

The Colonial Williamsburg

Animal News

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COWS & BIRDS & BEES

Alice the cow's recent strange behavior, witnessed by several people, caused us a little doubt about her state of expectancy. We had the vet examine her and he confirmed that she is definitely pregnant and is due to calf in late January.

SHEARED SHEEP

By Elaine Shirley

In the past few weeks we have shorn all the new lambs and the yearlings (last year's lambs). The most frequent question we are asked is, "won't they be cold this winter?" We calm the fears of our visitors who are prepared to knit sweaters for the sheep by telling them about the history of sheep and wool.

Thousands of years ago before man domesticated sheep they had a very short undercoat (wool) and long, rough guard hairs (similar to goat hair). Humans found that undercoat was very desirable, but the guard hairs were not. Sheep were bred and selected for thousands of years to come up with the animal we have today. Sheep wool today generally consists of no guard hairs (although a few breeds still possess remnants) and extremely long undercoats. Nature made sheep to survive with $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of wool and today some breeds can grow up to 16 inches a year.

Hand shearing leaves $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of wool so the animal has what it needs to keep warm and they are always growing more. We do leave the belly wool on the sheep as an added insulation against the cold ground. But don't worry. Those poor naked sheep aren't as naked as they seem.

HORSE HAIR FLYS IN THE MORNING

Mornings are busy at the C. W. Franklin Street Stable. In order to begin carriage rides at 9:30 people have to move fast and really make the horse hair fly.

The work day officially starts at 8:00 a.m., but a groom or coachman nearly always comes in early enough so the horses will have finished their breakfast grain by then. At eight each coachman receives his or her assignment from the head coachman. The head coachman determines who will drive what animals to which carriage and decides if the weather forecast is a factor. When the temperature is 95° or higher we only give rides in the morning. In very cold weather two coachmen are assigned to each carriage so one can thaw while the other freezes. The carriages are not used in rain, though the stage wagon can bear a light drizzle. High winds present the danger of falling limbs and airborne items that may frighten the horses.

Once the coachmen know which pair he or she is assigned they take the first horse out of the barn to be

groomed. The horses are cleaned up on a big concrete area beside the barn which has a long pipe hitching rail fitted with chains to tie five horses. At the front edge of the grooming area is a large concrete water trough where the horses are allowed to drink and play before they are tied up. Although the stalls are equipped with automatic waterers most horses take pleasure in a morning splash.

One of the most important grooming tasks, checking the horses hooves, is usually the first thing attended to by the coachmen. The feet are picked clean of shavings, manure, and mud, the shoes inspected and hoof dressing applied. Loose shoes are tightened. Horses can't work on the street without their shoes.

As each animal is curried and brushed the coachman looks for anything wrong such as cuts, swellings, or any other injury. The entire time a horse is handled during the morning his behavior and attitude are observed. Deviation from normal can mean sickness. We do not work sick animals.

If an animal is really dirty and brushing is not enough, it gets a bath. The grooming area is equipped with a drain and the horses are washed right where they are tied with the luxury of hot and cold water and Orvus soap. If it's too cold for even a hot bath a coachman will pull out the vacuum cleaner. Our special equine vacuum cleaners see a lot of use especially in winter.

Once a steed is clean and sprayed with fly repellent, the harness is put on. While the harness looks very complicated only two buckles are involved in fastening it on and removing it. It stays together basically in one piece and is taken completely apart only for thorough cleaning. If the coachman notices anything wrong with the harness it is corrected immediately.

The harnessed horse is returned to its stall to eat hay until it is time to go and the same process is repeated with its partner.

About five minutes before 9:00 a.m. the Courthouse calls and requests a schedule for the day. The three carriages most used have staggered starting times. Usually the head coachman answers the phone and tells the Courthouse the carriage and time of its first ride. Red 9:30, blue 9:35, and 10:00 for the wagon (9:45 for wagon tour). If it's necessary to skip particular rides in the afternoon or if carriages are only going out half a day, the Courthouse needs to know. This information is necessary so the tickets can be sold.

Coachmen only have about a half an hour to forty minutes to spend on each horse. Somehow when you're trying to groom a big horse like Topsy it seems impossible. Uh oh. Whoa now, big (oops) girl. Easy girl. I didn't mean BIG like fat. Whoa, girl. I mean like Jane Russell, a full figure girl. Whoa now. There, that's a GOOD girl. Whew! I thought she was going to step on my foot.

