http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~gregkrenzelok/veterinary%20corp%20in%20ww1/theinnocentabroad.html

Editor's Note: A little remembered fact is that before the U.S. entered World War 1 in 1917, we sold horses and mules to Italy. In this interesting article published in the American Veterinary Medical Association magazine, July 1918 issue, 2nd Lieutenant David McAuslin, U.S. Army Transport Veterinarian shares his experiences transporting animals from several voyages. This article gives us an invaluable insight to what it was like on those ships.

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"THE INNOCENT ABROAD"
D.A. McAuslin, N.Y.

Of all the components parts of the armies in this, the greatest of wars, no part is, to my mind, so absolutely innocent of having in any way played a part in bringing it about; none so essential in anything other than the actual fighting; none which has had so little voice as to whether he goes or stays and none so willing in the performance of his work, no matter how hazardous, as that of our equine friends, the army horse and mule. The are called upon to do the work when power machines fail, and it is due to the fact that they perform this work so creditably that they are retained in the face of all statistics compiled by the alert efficiently expert and salesman. It is not this work that I wish to bring to your attention but the lack of appreciation shown them for performances done or to be done. In seven voyages to Italy I have often wondered if it would be possible to destroy some horses that have gone through the ministrations of some of the so-called ocean-going veterinarians.

My first departure from New York was on the Italian Steamship Taormina – a large passenger-carrying ship before the war. The upper portions, reserved for horses, were fairly good, being the third-class passenger sections, but the lower decks could have been greatly improved so far as ventilation and drainage were concerned. The consignment consisted of 1076 horses and 150 mules, the latter rejects from former consignments. For four days previous to sailing these mules had been under my charge and treatment at the railway stockyards, and I was able to get a good line as to what was in store for me. The certainly were a sorry collection and were well styled "rejects"; but as they were a source of expense it was decided that I should endeavor to make the best of things and they were placed in a well ventilated part of the ship before the horses came alongside. The horses were transferred from the railway to the ship in the regulation double-decked cattle barge and loaded directly from its upper deck to the main deck of the ship and taken to the spaces allotted them in the holds, which on this vessel, numbered six, each three decks down. They were led singly from the barge by the crew who were to go over with them. They were given the halter-shank by the bargeman and inasmuch as some of these men had never handled a horse before, it took considerable watching to prevent their being injured. We

were fortunate in not having anyone injured. About 40 percent of the horsemen came on board intoxicated. It has been my experience since that it is these men who invariably make the best workers, as others, in a great many cases, are out for a joy ride, and when compelled to do their share have to be watched carefully or they would neglect to feed and water properly; while the “rummy”, when sobered up, will invariably attend to his charges with-out being told and in the majority of cases is willing to do little things outside of his duties, and he is more easily handled. Especially is this true if you expend a little money on smoking tobacco and cigarette papers. In this way you can satisfy his desire for smoking, which seems to be greatest, and curb the desire for alcohol by cutting off the tobacco. I have found that I only required to do this once, and within three days they were willing to do anything for a sack of tobacco and papers.

In reference to ailments, the first three shipments were as choice a collection of sick animals as could be found – pulmonary infections with their various sequelae, were the principal source of trouble. With the limited space allowed (2 ft. 4 inches wide by 8 ft. long and a head-room at the most 8 ft. high, making a total air-space of 150 cu. Ft. for each animal, with aisles 3 ft. wide and both rows of animals’ heads projecting into it), it was no easy matter to treat them. An ugly animal made matters worse.

On leaving port I found it much to my advantage on Italian ships to get in touch at once with the commissary officer who had charge of the food, and ascertain from him the food rations allowed by the ship. In the meanwhile the foreman, under instructions, arranged the men in messes of not more than six and gave each man a berth supplied with a straw mattress, blankets and a pillow, for which they were held responsible. When this was finished, they lined up at the cook’s galley, and the ship’s commissary issued the mess gear to each man individually, and to two in each gang, selected by themselves, the large pans for their food, etc. These two men obtained the rations for the six in that mess, and in this way much confusion was avoided. Also, if the food was not what was desired, or what it should be, one could check back very easily. Wine I always issued myself with the assistance of the foreman, only on holidays and Sundays, and at night after feeding and watering. I found this little personal touch was very much appreciated.

