how to drive horses. All training was deeply imbued with the ‘prevention is better than cure’ ethos which underpinned the holy trinity of humanity, efficiency and economy. Grooming, for example, was not merely a matter of improving the horse’s appearance, but was an essential aspect of the horse’s management. For example, Animal Management 1908 had this to say on the importance of grooming as a ‘preventive of disease’:

The importance of grooming ... must not be underrated; whilst it is quite true that mange and many other diseases are not produced by dirt, it is nevertheless equally true that they are most frequently met with, spread with greater rapidity, and are much more difficult to eradicate where dirty conditions prevail, and the regular brushing of the coat is an undoubted preventive.

Not only did regular grooming help to prevent the spread of disease, but it also provided a good opportunity to check the horse over for evidence of other problems such as sores, galls, or mud fever. Similarly, it was essential that recruits learn to tack up their horses correctly and how to handle them efficiently and safely on the ground, because this was how accidents were prevented and efficiency thus maintained. Badly fitted tack and harness

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30 “You learned to groom. Braces down, so you’d got plenty of room for your shoulders and curry comb and brush. Then you had a parade afterwards. Stables they used to call that. That was mucking out the manure. Always had stables 10:00 of a morning. ...it was hard work, it made you sweat. We had one officer who used to rub his hand on them, or his glove on them. If he saw dust from the horse on his glove you got in a row sort of thing. Got pulled up. Made to do it properly. ... It was alright I suppose.” Bird R.C., Private Royal Field Artillery, Taped Interview, IWM10656.
lead to sore backs and other problems, while a buckle left undone or a girth left unchecked had the potential to cause a serious, and possibly even fatal, accident. Again, attention to small matters prevented them from becoming more serious, and the horse’s military effectiveness was thus maintained. During training, soldiers were encouraged to see their horse as a weapon, which performed more efficiently when it was properly maintained, and upon whose health he would at some point have reason to rely. Echoing discussion in chapter one, where soldiers during the Boer War were put at risk because their horses were unable to perform the work demanded of them, the horse’s well-being was taken extremely seriously during the Great War. Not simply because it was humane, but because the horse was as essential as the soldier. For example, when interviewed, J.T. Capron explained how someone had been ‘surprised’ to hear that soldiers had groomed their horses. Perhaps the person had not understood what the purpose of grooming was, or simply not realised that such effort had gone into keeping the horses fit and well. No doubt Capron had put them right!

Recently someone was surprised to hear of our grooming our horses: but in fact much time was spent on this, Stables being a recognised and invariable part of our routine and daily drill. ... So absolutely dependent were we on the health and fitness of the teams that as the infantryman must keep his rifle clean and serviceable and never part with it, so the gunners with their horses and their guns – horse and gun forming our weapon and each always in serviceable condition (often under extremely challenging conditions) ready for action at the shortest notice.

As such, soldiers were also taught to identify common ailments, injury, lameness and signs of disease and, most importantly, how to avoid such problems occurring in the first place. The Field Service Pocket Book, for example, provided the soldier with clearly written descriptions of the various horse ailments and injuries he was likely to encounter, explained how these could be prevented, how to treat them, and when to report them. However, there was no real substitute for practical experience; a fact which sometimes left ‘Kitchener’s men’ open to criticism from those more adept at handling horses. For publications such as Punch and Country Life the travails of the hapless recruit provided rich ground for numerous amusing cartoons and stories; a particularly rich source of such material being the Army ‘Riding Schools’ in which recruits were transformed into riders in an

33 Capron J.T., 2nd Lieutenant Royal Field Artillery, Transcribed Interview, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS0268.
35 O’Rorke F.C., Executive Veterinary Officer Army Veterinary Corps, MS Diary, IWM11985.
impressively short space of time. Indeed, by the First World War riding instruction in the British Army had come to be seen as a science. It was not acceptable just to let a novice muddle along until he started to get it right, and there was no time for endless practice. Instead, aware that horsemen were not ‘made at a few days’ notice’, by 1914 the Army had adopted Major Noel Birch’s approach to riding instruction based on ‘scientific principles’.37

‘I must urge the necessity of forming by reading, and serious study, as well as by much constant practice, proper-riding-masters for the Army; though I am thoroughly apprized, as the celebrated Mr. Bourgelat observes that an ill-founded prejudice partially directs the judgement of the greater part of those people who call themselves connoisseurs. I know full well that they suppose that practice alone can insure perfection, and that in their arguments in favour of this their deplorable system, they reject with scorn all books, and all authors: but Equitation is a science; every science is founded upon principles, and they must indispensably be necessary, because what is truly just and beautiful cannot depend upon chance.38

In an army that was still overwhelmingly horse-powered, it was absolutely essential that all soldiers given ‘ownership’ of a horse were trained to ride (or drive) well enough to be able to concentrate, not on controlling their horses, or staying on-board, but upon the task in hand. Recruits, therefore, began in the comparative safety of the ‘Riding School’ and then progressed on to riding in the open and across country. Of course, we must also add to this education the drills and mounted orders which also had to be learned, not to mention instruction in shooting.39 Riding School was tough and, although the training was vigorous

36 See Appendix, Figures 6,7 and 8. ‘Our Voluntary Army’, Punch, 3rd March 1915; “Glad to see you walking, my lad.”, Punch, 23rd December 1914.; “What in thunder have you been doing all the morning?”, Punch, 14th October 1914.; ‘… this same A.D.V.S. was giving instruction to a class of officers who were concerned with horses in the field, and one enterprising member of the class volunteered the information that he thought he knew all there was to know. He had, for instance, carefully read Horace Hayes “Notes on Horse Management” and Fitzwygram’s well-known book on “Horses and Stables.” “Then,” observed the A.D.V.S., “I suppose you can tell me how many bones there are in a horse’s foot.” “There are three,” promptly came the reply. The interrogator was naturally rather startled, and he had to investigate deeper and inquire the identity of the three. Our gallant officer obliged at once. “They are,” he said, “ringbone, sidebone and navicular”! He was not discharged the class that day.’36 Galtrey S., The Horse and the War, compiled from articles originally published in Country Life Magazine, Country Life, London, 1918, p.62.; ‘There ensued a period of great activity in which the eyes of all interested in military equitation were turned towards Woolwich, where Major J.F.N. Birch had initiated a series of experiments in the quickest way of teaching a man to ride – a matter of growing importance when gunnery was every year claiming more and more of an artilleryman’s time. … It is not too much to say that the whole system of teaching riding throughout the Army was revolutionised by the Woolwich experiments.’, Headlam Major-General Sir J., The History of the Royal Artillery from the Indian Mutiny to the Great War, Volume 2, 1899-1914, The Royal Artillery Association, Woolwich, 1931, p.376.


39 ‘Wagon drill involved the learning of all the different parts of harness and equipment, and how to drive singles, pairs and teams of horses and mules. Round and round in a circle. The reins must be held just so. A definite distance to be kept from the horse in front.’, Pratchett W., Private Royal Army Service Corps Horse Transport, Memoir, Liddle Collection, Leeds, P14.
and often very good, little sympathy was wasted on the ‘duffer or malingerer’. For example when reinforcements were required for the 8th Cavalry Reserve, *The History of the 17th Lancers* tells us how ‘of necessity the methods of selection became rough and ready’. The recruits may well have questioned the humanity of this method, but it was ‘scientific’ up to a point, and it was nothing if not effective:

The 30 horses were paraded, 30 men were placed upon them, and after trotting and cantering with and without stirrups, the last two to be unseated were selected. This system repeated throughout the 2000 men produced a supply of human material which was handed over to be equally summarily trained by the musketry officer and drill sergeants. The material, however, was good, and if they were not polished soldiers, many of these men bore the brunt of the first battle of Ypres and helped to save the world from German domination.

*Punch* and *Country Life* may have made fun at the novice horseman’s expense, but such stories were not difficult to find. Not only were the men of Britain’s New Army new to soldiering, but the majority were also novices in the responsibility of ‘owning’ a horse. Indeed, soldiers who did bring experience of working with horses with them from civilian life found that their skills were highly valued. For example, W. Thompson, who served as a waggoner in the Army Service Corps, was immediately made Loading Driver because he was experienced at handling teams of horses in civilian life. Similarly, Thomas Kirkby, who served as a Driver in the Royal Field Artillery, was paid an additional sixpence a day because he was able to go ‘any position; lead, centre or wheel.’ Not surprisingly, Kirkby deliberately sought to join a regiment where he would be able to work with horses and utilise his existing skills. However, for W. Pratchett the prospect of having anything to do with horses at all was utterly terrifying. Pratchett recalled how eager he had been to enlist in 1915, but also how a ‘lifelong dread’ of horses had lead him to plead urgently with the recruiting sergeant that he might be assigned to “Anything but horses, please Sir!” Either the sergeant was not listening, or he had a sense of humour, for Pratchett found himself enlisted as a Private in the Horse Transport of the Royal Army Transport Corps. He distinctly recalled his first ‘stables’ where, despite his initial terror, he was soon being instructed by a corporal in how to groom and was thus able to ‘set about it’.

We were soon marched away to the stables in single file, and when we came to the halt each recruit stood opposite a horse which was waiting to be groomed and fed. The stables were long buildings lighted with rather feeble electric lamps, but it was

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40 Pratchett W., Private Royal Army Service Corps Horse Transport, Memoir, Liddle Collection, Leeds, P14.
42 Thompson W., Waggoner Army Service Corps Horse Transport, Transcript of Taped Interview, Liddle Collection, Leeds, TR/08/9.
43 Kirkby T.E., Driver Royal Field Artillery, Interview Nov 1989, Transcribed, Liddle Collection, Leeds, TR/04/11.
light enough for me to see with horror that above my particular horse was written on a large sign, ‘Danger!’ I don’t think I have ever funkled anything before or since as I did that horse. There was no opportunity whatever of changing horses – no appeal! I was in an agony of indecision, but fortunately the word of command to ‘set about it’ was not long forthcoming. ... So, trusting in providence, I slipped quietly into the stall and set about my work, receiving instruction as to holding a brush and grooming from a corporal.  

Recalling the old adage ‘pride comes before a fall’ the numerous stories of soldiers of all ranks remind us that the horse (and mule especially) were remarkably adept at checking any misplaced arrogance in their human counterpart. The Army’s horses may not have had agency in the wider scheme, but they were not machines either. A. Whiteley remembered how he, having started learning to ride only very recently in the Royal Field Artillery, was publicly humiliated by his horse after just one moment’s misplaced over-confidence:

I was billeted with a plumber and his family. So I am proud as punch going through Great Baddow and the plumber’s family were looking through the window and the greengrocer had stopped and there were some cabbage leaves on the floor and I had the reins that tight that he bends down to pick up the cabbage and I slide down his neck and sit on my behind in front of the window. The next thing was when I got up the horse had gone. It went on the parade ground and got in position before I did.

Indeed, it was the horses’ very individuality which made their management in war all the more complex. While the War Office saw numbers supplied, numbers on the Army’s strength, and numbers destroyed, the personnel of horsed regiments saw their horses from a very different perspective. It was relatively straightforward to think of a horse only as a weapon while it remained just one of many thousands. However, once horses were assigned to their units, and particularly once a soldier took ‘ownership’ of his horse, it became increasingly difficult to ignore the character traits and foibles that made each horse a ‘person’. For example, J.T. Capron described how each unit within the battery had a ‘corporate’ life, and how the horses were as much a part of this as the men. Their horses were individuals, and there was an ‘identification’ of each pair of horses with their driver. For many soldiers the relationship they formed with their horses was akin to that they forged with the men with whom they served.

Not only was there complete individuality in each horse, or mule, and – in a strange way – an identification of each pair with its driver – besides this there was a

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44 See Appendix, Figure 10. Pratchett W., Private Royal Army Service Corps Horse Transport, Memoir, Liddle Collection, Leeds, P14.
45 Whiteley A., Royal Field Artillery, Transcript of Taped Interview, Liddle Collection, Leeds, TR/08/59.
46 For example, and as many experienced horsemen were inclined to point out, although mules were in many ways superior to horses for war work, their legendary obstinacy could also make them ‘most frightful people.’, Theakston W.E., NCO Royal Field Artillery, IWM16710.
corporate and obvious life as a unit in the whole of the battery “horse lines”. ... Every one was an individual, with peculiarities and characteristics – they were more than “transport”, each driver “owned” and was jealously responsible for his own pair. Here was the tragedy when casualties occurred.47

Theakston was in agreement and added to the hard work the ‘pride’ that so many drivers took in their horses’ welfare and turnout:

“Everything that happened to a horse happened to whoever owned their horse. You groomed it, you had a tool for picking out stones in the horse’s hoof. You fed it. You bedded it down at night. Everything that happened to the horse. A horse was well maintained. ... One took a pride in that really.”48

It was this close daily contact that created the soldier-horse relationship. Useful parallels can be drawn, for example, between the working relationship that was formed between soldiers and their horses during the Great War and the experience of mounted police officers today. Like the soldier of the First World War, Dierendonck and Goodwin found that American mounted police officers described a close relationship with their horses that developed because they spent so many hours a day together. Moreover, and interestingly once compared with the dangers soldiers and their horses faced, these same officers considered the bond they formed with their horses as ‘essential to developing a mutual trust’ and being able to predict how their horses would ‘behave in most situations.’49 For the soldier and his horse, forced so often to rely totally on each other, this ‘mutual trust’ was reinforced every time they survived unscathed. For example, the service diary of C.A. Corfield, a Captain in the Army Service Corps attached to the 3rd Cavalry Division, described what happened when he was shelled while transporting horse feed and rations. Had he not been so quick thinking the consequences would most certainly have been very much worse.

...dozens of men were knocked over, the oats disappeared into the ditch on their own and several sacks were cut clean in half. We were all smothered in filth, the air was a mass of sticks and great clods of earth. I thought the transport horses were sure to bolt, but I think they were so frightened they really didn’t know what way to do. I held onto the leaders of the wagon, as much as to save myself being trampled as stop them running away!50

47 Capron J.T., 2nd Lieutenant Royal Field Artillery, Transcribed Interview, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS0268.
48 Theakston W.E., NCO Royal Field Artillery, IWM16710.
50 Corfield F.A., Captain Army Service Corps attached to 3rd Cavalry Division, GS Diary, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS0365.
Soldiers and their horses got ‘through tough situations together’ on a daily basis. They lived and worked alongside one another in very difficult conditions. No wonder then that the soldier came to rely on his horse, and his horse in him. No wonder also, that once a soldier had a horse he liked and trusted he guarded it so jealously. For example, the letters of E.J. Billington, an Officer in the 14th Battalion of The Gloucester Regiment, repeatedly expressed concern when he thought they might lose the better of their horses, or when the horses and men might be split up. In a letter dated 16th August 1917 he noted, for example, how one of his best heavy draught horses might be lost because of a picked up nail, and how he hoped ‘she gets better before we have a move or shall lose her’. Similarly, on 21st February 1918 his concerns were for one of his drivers, Fips, who having just come back from leave ‘was now parted from “his Billy” for the first time in two years.’ When soldiers, like Fips, had been almost entirely responsible for the same horse for two years, and often longer, it is not surprising that in so many cases a bond was formed between soldier and horse. Evidence of this bond was hinted at here when Billington referred to Fips’ horse not just as Billy, but as ‘his Billy’, suggesting that the two had come to be seen as a unit.

Perhaps not surprisingly then, soldiers considered it very good fortune when they found themselves issued with particularly good horses. Indeed, although efforts were made to match the right horses and then to match the right horses with the best driver for that team, there was no guarantee how well a horse would settle into military life and little opportunity for ‘going back’ once it had been issued. For example, Trooper Matson’s horse, the aptly named Jezebel, made his life thoroughly miserable.

He would have given a month’s pay to get rid of her, but he was powerless. Jezebel had been issued to Trooper Matson and Trooper Matson would have to keep her. That’s how things were in the Army.

In contrast, J.R. Johnston, who had served on the Western Front as a Horse Transport Driver with the Canadian Army from 1916-1919, was quite convinced that his saddle horse, Split Ear, had looked after him and often demonstrated far more common sense than he did.
himself. So much so in fact that he believed his ‘kindness’, or sympathetic consideration, was repaid when Split Ear ‘took care’ of him. Effectively, he felt he owed his survival to this horse.

A fellow soon becomes attached to his saddle horse and the feeling is very mutual, as I sometimes think the horse has the better common sense of the two, and appreciates a little kindness a whole lot ... I believe my saddle horse knew more than I did, and it is one of the reasons why I lasted as long as I did. He took care of me.\(^56\)

Split Ear’s apparent ‘common sense’ could be dismissed as pure instinct and any horse’s natural desire to flee from what it fears.\(^57\) Viewed thus, when Johnston’s horses bolted and took him home somewhat faster than the ‘regulation pace’ they had not shown common sense in human terms, but had merely taken themselves back to their lines and to a place of comparative safety.\(^58\) Importantly, however, when their instinct combined with Johnston’s ability to understand it and use it to his advantage, this had got all three of them out of trouble. Not surprisingly, Johnston believed he had been particularly lucky the day Split Ear and Tuppence were assigned to him:

I had been given a team of horses and it was one of my lucky breaks in the army. I had a small western team, about eight hundred and fifty pounds each and by far the best team in the outfit. My saddle horse was about as nice an animal as could be found and, although the off horse was somewhat nervous, they made a wonderful little team... I gave them credit for getting me out of a lot of dirty messes that I found myself in.\(^59\)

When Johnston remembered his two horses it was with pride, respect, and always with great affection. At some point Johnston and his team were separated and he doesn’t tell us what became of them.\(^60\) This small tragedy, for so it must surely have been for him at the time, reminds us that a soldier’s horse was never his own, no matter how fond of it he may have become. From the Army’s perspective, the soldier-horse relationship simply increased the efficiency of the horse-human partnership, and thus its effectiveness as a weapon of


\(^{58}\) ‘Fourth Army Standing Order no. 234 is republished for information. Horses and mules in all transport vehicles with the sole exception of Officers Mess Carts, are not to be trotted, except in cases of emergency. This is to be brought to the notice of all ranks.’ Orders Books of the Twelfth Lancers, Derby Museum and Archive.


war. However, the mutual understanding that came out of sympathetic consideration had the potential to save both human and equine life.

