

Hey Neighbor

# For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

## Horsemanship Again Needed In Army Training

History may soon repeat itself as the U.S. Army Horse Cavalry trains and rides again.

The horse cavalry was essential in battles of most conflicts through World War II, but modern mechanization phased it out. However, the cavalry may again become a necessity, as some present wars are being fought where horses are still in use.

Afghanistan is often referred to as having a tribal horse culture. "When Special Operation Force soldiers are deployed to this country, having at least a basic knowledge of horses can make a big difference," said Lt. Col. Mike McFarland, who recently conducted a horsemanship clinic at Fort Leavenworth.

"When the primary mode of transportation of the local population is the horse or the mule, it is

imperative for the soldiers to know what the animals are about and how to pack them," McFarland added.

About 20 soldiers and interested persons gathered at Fort Leavenworth Stables for the training coordinated by Maj. Steve Marks, an Army Special

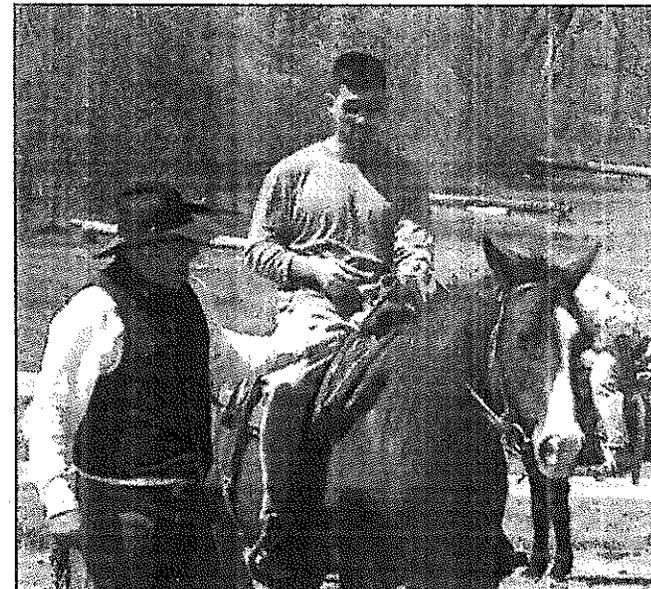
Forces officer, who became fully aware of the need after serving in Afghanistan.

"A lot of us have not been trained on proper techniques of horses or mules, so I thought it would be an excellent opportunity," Marks said. "I've been in situations before where we've had an accident or even an injury, and the only way of getting the guys out is either on horse or mule."

Those participating in the recent training will be deploying to Afghanistan in the next several months.

McFarland, who is a lifelong horseman and currently an instructor at Fort Leavenworth's Command and General Staff College,

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Lt. Col. Mike McFarland assists a Special Forces officer who is on a horse for the first time during a special clinic for Fort Leavenworth soldiers who will be deploying to Afghanistan, which has a tribal horse culture.

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spent the first part of the session explaining the nature of the horse as well as basic techniques for approaching, bridling and saddling different horses.

Responding to questions from the soldiers, McFarland said, "The best thing, if you get nervous, is to be as relaxed as you can be. The horse will feed off your confidence or fear."

As McFarland and part of the group started riding, Mike Dufresne, a local farrier with a background in pack horses, worked with the others on the basics of horse packing. "I want to give them hands-on, so they can put a load on a horse," Dufresne related.

"A soldier needs to understand the principles of handling horses, so they

have a basic understanding when they must use horses in the mountains of Afghanistan," Marks pointed out.

McFarland advised the students to be alert to messages the horses are sending and to be in control. "If you want to be a passenger, there's a horse at Kmart you can ride for a quarter," he quipped.

The riders rode a rugged trail, indicative of what might be asked of them in service. "This is just an introduction. You can't ride once and say you're a horseman," McFarland emphasized. "Any chance you can, get on a horse."

"Basic nature of horses, as well as riding and packing skills, are important for service members to learn," McFarland continued. "It would be nice if the first

time a soldier rides a horse is not in Afghanistan."

Since that initial clinic, McFarland has had a number of soldiers seek his personal advice on horses. He trains horses in his spare time and has three horses of his own. They are provided for interested soldiers to increase their knowledge in horsemanship.

"Everybody's been very appreciative of what they have learned and feel like it will be beneficial when they are deployed," McFarland noted.

While McFarland is not sure official training of soldiers in horsemanship will again become an integral part of U.S. Army programs, it is a definite possibility. "Since we had that clinic and people have become aware of the need for

this type of education, there has been a lot of interest from the soldiers and officers as well," the officer admitted.

Although the logistics of such a move would be boggling, McFarland stands ready to assist in any way. "I will be retiring within a few months (after 24 years in the service), and I would really like to help coordinate the training of soldiers in horsemanship as part of a full time program," he commented.

Some manuals on packing have been updated in recent years, and other out-of-date Army materials on horses and horsemanship could also be done likewise, according to the officer.

The U.S. Army Cavalry could truly ride again.

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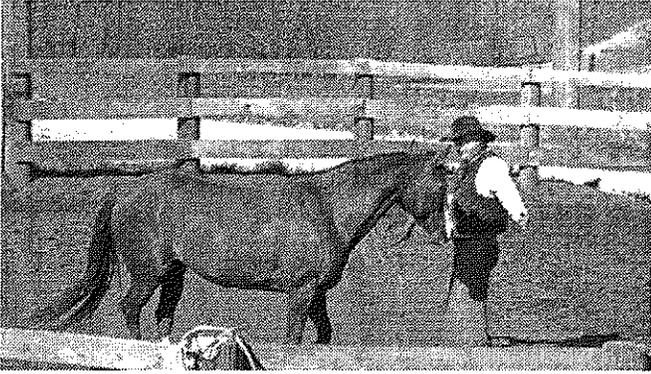
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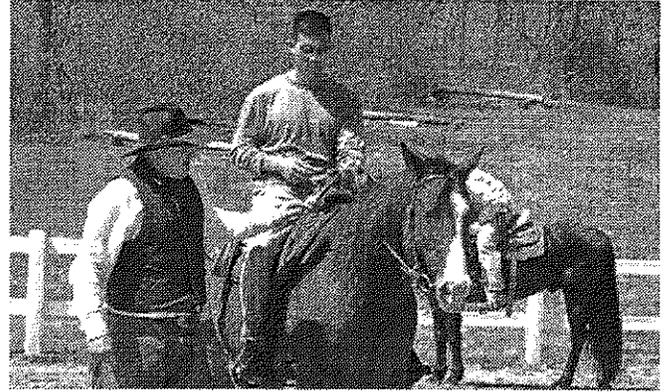
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Lt. Col. Mike McFarland works with a horse at liberty in a presentation on the nature of the horse. His session was for Fort Leavenworth soldiers deploying to Afghanistan, which has a tribal horse culture.



Lt. Col. Mike McFarland assists a Special Forces officer who is on a horse for the first time. A clinic was presented for Fort Leavenworth soldiers, who will be deploying to Afghanistan, which has a tribal horse culture.