In reference to the feeding and watering of the stock I found that, if the animals were fed a fair ration of good quality hay – about 6 to 8 lbs. in the morning and 10 lbs. at night – I did not get the same number of cases of azoturia which are so troublesome to handle aboard ship. A bran mash was given every third day and a generous portion of salt mixed in, and twice a week a handful of salt was given each animal – the same being placed on the iron deck immediately in front of each stall.

The day before arriving at Gibraltar, where we had to put in for inspection, as all ships are compelled to do, a count of all feed and hay was made and the animals got their first feed of oats in the ratio of bran four, oats one. This quantity of oats was increased each day for the next 3 days, when the bran was exhausted as per schedule, and the last two midday meals were usually oats straight. In this way the animals usually went off in fine fettle. For sick horses, which would not eat oats or other fodder, I carried a few sacks of corn-on-the-cob; and as a great many of these horses were corn-fed before starting their journey, I found it very helpful in restoring jaded appetites.

In reference to water, I was guided a great deal by the temperature of the holds, which was taken at midday, and in this way I could obtain a line of the requirements of the animals almost individually. In the winter months, or when the weather was cold, watering morning and night was sufficient, and they were not stinted in any way. If, however, the weather became warm, they were watered three times a

day, and in the very hot weather four times a day – each horse, from an individual round-bottomed bucket of galvanized iron suspended from the breast-board, which was also used for feeding the grain ration. It was the duty of the foreman and his assistants to take full charge of the feeding and watering. I always found the time to be on my rounds when this was being done, as in this way I was able to spot many an animal, which was coming down with some ailment and be in a better position to combat it. It was the ventilation upon which I laid the most stress. On the S.S. Taormina I utilized the thermo-tank system of forced air wherever it was possible and 16 canvas ventilators or wind-sails. On the S.S. Stampalia, in addition to the thermo-tanks, 12 canvas ventilators, and on the Caserta I had to depend on the canvas ventilators only. It required constant vigilance and supervision to see that these properly trimmed at each change of wind. In bad weather a man was stationed at each hold to watch the portholes, which were open whenever possible. On these ships I was most ably supported in this work by the captains and their officers, who were untiring in their efforts to land as many animals as possible. They made things as easy for me as possible, and my association with these gentlemen will always be a source of pleasant recollection.

The cleaning out of the manure is a much-discussed question. Personally I do not favor the daily cleaning of the stalls. First: if it is rough weather you have the animals deprived of footing, and as the racks are wet and slimy, they will go down and in many cases injure themselves most severely. This could be avoided if a fair and reasonable amount of droppings were allowed to remain underfoot, which would give a good secure foothold whether the animals be shod or not. Second: to clean the stalls you have to take the animals out and crowd them into a space already as full as possible consistent with safety. Some of the men or some of the animals are usually hurt, either by kicks or getting down. The only objection to not cleaning is the decomposition of the manure and the urine, with the resultant ammoniacal vapors. This I counteracted as much as possible by daily spraying with a good strong disinfectant solution which I had put in a portable tank and forced out by air pressure in the form of a jet instead of a spray. In the form of a spray it would strike the legs of the animal already irritated by the splashing of the urine and produce nasty sores. The condition was obviated by the straight jet. The tank was placed in as competent hands as possible and the work was done at night, usually by one of the night watchman.

In reference to the treatment of sick animals, as has been noted before; it was usually impossible to move them once they were placed in the holds. It was my custom to make as close and careful an inspection of the animals as possible when they came off the barge, and have any sick animals placed on deck or some other well ventilated portion of the ship where they could be under better observation and were convenient to get at. I always included any animal that lagged back upon the rope even if he showed no other symptom, as invariably these laggards were taken down with a serious trouble in a short time if not taken in hand at once.