A lighthorseman loves, lives with, cares for, and is sometimes saved by his horse. The horses are never left, day or night. Normally they are groomed twice a day, watered twice a day, fed three times a day, and picqueted at night. On picquet duty, a trooper will seek out and snuggle up to his own horse ... Tough troopers have been known to weep when their beloved horses are wounded, and have to be shot, which is often the case.

Thus, and although this scene may appear to verge on the sentimental, this description of the lighthorseman’s ‘love’ for his horse is not so romantic as it first appears. Soldiers did develop a particular fondness for one horse over another, and as we have already seen, came to guard their horses ‘jealously’ once this bond had been formed. However, how and why this bond was formed with some horses and not others provides us with some interesting clues as to why it ever came into being at all. For example, it is interesting to observe how, in the majority of bonds, the soldier’s particular fondness for that specific horse usually developed because it had been earned in some way. When horses were singled out for special consideration this frequently sprang from purely pragmatic, even mercenary origins. In many cases particular evidence of ‘character’ was sufficient reason, but more often than not this same horse was also a good worker, or had been in the battery longer than the others. For example, Major Archer-Houblon’s personal record of the war mentioned either by name or number at least thirty horses who had in some way distinguished themselves in his Artillery Troop over the course of the War. For example, Slogger was ‘the most perfect of gun leaders’ and, long before ever setting foot in France, was reputed to have jumped a gun in ‘a close run thing during a musical drive.’ Old Dick won first prize at the last brigade show of the war, while Cyril and Charlie were notable for being ‘the best-looking horses in the Troop’. Ben was ‘one of the most lovable and attractive’ horses ‘who ever wore a saddle’, while Taffy could be ‘called upon at every emergency’. Bill had served in the Boer War, and worked in his section’s gun team almost continuously until he finally broke his leg in 1917. Some carried wound stripes and a great many survived until the War’s end.

Horses earned their names in various ways. Sometimes horses were named after a place, or a battle, while others were given names which reflected their personality, for better or

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61 “We eventually arrived only to find broken down sheds for billets where we stabled the horses. I was frozen and hungry so turned round to the Brigade Major and asked him where the drivers were sleeping. The reply was – with your horses you are on active service now!” Clarke J.C., Transport Driver attached to 1/9th Battalion London Regiment, IWM06/70/1.


worse. Other names were more affectionate. For example, J.T. Capron’s horse was called Kitty, and he was evidently very fond of her:

My mare Kitty took it in her stride – no doubt after the two years she had already then faced belching gun and bursting shell she’d become inured, maybe already partly deaf, poor Kitty.

However, other horses of his acquaintance distinguished themselves in other ways. Capron also recalled a mule who his men named The Merry Widow, and who always took three times longer to drink her fill when watered. Another, Lion, had earned his name by being terrible to handle, but also an exceptional ‘puller’:

Among the mule reinforcements in DAC I remember Lion, a vicious animal needing two men to groom him (one held up a foreleg and held his nose with a twitch) but who was a mighty puller who, rightly handled by his own driver could lever a bogged-down vehicle out of mud or hole by his own peculiarly effective crawling forward method quite distinct from the normal horse’s heave.

Quite often the names bestowed upon horse and mule reflected the soldier’s sense of humour, and they certainly suggest the way the humans in the horse-human relationship felt about their charges. In more recent years Vicki Hearne has questioned whether the act of naming is merely another way in which humans exert their dominance over non-human animals, and she does of course have a point. However, and as Hearne also identifies, naming is part of a language that enables humans to train and work with their horses. Thus, in the context of the soldier-horse relationship of the First World War, the act of naming should be seen more as an identification of how soldiers grew to see their horses as individuals. For example, A. Rowlerson, who had served with the Lancashire Fusiliers in Gallipoli and on the Western Front, recalled a horse called Bovril. Bovril did not earn this name because he was particularly strong, or even particularly fierce, but because of his being a ‘rig’.

We … commandeered a Borough Council water cart drawn by a big strong horse which was later christened Bovril. This was not because the horse was beyond average size but because he was a ‘rig’, (in other words only partly castrated) and was prone to detaching himself from the picket line at night and looking round his...
newly acquired harem. I imagine it was not beyond the capabilities of some of the boys on night picket to deliberately let him loose, just for the mere hell of it.69

Very often a horse was singled out because it was more impressive to look at, was faster, better schooled, or didn’t bite, kick, or display any other such unpleasant vices.70 For example, W.E. Theakston prized Number 66 because ‘you could sit in that horse like an armchair ... without bumping.’71 This may seem a somewhat mundane reason to prize one horse over others. However, there is a lot to be said for a horse which is comfortable to ride when many hours each day are spent in the saddle. Although Number 66 may have earned Theakston’s affection through the mere fortune of having been born with good confirmation and a comfortable stride, this did not stop Theakston growing to see the horse, not just as a piece of Army machinery, but as a companion. Indeed, Theakston’s understated regard for his horse was evident when he spoke of his reaction to Number 66’s death.

It affected me a great deal. It was a sort of companionship that had weathered some years really from the time I had the horse.72

In memory, and at the time, soldiers often referred to their horses as friends, and expressed genuine sadness when they died. Private Bird, although he became accustomed to the death of horses aboard ship during his regiment’s transport to Alexandria, was never hardened entirely. Indeed, when asked whether he had felt ‘upset’ when horses died, Bird replied instead (and after a moment’s thought) that he had felt ‘sorry’.

Q “Did it upset you when they died?”
B “Well no, felt sorry. I felt sorry for them. I used to feel sorry for the horses ‘cause they can’t speak to you can they?”73

This subtle preference for one word over another was clearly important to Bird. For us it provides an insight into how the soldier-horse relationship grew out of sympathetic consideration for the horse’s well-being. Here Bird spoke about horses he may not have known that well, but he still felt enough sympathy for them to be sorry when they died. If this was the case with horses he had no particular bond with, we can only imagine the feeling of drivers who having so ‘jealously’ cared for their horses then lost them when they were killed.74 Indeed, it is not sentimental to suggest that in such circumstances these drivers would have felt ‘upset’ as well as ‘sorry’. To reiterate J.T. Capron’s similarly

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69 Rowlerson A., Lancashire Fusiliers, Memoir compiled from his letters, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS1392.
70 ‘Dirty Bertie, as he became known amongst my friends ... was a grey gelding, a good chest with good slim legs and much younger than my earlier mount ... he was as sure-footed as a cat. ... He had lived all his life out of doors on a farm but had been kindly used and had a good “mouth”.’, Leith H., My Four-Legged Friend Bertie, Trooper in German SW Africa, Liddle Collection, Leeds, AF09.
71 Theakston W.E., NCO Royal Field Artillery, IWM16710.
72 Theakston W.E., NCO Royal Field Artillery, IWM16710.
73 Bird R.C., Private Royal Field Artillery, Taped Interview, IWM10656.
74 Capron J.T., 2nd Lieutenant Royal Field Artillery, Transcribed Interview, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS0268.
understated reference to what must for the drivers must have been heart-breaking, ‘Here was the tragedy when casualties occurred.’ Sentimentality had little place in warfare, but there is ample evidence to suggest that many soldiers were deeply affected by the suffering they had witnessed. For example, W.E. Theakston remembered the terrible screaming of wounded horses.

A shell was dropped among the horses killing and wounding quite a number of the horses. I can remember feeling, strongly, that a thing I never wanted to listen to again is a horse that is wounded and hurt and screaming. Crying. If you can understand that?

In 1916 The Lancet published an article by Captain M.D. Eder on the ‘Psycho-Pathology of the War Neuroses’. In the article Eder considered several case studies of ‘shell-shocked’ soldiers, and amongst these was ‘Case 45’. For Eder it was Case 45’s intense response to his experiences which was particularly interesting. Here, however, his case provides us with another insight into the deep impression the suffering of the horses made on so many soldiers. Certainly, and especially given discussion already in this chapter, we can safely assume that Case 45 could not have been alone in his feelings.

He wept profusely when talking to me of the sufferings experienced by the wounded mules in Gallipoli, and when I suggested that human beings suffered more he would not have it so. Animals could not talk. No animals should have been allowed there he said.

Case 45 was a 25-year-old private serving in the Royal Engineers. He was described as being ‘a thick-set, sturdy fellow, jovial and kindly, the son of an agricultural labourer.’ As a child he had been brought up around horses and had recollections of being put up on the plough horse by his father. As a boy, he had been engaged around the stables and had later become a groom. As a result, Case 45 not only possessed an expertise in horse management gained through practical experience, but also the natural tendency to sympathetic consideration which makes a true horseman.

He never had any trouble with horses, for he understood them exactly, and he was always given the difficult ones to manage.

Case 45 had survived Gallipoli, but was later frost-bitten in Salonica. Interestingly, Eder observes how ‘the patient’ had been able to manage his fear whilst he was actively engaged looking after his horses. However once hospitalised, and therefore ‘condemned to

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75 Capron J.T., 2nd Lieutenant Royal Field Artillery, Transcribed Interview, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS0268.
76 Theakston W.E., NCO Royal Field Artillery, IWM16710.
inactivity’, he started to suffer from terrible nightmares, with insomnia, headaches and to shake uncontrollably.

So long as the patient was actively engaged looking after the horses he could expend all his mental excitement in pity for them ... But condemned to inactivity by the frost-bitten finger this mental excitement (which even before had been abnormally expressed) finds not outlet, emotionally or actually. Could it reach consciousness the patient would have been able to deal with it, as he subsequently did with our help.80

In more recent years Nigel Hunt has crossed disciplinary boundaries and applied his research into the psychological effects of war trauma to historical, social and literary contexts. He argues that although the symptoms experienced by veterans (and civilians) vary according to the exigencies of a particular campaign, the Western Front of World War One being very different to the Boer War for example, similar symptoms have always ‘tended to co-occur after a traumatic event’.81 For example, ‘avoidance’ helped to stop soldiers from thinking too much, but was only ‘an effective strategy for a limited length of time.’82 Thus, for example, while Case 45 had been able to manage while he had his horses and a familiar routine to distract him, he had started to suffer more acute symptoms once this outlet was taken away. In 1918, W.H.R. Rivers’ ‘The Repression of War Experience’ discussed ‘repression’ in much the same terms as Hunt talks about ‘avoidance’ today.83 Although perhaps not exactly identical, repression and avoidance do however show some similarity in that they involve a ‘channelling’ of emotion. What had certainly not been anticipated during the First World War was the psychological strain modern warfare would place on the soldier. For example, as W.H.R. Rivers noted:

There are few, if any, aspects of life in which repression plays so prominent and so necessary a part as in the preparation for war. The training of a soldier is designed to adapt him to act calmly and methodically in the presence of events naturally calculated to arouse disturbing emotions. His training should be such that the energy arising out of these emotions is partly damped by familiarity, partly diverted into other channels. The most important feature of the present war in its relation to the production of war neurosis is that the training in repression normally spread over years has had to be carried out in short spaces of time, while those thus

incompletely trained have had to face strains such as have never previously been known in the history of mankind.84

Of course only those who have experienced war first-hand can ever really know what it is like. However, the experience of Case 45 and of other veterans seems to suggest that routine provided a distraction from fears and worries. It was certainly the case that soldiers who worked with horses were left, and especially if they were conscientious, with very little time each day when they were not fully occupied. In horsed regiments virtually every point of every day was spent in some form of predominantly horse-related activity.85 R.C. Bird explained, for example, that “There was always something to do with horses.”86 Case 45 had coped while he remained in close proximity to horses. Similarly, his long-standing familiarity with the routines horses imposed had enabled him to temporarily avoid, or repress, the cause of his trauma. Indeed, given his natural sympathy for horses, it is not at all surprising that the event repeated in his nightmares had made such an impression upon him.

To return to the patient – his terrifying dream was always the same. “I see a Frenchman digging a knife into a horse. He gets off his cart to do this. It was in Serbia.” Not only at night but during the day this comes up as a vision. It is an actual occurrence. He saw a French transport soldier, drunk, get off the wagon and plunge a knife into a mule to make it go. With some others he stopped the Frenchman and drove the wagon into quarters.87

However, Eder was keen to interpret Case 45’s dreams less literally. Instead, he argued that this reaction was not about horses, but rather a projection of the patient’s fears for himself.88 Indeed, Eder appeared unable to entertain this seemingly irrational reaction of a grown man to the plight of a mere animal.

In short, he was as doting on horses as any dowager duchess over her Fido. We suspect all exaggerated sentiments – me thinks the lady does protest too much.89

Given Eder’s somewhat patronising response to this patient’s case, it is not surprising that we find other soldiers who (when confronted by scenes of equally horrific animal suffering) feigned an almost blasé attitude; no doubt fully aware that others might respond as uncomprehendingly as Eder had done. In one of several letters addressed to his uncle, W.B.S. Deverell described the daily task of shooting wounded mules. As an officer, this was a task it fell upon him to perform. There is a ring of bravado, even nonchalance, when he

86 Bird R.C., Private Royal Field Artillery, Taped Interview, IWM10656.
89 Eder Capt. M.D., ‘Psycho-Pathology of the War Neuroses’, The Lancet, August 12th 1916, p.266.
refers to the disposal of the mules at Suvla Bay as if he had simply been out for a pleasant morning stroll.

When one gets missed sometimes by (literally) inches every day one gets used to it and fatalistic and do not remember incidents very long. I suppose that is one of the joys of keeping a diary – a thing I haven’t been able to do up to the present. However, while I was out shooting mules one morning that had been knocked over by shrapnel I got the wind of a shell which burst about 3 feet behind me. I tell you it frightened me some as the Americans say.90

Perhaps he expected his uncle to appreciate the irony of the situation, or perhaps hoped to make a more serious point, just as Ross had in 1901.91 Certainly, to borrow Eder’s phrase, he seemed to ‘protest too much’. Indeed, when W.E. Theakston described a young veterinary officer’s task of destroying horses (like Deverell also whilst at Gallipoli) he was probably nearer to the truth of the matter.

Now what happened there is that the person who put them down is the veterinary surgeon. Now he was a chap that couldn’t have been much older than me. One of the Sandhurst lads. I don’t suppose he’d ever shot a horse in his life and I can remember – I can remember his feelings actually – I can remember what his feelings were like shooting the horses.92

Many soldiers did become extremely fond of their horses, but it would be sentimental in the extreme to believe this was a feeling universally shared. Indeed, to give the soldiers themselves some credit, there would have been some horses that were downright unlovable. This is not to say that soldiers were wantonly cruel, for there is little evidence to suggest that this was the case. It certainly would not have gone unpunished in an organisation where humanity, efficiency and economy were so mutually reliant. However, what we tend to observe instead is a neglect of duty, and slackness either in supervision or in discipline, which allowed neglect to occur when it should have been avoided.

However, for those soldiers who did experience such a bond, and as the example of Case 45 amply demonstrates, it became a sort of lifeline. The routine of working with horses, although hard and deeply unglamorous, provided a welcome distraction from pent up fears. Many soldiers came to rely upon their horses, and to put their trust in them. However, horses also had the potential to get a soldier into just as much physical danger, and into just as much trouble, as they did of saving him from it. In short, horses were military equipment, but they were not machines. Sympathetic consideration was about empathy; being able to appreciate that the horse for whom he was responsible also felt cold, hunger, discomfort,

90 Deverell W.B.S., Officer Army Service Corps attached to 10th Division MEF at Gallipoli, Personal Letters, IWM13093.
92 Theakston W.E., NCO Royal Field Artillery, IWM16710.
fear and pain. Similarly, a horse recognised and responded to care and affection. Many soldiers became extremely fond of their horses. Love them, or hate them, it was inescapable that some sort of relationship was formed between soldier and horse.

Now let me see your transport, are your mules in good condition?
You must cheer them up if they’re inclined to fret,
A blotting pad per head would be an excellent addition
To dry them if they ever start to sweat;
And now, when shoeing animals I’ll tell you what to do,
You must always be as gentle as a lamb,
Just make the shoes of biscuit tins and stick them on with glue,
Farrier, do you know who I am?
Chorus. – I’m General Sir Chloride H.K.L.M.
Bunter Bart., etc.

‘Until the gasoline replacement comes up, the motor is riveted in place; but with the horse, a little rest, a little water, a little stubble from the roadside or bark from the trees, a little chafing of palsied muscles, oftentimes just a little petting — and the forward march can be resumed.’ Bishop Maj Gen H.F., USA Chief of Field Artillery 1929-1934, Field Artillery, the King of Battles, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1935, p.66-68.

Chapter Four

“For King and Country” How the Soldier-Horse Relationship was Portrayed in Britain during the Great War.

We are so small, at home we have to stay. ...
But dear old Brownie soon will march away,
To serve his King and join his Country’s forces.
Oh! Isn’t he the very best of horses!1

The British Army of 1914 to 1918 expected the soldier to take care of his horse. The horse’s value, both in terms of its contribution to efficiency as well as its monetary worth, ensured that it was as well maintained as was practically possible. Humanity to the soldier was now increasingly extended to the horse, but as far as the British Army was concerned the benefits were purely pragmatic. As the Army saw it, horses that were treated with sympathetic consideration remained serviceable for longer, just as a soldier could only function if he was provided with the necessities to sustain life: food, water, warmth, shelter, rest and medical attention. In fact, the Army saw very little difference at all between the management of the soldier and the management of its horses. Ensuring the health and well-being of either was difficult when in the field. However, work with horses at any time was physically tiring, repetitive, dirty and often dangerous, and all of these hardships were multiplied in the theatre of war. Previous chapters have discussed how this partnership of human and horse contributed to military efficiency. They have also explored what the soldier-horse relationship meant to the soldiers who experienced it first-hand. Perhaps even more importantly, they have identified what held the soldier-horse relationship together, what circumstances tested it, and what the consequences were when it failed.

