

Butler Beattie's Horse Stories

These stories were written by Butler Beattie for his grandson Ben. At the time Ben was in riding camp and taking riding lessons.

My horse stories for Ben were from the time I was a cadet in the ROTC field artillery at the University of Illinois, about 63 years ago. A battery of field artillery consisted of four guns and four caissons. The caisson was a cart that carried the ammunition. One unit consisted of a gun and a caisson connected together. Each of the units was pulled by three teams of horses or a total of twenty four horses to pull the entire battery. The reel cart that contained the telephone wire, and other equipment to complete the necessary equipment for the battery, was also pulled by a team. In each team of horses, soldiers rode one the horses in each pair. The first pair was called the number one, or lead pair. The second pair was the number two pair, or swing pair. The third pair was referred to as the number three pair or wheel pair. The numbers also indicated what duties the soldiers had when firing the guns. The non-commissioned and commissioned officers rode ten more horses. This came to a grand total of forty horses. It took a few horses to pull a World War I battery of field artillery. These horses were quite small and were picked for speed. They were about thirteen hands high. The guns were from World War I and they were French, 75 millimeter. The shells they used were ones that would explode over the target, raining shrapnel. The guns had a range of about three miles. The field artillery song "The Caissons Go Rolling Along" was in the Chicago assembly song book.

This day is one that I remember very well. It was on the Saturday morning when I had military and I was told to ride the lead pair. Two cadets were to ride the swing and wheel pair. A fourth cadet rode the caisson and operated the brake. We rode the left horse and drove the right horse. We were hooked up to a caisson this day instead of a field piece. The horses were hooked up by traces like dog sleds are hooked up. The normal cry was to keep your traces tight. That is where in the song we sing "Counter march right about, Hear those wagon soldiers shout, and the caissons go rolling along". When we arrived at the stables the enlisted men had everything ready to go for us. The horse that I was to mount had a strange look in his eye, and I did not think it liked me. I guess I did not smell just right. I also noticed the enlisted men standing around. When I tried to mount I found out why the enlisted men were waiting. They wanted to see if I was a bronco rider, because the next thing I know I was standing there with the bridle in my hand and there were five horses left and the one I was told to ride was going over a hill at full speed with two other cadets on individual mounts attempting to catch up to the horse I named "Thunder". I walked back to the enlisted men and asked "What did I do wrong?" They said "nothing." We were just waiting for you to get on that horse, to see what would happen. We told the officer in charge that the horse was sick and he told us that it wasn't. In the army orders are orders and one never questions them. They then went back to the stable, and found a horse that they thought would like me. They had to find another saddle because the wild horse had broken the cinch strap. I then mounted the horse and gave the signal to start on our trip to the drill field.

Now from the song we went "Over hill, over dale, as we hit the dusty trail as those caissons go rolling along". The trail was less than a quarter of a mile and it was not very dusty because it was a paved street. I think I courted Ruth on the same street some nine years later. Back to the song: "Counter march right about hear those wagon solders shout as those caissons go rolling along." We shouted keep those traces tight and then we pulled each unit into place, so each field piece would be pointed toward the fraternity houses across from the drill field. We then disconnected the field pieces from the caissons and we were ready to play war. Now back to the song again. "Call off your numbers loud and strong, one, two, three ,four." As I was riding the lead pair I was number one. My job was to sit on a tractor style seat and sight the gun according to instructions that I got over a field telephone from the battery staff. They got their instructions from the man operating the range finder. Number two man opened the breach and loaded a seventy five meter shell. When he was given the order to fire he pulled the lanyard a piece of rope that fired the gun. Number three man passed the shell from number four man who cut the fuse as he took it out of the caisson. If this had been for real, there would not been a fraternity house standing. I spent all of Saturday mornings playing war for the two years I spent at the University of Illinois.

It was my second year as a cadet in the ROTC unit at the University of Illinois in the spring of 1932. We went out to the stables to get our battery. I was told to ride the wheel pair. We were pulling a caisson that day and the wheel pair was next to the caisson. Everything went fine and we pulled the unit out into the drill field. We unhitched the horses and set up the guns. We all took our places. The number one cadet was the gunner and he got his instructions from the command post by telephone, from information that he received from the range finder operator. I was number three cadet that day and I was to fire the gun but as the ammunition was not loaded we just played war. Some of the cadets that played war, ended up in World War II.

When our practice ended we hitched up the horses again and started back to the stables. When we went to get back on the hard road, the cadet riding the lead pair cut the corner too sharp and the limber pole of the caisson struck the horse that I was riding in the belly. My horse objected and the wild west show started. He managed to go up instead of forward hitting the horse in front of him causing that horse to do the same to the horse in front of him and then the fun started. The three horses on the right side of us then joined in and all six decided to take us for a ride. The cadet who was riding the caisson stood up and pulled the emergency brake and the caisson gave a lunge forward. He ended up on the street. The lead pair decided to cross the street and head for the nearest tree so they could get rid of the poor cadets, that they did not have any great love for. The lead pair decided split when they came to the tree. The cadet who was riding that pair must have been a farm boy because he leaned over and grabbed the neck of the horse that he was not riding and pulled him over, so he went around the same side of the tree as the one that he was riding. If he hadn't been able to do that I think I would been under a caisson loaded with about one hundred rounds of seventy-five millimeter shells. Someone else would of have had to write this story. We then continued at full gallop across a practice football field where a group of Illinois football players were practicing. A couple of individual mounted cadets were then on each side of us trying to slow us down so we

could not make a touch down. The players were scattering like a bunch of rats that were surprised by a cat. When we reached the center of the field the "Charge of the Light Brigade" ended through our efforts and the help of the cadets that came to our assistance. We then took the unit back to the stable and listened to a talk from the regular army officer who said that we did not know much about horses. He was a professor of military tactics and it was his responsibility to teach us.