Taking temperatures was out of the question, the principal dependence being placed upon the pulse, respiration and mucous membranes of the eye. Wherever a sick animal was placed, the diagnosis was marked on the headboard in black crayon and instructions to assistant and foreman were included from time to time. If animals were shifted in the cleaning of the stalls, great care had to be taken to see that the animals were returned to their proper stalls, for if changed great harm was apt to be done in that sick animals would be neglected. In such cases death is very often a result, and is another objection to daily cleaning.

As far as treatment is concerned supportive measures in my opinion are always indicated. In the pneumonia cases, phylacogens were used with very excellent results. On one voyage a record was kept of each case and it showed that out of 150 odd cases of pneumonia, the loss was but 8, and post mortem showed well-developed cases of pleurisy with adhesions. It also showed extreme dilation of the heart, which, in one instance, when put upon the scales, weighted 11 lbs. 14 oz. The walls of the ventricles were thickened out of all proportion and of a very inferior consistency. This condition was produced, in my opinion, in conjunction with other conditions present, by the injudicious use of strychnine, which seems to be the sovereign agent of those not competent to judge of its action. Purpura was quite prevalent, but of all the cases treated only one died, and that one lived less than 12 hours after being detected. The treatment consisted of ammonium chloride and potassium dichromate, in solution, internally and applications of tinet. iodine externally applied with friction. When the symptoms showed signs of subsiding dilute chloride of iron solution was administered. This treatment was never changed; the results obtained, as noted, being in my opinion satisfactory. On the last three voyages considerable annoyance and hard work was caused by infectious stomatitis. I had been aware that it was quite prevalent at the yards, and had been fortunate in having only a few isolated cases. The three voyages referred to saw it well established on board – so much that I was enabled to detect some of these cases by the odor. These cases, which at one time numbered over 350, treated on one trip, were first treated by a solution of potassium permanganate, alum and boric acid, but owing to the effect of the continued use of this mixture upon my hands and arms, I discontinued it for a solution of potassium chlorate and hot sea water. This I think gave me much better results upon a very severe case and required more than four washings of this. This was done by means of a force pump and an 8 ft. enema hose. The latter was passed into the mouth between the teeth and cheek a far back as the angle of the jaw and about 2 qts. Of the solution slowly pumped from a pail by an assistant. Very little trouble was experienced if done quietly. Care was taken that the animals affected did not drink or feed from any other than their own pails, and to this end the sides of the stall were slatted to prevent them reaching to either side. The only instance in which this infection caused real damage was when it attacked an animal suffering from some serious depleting disease, such as pneumonia, and prevented his eating; the animal being weakened by lack of nourishment. As a direct and sole cause of mortality I never saw a case although a number were reported.

Abortion was quite common, a half dozen or more occurring every voyage, but in every case stillborn; although we had a number that has almost reached maturity. To my mind, it is a crime against the shippers to ever put mares in advanced pregnancy aboard a horse transport, as invariably if there is heavy weather they will abort. It is running an unnecessary risk, which could be easily avoided. Records have been shown me of deaths of mares after they had aborted.

As far as surgery goes, very little could be done – owing to surroundings – outside of opening abscesses from strangles and on the buttocks. In reference to abscesses on the buttocks, this is caused by continued chafing on the end boards and is apt to prove very serious if not remedied.

The animals, when unloaded in Italy, were taken in hand by soldiers at the land end of the gangway and loaded direct into boxcars and taken inland to the various concentration and remount camps. It was here that I first saw the treatment that suggested the title of this paper. These boxcars are about a third the length of our boxcars, which carry from 21-22 horses or 24-26 mules, according to size; but they packed 11 horses or 14-15 mules. To get then to enter, moral suasion plays no part. Anything that will administer a blow is used, be it a piece of 2x4, a halter shank with bale wire to reinforce it, or a 5-ft.