Despite being so unglamorous, the soldier-horse relationship was nevertheless deeply romanticised. This chapter thus begins by exploring how the soldier-horse relationship was portrayed in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. It will then follow these themes into the Great War, where discussion will consider whether portrayals of the soldier-horse relationship evolved as the War itself developed. To what extent were the British public aware of what war was really like? If a line was drawn between what could and could not be shown, where did this fall? As such, portrayals of the soldier-horse relationship are enormously valuable in that they allow us to gauge public feeling at the time. Why was the soldier-horse relationship such a popular theme? To what extent did imaginings of the soldier-horse relationship bear any resemblance to what soldiers and their horses experienced first-hand? It is by exploring these questions that we again champion the soldier-horse relationship, because they bring us closer to understanding how essential it was. Not only on the battlefield, but also in civilian life, where portrayals of the soldier and

1 See Appendix, Figure 11. For King and Country, colour postcard, Henry Frowde and Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1914/1915, Private Collection.
his horse helped the British people to safely imagine the otherwise unimaginable horrors of
modern war.

Although it is a seemingly obvious point, the fact that war looked very different when
viewed from the inside out and without the gift of hindsight is one too often overlooked.
Therefore, we must be mindful that although some wartime portrayals may seem naive, or
downright sentimental, they were produced when those who created these images, and
those for whom they were created, did not know how events would unfold. Indeed, what
instead emerges is an important distinction between what was and was not considered
acceptable when it came to human empathy with animals. For example, while the Victorians
and Edwardians did sentimentalise the horse, we must also remember that horses were
working animals, and not always treated as well as they might have been. Moreover, when
few people as yet envisaged a world in which horses would no longer carry men into battle,
the war horse was sentimentalised for the very reason that its suffering was an inevitable,
but regrettable necessity. Indeed, as James Turner warns us so enticingly in his epilogue to
Reckoning with the Beast, although it may be easy to smile at the unashamed
anthropomorphism and sentimentality of Victorian animal lovers, we must not ‘let our
amusement turn to condescension’.

Establishing a real and solid bond of sympathy with a mute beast was difficult, if not
impossible, whatever the professions of Victorian animal lovers. The somewhat
awkward and artificial compassion developed could easily have drifted into
disembodied sentimentalism, especially in an age that did not shrink from
sentiment. If love for animals appeared to many as the purest type of compassion
(as it did), it may have helped to embed in Anglo-American culture this detached and
impersonal sympathy for suffering. When contemporary indignation about suffering
occasionally seems more ritual than real, one might reflect on its ancestry.2

The soldier-horse relationship, once imbued with all the positive moral and spiritual traits of
the English ideal, became a powerful personification of the country and its people. Indeed,
the soldier’s care for his horse and his horse’s reciprocal fidelity achieved almost allegorical
levels of symbolism; the soldier becoming the gentle knight of romance brought to life. This
association with the mounted knight may well have conjured up romantic images of
‘glittering arms and floating plumes’, but the horse’s deep-rooted association with warfare
had been very well earned.3 After all, the horse had invariably participated whenever British
history was decided on the battlefield. The inevitable consequence of this association was
that when the British thought about warfare, imagined warfare or planned for war, horses
were an intrinsic and integral part of this picture. Indeed, once we remember that war could

2 Turner J., Reckoning with the Beast, Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind, The John Hopkins
3 ‘Equine Analogies,’ Household Words, 7:179, 27th August 1853.
not be waged without them, images of the soldier and his horse immediately achieve a subtle shift in resonance.

Mc Luhan has suggested that when the British portrayed warfare in the Edwardian period the horse provided a ‘cool medium’ which allowed aspects of warfare to be portrayed that would not otherwise have been acceptable. Wilkinson has taken this idea further and argues that such imagery provided the metaphorical fuel for ‘an emerging death-denying culture’. For example:

In this way, illustrations and writings constructed ways of conveying death which could not be based upon experience, but used imagery that would be obvious to viewers and readers. This imagery, firmly rooted in the emerging death-denying culture, masked the reality of casualties through suppression and denial, and did not effectively counter the pervasive image of war as beneficial, sporting, entertaining and adventurous.

Wilkinson’s picture of a readership who believed death and suffering in warfare to be ‘romantic, idealized, painless and beneficial’ is certainly a very interesting one. Indeed, there is ample material to suggest that this may well have been the case. However, the horse’s practical role in this society also suggests that this same Edwardian readership were not quite as naive as Wilkinson implies. Indeed, one only has to look to coverage of the Boer War to find examples of war portrayed, although often still sentimentally, in a fashion which suggests this audience was more willing to engage with war’s realities than Wilkinson would have us believe. Instead, warfare’s glamour, borne of a danger of the most visceral kind, generated opportunities for extremes of human behaviour which, while rightly anathema, also provided the period’s artists and commentators with boundless opportunities for drama and, inevitably, sentimentality. As Freedman has noted:

There is a thrill and drama associated with war, which every news editor and most publishers understand. ... The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs is unlikely to stimulate great novels or popular magazines with blow-by-blow accounts of negotiations over market access for textiles. ... War is the deadliest of sins, and unfortunately sin fascinates while good deeds bore. ‘War makes rattling good history’, observed Thomas Hardy, ‘but Peace is poor reading.’

Indeed, and in reference to Sir Walter Scott’s colourful rendering of a medieval tournament in his romance *Ivanhoe*, we could even suggest that the excitement generated by accounts

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of war and the sentimental satisfaction to be had from its tragedies (and the real and numerous wars of the period provided excellent opportunities for both) were only ever ‘in proportion to the actual dangers incurred’. Although *Ivanhoe* may seem an early text, what it amply illustrates is how the Victorian and Edwardian taste for the romantic and chivalric was already an inheritance:

The lower order of spectators in general – nay, many of the higher class, and it is even said several of the ladies, were rather disappointed at the champions choosing the arms of courtesy. For the same sort of persons, who, in the present day, applaud most highly the deepest tragedies, were then interested in a tournament exactly in proportion to the danger incurred by the champions engaged.\(^8\)

Indeed, such contradictions were by no means new. Although the Boer War was an important mile-stone in the practical utilisation of horses in warfare, and certainly in how the public thought about war, much of the imagery used to portray it would already have been familiar. For example, when in 1904 the committee represented in England by Mr. Albert Holt of Messrs. Holt and Holt, South African merchants, chose to commemorate ‘the services rendered to our gallant soldiers in the late war in South Africa by that most faithful of all servants the horse’ the Port Elizabeth memorial took the form of ‘a rough-hewn pedestal with a cattle trough at the foot’.\(^9\) The bronze sculpture depicted a soldier kneeling before his horse to offer it a much needed drink of water. This epitaph was carved into the stone base:

The greatness of a nation consists not so much in the number of its people or the extent of its territory as in the extent and justice of its compassion.\(^10\)

The subject of this memorial would already have been familiar by 1904. For example, this image of a soldier offering water to his horse, but for some timely alterations to uniform and equipment, bore more than a passing resemblance to a Stanley Berkley illustration of the Madhist War from the 1880s.\(^11\) During the First World War it appeared again, but given discussion in previous chapters this should not seem surprising, when as Hilda Kean has identified, this ‘common necessity drew together animals and people in a common action, drinking.’\(^12\) Thus, the simple fact that man and horse likewise felt thirst also drew the soldier and his horse together in the public imagination. Moreover, these inherited images appeared again and again for the simple reason that, as long as horses were used in war,


\(^11\) See Appendix, Figure 13. Berkley S., ‘English Cavalry Watering their Horses during the Madhist War’, http://www.gettyimages.fr, accessed 01.05.2016.

and as long as soldiers had to ensure their horses were watered, they would always have a basis in actual experience. For example, following the First World War, Sergeant C.G. Nicol concluded his official history of the Auckland Mounted Rifles with a chapter dedicated to ‘The Horse – Comrade in Arms’. Here he recounted a story not dissimilar to that told in both the Port Elizabeth memorial and in Berkley’s illustration.

...the old pack horse, smelling the water, struggled to his feet and staggered up to the group. “Shout the old chap a pint,” said a trooper, and immediately a pint of the precious liquid was poured into the lid of a “Dixie” and held out to the animal, which sucked up every drop. He looked so grateful, that another pint was given him and, small though the quantity was, he began to look better immediately.\(^{13}\)

Images which portrayed the horse’s suffering and the soldier’s endeavours to relieve this, while clearly emphasising the British soldier’s capacity for compassion, spoke also of the humanity imagined to be inherent in all those born of the same nation he served. It may merely have been an illusion, but such images helped to reinforce a belief that the British were a people of ‘justice and ‘compassion’. For example, in a poem from Kipling’s *Barrack Room Ballads* entitled ‘Follow me ‘Ome’, a soldier reflected on the death of his comrade and his regret that he had not been a better friend.\(^{14}\) In order to convey the good character of the dead man, Kipling’s grieving soldier told the reader how even his horse pined for her dead master; the implication being that she would not have shown such distress at being parted from him if he had not been so kind to her.\(^{15}\)

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Kipling was far from alone in using the horse’s faithfulness to imply that the soldier had earned it through his kindness. In an early scene of Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, for example, it was the errant knight’s ‘anxiety’ and ‘address’ in tending his horse, even putting his own cloak on his horse’s back, which convinced the hermit of his good character. Such an image reminds us of the great care so many drivers took of their horses during the First World War.


\(^{15}\) ‘Although they have a certain affection for the hand which feeds them ... they are not really affectionate, and never ... show any distinct signs of grief at separation from their masters or of pleasure when they return to them. Although there are many stories appearing to indicate a certain faithfulness in horses which have remained beside their fallen and wounded riders, the facts do not justify us in supposing that such actions are due to the affection a dog clearly feels.’, Southgate Schaler N., *Domesticated Animals, Their Relation to Man and to his Advancement in Civilization*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, first ed. 1895, 1908, p.77.
The knight shrugged his shoulders, and leaving the hut, brought in his horse ... unsaddled him with much attention, and spread upon the steed’s weary back his own mantle. The hermit was apparently somewhat moved to compassion by the anxiety as well as address which the stranger displayed in tending his horse; for muttering something about provender left for the keeper’s palfrey, he dragged out of a recess a bundle of forage, which he spread before the knight’s charger, and immediately afterwards shook down a quantity of dried fern in the corner which he assigned for the rider’s couch.\textsuperscript{16}

Ivanhoe’s sympathetic consideration for his horse demonstrated his noble and honourable character. Importantly, however, it was not entirely necessary to be of noble birth to achieve this ideal. Rather, the humble soldier’s kindness to his horse was a reflection of the wider ‘justice’ and ‘compassion’ of the country he served.

Conversely, the horse was also used to portray the barbarity of Britain’s foes. For example, in 1894 the \textit{Illustrated London News} published an exciting battle scene by the war illustrator Caton Woodville. Amidst the tumult of the fighting a ferocious ‘savage’ grasped the forelock of a fallen horse and was clearly about to strike and kill it with a wooden weapon. However, in the centre of the image a British officer, having seen what was about to occur, raised his pistol clearly with the intention of halting such an act of barbarity.\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, and looking forward again to the First World War, a supremely jingoistic article published in \textit{The English Review} in October 1914, set out to prove the ‘Intelligent Brutality’ of Britain’s German foe by unfavourably comparing the German Army’s treatment of its horses with the British ideal. For example:

Anything more sickening than the brutality with which horses are treated in Germany it would be difficult to imagine. In the Army horses are not “ridden in,” they are flogged in. I have seen refractory horses flogged by German dragoons with heavy thongs until the beasts, who were tied up, shrieked. When I subsequently complained to an officer of the regiment to which the men belonged ... he smiled at me condescendingly. “We Germans don’t mince matters,” he explained. “Horses have to be licked into shape. The sooner they learn what is wanted, the better for them”; and he added, “We don’t want circus horses in our Army like you English.”\textsuperscript{18}

Such comparisons were not limited only to Britain’s enemies. How a nation was imagined to treat its horses was also used as a measure of its moral character and its worthiness as an ally. Such sweeping observations may not have been particularly accurate, but they were certainly resilient. The French cavalry of 1914, for example, were thought to be excellent

cavalrymen with fine quality horses, but to be ‘painfully’ bad horsemasters.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, according to General Sir George Barrow, even the ‘groaning and struggling’ of a wounded horse failed to provoke ‘the slightest notice’ amongst the French troops. Recalling some of the horror that had so profoundly affected Case 45, it was Barrow who had put an end to this horse’s suffering.\textsuperscript{20}

One morning I saw a wounded horse lying on a heap of burning litter. He was groaning and struggling to get up but fell back each time on the burning stuff. The yard was full of French troops, but not one took the slightest notice of the horse which was slowly roasting to death in front of their eyes. I put him out of his misery with a bullet from my pistol.\textsuperscript{21}

In direct contrast, Britain’s Russian allies were viewed very positively. It was widely thought, for example, that the Russian Cossack loved his horse above all else and that, because of this, there was a bond of ‘ready sympathy’ with the British soldier. This was, of course, a flight of fancy which took the soldier’s ‘love’ for his horse rather further than would ever have been tolerated in British society. Nevertheless, it was a useful comparison to draw when it came to generating sympathy for an ally.

“His horse, his arms, his son, his wife.” Such is the order of precedence of the Cossack soldier’s main affections; and when they talk of revenge upon the Germans the reason for their resentment is expressed not in terms of human lives lost or of country devastated or of towns razed flat, but in terms of horses. “We will make them pay dearly,” they say “for all the horses we have lost.”\textsuperscript{22}

Images of the soldier’s horse fulfilled an emotional need. Evidence of the soldier’s kindness and compassion helped the British people to reconcile themselves with the act of war. It was far easier to believe the actions of your country to be honourable when the soldiers sent to fight on its behalf were all made in Ivanhoe’s image. Even death was easier to tolerate if it could be imagined to have been heroic and necessary. In 1905, for example, Tennyson’s \textit{The Charge of the Light Brigade} appeared in a popular book for children entitled \textit{Our Island Story} alongside an account which, although extremely patriotic, certainly did not shrink from describing the disastrous charge at Balaclava.

One dreadful mistake was made at a battle called Balaclava. ... Lord Raglan sent a message to the officer in command, telling him to prevent the Russians carrying

\textsuperscript{20} Eder Capt. M. D., ‘Psycho-Pathology of the War Neuroses’, \textit{The Lancet}, August 12\textsuperscript{th} 1916, p.266.
away some guns. The officer thought he was meant to charge right forward and he did so. ... He and his men rode straight to death. ... When their comrades saw what the Light Brigade was doing, they stood watching in horror and wonder, as six hundred men of the brigade rode down the lane of fire and smoke, and disappeared in the bank of the smoke beyond. It was horrible! ... Six hundred and seven men went, only one hundred and ninety-eight returned. ... It was a splendid show of bravery, but utterly useless. What was the order given? What were the men meant to do? No one can answer the question. ‘It is magnificent,’ said a French officer who saw it, ‘but it is not war.’ Yet all the world saw what the Britons could do in obedience to a command.\textsuperscript{23}

It is interesting to note, for example, how the ‘dreadful mistake’ that had led to the ‘utterly useless’ deaths of four hundred and nine men was still considered to be a ‘splendid show of bravery’. A military disaster was gradually being transformed into an opportunity to praise the British soldier’s discipline and, thus, into a cause of pride. Similarly, Tennyson’s \textit{The Charge of the Light Brigade} conveyed the speed and barely-controlled power of the \textit{arme blanche}; the poem’s very rhythm inviting the reader to imagine the danger, noise and sheer spectacle of over six hundred mounted cavalrymen thundering into action.\textsuperscript{24}

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\textit{Thus we now focus upon the First World War, and how its events were similarly transformed. For example, when Aunt Jolly sent a postcard to Dolly ‘with love’ in December 1915, we gain a valuable glimpse of how the British had coped with mobilization. The card, published by Henry Frowde and Hodder & Stoughton, was entitled \textit{For King and Country}.\textsuperscript{25} The card’s message, conveyed in the poem quoted at the beginning of this chapter, was accompanied by a decidedly romantic illustration in which two very blond and rosy-cheeked children said a fond farewell to a contented looking chestnut pony. The oldest of the two

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children, a girl dressed all in pink with frilly petticoats, stripy ankle socks and her hair tied with a pink bow, hugged the pony’s neck. In front of the pony stood her younger brother, dressed in a blue checked smock. He offered Brownie a piece of apple with his small hand held palm upwards and fingers flat, while in the other hand clutching another shiny apple. It was clear that a sensible adult somewhere in his life had taught him the proper way to offer a treat to a horse; a detail which tells us that ‘dear old Brownie’ was something of a family pet. The tragedy of this happy scene was that Brownie was needed for the war effort and so would soon ‘march away’ when the Army’s purchasers came to claim him. Heart-warming certainly, but did it bear any resemblance at all to what compulsory horse purchase had really been like? Discussion in previous chapters tells us that sadly it did not. Rather, this postcard suggests that sentimental portrayals like For King and Country fulfilled an emotional need at a time of national crisis. There may have been no room for sentimentality on the battlefield, but people at home sometimes needed the consolation that such portrayals were able to provide.

The subject of For King and Country places it firmly amidst the large-scale Army horse purchases of 1914 and 1915; first on mobilization and later following the War’s costly initial stages. These early horse purchases were conducted within the United Kingdom, and thus involved the British public in a manner that would not be repeated once horses started to be sourced abroad. To add context to this image, The Times reported on the recent mobilization in a regularly appearing feature entitled ‘Horsing the Army’. The article, which was clearly of sufficient interest to warrant two columns in the more serious section of the newspaper, believed the mobilization to have been a great success.

