A Sorrowful War: Veterinary Medicine During the War of the Rebellion

Mary-Elizabeth Ellard, MS, DVM
Many thanks for letting me be with you today!
Farrier, smith or veterinarian?
At the start of the War, there were about 7.5 million horses and mules in this country. By contrast, there were less than 50 degreed veterinarians, most of them foreign born, all of them foreign trained.

Horses and mules on both sides will be the real losers.
Dr. John Busteed

“The US Army is the only one in the civilized world without educated veterinarians.”

To Sec. of War Edwin Stanton in 1863
One great want felt ... is the deficiency of veterinary talent in the country, and the impossibility of obtaining what little there is for the compensation now allowed by the government.
Cavalry Bureau Act of 1863
Vets received the rank of Sgt. Maj. (i.e., no commission) and $75/mo (lieutenant’s pay).
George F. Parry, (1838-1886)

7th PA Cav, Army of the Ohio, Veterinary Surgeon (Newtown, Bucks Co.)

Mustered in 22 June, 1863; unit mustered out in Nashville in August 1865

Papers acquired by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania
July 29... Called on Capt. Rickett’s mare, ordered her shot

August 24 in camp till 4 o’clock reading and prescribing for horses....

September 1 ... Scouted the country in search of mules and horses, found some ...

Sept. 5 Shaved and washed my shirt... very dull
Basic equine health needs

- Forage (and water)
- Horseshoes
- Grooming
- Rest
Horses’ Daily Food Needs

- 14#/day hay for horse or mule
- 12#/day grain for horse
- 9#/day grain for mule
Staggering Calculus of Needs

- 100k men
- 16K cavalry and artillery horses
- 12,552 mules
- 2092 wagons (4 horses or 6 mules each)
- 673 tons forage for animals for just 2 days!
- ~ 520 wagons to carry forage for just one day!
June 1, 1864:... Horses starving to death by hundreds.

July 26 all unusable horses and pack stock sent back to Marietta. No feed for our horses....

August 1 wagon train came up and brought rations for men and horses.
Next to forage (and water), horses’ biggest need is for horseshoes.
Grant Crosses the Rappahannock with 24,000 wagon horses

Do the math!
In 1835, Henry Burden patented the first machine to successfully mass produce horse-shoes. It could produce 60/hour, a 7-fold increase over hand made.
John Singleton Mosby
December 6, 1833 – May 30, 1916
December 24 (1863) clear and nice. Ordered all the smiths at work shoeing horses....

December 27 very busy all day. Inspection of horses...
Sore back

- Caused by poor grooming or poor placement of saddle or blanket

- Each trooper is responsible for this care, so the quality of care varied widely.
The McClellan Saddle
Horses’ backs were actually putrid from … wear of saddles which had not been permitted to be removed for weeks, they fell down in the ranks from exhaustion and starvation and were abandoned by the wayside.”
Wed., Nov. 25
Condemned mules and sent to Nashville
Federal Horse Depots

- St. Louis, MO
- Greenville, LA
- Nashville, TN
- Harrisburg, WV
- Wilmington, DE
- Giesboro Point (D.C.)
Giesboro Point Cavalry Depot (or Remount Station)
Deaths at Giesboro: A Perfect Storm

• Sept. 1864: 100 animals
• Next the three months: 1462
• In December alone: 520
• Jan ’64 – May 1865: 17K horses died (cavalry remount for Army of the Potomac)
Glanders (a.k.a. “snot”)
Classic features

- Burkholderia mallei
- 21 day incubation
- Acute form: fever, death within few days of signs
- Skin lesions frequently along the medial hock
- Localization in the lungs always!
- Victims suffocate to death
- STILL no vaccine and no effective treatment
Risk factors

- Animals badly fed
- Kept in a poor environment
- Over worked
- Stressed due to travel or crowding
Drs. John Terrell and John Page at CSA Horse Infirmary in Lynchburg, VA
1864: Page and Terrell publish the demonstration of “contagion”

- Followed disease in 19 horses;
- Successfully inoculated healthy horses and produce Glanders
- Post-mortem exams showed classic lesions
- Lucky they didn’t get it!!!
- Refuted humoral theory of disease
How to create an epizootic of Glanders!
Of 3 million who served, 1.2 to 1.5 million horses and mules died

Roughly 90% from disease
Compared to soldier’s ~ 66%
GEO. F. PARRY,
VETERINARY SURGEON,
Treats all Diseases of
HORSES & CATTLE.

DISABLED HORSES
Recruited at my Stable.

SURGICAL OPERATIONS
Performed according to most
Approved Methods.

PROMPT ATTENTION GIVEN
In all cases.

Residence, Doylestown Road,
one mile north of Newtown
Borough.
I NEED A HOME
I SEE YOU HAVE ONE