length of Italian locust, which, when dried, I have never seen broken not matter how much on hammers with it. The horses are led singly up to the door; the shank thrown over his neck and everyone who can reach him safely starts to beat him into the car. If the car is empty or half full the first blow is enough, but when there are 9 or 10 horses in, of course they block the door-way, and it is the work of the animal to force his way in by shoving aside those already in. If he is not strong enough he is almost beaten into a pulp until he, in agony, will plunge into the car. If there are others already weakened by the voyage, the are apt to go down, and once down, in the crowded condition of the cars, I have never seen an animal get up and be worth anything after a 30 or 40 mile railroad ride. I trust that our government will not make this error in transporting these humble, willing, and in the majority of cases, efficient co-workers, but give them a chance to stretch their stiffened legs, together with a night's rest and pure air and water, before continuing their journey.

However, there are times when animals do not submit meekly to brutal beatings. I witnessed the death of a soldier and a broken leg of another by a horse of which I had warned a soldier, and my thanks was a blow from a locust stick across the horse's nose. The horse, a big black ridgling, which had given us considerable trouble until we found that we could do much more by kindness than by any other means, instantly reared and lashed out with his front feet, which were shod, and struck his tormentor full in the chest which you could see collapse. The man fell unconscious to be removed to the hospital where, I was informed, he died later in the day, the majority of his ribs being broken. When other soldiers attempted to catch him the same horse stampeded over 200 already landed and broke a man's leg with a kick for striking him with a stick while within reach of his hind legs. After a half-hour's futile work the animal was placed in a car by two horsemen from the ship in a few minutes.

The mules are loaded in the same way with this exception, that instead of being led singly, they are herded in gangs of six and the soldiers, usually about 100 to 150, form a half circle with the ends resting on the two sides of the car door. They gradually close in, and the beatings the stubborn animals received made me see red the first time I witnessed it. As in the black ridgling case, there were mules that asserted themselves, and when they did, things were lively. In one instances, I had a loop around the neck of a big brown mule of about 1200 lbs., which had been boss of his section all the way over and was in good physical trim. Sixteen soldiers tried to dray him into a car after he had burst things up several times. It was certainly a funny sight to see this mule, by a sudden plunge forward, catch the men off their balance and by a quick turn to one side every man was dragged off his feet. The officers in charge shouted to hold on and they obeyed orders and that mule, I think, took a malicious delight in picking the dirtiest and muddiest part of that corral where the overflow from the watering trough collected and dragging these men through it. Their uniforms were a sight. Of course the cattlemen offered their regrets, which the soldiers returned in kind; and I was more than glad that neither understood the other. I made it a hard and fast rule that under no consideration was a soldier to touch an animal while he was yet upon the ship. I think in this way many weak animals, which would have been killed by the brutal handling of the soldiers, were landed. However, I always made it a point to call the attention of the officer in command to these animals, and after the first voyage they heeded my warnings.

A number of times I was called upon to assist in the unloading of other ships; and it was on these that I made the acquaintance of the ocean-going Horse Doctor and the ocean Cowboy, on in particular had a choice a collection of remedies as I have seen. I had to check up his drug list and found a gallon of tincture aconite, a pint tinet, nux vomica, a pint tinet. Gentian, 5 gals. Linseed oil, 2 gals. White liniment

P.D.& Co., half-gallon aqua ammonia, 1 gal. turpentine. I noted a number of animals go off with a weak straddling gait and with the sheath much swollen, and in one instance with the penis extended fully and marked discharge and great swelling of the glands. On asking the cause I was given a very wise wink and the answer: “I know de treek”, and nothing more. Later inquires revealed the fact that nearly all of these animals died from cystitis and kindred urinary troubles; and one day when the veterinarian’s assistant was badly in need of the price of a drink, I had revealed to me the secret of the “Treek”. Nearly all of these animals were down; and as it would make a material difference in his bonus, he had given each horse a grain of strychnine sulphate hypodermically, and filled a two-ounce dose syringe with equal parts of white liniment, aqua ammonia and turpentine, and had injected it into the urethra. What with the injection and the agony caused by the ammonia and turpentine, the animal had managed to get to his feet, and if he showed signs of weakening, another grain of strychnine was given. This same man, by the way, a Frenchman, has had mules whose hoofs have dropped off through neglect, in my opinion. I had charge of loading them and remarked at the time about the good condition of the animals; and when another veterinarian – this one a graduate – had the remainder of the consignment, 1180 odd, while the Frenchman had but 442, the losses were: for the graduate veterinarian, 5; for the Frenchman, 11, with the latter’s stock all on the main and upper decks, while the former was handling three decks down.