Reviewing the situation generally the Remount directorate at the War Office, presided over by Major-General Birkbeck, and its officers distributed over the country, may congratulate themselves on having placed 30,000 magnificent horses in the ranks of the Expeditionary Force, 80,000 useful horses for the Territorial Force, and 18,000 horses for the Reserve formations within 12 days of the order to mobilize. ... Since the completion of the mobilization the large increments to our Forces and the large demands to replace the natural wastage due to extremely arduous operations have been successfully met during the last three months from the resource in the United Kingdom. Horses are still flowing to units in the field of a sample equal to that with which they were first equipped, and some 60,000 more have been purchased since mobilization was completed for drafts and new formations.26

We may question whether the horses which continued to flow into units were of the same quality, as evidence suggests this may not have been so.27 However, what is certain is that

26 ‘Horsing the Army, The Expeditionary Force, Method and Success, The Times, issue 40743, 5th Jan 1915.
27 "I had on mobilization, a fine pair of horses. A beautiful pair of horses they were. Normandy’s they called ‘em. ... But as time went by the Regular Army came and stripped the Territorial army of its best horses to make
an operation of this scale could not have proceeded as efficiently as it appeared to have
done without the support of the British population; a point *The Times* recognised in this
same article by mentioning how a ‘successful mobilization in time of national peril could
only be done if the spirit of the country was with it.’

What is certain is that the experience of compulsory purchase would not have been a happy
one for a great many horse owners. In his 1932 book “Here’s Horse Sense!” R.S.
Summerhayes recalled ‘the most affecting scene’ he had ever witnessed between man and
horse. This had taken place in 1914 when he was acting as Civilian Remount Purchasing
Officer for the Expeditionary Force. He explained how it was his job to select any horse he
thought suitable ‘no matter to whom it belonged’ and how he then had ‘to fix the price.’
This was a process he must have repeated numerous times. However, he particularly
remembered this instance because of the owner’s reaction to the sale.

...my attention was drawn to the man who had owned him – a greengrocer in a small
way of business. This big burly fellow was patting the horse and generally making
much of him; he then pulled out a lock of mane which he rolled up and put in his
pocket, and, after kissing him on the nose, he turned away with the tears streaming
down his face. War or no war, you can imagine what I felt like at parting for all time
two such friends.

H.J. Pendleton, who served as a wheel driver in the Royal Field Artillery and later as a sapper
with the Royal Engineers, also remembered accompanying his commanding officer when he
went around the local area ‘commandeering’ horses for his regiment. It appears that if it
could be proved the horse was necessary for business, the owner had an opportunity for
appeal. From this we must then draw the conclusion that the greengrocer of Summerhayes’
tale had relinquished his friend voluntarily. However, Pendleton’s experiences tell us that
many owners did not respond to compulsory purchase with quite the same quiet
resignation.

Well it was one of surprise and objection. There was one chap had a coal cart and he
said, “You don’t want this horse he said. This thing he’s 11 years old and he made all
sorts of excuses. It was a fine horse, but you’d have thought it was the worst old
dobbin that ever struggled on God’s earth ... but there were going to be a few
objections among the ones we approached.

It would be incorrect to assume that all horse-owners responded with such reluctance, but
neither should we underestimate how traumatic the process could well have been.

up for the casualties in France and we had more horses and many couldn’t understand English because they’d
come from the Prairies and South America. Difficult horses.” Pendleton H.J., Wheel Driver Royal Field Artillery,
IWM10939.

30 Pendleton H.J., Wheel Driver Royal Field Artillery, IWM19039.
Singleton, for example, gives the example of Farmer Knox of Upper Baynton Farm near Westbury who refused access to his stables until threatened with a search warrant.\textsuperscript{31} Similarly, although farmers were to some extent spared, many still felt they had been left to manage with only the aged and the lame while their best horses were taken.\textsuperscript{32} Indeed, in Chapter Two, discussion demonstrated to what extent \textit{Remount Regulations} had fully anticipated how some owners would deny access to their stables.\textsuperscript{33} 

\textit{For King and Country} depicted an event rendered irrelevant today by mechanisation, but which at the time was already in the process of becoming part of the War’s story. Even a humble postcard carried with it an essence of what it must have been like to be on the receiving end of mobilization. Indeed, the very fact that this postcard came into existence, was purchased, written upon, posted, read and then kept suggests that the sentiments it conveyed were of sufficient value then to have ensured its survival today. By likening the horse to the soldier, and by emphasising their shared experience, even the humblest of horses could become a war horse. Brownie was as vital to the war effort as the soldier, and his going thus bravely borne with a similar spirit. Today it retains its value because it provides us with an opportunity to understand how people may have felt at the time. However, Bettelheim takes this still further, arguing that such representations of human-animal relationships in fact allow us to explore the very nature of what it is to be human.

From fairy tales to photography, nowhere is the complexity of human-animal relations more apparent than in the creative arts. Art illuminates the nature and significance of animals in modern Western thought. Encounters with animals – whether fictionalized in fables or visualized in paintings and photographs – compel us to question what it means to be human and how we differ from and are similar to them.\textsuperscript{34}

However, for others amongst the British population life continued regardless. Indeed, there were those whose primary concern was not when or if Britain would achieve victory, but whether the War would have a detrimental effect on their sporting calendar. In \textit{Academy and Literature}, for example, F.G. Aflalo questioned to what extent it was acceptable that the War ‘put an end to sport’ and argued that it should not be allowed to cause ‘the compulsory abandonment of field sports that stand for much in the normal year of those able to enjoy

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\item \textsuperscript{32} Chandler D., interviewed 29.9.11., re. article in \textit{Derby Evening Telegraph, Bygones}, 12th Sept 2011, p.4-5.
\item \textsuperscript{33} \textit{Remount Regulations 1913}, HMSO, London, p.8-9.
\end{itemize}
Other articles questioned whether the War would put a stop to horse-racing and what impact it would have on the forthcoming hunt season. For example:

Melton is not just now rich, or busy, or gay; and hunting just now has all but ceased to be a form of sport. The masters themselves have said it. ... It could hardly be so looked upon when hunting men had joined the colours in thousands; and when the Remount Department had swooped in the first days of the war on the 15,000 and more hunters which were in condition and ready for service. For example, the Belvoir Hunt sent 35 of its horses; the Meynell 15, and its members 170 ... Things are not yet so serious as to demand the abandonment of the Hunt steeplechases in the spring. Meanwhile Melton must go quietly along, doing its best with its remounts, its pork pies, its two more than usually busy mills, and the soldiers who fill the lodgings usually occupied in winter by grooms and gentlemen’s gentlemen.

Commonly held assumptions about the period tend to assume such concerns were those of a social elite, so out of touch with reality they could preoccupy themselves with their sports and games while the country was at war. Nevertheless, for the writer of this column, and those for whom it was written, it was genuinely felt that ‘a blight had fallen’ over an essential aspect of British life.

Intriguingly, and although we rarely hear their voice, there were also those who cared little one way or the other what happened to horses at any time, and less still when the country was at war. This was a matter bemoaned by Bell and Baillie-Weaver in their 1912 article for the Humanitarian League, in which they had argued that war horses be included under the terms of the Geneva Convention. One means by which to elicit support for the horse’s cause was to emphasise the moral and humane connection that existed between their welfare and that of the soldier. Indeed, it is at this point in their argument that Bell and Baillie-Weaver were perhaps the most persuasive.

...we shall thereby raise the status of animals as a whole, and heighten the estimation with which they are held by the majority of men. And this point is of the utmost importance not only to animals but also to men, for the link between the proper treatment of the one and of the other is far, far closer than most people realise.

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36 ‘Sporting Intelligence, The War and Racing, Horse-Boxes taken over by the Government’, *The Times*, issue 40595, 5th August 1914.
This connection between the welfare of the soldier and that of the horse had not been missed by the British Army who, as the previous chapter explored, fully recognised the benefits such an approach brought to its organisation. However, the general public did not always see how vital the horse was. Poems, such as Ogilvie’s The Remount Train, addressed this ambivalence to the war horse’s plight by imbuing it with a spirit of the chivalric, the romantic and the patriotic.\footnote{Ogilvie W.H. in Galtry S., The Horse and the War, Country Life, London, 1918.}

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Here Ogilvie’s rhetorical ‘Only horses?’ gives us the impression of a conversation, where although we do not hear what was said, we hear only his reply. The result is that we are given a rare and valuable glimpse of a Britain in which horses were often given no thought at all, even though a love of animals was thought to be one of its people’s traits.

Nevertheless, the horse still provided a safe vehicle through which to express the sacrifices that war had forced upon the nation. Although the military horse did not of course take sides, and certainly had no agenda where the War was concerned, it was loaded with a wide range of preoccupations and anxieties that went beyond a simple concern for its welfare. In many instances concern for the horse was extended to the soldier and vice versa; their shared suffering helping to emphasise also their importance to the war effort. For example, when Lucy Lawrence imagined a soldier’s farewell to his dying horse we begin to see how such writing provided a means of expression for those who could only imagine the realities of war. Here the poet emphasised how the soldier and his dying horse fought and suffered ‘together’ in the service of their country.\footnote{Lawrence L., ‘Good-bye Old Man’, A Book of Poems for the Blue Cross Fund (to help horses in wartime), President Lady Smith-Dorrien, Jarrolds Publishers Ltd., London, 1917, p.73-74.}

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This poem appeared in a collection of poems in support of The Blue Cross Fund. Indeed, the
plethora of images, poetry and stories in support of the animal charities provides us with a
rich vein of similar material. However, because we bring a meaning, or a narrative to such
images, and it is this which lifts them from ‘flat death’, neither must they be considered in
isolation. Alone, we are likely to be swayed by their very persistence. The images created
by the charities were necessarily appealing, and rightly so, but their emotiveness, their
visibility (and their accessibility today) may also give a skewed impression of social attitudes
to the horse during the Great War. As such, they must not be studied without also
considering the wider picture. After all, there would have been no need to campaign so
vigorously had everyone supported their cause. Indeed, there were those who felt that
support for Our Dumb Friends League’s Blue Cross Campaign, and the R.S.P.C.A.’s similar
fundraising on behalf of the war horses was a mere ‘access of sentimentality’. Thus it was
that the appeals on behalf of the Army’s horses gained the support of a much wider
audience when the soldier’s reliance on his horse was emphasised. For example:

The horses of the British Army are an integral part of the British Army itself, and the
care which the soldiers give to their horses shows that they value their co-operation
and their friendship. We all want to help the men who are fighting for their country’s
honour, and, having helped them to the best of our ability, we must continue to see
that their horses are not neglected.

Singleton rightly indicates that study of the soldier’s horse gives ‘scope for considering the
relationship between human beings and animals and their suffering in early twentieth
century warfare.’ He also argues that when the horse was pictured in the early months of
the war it was as a ‘dashingly romantic’ cavalry mount ridden ‘in pursuit of an ever-fleeing
foe’, but that in the War’s later years the horse came to be revealed in ‘less glamorous, but
equally gallant, roles’. According to Singleton, this was an evolution that concluded once the

42 See for example: ‘Though weak and wracked with pain, the wounded man thinks of his faithful horse. He
sees it lying where it fell, its sides heaving in an agony of terror and pain. He pleads with others to do what he
cannot do himself. Will you let him ask in vain?’; R.S.P.C.A., display advertising, The Times, issue 41225, 21st
July 1916.; ‘Help the Poor Dumb Sufferers of the War’, R.S.P.C.A., display advertising, The Times, issue 41188,
8th June 1916.; ‘Our Wounded Horses at the Front’, R.S.P.C.A., display advertising, The Times, issue 40965, 21st
September 1915.; ‘Together they fell – but – whilst comrades were able to bring the rider back to safety, the
faithful horse had to be left where it fell.’; R.S.P.C.A., display advertising, The Times, issue 41201, 23rd June
1916.; Hardy J.W., ‘Our Dumb Friends’ League’, poster, IWM6185.; ‘I have Done My Bit!’; poster, 1915,
IWM6190.

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44 ‘Army Horses, Animals Sufferers from Shell Shock’, The Times, issue 41672, 28th December 1917.

45 Lockwood M., ‘How the Horse is Cared for at the Front, The Magnificent Work accomplished at the Front for
Britain’s War-horses’, The War Illustrated, 27th November 1915.
War was won and the illustrated press were able to return to a more ‘traditional imagery of the war-horse’:

...in 1917, a powerful illustration of a battery advancing under heavy fire emphasized “the heroism of the horses ... (and their) grim fortitude”, in a situation which offered no romance, but only “mud, shells, chaos, and more mud – and death!” Yet, by the end of the war, the horses of the Royal Field Artillery were depicted in old-fashioned pose, galloping to victory with plenty of “dash and go”. 46

Singleton is correct when he identifies an evolution of the horse’s portrayal that mirrored wider social feeling. However, the process was in no way as linear as that he describes, and far more contradictory and convoluted in nature. Although early portrayals of the soldier’s horse did exploit the excitement and glamour of the cavalry charge, these never disappeared entirely. In fact, their persistence indicates that there was a powerful, even if somewhat schizophrenic, desire to present war as it had always been imagined whilst reluctantly acknowledging what it had become. For example, an article by Colonel Mark Lockwood, published in The War Illustrated in November 1915, challenged a misconception that, because knights did not spur into battle, the horse was ‘no longer a very important factor’ in modern warfare.

Since the beginning of the age of chivalry, when first knights spurred into battle, the horse has been always associated with the romantic pageantry of warfare. Until the last few months, to think of war was to conjure up stirring visions of reckless cavalry charges, of foam-flecked charges, imagine the thudding of hoofs, and the fierce shouts of maddened men on no less maddened steeds. Of late the opinion seems to be held among civilians that horses are no longer a very important factor in the success of a campaign; this is a fallacy. 47

Coverage of the war in The War Illustrated both supported and disputed Mark Lockwood’s argument. That horses were absolutely essential in modern warfare was made abundantly clear by their sheer proliferation. Horses were everywhere in almost every edition, whether as the subject of a photograph, illustration, article, or just because they were part of the War’s landscape. However, the drama and romance of ‘the reckless cavalry charge’ was almost as persistent. Indeed, so popular was this collective imagining that the leading war illustrators were kept very busy nourishing it. Cavalry charges and heroic (preferably mounted) acts of great heroism and daring appeared on a regular basis throughout the War. For example, the infamous charge of the 9th Lancers was transformed by the press into a Charge of the Light Brigade for the new War. 48

48 The 9th Lancers seem to have repeated under almost identical conditions, the famous Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava. Under a hail of lead they rode at a battery of eleven German guns which, posted inside a
of the action was published as a centrefold in *The War Illustrated*, and as a photogravure in its sister publication *Answers* the following week. Such images were intended to be removed from the body of the magazine and framed, thus extending the image’s impact beyond the lifetime of the magazine itself. This focus on a few particularly evocative stories and images was to influence how the War would eventually come to be remembered.

Published by The Amalgamated Press, *The War Illustrated* emerged in 1914 as an illustrated newspaper dedicated solely to coverage of the War’s events. Photographs enabled the magazine’s readers to *see* war. War photography still had limitations, but while it was difficult to capture the action as it happened, it did make it possible to imagine what life behind the lines was like. Similarly, photographs taken after a battle conveyed the ferocity of the fighting that had gone before. What was and was not shown was important for morale, but this was not simply a matter of propaganda. Indeed, Stephen Badsey reminds us that propaganda had not been widely used before the First World War, and had not as yet acquired its largely negative connotation. Nevertheless, there was a strong desire to avoid bad news and there was a limit to what could be shown. As Badsey explains it, ‘no news was better for the military than the good news desired by the politicians, and bad news was what all wanted to avoid.’ However, this ‘absence of news’ does not suggest that the period’s newspapers simply delivered pro-war propaganda, or that the British public were shielded entirely from the realities of war. In fact, what was and was not said was decided as much by the people who bought the newspapers as it was by those who produced them. Publications like *The War Illustrated* reflected the tastes and views of their readership, and this in turn encouraged the type of coverage that was produced.