This is all I can remember after 65 years. Corporal Butler Beattie US ORC (Officer's Reserve Core) Field Artillery

Cathy's Horse

Some time ago I asked Cathy if I could write about her horse and she said yes. This is part of the story of "Beau", her horse. Ever since our oldest daughter, Cathy, was very young, she was interested in horses. For the first ten years of her life we lived in the city, and we did not see any way to get her a horse. On one of her birthdays we got her an outfit that made her look like a cowgirl, and I remember taking a picture of her sitting on the stairs in our Michigan Avenue home. Another time as we were walking on Indiana Ave and 85'th street where we met a man with a pony who was taking pictures of children sitting on the pony. He sat Cathy on the saddle of the pony and took her picture. When we were on the way back from Florida in 1950, we stopped at Brown County State Park in Indiana. They had a horse and buggy there. We took Cathy for a ride and when we had completed the ride Cathy went up to the horse and talked to it. We knew then, we would get her a horse when she got a little older.

In 1953 we moved to New Lenox where we had a small stable where we could keep a horse. There also was a place in the park just west of us where we could rent horses and we could get riding lessons for her. The riding stable had a very gentle old horse with a western brand on his hip, which they picked out for her to learn how to ride. Her teacher was a very nice young girl who loved horses. After many trips around the ring that they used to train the young riders, she was allowed to go out on the trails. One day I got brave enough to go out with her but the ride reminded me so much of my first ride that I had taken when I was in the field artillery I did not try it again.

When she had become an excellent rider, we decided to buy a horse. We found a place west of here that sold horses. We first found out that we were not good horse traders. Then we bought a horse and a western saddle. We brought it home in the open trailer that I had used to move from Chicago to New Lenox. The first problem we had with this so-called horse was getting the bit in his mouth. The man that I rode to work with had horses in his younger days. He got the bit in the horse's mouth. He told me that you have to show him who is the boss. These horses were geldings but I call them he. A gelding is a male horse that has been neutered. We called Don Warning, the man that put shoes on the horses in town, to shoe Cathy's horse. The horse kicked him and he hit the horse with his hammer. I was holding the horse with the bridle when this all happened and I could

see fire in the eyes of the horse and he was breathing very heavily, but he did not kick Don again. Don then gave us the bad news that we had bought a pony rather than a horse. He said ponies do not make good riding horses. Cathy rode the pony, but the pony threw her off while her mother was watching her ride. We all decided that the pony should go back.

We called the dealer and he said that he had a horse that we could have in place of the pony. We went back and got the horse, but the fellow that sold him to us said that he had a cold and we must keep him warm. We only had an open trailer and it was late fall, but he survived the trip home. With the help of a local vet and Cathy's loving care he got well and turned out to be a fine horse. Cathy got the horse when she was about twelve years old and rode it until she finished high school. She then sold it to a girl that lived east of New Lenox. The girl never rode the horse. She wasn't as brave as Cathy. When Irene was a little over one year old, Cathy took her for a ride on the horse without her mothers permission. When Ruth saw Cathy coming cantering down Francis Road with Irene in the saddle in front of her laughing, Ruth did not look as happy as Irene did. I wish I had a camera to take that picture of my two daughters so happy, but I would not want to take a picture of their mother. I have always like to take the line out of the old cowboy song "she learned to ride before she learned to stand".

One Saturday afternoon I invited some of my students to our home. These students were members of the Chicago Vocational High School Radio Club, of which I was the sponsor. They were about Cathy's age, and Cathy asked them if they would like to ride her horse. They said that they would. I don't think any of them had ever ridden a horse before. When she asked the first fellow to help her to saddle her horse he was glad to help her. When he was about to pull the cinch strap, the horse took a good look at the fellow and said to himself " this fellow doesn't know what he is doing." He pulled the cinch strap and started to mount the horse but the saddle started to turn, and he got down. Cathy who was about two thirds the size of this fellow, tightened the cinch strap for him. He thanked her and got on the horse and took a ride. The next Monday this student came up to me in school and asked me "how could your daughter be so strong?" I think the boys were more interested in Cathy that day, then they were in my radio station.

After Cathy had her horse for several months she was able to ride like a pro. She would either ride with the saddle or bareback like the Indians did. One day she and I decided to see how fast her horse could run. She was about the same size as the fellows that rode in the Kentucky derby. She rode the horse and I drove our 1948 Chevy down to Cedar and Francis Road. Francis Road was not paved at that time. We then raced west to Clinton Street. The trip took a little over two minutes so we went a little less than 30 miles per hour. I am just to beginning to understand why her sons like to race cars and autocross.