In another instance, while assisting in the unloading of 490 horses, 14 were unable to up the brow. I was sent for to see what should be done and found all of these animals suffering more or less from aconite poisoning, all the symptoms being present. Upon my asking what treatment has been given, I was told they had been given exhaustion mixture, the contents of which I found were equal parts of aconite, nitrous ether, belladonna and nux vomica, the dose being one ounce, to be repeated in 15 minutes, and then a grain of strychnine hypodermically. It is needless to say that they received no more exhaustion mixture. The animals were placed under my care for a week, when they were turned over to the government in fairly good shape.

Again, a mule was reported as having gone crazy and had been destroyed as being too dangerous to keep on board, but fairly good information indicated a case of spasmodic colic. At any rate the veterinarian hit the animal with a hatchet, and as the animal dropped, ordered the carcass thrown overboard. When it came to the surface, lo! The animal supposed to be dead started to swim after the ship.

When I asked to make up a list of drugs for a ship, of which the veterinarian in charge said, upon looking it over, he thought it would do but that it lacked whiskey. When asked how much, he replied: “5 gallons.” When asked what kind, he replied: "O! I like Green River."

When crossing either was I was always given the best accommodations possible and always tried to be a gentleman. It was hard to have to associate with some of these men who did not know how to conduct themselves in any way except to drink excessive quantities of wine. Those of us who desired to be judged by our actions suffered more or less by the comparison.

It was not only to Italy that these men were put in charge of animals. I have witnessed the unloading of several shipments in Bordeaux. On one occasion a consignment of very fine Canadian medium-draft horses was landed. I never saw such a sight – proper drainage had not been maintained, and as the animals were all housed on deck, but arranged in two tiers with a wooden floor, the urine seepage had removed the better part of the hair from the back and sides and great sores had resulted, so that it

would be weeks before these animals would be in a condition to work. It cannot be said that this condition would redound to the credit of the veterinarian. I do know that if given healthy horses and good feed one can be reasonably sure of landing a consignment that will be a credit to veterinary science, if one will only use properly trained men. An assistant I had with me for four voyages went as foreman under a veterinarian for the British, but on sailing the veterinarian was removed for intoxication and another could not be obtained in time so my assistant was entrusted with the entire charge. By using stimulants and paying attention to ventilation, feed, watering, etc., he landed a complete cargo of 870 head, every one in good physical condition. He had no serious trouble as the animals were shipped in good condition and the voyage short.

In conclusion I would urge everyone present to use his influence with anyone and everyone connected with the transport of horses – whether for war purposes now or peace pursuits after the war – to have competent men in charge of their cargoes; to pay them a respectable sum as a salary and award them a fair bonus based upon results obtained. While it may cost a little more, it will be compensated for by the results obtained. It is only the just due of the animals over which they have been placed. These animals are called upon to do the most hazardous work and constitute one of the great supply trunks, which the British term the “Silent Service”. They go where the mechanical transport cannot go. They are called upon to assist the same mechanical transport when it has gone beyond its depth: i.e., the made road; and I call your attention to the fact that this War of Wars is not being fought on macadamized roads. Wherever there is a advance these animals are the sole source of supply for the immediate needs, for without their aid exhausted supplies could not be replenished in time to be of any service. When this war is won (and win we must and will) we will find that after we have had all our say about Liberty Motors and Standardized Army Trucks, we will have to take our hats off to the Liberty Army Horse and Mule.