For example, in October 1914, *The War Illustrated* published a full-page article depicting ‘The Piti able Martyrdom of Man’s Faithful Friend’. The greater part of the page was given over to three photographs showing a large number of dead horses lying in the streets of Soissons. Most lay stretched out, but in one of the photographs a light coloured horse appeared almost to have crumpled to the ground. Every horse had been stripped of any harness and equipment; their nakedness almost emphasising the innocence of the horse drawn into a war beyond its comprehension. The impact of this article is amplified when we consider too that readers of *The War Illustrated* would have been brought up in an era where the horse in battle was often used to suggest war’s realities; a rider-less horse inviting the audience to wonder what had happened to its rider, or fallen horses and debris...
conveying the intensity of a battle. Thus, the particularly emotive nature of this article had the potential to shock, and especially if the horses pictured were imagined to be British horses ‘combed ... out from happy silences on thymey downs’.53

There was an acknowledged subtext to the military horse’s portrayal which would not have been lost on those who read The War Illustrated. Indeed, the rider-less horse, the horse alone in No Man’s Land, or the horse standing patiently over the recumbent figure of his sleeping (or often sometimes deceased) master were inherited images of battle which carried with them the assumption that horses were part of this landscape. New drama was created, however, when the evils of modern warfare impinged on these old imaginings. In October 1917, for example, The Illustrated London News carried on its front cover a full-page illustration by Wallace Coop entitled Fidelity. In the image a horse stood over the body of his dead master. His ears were pricked and his eyes wide with fear as shells exploded behind him and a tank rumbled towards the brow of a hill in the distance. The text read:

Nothing could be more pathetic than the sight of a terrified horse left alone on the battlefield. During one of the recent battles before Ypres, a machine-gun officer acting in a forward capacity, who had been reconnoitring, informed an artillery officer that there was a riderless horse standing beside its dead rider, to whom it was evidently still faithful. The artillery officer went to the place indicated, and found the horse, which was apparently one of a gun-team. It was evidently in an exhausted state and had become entangled in wire near its dead master.54

In her work on the British Army in art prior to the Great War Hichberger points out that the very success of an image often relied to a large extent upon ‘the imagery and clichés of newspaper war journalism’ and that because of this it was also assumed viewers would imagine the events that had led to that point.55 Thus, when The War Illustrated showed photographs of dead horses their readers would have looked far beyond what was printed on the page. They would have imagined the ferocity of the fighting, and also the death and wounding of the humans who had been with them. Wilkinson, for example, argues that:

The wounded horses acted as a means to convey an image of British casualties without expressly showing them, an image unacceptable to viewers. Photographs operated in a similar manner, using dead horses as a way of conveying the idea of dead soldiers without actually recording any on film.56

Had the ‘Pitiable Martyrdom’ referred to the soldier rather than to his ‘Faithful Friend’ it is therefore safe to assume that this would have stepped over the line of what was

acceptable. Certainly, any explosion that had the energy to stop a horse in its tracks would have had a devastating effect on the far more fragile body of a man, and this implied comparison no doubt came quite close enough. Indeed, we can immediately see that while the photographs themselves provided very little comfort, the text which accompanied them exposed an undercurrent of anxieties for the soldier himself. Again, an article which seemed ‘only’ to be about horses was in fact about very much more:

Perhaps the most pitiable aspect of the war is the destruction in tens of thousands of man’s faithful friend – the horse. Innocent, trustful, nervous, it is forced to assist its master in fighting his battles. A troop horse is believed to enjoy the wild delirium of the charge almost as highly as the rider upon its back, but the pained, accusing look that enters its eyes when it is wounded is heart-searching to see. Horses maimed by shell fire are put out of their pain as speedily as possible, the Army Veterinary Corps and its helpers carrying an instrument for the painless despatch of all horses that are injured beyond hope of recovery. A great sympathy exists between cavalrymen and their chargers, and there have been many instances of horsemen with tears in their eyes, giving their wounded animals a fond caress, and then putting them out of their agony.\(^{57}\)

Within this extract, it is possible to identify several persistent themes associated with imaginings of the soldier’s horse and the soldier-horse relationship. Here, for example, sympathy for the horse is elicited by sentimentalising the martyrdom of an animal naturally unwarlike and ‘innocent, trustful’ and ‘nervous’ by nature. Interestingly the horse is imagined as a cavalry horse wounded during the ‘wild delirium’ of the charge, but there is no evidence in the photographs that this is so. Although there is nothing in the image to suggest these were cavalry horses, when the soldier’s sympathy for his horse is described the text focuses on the bond found between the cavalryman and his charger. This suggests that, rather than images of the cavalry simply being replaced by more thoughtful mid-war portrayals as Singleton suggested, these portrayals were already in existence. Not only did they exist, but they continued to do so throughout the War. However, what did change was that sympathetic portrayals came to encompass the horse’s myriad roles in the war effort on a scale that had not been seen before. For example, Captain T.A. Girling’s poem *Dumb Heroes* described the nightly dangers braved by soldiers and horses when taking up rations.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{57}\) ‘The Pitiable Martyrdom of Man’s Faithful Friend’, *The War Illustrated*, 3rd October 1914.

The humble transport driver, artilleryman, and trooper were now also praised for the sympathy with which they cared for their horses. In *The War Illustrated* heart-warming images of Tommy Atkins and his menagerie of animal companions provided a rare opportunity for humour, and the consoling evidence that some semblance of normal life continued even amidst the drama of that particular week’s military events. Pages entitled, for example, ‘Fragments from the interminable Film of War’, while not included in every week’s issue, were still a regular feature; in this case showing photographic curiosities such as a smiling sailor carrying a donkey upon his shoulders with the caption that it had been acquired in Gallipoli and was a ‘pet of the Royal Naval Division’. Thus, even humour and the consolation that soldiers were kind to animals could be found in the aftermath of an episode in the War’s history where man, horse, mule and donkey had in fact found little cause to be thankful. For example, in an anonymous and decidedly frank account of the evacuation of Gallipoli in January 1916, an officer recalled the ‘pathetic’ destruction of artillery horses ‘at the eleventh hour’.

My own two horses I got away by great good luck on night of 6th 7th January so they I trust will be retrieved eventually – the final phase of the evacuation on night of 8th 9th Jan was not all that exciting – perhaps it was just as well and I thought it the most degrading show I have ever been associated with. ...the loss of stores was prodigious and the loss of prestige is to match, but it was a triumph of organisation to get so many troops away unscathed. ... A most pathetic feature was the slaughter of horses in rows at the eleventh hour as there was no means of taking them away –

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59 ‘Fragments from the Interminable Film of War’, *The War Illustrated*, 26th February 1916.
these were mostly if not all artillery horses and the officers and men got away on the same lighter as I was on.\footnote{Anon Officer of the 29th Division, Account of evacuation of Gallipoli January 1916, IWM17036.}

We might be tempted to conclude that this account was so frank because of its very anonymity. However, veterans’ recollections of the Gallipoli campaign, and even their letters home, tell us that this artillery officer’s account was not simply the product of one man’s disillusionment. For example, in a letter to his uncle written while serving as an officer in the Army Service Corps at Gallipoli, W.B.S Deverell described the destruction of mules wounded by explosive shrapnel.

We had a high explosive shell over our mule lines the other day which caused 115 casualties. We had to shoot the majority ourselves; a most unpleasant performance before breakfast. Curiously enough they caused exactly the same number of casualties among our mules with small shrapnel. The disposal of large numbers of mule carcasses is rather a problem in a country like this. We had to drag them down to the water’s edge, load them on a lighter, and dump them a good way out to sea.\footnote{Deverell W.B.S., ASC Officer attached to 10th Division MEF at Gallipoli, Personal Letters, IWM13093.}

Letters like W.B.S. Deverell’s remind us that news travelled in both directions. Soldiers may have been restricted as to what they could and could not say, but they certainly knew when what was being reported at home did not tally with their own experience.\footnote{In his diary Sergeant R.G. Flowerdew often refers to newspapers sent to him by his wife and to topics raised by them. For example, ‘By the way, in the paper my wife sent, the Transport Officer said, “I shan’t want my horse tonight I will walk.” When I saw that I said I take it that they have the wind up and are afraid to ride, they don’t like walking, but riding they can’t lie on the ground etc. It also talks about being ready in about ten minutes, it takes hours.’, Flowerdew Sergeant R.G., Machine Gun Corps, Transferred from Suffolk Yeomanry, Personal Diary WF 1916-1917, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GS0562.} Conversely, although readers of The War Illustrated evidently enjoyed the humour and light-heartedness its frequent portrayals of Tommy’s undiminished sense of fun provided, they must also have known when these strayed too far from the soldier’s actual experience. Instead, the value of these images was in that they provided a form of placebo. This does not diminish their importance, but rather emphasises the soldier-horse relationship’s important role as a stepping-stone between the real and the imagined. These portrayals may have seemed sentimental, but they provided much-needed reassurance when those at home feared for their loved ones. For example, illustrations such as Fortune of War at the Estaminet Fortune provided a consoling illusion that the cheeky young soldier positively thrived:

Alas! that many picturesque hostelries in Belgium have fallen on evil days. Fate has brought them into “No Man’s Land,” but it is an ill wind that blows no good, and a few estaminets have done well through the war, especially those situated behind the lines, which are used for stabling transport horses. Not infrequently a fascinating Belgian or French peasant girl will brave the stray shell to bring fodder to the horses,
and if Tommy is in the offing a pretty though somewhat incoherent flirtation will ensue. But who cares about neatly-polished phrases when youth, beauty and gallantry are eloquence itself?63

This type of illustration told a story about the soldier’s day-to-day life and experiences which provided reassurance and, sometimes, even a little romance. There were undoubtedly flirtations with local girls, and circumstances often dictated that the soldier and his horse found themselves accommodated in whatever building presented itself. Fortune of War at the Estaminet Fortune may seem naïve, but we should not underestimate the power such images had to bolster morale. Especially when we remember that, by March 1916, the War had already entered its second year.

Interestingly, these imaginings of the daily life of the soldier and his horse were often those which, although idealistic, often captured the soldier-horse relationship most strongly. Cavalry charges may have provided excitement and drama, but images which conveyed the human, and humane, face of the War allowed those at home to imagine the soldier’s daily life in a positive light. For example, the 1916 Christmas edition of The War Illustrated carried on its front page an illustration by Stanley Wood. It depicted a trooper smiling kindly, even a little indulgently, as he shared his precious ‘Christmas Box’ with his horse.64 This scene may not have had the glamour of an artillery gun being brought up, or of a cavalry engagement, but it did offer consolation at a time of year when separation from loved ones would have been felt all the more keenly. It allowed the British public to imagine a soldier who was humane and kind. Not only did this provide some reassurance that the soldier’s humanity was not destroyed by war, but also implied that he was possessed of all the positive attributes of the British race. Moreover, because these images bore more than a passing resemblance to the stories and events soldiers told their families about in their letters, they helped to bring these closer to home. For example, parallels can be drawn between Wood’s illustration and J.C. Dart’s recollection of how he had indulged his own horse’s sweet tooth.

On May 12th when we were at Newbury “on manoeuvres” I had an interesting incident with my horse Buller. He had a sweet tooth like most horses and was fond of lumps of sugar. ... My arm was linked through Buller’s rein when I passed a small sweet shop. Amongst the items on offer were bars of Fry’s plain chocolate. These were much to my liking always, so I led the horse to the shop door and gave the good lady my order of the bars (cost 6d, I remember) and put the bag in my flap pocket. As soon as I got outside, Buller started to get his nose and mouth into the pocket and in the end I had one bar of chocolate only out of six. Buller remembered this when next we passed the shop in question and actually made his own way to the

64 See Appendix, Figure 17. Wood S.L., ‘Sharing Rations: The Trooper’s Christmas Box’, The War Illustrated, supplement to Christmas edition, 23rd December 1916.
shop door although I tried to stop him. He won the battle of wills, got the sweet which he wanted and so did I for I doubled the chocolate order.

Portrayals of the rapport between soldier and horse were so prolific because they had such value. In effect, the soldier-horse relationship’s power off the battlefield was in direct proportion to its importance on it. For example, on the 15th of July 1916 *The War Illustrated* lead its one hundredth edition with a front page illustration entitled *Goodbye Old Man, An Incident on the Road to a Battery Position in Southern Flanders*. Published when British forces on the Western Front were fighting in the succession of battles which would later be remembered collectively as ‘The Somme’, it told the story of a young artilleryman whose horse had been mortally wounded. Although torn by the urgency of the situation, and the shouts of his comrades, the soldier knelt with the dying horse’s head cradled in his arms. With its harness removed and hitched over his shoulder he wept as he said a hurried last goodbye to his faithful friend and comrade.

If we are to fully appreciate the influence *Goodbye Old Man* had over the British imagination we have only to turn to the plethora of reproductions and written homages it inspired. For example, Henry Chappell’s *A Soldier’s Kiss* and Fortunino Matania’s *Goodbye Old Man* became synonymous, even though it is uncertain whether Chappell was in fact inspired by Matania, or whether Matania was inspired by Chappell.

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65 Dart J.C., Signal Company, Memoirs, Liddle Collection, Leeds, GALL025.
66 Matania F., “‘Good-Bye Old Man!’ – The Soldier’s Farewell to his Steed. A touching incident on the road to a battery position in Southern Flanders.’, *The War Illustrated*, 15th July 1916.
67 See Appendix. Figure 18. Matania F., “‘Good-Bye Old Man!’ – The Soldier’s Farewell to his Steed. A touching incident on the road to a battery position in Southern Flanders.’, *The War Illustrated*, 15th July 1916.
When *The War Illustrated* led its 100th edition with Fortunino Matania’s illustration as its front cover, the implication was very much that it was an artistic interpretation of a real event. In fact, although it would be all too easy to dismiss the image as nothing more than a much-sanitised portrayal of warfare created to appeal to the naive sentiments of a public unaware of War’s realities, this was never entirely so. Indeed, while serving in the Hussars at Arras, Corporal Jack May chose to commemorate the day his horse was shot under him by meticulously copying down Chappell’s poem.\(^{69}\) That he did so reminds us, not only that soldiers also saw these portrayals of war, but also that they were at times sufficiently in tune with their experiences to be able to offer some comfort. Indeed, soldiers’ recollections sometimes hinted at the ‘truth’ behind the image. For example, an ex-troop sergeant of the 19th Hussars described a trooper’s reaction to the death of his horse during a withdrawal under fire in 1918:

...I was riding with the Squadron rearguard when one of the troop horses was badly hit by MG fire. Horse and rider crashed down in front of me. The horse lay on its side and the trooper, unhurt, had rolled clear. Kicking one foot out of the stirrup, I ordered the trooper to mount behind me. Instead, he crawled towards his horse which had raised its head and was looking at him. He reached the horse, gently lifted its head onto his knees, and stayed put. I again ordered him to mount, and drew my pistol, saying I would shoot the animal. He said nothing; just looked up at me, then down to the horse, and continued to stroke its head. I think he knew it was the end, and I also think it understood its master was trying to give it what comfort he could. I didn’t shoot. The squadron was almost out of sight. I said something to the effect

\(^{69}\) Chappell S., in an extract from a local Hampshire newspaper, 1918, ‘The following verse was written by Corporal Jack May, Hussars, son of Mr and Mrs May of Kingston Down, on an occasion when his horse was shot under him near Arras’, note that the newspaper inaccurately cites May as the poet, www.westernfrontassociation.com, accessed 22.3.2013.
‘Well, it’s your funeral’ and trotted on to rejoin my place. The trooper caught up with
the squadron later: he had stayed with his horse till it died. By all the law of
averages, he should have stopped one too.\textsuperscript{70}

Thus, although the story told in \textit{Goodbye Old Man} may well have been a sentimental re-
telling based, not on any regular occurrence but on an isolated case, the very reason it
proved so popular was not because it was an entire fiction, but because it contained more
than a grain of truth. Soldiers did not always say what had happened to their horses, but
there were many who remembered vividly.

The soldier’s compassion for his horse’s plight, and the horse’s reciprocal ‘faithfulness’ had
provided a rich vein of material for a public eager for evidence that acts of kindness and an
empathy for the sufferings of a fellow creature survived even when it must have seemed
that mankind was bent on its own destruction. Thus, it was no surprise that when the war
illustrators sought to present the humanity of the soldier they turned to the age-old bond
between horse and man and created the influential, and enormously popular images that
would in later years become the very embodiment of the soldier-horse relationship. In some
cases, these imaginings in fact began to achieve a life of their own. For example, Basil Clarke
asserted that the event depicted in \textit{Goodbye Old Man} was one that had occurred ‘over and
over again in actual fact.’

Many touching scenes occurred on the battlefields, not only in France but
elsewhere, where British soldiers lost horses in this way. Men who in times of
shortage or danger had shared rations with their horses, or even risked their lives to
save them from danger – as had many British soldiers – could not come to this tragic
parting without real sorrow. One of the most human pictures of the war represented
a British soldier on the battlefield holding up the head of his wounded horse and
saying “Good-bye, old pal!” It was no mere flight of imagination on the part of the
artist for that scene occurred over and over again in actual fact.\textsuperscript{71}

The soldier-horse relationship had been as important off the battlefield as it was upon it. It
had enabled the British people to imagine war from a safe distance. Images of the soldier
and his horse had also helped to bolster morale. Although war-time portrayals of the
soldier-horse relationship had been sentimental, neither had they ever been entirely
divorced from reality. Indeed, although much sanitised, it was through such articles, poems,
stories and illustrations that the Army’s principle of humanity, efficiency and economy was
presented to those at home. In fact, rather than shy away from the realities of war, or hide
from its violence and destruction, we discover that it was through portrayals of the soldier-\textsuperscript{70} Brereton I.M., \textit{The Horse in War}, David & Charles, London, 1976, p.129-130.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Goodbye Old Man}, was also often referred to as ‘Goodbye Old Pal’, Clarke B., ‘The Story of the British War-
Horse from Prairie to Battlefield’, \textit{The Great War – The Standard History of the All Europe Conflict, 1917.}, later
included in \textit{The Blue Cross Magazine}, 1920, p.467.
horse relationship that the British public of 1914-1918 had imagined the war, and that this was often nearer to its reality than we might otherwise have imagined.

The soldier-horse relationship had always held positive associations for the British people. It had implied a sense of continuity and an inherited connection to the heroic and chivalric. During the Great War, these associations had been re-worked to suit the demands of modern warfare. However, in the post-war period these same traditional associations caused the soldier-horse relationship to come under increasing strain. As Britain struggled to put the War to rest and move on from it, the soldier-horse relationship was simultaneously remembered and forgotten. Indeed, even Dorothy Brooke, who sixteen years later would become the saviour of the old war horses in Cairo, admitted she too had ‘hated to remember but could not forget.’

...one of the first things she realised upon hearing of her husband’s appointment in Egypt was the dreadful certainty that she must use this opportunity to try and discover if any of these horses were still alive. All must by then have been over twenty-two years old, but only people who know nothing about horses think they die a natural death at eighteen years of age. Thirty years is the normal expectation of a horse permitted to attain it, and in Egypt none were destroyed whatever their age or disability. Many English horses properly cared for when no longer fit for actual work, live longer. No wonder Mrs. Brooke feared that there might be survivors among the old war horses. She was right.

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Chapter Five

“Mortal Immortals” Remembering and Forgetting the Soldier-Horse Relationship after the Great War 1918-1939.