WAR IN PIECE

With the airing of the television movie *War and Remembrance* and Pearl Harbor Day drawing near, it's timely to consider the role played in World War II by animals.

Hitler's fully mechanized modern army used about 2.75 million horses in World War II. An average 865 of his horses were killed daily during the more than two thousand day war. The Nazis lost 52,000 horses in the Battle of Stalingrad. These figures—and they are just for the German Army alone—are taken from *The Noble Horse* by Monique and Hans Dossenbach, a book we have on the shelves here at the stable. This book shows pictures of a horse wearing camouflage paint and another wearing an equine gas mask.

The predecessor of *War and Remembrance*, *The Winds of War*, showed Polish cavalry being strafed by a German airplane. While it appeared at the opening of World War II horses had no place in modern warfare, there turned out to be several advantages to military horsepower. Although the mounted Poles were no match for Hitler's Luftwaffe and Panzer units, Russian cavalry was important in the Soviet Union's defense against the Nazis.

According to the book *Animal Reveille* in August of 1941 3,000 mounted Russians, over a period of twelve days, skirted around behind German lines and accomplished the following:

“routed the 430th German Infantry Regiment; wiped out the headquarters of two other regiments and the complete topographical department of the German Sixth Army, exterminated 2,500 German soldiers and twenty-four officers; destroyed 200 lorries, four armored cars, two tanks, four big guns, six mortars, thirty heavy machine guns; captured 1,500 automatic and infantry rifles, many horses and trucks, and sheafs of important documents.”

These Russians were so effective on their horses because the thick mud and harsh terrain made trucks and tanks less effective, if not virtually ineffective.

Now facts from this little book, *Animal Reveille* by Richard Dempewolff, should probably be taken with a little grain of salt. Copyrighted in 1943 it may just be Allied propaganda, but it is filled with delightful stories of all sorts of animals who contributed to the war effort. Besides the obvious horses, mules, and dogs, accounts of contributions by llamas, reindeer, cats, roosters, hamsters, spiders, and even slugs are included.

One thing *Animal Reveille* does accurately point out is why horses were important to all armies involved in the war. In treacherous terrain (rocky, muddy, or whatever) horses could go where tanks and trucks could not. A horse could quickly leave the road and take cover in wooded areas or kneel down and hide in a three-foot ditch. Trucks and tanks need precious petroleum products to be useful. A horse can live simply off the land. Horses can swim and make their way through thick woods, not needing bridges or roads.

Animal Reveille reports that transport horses, negotiating terrain motor vehicles could not, “saved the lives of countless thousands of men up there in the trenches who would never have had guns, bullets, and vital supplies.”

Millions of horses and mules served in World War II. Many died. So did their masters. So did many innocent noncombatants. Hopefully the final segment of the televised *War and Remembrance* will include the last phrase from the book: “. . . remembrance can lead us from the long, long time of war to the time for peace.” Let there be peace all over the earth. Happy Hanukkah. Merry Christmas.

T'WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

by Prince (the Percheron) as told to Karen Smith

T'was the night before Christmas,
when all through the stable,
not a creature was stirring
not even Lucy and Ethel.

The feed buckets were hung by the stalls with care,
in the hopes that St. Nicholas
soon would be there.

The horses were nestled all snug in their stalls,
while visions of sugar cookies danced in their heads.

And Topsy in her hay, and I in my shavings,
had just laid down for a good nights nap.

When out in the paddock there arose such a clatter,
I got loose to see what was the matter.

I trotted to the window quick as I could,
to see if the noise was coming from above.

When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
but a miniature carriage and two white horses.

With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

More rapid than thoroughbreds his horses
did come, and he whistled, and shouted,
and called them by name.

To the top of the hill to the bottom of
the carriage house they came, now trot away,
trot away, trot away all!

So up to the carriage house top the horses flew,
with a carriage full of goodies and St. Nicholas, too.

And then in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
the prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
down the aisle he came with a bound;

He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot,
and his clothes were all dirty with shavings and muck.

He was chubby and plump—a right jolly old elf,
and I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself.

A wink of his eye, and a twist of his head,
soon gave me to know I had nothing to fear.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work.
Gifts he did give to all in our barn. More heart, or
more courage, or to be free from harm.

He filled all the buckets; turned with a jerk,
and laying his finger aside of his nose and
giving a nod, up the aisle he did go.

He sprang to his carriage, to his team
gave a whistle, and away they all flew
like the down of a thistle;

But I heard him exclaim, as they drove out of sight,
“Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!”

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? Please write to:
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