The battery itself is but a memory; near the grave of the sergeant-major lie a subaltern, gunners, drivers and the horses whom they loved so wisely and so well. Their graves have long ago been pounded into dust by guns of whose calibre they never dreamed; old things are passed away and all things have become new; the very wood in which they fell has long since disappeared from the face of the earth. But these mortals in dying put on immortality, being dead they live, being silent they speak, and leaving behind them an imperishable memory they need no memorial.¹

Paul Fussell has observed that ‘At the time the war was relying on inherited myth, it was generating new myth, and that myth is the fiber of our own lives.’² It is certainly no accident that familiar imaginings of the soldier’s horse were reworked during the Great War. There was, after all, more comfort to be found in the familiar and the sense of continuation it created than to dwell too much upon the present. The British people had needed something that would help them to imagine what war was like, and the soldier-horse relationship had enabled them to do so. In the War’s aftermath, many images of the soldier and his horse that had been popular during the War endured because they were still able to provide comfort. This was a society unwilling to accept that their loved ones had died in a war that had been futile, or that the sacrifice of so many had not been necessary and worthwhile. The message of humanity and compassion these stories and images had provided during the War, thus continued to provide consolation at a time when the British people needed to believe that their fathers, husbands and sons had not died alone and in pain. As Jay Winter explains it, these ‘traditional forms’ may not have been philosophically or intellectually challenging, but they did provide ‘a way of remembering which enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind’.³

This final chapter focuses upon the years which followed the Great War. It initially considers the British Expeditionary Force’s demobilization and the casting and disposal of its horses during 1918 to 1919. The war horse’s progress is then charted from 1919 through to 1939, with particular emphasis paid to the effects of the Army’s mechanisation in the late 1920s. One consequence of mechanisation was that the soldier and his horse were severed from each other for the first time in British military history; not only in a practical sense, but also in the public imagination. This chapter thus considers a highly complex era in which the

British people, first in their grief and then in their haste to move on from the War, became increasingly detached from the soldier’s horse. Images of the soldier-horse relationship did continue to provide solace, but these traditional forms increasingly found themselves at odds with those who saw them only as relics of a past Britain needed to leave behind. This was a period of remembering and forgetting. The Great War’s veterans still remembered their horses, but many feared that what they had to say would be misunderstood. In their silence, mere threads held the soldier and his horse together in the public consciousness. Thus it was that the soldier-horse relationship was increasingly remembered only by a dwindling few. This chapter now explores this process of remembering and forgetting, and the effect it was to have upon memory of the soldier-horse relationship.

When the War came to an end in 1918, the British people concentrated on the horses who had been fortunate enough to find their way home. These few became the representatives of the many thousands who had not returned, and were duly accorded veteran status. For example, in 1919 The Times reported on the romantically named B30, who was one of many horses entered in a class at the Aldershot Command Show specifically for horses who had seen active service:

Among the horses entered in the class for military horses that have seen active service overseas at the Aldershot Command Show on August 13 and 14, is B 30, a brown gelding, whose Army service began in 1912, when he was issued as a troop horse to the 5th Dragoon Guards. He was at Mons, and took part in the great retreat; was in every action in which the cavalry was engaged including the battle of the Marne, Aisne, Ypres, Loos, the Somme, Cambrai, and Arras. He was the first horse to jump the Hindenberg Line, in full marching order, after the infantry had broken through. Although wounded on several occasions, he never went into the sick lines, and was never “excused duty.” He was ridden throughout the war by Lieutenant-Colonel W.Q. Winwood, C.M.G., D.S.O., commanding the 5th Dragoon Guards, in whose name he is entered at the Aldershot Show. The horse was looked after throughout the war by the same groom, private Glare.4

Horses retained by their regiments, and especially those who been ridden by a person of significance, often became war heroes in their own right. Indeed, we could suggest that the evident affection with which certain individuals were remembered and revered by their regiments almost acted as a form of displacement or distraction when that soldier’s own horse had not returned. For example, The Leicestershire Yeomanry had a horse called Songster, who not only became the object of his regiment’s affection, but also something of a local celebrity. He was photographed, ‘Painted from Memory by Sergeant Fred Schepens’, his final resting place at Newstead Abbey was marked with a cross (his numerous medals buried with him) and before his death he appeared in the Leicester and Loughborough press

on numerous occasions. Today he is remembered in the regimental museum as Loughborough’s very own war horse. When he finally died in January 1940 (at the ripe old age of 39) Squadron Sergeant Major Harry Poole recalled the ‘luck’ attached to Songster, the horse’s cheeky character and his ‘proverbial’ ability to avoid ‘wounds or worse’; all of which had won him a special place in the yeomanry’s hearts. He was purchased at an Army dispersal sale soon after the War, following which Poole provided him with a home for life and the well-deserved retirement of a veteran war horse.

...when the authorities dismounted us there was not an officer or man who failed to bid Songster “goodbye” for he was the pet of the regiment. He went to the 3rd Hussars, and when we were given our horses back ... Songster was speedily reclaimed. ... He was always as artful as a barrow-load of monkeys, and tales of Songster are told wherever Leicestershire Yeomanry gather. The majority are true.

Songster was both in life and death the stuff of which legends are made. However, he was one of a very lucky few. Between February and July 1919 the British Expeditionary Force in France and Belgium disposed of over 190 thousand horses and mules. On 6th February its strength was over 326 thousand, but by July this had been reduced to just over 20 thousand. Initially, Disposal on Demobilisation concentrated on horses placed in category D as ‘Only fit for destruction for Food and By-Products’. However, once those most enfeebled by the War had been destroyed (and as much money recouped as could be from each carcass by the economiser plants) attention increasingly shifted to those horses considered fit for repatriation.

In the United Kingdom there was an urgent demand for horses to relieve those who had taken on an additional workload when their colleagues were requisitioned by the Army, and who had then suffered further when feed for civilian horses was rationed in the latter part of the War. In farming and food production the need for heavy draught horses was particularly acute, and this was reflected in the sort of prices

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6 See Appendix, Figure 19. ‘Mr Poole once said of Songster “He had an uncanny knack of sensing danger, and his luck in escaping wounds or worse was proverbial. Our horse lines were heavily shelled on one occasion. We lost a number of horses killed and wounded, and Songster was found to be missing. Soon afterwards he came trotting up as if nothing had occurred. There is no doubt he had freed himself and galloped out of the danger zone.”’, ‘Famous War Horse Dead, His Luck in the Great War, Hero of the Yeomanry’, The Loughborough Echo, 17th January 1940, Loughborough Carillon Museum Archive.
7 Poole H., Squadron Sergeant Major, Leicestershire Yeomanry, interviewed in ‘Leicestershire Claims the Oldest War-Horse, Rejected in 1914 on Account of Age: But went to France – Now Pulls a Milk Float’, newspaper cutting, date etc. unknown, Loughborough Carillon Museum Archive.
8 ‘The figures do not include the animals of the Canadian Corps who undertook the sale of their own, nor of the Portuguese Force who took the majority of their animals back to Portugal. No live animals were sold in Germany.’ Moore J., Animal Veterinary Service in War, H & W Brown, London, 1921, p.176.
10 See Appendix. Figure 20. Moore J., Animal Veterinary Service in War, H & W Brown, London, 1921, p.179.
11 ‘Army Remounts, 750,000 Horses Released, Methods of Dispersal’, The Times, issue 41970, 11th Dec 1918.
12 Hill L.R., Underfed, R.S.P.C.A., poster, no date, poster, IWM10977.; ‘Motors, Petrol & Horses are Urgently Needed at the Front.’, Carry Home Your Own Parcels, Ministry of Food & League of National Safety, 1918, poster, IWM13329.
paid; draught horses selling at Army casting sales for as much as £100 to £200.\textsuperscript{13} As such, the Army, in its pragmatic and characteristically unsentimental manner, set about recouping as much money as had been lavished on the purchase and maintenance of these animals over the previous four years of war. Indeed, the entire process of disposal in France and Belgium was heralded as a triumph of humanity, efficiency and economy. For example, Sir John Moore believed that ‘proper and efficient organisation’ had not only made it possible to dispose of horses on such an unprecedented scale, but to also realise a profit from each one sold or destroyed.

All animals wasted by war must be accounted for, not only in respect to numbers, but as to money realised in their disposal, and although this to the uninitiated may sound an impossible or hopeless undertaking, with proper and efficient organisation it becomes a comparatively simple process. This, at all events, was so in the British Expeditionary Force, France; and as disposal in that Force reached a magnitude which probably will never again be experienced, and as exceptional facilities existed, the procedure there followed may be taken as an example not only of the manner in which disposal is affected, but as to the profits, and the economy which can be made applicable to it.\textsuperscript{14}

Although Singleton has suggested that the Army ‘proceeded with stealth’ during the Disposal on Demobilisation for fear of a public outcry, there is no real evidence to suggest this was the case.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, the matter of disposal was an issue that had been raised in parliament during 1916. Representations had then been made by Colonel Mark Lockwood and Sir George Greenwood who, after warning that the R.S.P.C.A. was ‘watching this question’, had gone on to express their ‘sentimental objection to exposing the Army’s animals … to the risk of ill-treatment’ when their work was done. Mr. Lloyd George’s initial response was to promise that the Army’s war horses would not be sold to the local populations of Egypt, Salonika, or Mesopotamia.

... As far as the East is concerned, the Right Hon. Gentleman’s case is completely established. I do not think that under any conditions we ought to sell our old War horses to the Easterns to be dealt with in their usual way – to be treated in a way in which they are too often, no doubt, treated in those places. ... My Right Hon. Friend

\textsuperscript{13} Moore J., \textit{Animal Veterinary Service in War}, H & W Brown, London, 1921, p.177.
\textsuperscript{14} Moore J., \textit{Animal Veterinary Service in War}, H & W Brown, London, 1921, p.163.
may congratulate himself, at any rate, upon the fact that he has protected the horse from any possibility of maltreatment in the East.\textsuperscript{16}

However, the War Office now placed this situation before the Ministry of Reconstruction who in turn referred it to the Surplus Government Property Advisory Committee. Their recommendation was that ‘animals no longer required by the Armies in the Eastern theatres of War should be disposed of to the best advantage’ and that it was on these recommendations Generals Commanding-in-Chief would prepare their plans for demobilisation. Indeed, the only remaining question seemed to be ‘whether Mr. Lloyd George’s answer in the House of Commons ... was to be held to govern the sale of all surplus animals ... in the altered circumstances of demobilisation.’\textsuperscript{17} However, the key to the problem lay in this phrase, ‘the best advantage’. Disposal on Demobilisation was a subject which magnified every conflicting interest and anxiety regarding the soldier’s horse. For example, in December 1918, \textit{The Times} reported on what it now described as a ‘ticklish problem’.\textsuperscript{18}

Enumerating some of the difficulties of dispersal, the speaker said there were conflicting interests to be considered. They wanted to sell the horses as quickly as they could, to save expense and to release men, but if they flooded the market they would not get a tenth of the value. There were the conflicting interests of the horse-user, the horse-breeder, and those who wanted the horse either to be destroyed or brought back to this country to escape slavery in foreign lands. To meet the difficulty, they were dividing the horses into groups according to their ages and standard. They proposed to bring back to this country for sale only good sound horses, not over 12 years old, and to bring them up as near as they could to the numbers wanted. They had taken 17 per cent of the horses from Great Britain, and reckoned to bring the percentage back, to restore the pre-war situation.\textsuperscript{19}

From a practical perspective, it was possible to return many more horses to the United Kingdom from France and Belgium than it was from the ‘foreign lands’ of Egypt, Salonika and Mesopotamia. In Egypt alone it was estimated that there were 100 thousand horses and mules that would have to be disposed of; the alternatives being destruction, repatriation or sale. Destruction (although it had been employed to great effect in France and Belgium) was considered too impractical and costly.\textsuperscript{20} Repatriation was ruled out

\textsuperscript{16} ‘Disposal of Surplus Animals on Demobilization. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War’, War Cabinet, October 12\textsuperscript{th} 1916, CAB/24/65, p.205.  
\textsuperscript{17} ‘Disposal of Surplus Animals on Demobilization. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War’, War Cabinet, October 12\textsuperscript{th} 1916, CAB/24/65, p.206.  
\textsuperscript{18} ‘The War Horse in Peace’, \textit{The Times}, issue 41970, 11\textsuperscript{th} December 1918.  
\textsuperscript{19} ‘Army Remounts, 750,000 Horses Released, Methods of Dispersal’, \textit{The Times}, issue 41970, 11\textsuperscript{th} Dec 1918.  
\textsuperscript{20} This was the official line. However later accounts of the disposal would argue that it had merely been an excuse. ‘Mrs Brooke was to find out later upon good authority that the ‘lack of transport’ excuse was not substantially valid. It is pretty safe to conclude that, as usual, the easiest solution was the most acceptable. A few tentative efforts were made to induce the authorities to change their minds. General Sir George Barrow
because horses took up shipping that could be better used repatriating soldiers, and rightly so. In the War’s Eastern theatres, the opportunity to recoup the investment the Army’s unwanted horses represented and the promise of a speedy resolution to a sticky problem meant it was decided (despite moral objections) that the British Army’s horses and mules be cast ‘by sale or otherwise.’ Thus, these horses and mules were disposed of in a manner which, while economic and efficient, was not entirely humane.

There were three alternatives ... Repatriation was out of the question, as every ship was wanted for more necessary purposes. Destruction was impracticable. They would either have to get a very extensive plant to deal with them, even at the rate of a thousand carcasses a week, or they would have to take some £5,000,000 worth of horses and mules into the desert and shoot them, leaving their carcasses for vultures to eat. Selling was the only course. The instruction was that animals in the Eastern theatres of war were to be disposed of to the best advantage “by sale or otherwise.” At the same time commanding officers were instructed to use a liberal discretion in destroying animals, especially those that were of British origin, which could not be repatriated and for which good homes could not be found on the spot.

Fortunately for the horse, the First World War was to be the last conflict in which it would be utilised on such a scale. However, debate raged throughout the inter-war period as to whether mechanical alternatives to the horse really were viable, or whether the horse was still the more reliable and versatile option. Indeed, the horse, mule and donkey had provided such good service during the War many people feared, that were there ever to be another such conflict, the horse would again be pressed into service. For example, General Sir Jack Seely believed, that of all animals, it was the horse who had most cause to wish for peace.

Between 1914 and 1918 hundreds of thousands of horses were employed on the Western Front, as they must be in every war. People who do not understand the realities of warfare think that horses are not required on modern battlefields. They think that all battles will be conducted by mechanical means. So they will be for the...
first few days, then it will be the horse. Truly the horse might cry out more loudly than any other creature, “Give peace in our time, O Lord”.24

Mechanisation of the Army promised to free the horse from the suffering it had hitherto endured. This was a welcome change, even for the military horse’s most ardent supporters. However, those who remained reluctant to mechanise did so with very good reason. In the War’s immediate aftermath, it was a faith in the horse’s utility which lead the military minds of all nations to consider how they might be better utilised in future conflicts. Indeed, an article from The Times in December 1918 argued that the war had ‘confounded many prophecies, but none more than that which predicted the extinction of the horse through mechanical means of transport.’25 Victory in 1918 had done nothing to dissuade those who still felt the horse had a part to play on the modern battlefield, and who strongly objected to the ‘wholesale equipment of our fighting forces with aircraft and tanks’.26 Indeed, even as late as 1935, there were still those yet to be persuaded against the horse. For example, a highly critical review of Captain J.R. Kennedy’s This Our Army made a persuasive case for a more careful transition from ‘the age of oats to the age of petrol.’

The irresponsible critic always evades the fact that we are at present passing through a transition period from the age of oats to the age of petrol, which may be likened to the stage when the Royal Navy was changing over from sails to steam; such a transfer cannot, like the change of gauge on the Western Railway, be carried out in a single night. Had the author followed closely enough the recent army manoeuvres in Hampshire he might have been made to think twice, if not furiously, by the sight of tanks with their noses firmly embedded in a ditch, which a child on a 13-hand pony could have cleared with ease.27

Thus, the years which immediately followed the close of the First World War saw a consolidation and a taking stock of the manner in which animals for war purposes were supplied and managed. For example, when Sir John Moore’s Army Veterinary Service in War was published in 1921 his intention was to identify where unnecessary wastage had been successfully minimised in the last war, and where there was room for improvement in case of another. He was certainly right to be very proud of how the Royal Army Veterinary Corps had responded to the unprecedented challenges a conflict of such magnitude and duration had placed before it.28

However, these positive associations with the soldier’s horse were to come under increasing strain in the inter-war period. Mechanisation of the Army threatened to sever the horse from military life, and with it the horse’s ancient relationship with the soldier. Inevitably, such dramatic change was met with resistance; not because the horsed regiments were technophobic or reactionary, but because the horse was at the very core of their individual histories and identities. For example, as French explains:

...mechanization of the cavalry was inextricably entwined in the minds of many cavalry officers with a threat not simply to their status as horsed soldiers, but also to the continued corporate existence of their regiments. ...the regiment was more than an impersonal bureaucratic structure. It was also their professional home. ... Many officers ... not only developed strong friendships with their comrades, but received a lengthy socialization into the peculiarities of their own particular regiment and came to identify with its corporate existence.29

In the May 1928 edition of The XII Lancers Journal a poem, presumably contributed from within the Lancers’ personnel, expressed the feelings of a regiment on the brink of mechanisation. Stanza by stanza ‘Mechanization’ humorously measured the comparative benefits of machine and horse, but ended by warning its reader that mechanisation might not always be ‘the kinder’. The advantages of mechanisation were obvious; and not least for the horses who would no longer become ‘crocks’ in the Army’s service. Nevertheless, the humour of this poem was tinged with just a little sentimental regret at the war horse’s passing.30

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Such profound change threatened every aspect of a horsed regiment’s organisation, and was certainly not a matter of simply replacing a horse with a machine. It affected each regiment’s ‘corporate existence’, from its daily routines, to its rank structure and the

30 ‘Mechanization’, stanzas 2, 7 & 8, The XII Lancers Journal, Cairo, May 1928, p.35.
specialist roles within it, its training and tactics, its history and customs, and even its social and recreational life. For example, French quotes Colonel T.B.A. Evans-Lombe:

...plenty of cavalry officers still had a deep sentimental attachment to horses and ‘horsy’ sports. T.B.A. Evans-Lombe, who was commissioned into the 8th King’s Royal Irish Hussars in the middle of the First World War, thought that the officers of his regiment were genuinely attached for sentimental reasons to their horses. ‘People show-jumped, rode races, played polo; genuine love of horses.’

This love of horses was very real and was cultivated, not merely because there was a ‘sentimental attachment’ to all things horse-related, but because horses mattered. While French’s use of the term ‘horsy’ may imply that horse sports were trivial, they were in fact an essential part of training the soldier and his horse for war. Officers did compete, hunt and play polo, but men of the ranks rode too. Recalling discussion in chapter three, we must remember that horsemanship had been an essential skill. It had never been a ‘mere’ sport and neither had it been the preserve only of the rich and privileged. It had, for example, been a necessity that an artillery driver be able to ride well enough, not only to be able to control his own two horses, but to concentrate on the other two drivers and four horses in his team, the terrain over which they were travelling and the battery of which they were a part. This was no mean feat of equestrianism. As Thomas Kirkby, a Royal Field Artillery Driver and veteran of the Western Front recalled:

I remember one particular time we went up full gallop to cover the infantry and we were near Bailleau Wood. We galloped into action, we took gateposts, went over fields and full gallop. 2,4,6 horses and a wagon. ... We got there that fast!

However, when the Army was mechanised this important association of the soldier’s horse with serious horsemanship was lost. Similarly, the soldier-horse relationship was becoming detached from what it had really been; a way of ensuring that an essential weapon was properly maintained. Britain’s victory in 1918 had been widely attributed to its Army’s horse supply and management, but horses were becoming a less serious subject than they had once been. For example, R.H. Smythe described how attitudes to the horse had changed during his career as a Veterinary Surgeon:

After the advent of peace in 1918 ... People who hitherto had lived with horses, talked of horses and dreamed horses, suddenly lost all interest in them as living creatures and regarded this as a suitable moment to be rid of them ... Within a few years the only horses remaining with us in any number were those which played an

33 Kirkby T.E., Driver Royal Field Artillery, Interview Nov 1989, Liddle Collection, Leeds, TR/04/11.
essential part in various sports, more especially those which provided an incentive to gambling.\textsuperscript{34}

The heavy draught breeds, like the coaching breeds before them, were now threatened with extinction.\textsuperscript{35} Ironically, while Dorothy Brooke strived to rescue the old war horses in Cairo, mechanisation was killing off the working horse in Britain with ruthless efficiency.\textsuperscript{36} For example, D. Russell’s 1936 article \textit{Reward for Service} described what became of Britain’s unwanted horses exported to the continent for slaughter. It did not make for happy reading:

It ended on the quay of a Belgian port. Thirty of them stood there, poor, worn-out old horses. They had crossed during the night and now in the grey dawn they stood shivering and bewildered on the greasy stones. Thin, with lack lustre eyes and staring coats, bones almost sticking through their hides they waited apathetically to be led away. For long they stood there until at last they were driven through the cobbled streets to the place where they met their end. ... The old chestnut horse lay on the floor of that Belgian slaughterhouse... In the middle of his forehead was the hole made by the poleaxe. He twitched and shivered and lay still. He had received his reward for service.\textsuperscript{37}

Although members of Our Dumb Friends’ League may have congratulated themselves on the rescue of ‘the two hundredth ex-British war horse’ from Belgium in 1934, many thousands of horses had simultaneously travelled in the opposite direction never to return.\textsuperscript{38} There were still a great many amongst the British population with the sympathetic consideration to notice the fate of the old, the lame and the redundant, but the horse’s place in British society was changing. With its old associations with work and war thus diminished, a fondness for horses was gradually becoming ‘something faintly improper’.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{35} Horses themselves are expensive and few in number, since the horse population steadily decreases year by year. The old Yorkshire coach horse now seems to be extinct, and even the big hackneys, which often took their place in pre-war private drags, seem to have vanished... Personally, I always preferred the heavyweight hunter type, but there are not enough to go round for riding, so that not many find their way into harness.’ Edwards L., \textit{Thy Servant the Horse}, Country Life, London, 1952, p.111.
\textsuperscript{36} ‘As always happens when enterprises of this description are undertaken by (comparative) newcomers to a country, the Brookes were subjected to quite a lot of criticism. ... Nothing she could say made any impression upon these armchair critics whom one suspects were suffering from guilty consciences... But as ever nothing deterred her. She could even listen to accusations that the whole campaign was a ramp and without losing her temper, with genuine amusement and without becoming embittered. She calmly carried on, consoling herself, that her critics were few whereas her supporters numbered thousands and ... included their late Majesties King George V and Queen Mary.’ Spooner G. ed., \textit{For Love of Horses}, The Diary of Mrs Geoffrey Brooke, The Old War Horse Memorial Hospital, London, 1960, p.4.
For example, in *The Road to Wigan Pier* Orwell identified a shift in attitudes away from the horse, and all the horse was thought to stand for. As it transpired he had identified social and political changes in Britain that were to have a profound effect upon how the military horse was remembered for at least the next seventy years.\(^\text{40}\)

The kind of person who hates machinery also takes it for granted to hate Socialism; the Socialist is always in favour of mechanization, rationalization, modernization — or at least thinks that he ought to be in favour of them. Quite recently, for instance, a prominent I.L.P.‘er confessed to me with a sort of wistful shame — as though it were something faintly improper — that he was ‘fond of horses’. Horses, you see, belong to the vanished agricultural past, and all sentiment for the past carries with it a vague smell of heresy.\(^\text{41}\)

Orwell did not agree that the past had to be abandoned entirely. Rather, he saw a future without animals as one that, although efficient, clean and safe, would be bleak and sterile.\(^\text{42}\)

In doing so, *The Road to Wigan Pier* expressed the anxieties of this post-War world. This was a society where, but for a few exceptions, the soldier’s horse had become an irrelevance, and where those who remained its champions were increasingly dismissed as a reactionary and misguided minority.\(^\text{43}\) For example, Winifred Holtby’s novel *South Riding* captures the complexity of this period between the wars. Here progress sweeps away the ‘old world’, and with it horsemen like Carne, but we are left questioning whether the changes wrought are necessarily for the better.

“What has Carne to do with this?” asked Sarah Burton.
“Oh, he’ll fight the new road, I expect.”
“Why should he?”
“Because he’s a gentleman farmer — survival of the feudal system. Because he hates Snaith and does everything he can to block his programmes. Because whenever we propose anything for Kiplington and Kingsport, he drags up his fifty or so colonists. They’re all ex-service men. Old Comrades of the Great War.” …

I know his type, she thought — aristocrats, Conservatives, vindicators of tradition against experiment, of instinct against reason, of piety against progress. They were pleasant people, kind, gracious, attractive. They cultivated a warm human relationship between master and servant. They meant well. And they did evil.\(^\text{44}\)

Indeed, one of the reasons veterans became reluctant to talk about their horses with any great affection was because there was no longer any guarantee that those they did tell

\(^\text{40}\) For example, although Liddell Hart has now been largely discredited, his politically fuelled attack of the cavalry was influential in provoking an antipathy against horse soldiers and their regiments. Liddell Hart B., *The Tanks*, Cassell, London, 1959.


\(^\text{43}\) ‘Everyone knows Colonel Blimp.... Blimp gave the order for the charge of the Light Brigade.... Blimp it was, too, who wrote to the papers in 1934 to insist that the cavalry go on wearing spurs after they were mechanized...’, Seymour-Ure C., in Bryant M. ed., *The Complete Colonel Blimp*, Bellew, London, 1991, p.13.

would understand. We might recall, for example, how M.D. Eder had likened Case 45’s feelings about horses to those of a ‘dowager duchess’ who doted ‘over her Fido’ Other veterans clearly feared similar ridicule. For example, when J.R. Johnston recalled the strong bond which had formed between him and his favourite two horses, he was clearly aware that those who read his memoir may not appreciate what the soldier-horse relationship had been and what it had meant to the men who had experienced it:

If it seems sometimes that my emotions are overruling my sounder judgement, it only shows in a small way how man and horse can become attached to one another under rugged circumstances.

Although Leinonen’s work on the soldier-horse relationship has focused upon Finnish narratives of the Second World War, it is nevertheless relevant to discussion here. She describes how veterans, afraid of political criticism, ‘told the stories of war horses only to their families’. It was not until the 1990s that Finnish veterans regained their voices. In part this was because they now felt confident enough to speak and that what they had to say would be respected. However, this also became possible because remembering the war had become ‘fashionable’ and because ‘horses were a safe and non-political subject to remember’. Attitudes to the war horse have similarly changed and changed again in the United Kingdom. In the inter-war period the war horse was neither fashionable or non-political, and we might assume that this is why the soldier-horse relationship was never really celebrated. The British experience is, for example, in stark contrast with that of Australia and New Zealand, where the soldier-horse relationship became part of their folklore in a positive way; free of the numerous negative associations that combined to sully memory of the horse soldier in Britain.

The stories veterans recalled, or were willing to recall, the elements of the same stories that were altered, or left by the wayside as the years went by, the telling and the re-telling all played their part in ensuring that some recollections survived in memory and into post-memory when others did not. Similarly, what was ‘true’ and what was legend, what was historical memory and what was personal experience became mixed up. This is not to say that the stories veterans told were untrue, or that their memories are in any way less important than the ‘hard realities’ that historians tend to deal with by preference. Far from it. Rather, we begin to see how, as Portelli explains it, ‘personal ‘truth’ may coincide

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with collective imagination.' For example, when interviewed many years later for the Imperial War Museum, R.C. Bird remembered how he had saved a donkey from being destroyed during the evacuation of Gallipoli in 1916. Although he was unable to remember the donkey's name, he referred to it as 'Our Moke' and explained that it had been looked after by an Australian who used to carry water and other supplies up to their gun position. Realising that the donkey would be shot with the other horses that could not be put on the transport, Bird had decided to hide it in a gully.

When we retired I saw that in the gully there was a dug out position and I knew myself that the Turks wouldn’t hurt a donkey because he’d be a prize to them, so I left him there in a recess with plenty of hay and stuff and I knew he wouldn’t be there long and I knew they’d find him. I knew he was alright our moke.

Bird’s story is intriguing, especially in view of what he then went on to say.

B “Some horses were shot down on the beach because they hadn’t got the facilities to take them out and put them on the transport.”
Q. “Shouldn’t you have shot the donkey then?”
B. No...well...why should we? He was alright.”
Q. “Did you approve of the shooting?”
B. “It was nothing to do with me.”

Bird’s reasoning was certainly understated. However, this small act of compassion seems almost to have been an act of defiance. Indeed, we might tentatively suggest that its perpetration had not only enabled Bird to rescue the donkey in a literal sense, but had in some way served to preserve his emotional self. There certainly seemed to be anger and sadness in his recollection of the scenes of disposal on the beach. Indeed, what we see here is the complex process through which events became narratives, some narratives were shared verbally and therefore transiently, some written down, and thus recorded more permanently, some remembered and others misremembered. Indeed, as Portelli explains, this process of remembering and forgetting ‘tells us less about events than about their meaning’ and about the ‘psychological costs’ of these events upon those who experienced them.’ Moreover, ‘They tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing’ and ‘what they now think they did.’ Nigel Hunt takes this further, and argues that ‘we are compelled to narrate’. For example:

We constantly narrate our lives, creating and telling stories about who and what we are, and why we exist. We are natural storytellers and natural audiences. ... Narrative is an essential function. We use and manipulate our memories, consciously and unconsciously, in order to present ourselves to the world in a particular way. Our life
stories are constantly changing according to our circumstances. We do not have any choice in the matter. We are compelled to narrate.\textsuperscript{55}

Bird’s story of ‘Our Moke’ was a personal memory and not one destined to become part of the War’s story. For this to happen, the memory of one person was generally insufficient. However, if that person wrote their story down, or recorded it in some other way (in a painting for example) its power to withstand the passage of time was immediately increased. Thus, while Bird’s donkey may have faded from memory into obscurity, other similar recollections did not. One such example was that of an Australian called John Simpson Kirkpatrick and his donkey Murphy. While serving with the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Field Ambulance at Gallipoli, Simpson and Murphy had become great favourites with the men. This affection was expressed in a letter written to Simpson’s sister following his death.

\begin{quote}
\ldots Everyone from the General down seems to have known him and his donkey which he christened Murphy. The valley at the time was very dangerous as it was exposed to snipers and also continuously shelled. He scorned the danger and always kept going, whistling and singing, a universal favourite.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

Simpson and Murphy came to embody the message of undamaged selflessness, kindness and good humour that were the cornerstone of all wartime consolations. Once memorialised, a shared, national ownership of their story ensured Simpson and Murphy’s immortality.\textsuperscript{57} Maybe Murphy had not been able to foretell when shells were coming, as the men had thought he could, but they had wanted to believe it and that was really what mattered.\textsuperscript{58} In the years after the War stories like that of Simpson and Murphy helped to heal the wounds. No wonder then that one poet saw in the actions of one man and his donkey ‘Those deathless hosts of Christlike chivalry’.\textsuperscript{59}

\textit{Material Removed for Reasons of Copyright.}

\textsuperscript{57} Simpson and his donkey have become the focus of an almost cult-like following; particularly in Australia where Simpson and Murphy have inspired several books for adults and children, and where it is possible to buy a wide range of commemoratives, toys and other memorabilia. See for example: http://www.sandsofgallipoli.com.au/collections/sog11.ph; http://www.amazon.com/Simpsons-Donkey-Peter-Stanley/dp/1741968119 p; and https://hobbyco.com.au/william-britains/simpson-his-donkey-gallipoli-set-3pc. accessed 6.2.2015.
Similarly, some stories lived on when a group of veterans, perhaps even without being conscious of doing so, settled on a mutually accepted version of events. One such example can again be found in Australia, where the Australian Light Horse are remembered with great pride and affection. Perhaps the most well-known story attached to the Light Horse is that the regiment’s troopers unofficially shot their own horses when they discovered they were to be sold to the local population at the end of the War. For example, Banjo Paterson’s Poem *The Horses Stay Behind* has become a focus for their legend:

No, I think I’d better shoot him and tell a little lie: -
“He floundered in a wombat hole and then lay down to die.”
Maybe I’ll get court-martialled; but I’m damned if I’m inclined
To go back to Australia and leave my horse behind.  

In more recent years Jean Bou has challenged this story, arguing that although the military authorities were worried that men might have their horse falsely classified and destroyed, attentive veterinary officers had made sure this did not occur. According to Bou the whole programme was handled meticulously, suggesting that the chances of something untoward happening had been slim, and that units had kept a very close eye on their horses. This may well be true, but it would be nice to imagine that at least a few horses avoided the miserable fate that awaited so many. Indeed, given what we now know of the soldier-horse relationship, it is not inconceivable that some soldiers would have risked punishment to ensure their horses did not suffer. Likewise, that veterinary officers were not a little creative in their categorisation. It is, in fact, just as difficult to prove that it did not happen as to prove that it did. Should we, therefore, even try to ‘puncture’ their legend? Whether the troopers did shoot their horses, or only wished they had, the version of events which proved the most resilient was that which had the power to heal. If it was only a story, it was one cultivated in response to a painful memory, and that meant it had value. Indeed, when the alternative was to remember the War without recourse to any form of consolation, it seems perfectly rational that veterans had ‘narrated’ a story of their own. For example, and returning to the experience of British veterans, when T.E. Kirkby described the very real chaos and appalling carnage wrought by an enemy attack on his gun battery at Ypres, there was no self-pity. Instead, the men had done what they could; keeping hold of the remaining horses, retrieving the dead horses’ harness, and cleaning up the mess that was left behind. If there was an omission to his story it was hidden in plain sight. It was there in Kirkby’s unwillingness to remember the men killed as anything else but dead, even when the horses’ appalling fate suggested otherwise. Indeed, when the events he remembered had surely been far, far more terrible, this telling no doubt went as close to that day as he was willing

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to go. It was undoubtedly a massive understatement when Kirkby said, “It were terrible some of it.”

He came back with a plane and he strafed us with bullets and bombs all the length of us and it was a proper shambles. You’ve never seen anything like it. Terrific. Horses all over the place with legs off, heads off, drivers killed, horses all reared up and tangled in their harness and I was among all that lot and I think lost my two horses, I don’t remember ever seeing them anymore, but I rounded up about four horses I was holding that night. The order was if we could bring any harness back, bring your harness back you see. Horses with harness on. I lost pals. There were quite a few killed and lots of horses. ... Horses, parts of horses all over the place. And we’d all that to clear up. It were terrible some of it.

Despite there being many thousands of British veterans who had, like Kirkby, experienced first-hand what it was like to take horses into war, in Britain it was a small collection of images and poems, and those with the loudest voice: the animal charities, the influential, the leisured, and the writers, artists and commentators of the period, who saved the soldier-horse relationship from oblivion. Thus, we see how the ‘real’ became the imagined and the imagined became evidence that these events had been ‘real’. Indeed, the soldier-horse relationship’s increased dependence on an ever smaller collection of stories, images, poems and recollections was a microcosm of what was already beginning to happen to memory of the War more generally. It was not that the events recounted in images and poems like Goodbye Old Man or The Horses Stay Behind had never happened, but rather that there was no longer a current soldier-horse relationship to support them, and that what did remain was becoming increasingly detached from the War as it had actually been fought. While J.R. Johnston was afraid to speak, lest he be accused of letting his emotions ‘overrule his sounder judgement’, the soldier-horse relationship was becoming legend. In effect, a handful of wartime images had ensured the soldier-horse relationship’s survival in much the same manner as the words of writers like Sassoon, Owen, Graves, Blunden, Brittain and Madox-Ford would become representative of the War’s ‘lost’ generation. For example, in All Quiet on the Western Front, Remarque used the reaction of Detering to the screams of the dying horses to express the terrible consequences of war:

63 Kirkby T.E., Driver Royal Field Artillery, Interview Nov 1989, Transcribed, Liddle Collection, Leeds, TR/04/11.
64 “Good-Bye Old Man!” – The Soldier’s Farewell to his Steed. A touching incident on the road to a battery position in Southern Flanders.’, The War Illustrated, 15th July 1916.
The screaming of the beasts becomes louder. One can no longer distinguish whence in this now quiet silvery landscape it comes; ghostly, invisible, it is everywhere, between heaven and earth it rolls on immeasurably.67

Here there was no victor, only ordinary young men who, having been temporarily carried away with the idea of glorious battle, were now struggling to survive. In this instance the horses became representative of the terrible anguish the War had caused. Their screams were not simply those of something mortal in pain, but the allegorical embodiment of all the grief, fear, pain and loss the War had caused. For Remarque, the War had left nothing but unutterable sadness and ‘a generation of men ... destroyed by war’.68 Thus it was that the soldier’s horse, and the men who had served alongside them, became mortal immortals.

When Stanley Spencer depicted the resurrection in his Resurrection of the Soldiers in the memorial chapel at Burghclere the focus of this central panel was the image of a soldier lying between his two mules.69 It is as if he had just been sleeping, with one arm affectionately thrown over what would in life have been his off-horse’s back. The two light-coloured mules lie still paired, as though still harnessed. (This is a simple detail, but one which echoes the many official photographs of horses killed whilst in harness taken during the War.) Both are turning their head to look back into the picture, as if waiting for those who have not yet been woken from death by the wave of resurrection travelling from the foreground and back into the painting. Our eye is drawn to these two mules and to the central figure, partly because of their lighter colour, but also because of the apparent love between mule and man. As our eye follows the mules’ gaze and is drawn into the picture, we gradually discover that what had appeared merely to be the earth of a shell-torn landscape, is in fact comprised of the bodies of countless, indistinguishable dark coloured mules, of debris and men. The men, like the mules, are recognisable as individuals, but at the same time could be anyone; creating an anonymity which surpasses rank, class, nationality and even species. Instead, we think not only of the sheer number of dead, but the dead who had not and may never be found. What is significant in terms of the soldier-horse relationship is that Spencer does not infer any difference between horse and man. Thus, the impression is one where the destruction and suffering of war were equally shared, where the bullet or shell that killed them cared not which it killed and, perhaps most interestingly, that when the soldiers were resurrected their horses would be too. The horse of Spencer’s imagination was simply one of God’s creatures. The ultimate impression is one of hope and comfort, even as we are reminded of the almost unimaginable loss and destruction the War had inflicted. As Spencer explained:

69 See Appendix, Figure 21. Spencer S., The Resurrection of the Soldiers, churchonthecorner.org.uk, accessed 02.05.2016.
The general picture is supposed to be a reflection of the general attitude and behaviour of men during the war. As soon as I decided in this it seemed that every army incident was a coin, the obverse of which was presented to me and on the unseen face was the Resurrection.⁷⁰

Spencer clearly remembered the horses who had shared in the War’s horrors and who had formed an integral part of its way of life, of death and of its landscape. Indeed, in The Road to Burghclere Gough notes how ‘Despite their cussed stubbornness, Spencer came to be extremely fond of the large pink mules that were his work-mates during much of the Macedonian campaign.’ Significantly, too, he tells us that Spencer demanded the mules be given equal status with the soldier in his art and that they were, thus, equally deserving of redemption, or a ‘re-finding of themselves from their experiences.’⁷¹ Moreover, in Spencer’s own words, we discover that the central figures in The Resurrection of the Soldiers came out of his memory of an actual event.

The central motif of this picture is also mules. They are lying on the ground in the same order as when they were harnessed to the timber wagon ... the wheels and the mules and the men, who were the riders of them, waking up ... This that I want to tell you ... is gruesome ... It is that once I saw a scene very similar ... of riders fallen between the mules...⁷²

Nevertheless, by the 1930s, the world had started to move on. The war horse was increasingly becoming, not a fact of military life, but a relic of its past. The War’s culmination had already proved to be a turning point in how the British public saw itself in relation to the soldier’s horse. However, just as the few named war horse veterans became living and breathing representatives for the many, the imaginings which had thus far been countered by reality now also started to gain a life of their own. Where stories were not always forthcoming (veterans of World War One rarely spoke about the death of their own horses, even if they talked about the death of horses more generally) existing portrayals, and particularly those that had been popular enough to ensure their survival, moved in to supply any residual interest in the soldier-horse relationship. In effect, the most appealing stories and images gained increasing credence in the absence of any evidence that may have otherwise contradicted them.⁷³ It was not that these stories were untrue, but rather that their influence began to distort, and be distorted by, a fading memory (real and imagined) of what the War had really been like.

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Meanwhile, in an increasingly mechanised age, the horse also came to be seen differently. Mechanisation of the Army meant that the soldier-horse relationship was, but for a few exceptions where horses were still used, no longer a necessary working partnership in the theatre of war. Similarly, in civilian life an absence of working horses meant that the skills and knowledge that had once been so vital in their management became increasingly irrelevant. Thus it was that the serious edge that had always underpinned even the most romantic portrayal of the soldier’s horse was being lost. Indeed, we could say that it was not until the horse’s perceived place in British society was tipped away from that of comrade and co-worker that accusations of sentimentality in regard to the soldier-horse relationship were really able to take hold. For example, when Sassoon evoked his vivid and angrily sentimental memories of an idyllic rural England destroyed by war, he turned to a perfect, and vanished, horse-filled world.

Later in the morning I visited the stables. Stagnation had settled there; nettles were thick under the apple-trees and the old mowing-machine pony grazed in shaggy solitude. In Dixon’s little harness room, saddles were getting mouldy and there were rust-spots on the bits and stirrup irons which he had kept so bright. A tin of Harvey’s Hoof Ointment had obviously been there since 1914. It would take Dixon a long time to get the place straightened up, I thought, forgetting for a moment that he’d been dead six months. ... It wasn’t much fun mooning about the stables.

During the War the horse’s innocence and selfless service of mankind had been used for patriotic gain; emphasising the soldier and horse’s combined stoicism, hard work, unstinting bravery and spirit in the face of war’s untold horrors. It had enabled the British to express and imagine the unimaginable. The soldier-horse relationship had also provided consolation, hope, and even the opportunity for humour. However, by the 1930s, and even though the soldier and horse veterans of the soldier-horse relationship had long since returned to the daily business of ordinary life, it seemed they both still had work to do. The soldier-horse relationship was a rapidly dying feature of military life, but as a means through which to express anger and disillusionment it was being resurrected. This was not the resurrection Stanley Spencer had envisaged in The Resurrection of the Soldiers, which had provided solace and hope in the knowledge that God’s love extended to the souls of man and horse alike, but one which would come to express the suffering of man and the pitiable waste of war.

The cries continued. It is not men, they could not cry so terribly. ... It’s unendurable. It is the moaning of the world, it is the martyred creation, wild with anguish, filled with terror, and groaning. ... One can no longer distinguish whence in this now quiet silvery landscape it comes; ghostly, invisible, it is everywhere, between heaven and

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74 For example, Mules were used by the British Army in Burma during World War Two., Clabby Brigadier J., The History of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps 1919-1961, J.A. Allen & Co., London, 1963, p.118-153
earth it rolls on immeasurably. ... We can bear almost anything. But now the sweat breaks out on us. We must get up and run no matter where, but where these cries can no longer be heard. And it is not men, only horses.\textsuperscript{76}

Conclusion

After the lapse of time since the conclusion of hostilities one is apt to forget the services rendered by animals in that terrible conflict, and the rising generations in this age of mechanisation have little idea of the sacrifices made by animals and the necessity for their being counted as participants in victory. Yet, to those of us who bore the brunt and burden of the day, the old remembrances of companionship in distress and the old ties of friendship and sympathy in that long drawn-out struggle will ever remain in affectionate memory until the slate is washed clean.¹

By the First World War the British Army was keenly aware that the horse’s physical condition deteriorated more slowly when it was treated with sympathetic consideration. This same sympathy for the horse’s well-being also helped to bond the soldier and horse together, and this in turn made them a far more effective weapon. The soldier-horse relationship was useful to the Army, because it helped to protect the significant financial investment each horse represented. This mindset was simply an extension of the attitude the Army had to the welfare of its human resources. Indeed, the old adage ‘no foot no horse’ was as easily applied to a lame horse as it was to an infantryman who could not march.

Working with horses on the front line was dangerous and difficult, but this did not prevent some soldiers from forming a bond of trust with their horses akin to the comradeship which existed between men. For soldiers assigned the task of working with horses day-in-day-out, and expected always to put their horse’s welfare before their own, circumstances dictated that some form of relationship was created between horse and man. Many soldiers did acquire a sympathetic consideration for their horses’ wellbeing, and never entirely forgot the very real bond of mutual reliance and trust war had forced upon them.² It would certainly have taken a very hard-hearted man not to have acquired at least a grudging sympathy for horses that had strived and suffered alongside him. For example, when asked whether he had liked his horses, R.C. Bird replied that he had ‘loved’ them and had felt ‘sorry for them’ because of how they had ‘suffered’.³ This was a sentiment shared by Lieutenant Colonel A.W. Walmsley when he recalled the terrible conditions at Passchendaele. He described how on one occasion a team of mules had struggled in mud so deep that their drivers were unable to save them, how he had been unable to get near enough to shoot them and how, because of this, they had eventually drowned. Indeed, even when interviewed in 1978, his regret was still palpable:

² ‘I got really quite fond of Jimmy and Toby, and took great pride in turning them out spick and span.’ Pratchett W., RASC Horse Transport, Western Front, Liddle Collection, Leeds, P14, p.76.
³ Bird R.C., Private in Royal Field Artillery, Gallipoli and Western Front, IWM 10656, Reel 3.
“Six mules were trying to pull an ammunition wagon up. Had gone on struggling until they definitely sank in the mud and had been suffocated. ... Their drivers were trying to the very last moment most desperately at the risk of their own lives to get them out. I went to try and help and was completely useless because I found the mud was so deep I couldn’t even get near.”

Such events should not have belonged to any glamorous imagining of the battlefield, but once retold and reworked with the era’s characteristic flair, it was sometimes surprising how much romance, picturesque domesticity, drama and humour could be extracted from even the most humble or tragic of scenes. The war illustrators, the wartime press, the period’s numerous writers, poets and artists, had positively thrived on the literary and artistic opportunities the War’s events provided. Indeed, and perhaps paradoxically, it was often when imaginings of the soldier and his horse had touched most closely on the War’s darkest realities that they had achieved their greatest appeal. For example, an article published in *The New York Times* in September 1918, told the story of how a horse had stood over the dead body of its rider for two days. Stories such as this alluded to the horse’s faithfulness and sagacity, but were popular because they also suggested the good character of the man whose sympathetic consideration had earned his horse’s loyalty.

After every engagement at the front riderless horses are always rounded up and brought in. Often they are found near their dead masters, or following other riders. It was one of the Coldstream Guards who told how, after the fierce fighting at Loos, a horse was seen standing between the firing lines. For two whole days he remained there, when some of our men crawled out and found he was standing by the dead body of his rider, the horse himself unharmed. It was with difficulty he was induced to leave the spot, and only by blindfolding him could he be persuaded to leave his dead master and return to the British lines.

Portrayals of the soldier-horse relationship provided a metaphorical stepping stone between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Such imaginings also offered comfort, by suggesting that the actions of the individual still mattered. Thus, the small kindnesses a humble soldier bestowed upon his horse, his sympathetic consideration for its welfare, and his grief at its loss became an extremely powerful, but relatively safe, medium through which to engage with fears and anxieties that were often all too real. For example, D.S. Tamblyn described the feeling of the British soldier for his horse as having been akin to an act of chivalry bestowed upon a ‘lesser’ creature:

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4 Lieutenant-Colonel A.W. Walmsley, Royal Army Transport Corps, Transcript of Tape 513, Liddle Collection.
5“The Horse in War, Bits of his Life Portrayed by a Blue Cross Worker’, *The New York Times*, September 151918.
Not for honors alone will the British soldier risk danger, but with that fine chivalry which is ever at the services of the weak and oppressed, he will, whether a simple private or a commissioned officer, extend his aid to creatures of lesser usefulness.⁶

The humble soldier may not have been a knight in name, but he had been elevated philosophically and spiritually by his very actions. Allegorical associations of the soldier and horse with the knightly virtues of bravery, kindness and honesty endured, because they gave life to the illusion that the British were humane in all things. These associations were by no means new, and were an inheritance even in 1914. The cavalryman may no longer have been quite the military force he had once been, but this did not stop the nation’s people from invoking him, and all that he represented. During the Great War the artilleryman, the mounted infantryman, and even the humble horse transport driver, were increasingly imbued, like the cavalryman before them, with the positive chivalric virtues of the mounted knight. No longer was it necessary to be a gentleman to be possessed of all the most positive attributes of the British race, and nowhere were these qualities better illustrated than in the soldier’s kind and sympathetic treatment of his horse.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the noble horse still retained its place at the top of the animal hierarchy. However, the very same utility that had won this high regard was ironically also the horse’s greatest enemy. The horse was admired for its strength and versatility, but it was its willingness to cooperate with man which had so often proved more of a curse than a blessing. After all, had horses not provided such a reliable source of traction and mobility the British Army would not have demanded them on such an unprecedented scale during the First World War. The war horse’s suffering was an unfortunate, but inevitable, fact in the prosecution of war, and it was this that made it such a powerful focus for sentimental regret.

As long as portrayals of the soldier-horse relationship were balanced by a solid grounding in reality, the sentimental stories that had always provided a means of venting guilt at its inevitable suffering remained only what they were, a way of exploring the reality of war from a safe emotional distance. We must remember too, that many of these images and stories owed their inspiration to the experiences of soldiers themselves. For example, W.H. Parr’s poem was inspired by a conversation he had overheard in which a driver of his battery had said that, should he be killed, he wanted to be buried with his horses. When they were killed a week later, Parr had buried his driver and his horses together according to the dead man’s wishes.⁷

⁷‘The author of this poem, while serving in the Field Artillery with the 1st Canadian Division, heard one of the drivers say that should he “go west” he would like to take his horses with him. A few days later an exploding shell killed the soldier and both his horses. In deference to his wish, Mr. Parr buried the driver with a horse upon each side of him, and now they lie sleeping in the Ypres salient.’ Parr W.H., ‘His Two Horses’, September 1919, in Baker P.S., Animal War Heroes, A & C Black Ltd., London, 1933, p. xx.
While *His Two Horses* had been written during the War, it was first published in America’s *The Ladies Home Journal* in 1919 and not in the United Kingdom until 1933, when it was included in Peter Shaw Baker’s *Animal War Heroes*. Parr’s poem about a humble driver’s last wish thus appeared alongside the deeds of such illustrious (and well-connected) animal veterans of the recent War as General Jack Seely’s Warrior (who would be immortalised in his own right) Colonel E.J. Harrison’s Charlie and even the 1st Scottish Rifles’ mascot - a donkey named Jimmy.\(^8\) As the War gradually receded into memory, it was these few who became representatives of the many.

Despite its importance during the Great War, the soldier-horse relationship has since been sorely neglected; by turns dismissed as an anachronistic irrelevance and undermined by its own legend. Both extremes trivialise what it was like to take horses into war. We seem to have forgotten that the working partnership between soldier and horse was once essential in the prosecution of war. Likewise, the sheer enormity of the operation by which horses were supplied to the British Army during the First World War has been largely overlooked. Much has been said about the usefulness of cavalry, but very little has been said about how

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horses were managed in the field. Horses mattered to such an extent that Britain would not have achieved victory in 1918 without them. However, this fact has also somehow been forgotten. To have so neglected the soldier and his horse has been to do them both a great disservice. Likewise, the many thousands of British Army personnel who purchased, trained, transported and ministered to its horses with the sole purpose of achieving victory.

However, neither should we entirely dismiss the sentimental portrayals that were so popular during the Great War and which have enabled the soldier-horse relationship to live on into modern memory. Although the period’s more sentimental portrayals of the soldier-horse relationship may not be to modern tastes we should not be too hasty to dismiss them. Neither, however, should we refer to them as though as evidence of fact, or without equal reference to the sense that originally underpinned them. Such an approach to the soldier-horse relationship does not take us forward, because it does not really go back; the results are therefore only illusory. Although they tell us about public feeling at the time, they do not necessarily tell us what soldiers actually thought about their horses, or what it was like to be responsible for a horse in the difficult circumstances in which soldiers found themselves. Thus, we need to achieve a balance between sense and sentimentality. After all, while sentimentality may be more than a matter of ‘enjoying emotions without paying for them’, there is nevertheless a price paid when it is allowed to colour the past without recourse to reality.⁹

This thesis has put the soldier and his horse centre stage. It has explored what the soldier-horse relationship was, and how it was key to ensuring an expensive weapon was properly maintained. Most importantly, it has gone beyond the few portrayals that now inform our understanding of the soldier-horse relationship, and has focused instead on the first-hand experience of the soldier himself. Thus, the soldier and horse of the Great War are accorded the respect that has hitherto alluded them. By championing the soldier-horse relationship as a subject worthy of serious academic attention this thesis has illustrated what can be achieved when the balance between sense and sentimentality is restored. Only by so doing will the debt we still owe the soldier and his horse be repaid and the slate washed clean.¹⁰

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