

## War Horses at Middleton Place After Action Report

This event started as an idea I had in the fall of 2007 when I was hired to be a Livestock Interpreter at Middleton Place, and no I was not the back end of a horse costume. After lots of research I found that the Horse culture in Charleston rivaled both Virginia and England in abundance and extravagance, but nobody told anyone about it. There are no plaques or displays in any of the museums or historic houses to tell anyone of this rich past. I then found out how crucial Cavalry was in the defense of Charleston in 1780 after attending a lecture and presentation on the defenses of Charleston by Carl Borick of the Charleston Museum. This really put a bug in my bonnet to do something with horses at Middleton Plantation. After some time and some management shifts, the time was right and with the coordination of the Middleton Place staff and the Third Continental Light Dragoons, it happened.

After a unexpected 10 hour ride from Spartanburg to the site, I arrived. The Crawley-Anderson caravan unloaded horses and stuck them in paddocks for the night. After we parked trailers, everyone went to their designated places of rest. For Bert, it was the base of a live oak, which apparently was inhabited by moss monkeys who yelled all night. Hunter Puckett curled up in the truck. The Murphys and Crawleys stashed themselves away in their trailers and Ron and I headed back to Chateau Videau for a decidedly well earned night's sleep. However, around 5:00 in the morning, the Vido household awoke and began preparations for the Cooper River Bridge Run. I heard Anne Vido laugh and I knew I was up. There was no fighting it. After the other 2<sup>nd</sup> South compatriots left for their run, Vido and I sat dazed watching a bit of the Military channel before we headed off to the plantation. When we arrived, there was a distinct chill in the air, cloud cover, and wind. This was not what we wanted. After about 30 minutes the wind pushed the clouds away and gave us a bright and beautiful sunrise on the site. We fed horses and strung a picket rope between two 200+ year old oak trees and lit a fire with flint and steel. We set up a minimalist camp that included a couple blankets and a ground cloth to represent a group of dragoons on the move towards Bacon's Bridge. We mounted up for drill and started knocking the rust off ourselves and our horses. For those not present at the event, the site is partially a farm with cows, draft horses, water buffalo, all sorts of fowl, goats, and oh yeah...Sheep. Normally, these sheep are let out onto the greensward where we were camped to graze and run about. Unfortunately, some of the horses we brought had not heard about this. The wooly beasts and their razor sharp teeth began to startle some of our mounts. Dan, Bert, and I did some desensitizing with them but the threat still loomed. Eventually Vido took the initiative and lured the bloodthirsty beasts back into their pen with a scoop of grain. After that, it wasn't so bad. Our first demo was at 10:00 and we formed up with visitors already waiting and gave them a good talk and display. About that time Stuart Lilie drove through the main gates and we jogged over to greet the distant traveler. We were also notified about this time that we needed to move our trailers to a different location, which we did with all speed and alacrity. Stuart set up a small area where he interpreted a British Legion saddler. He exchanged saddles and gear with Dan and repaired some issues with my own saddle. Our next demo was at 12 where we also performed extremely well. Some of the troopers went to the Restaurant to eat lunch while others nibbled out of their trailers. The group went on a free house tour at 1:00 and they got back just in time to do the 2:00 demo. After this talk, Stuart, Vido, and I went over to the Garden Market to get some lunch and then came back to fit Vido to some clothes. I ran over to the camp and saddled up in time for the 4:00 demo. This was our largest crowd and we gave them the show of their lives with lots of good questions at the end. This was our last demo for the day and so we relaxed a bit and prepared to go on a ride around the plantation. We bid farewell to Stuart and mounted upon our chargers and set out for adventure. Vido took the lead in his truck and took some outstanding photos of the ride. We rode through the property called Ashley Hill which was the site of the 1782 encampment and headquarters of Greene's southern army. We also passed through the heights above the plantation looking over the terraced lawns and butterfly lakes. We then made our way through the Middleton Equestrian Center and towards the

Middleton Inn where we turned and followed the dikes around the site's Southern rice fields. The spectacle was seeing how many alligators we could find. About half way through we lost count and Dan Murphy aptly quantified that we had seen an ass load. We came back through the same path as before and arrived back at camp with plenty of Daylight left. Some of the troopers untacked and some switched out riders. Liz, Hunter Crawley, Jennifer Murphy, and I continued our ride on the other side of the Plantation along the Northern Rice fields and through the bamboo forest passing phosphate mines and arriving back at camp talking about the 12 foot alligator we had seen. We untacked through our horses in the pens and loaded our gear back in the trailers. The Crawleys pulled out not long after. It was a fine day indeed. Bert, boy Hunter and I rode back with Vido to his place and took in the hospitality given to us. The men went upstairs to smoke cigars and sniff brandy while watching Jeremiah Johnson and Silverado, while everyone else remained downstairs to watch the latest installment in the Twilight saga.

On Sunday morning, we got up and arrived at the plantation around 8:00. We fed horses and squared away our gear for the ride home. Nobody seemed to be in a hurry to leave though, so we saddled up for one last ride. We took the Northern route, which gave everyone a chance to see the both sides of the plantation. We got back and leisurely loaded our tack back up and loaded horses into the trailers. The remaining troopers made a caravan back to the interstate and headed for home.

This event was the first military horse event for the plantation and probably the only reenactment that will occur for the 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the siege of Charles Town. I am extremely proud of everyone who was able to make it and it seems that everyone had a good time. The weather was beautiful and the site lovely. I hope to make this event an annual one as it is a great time of year and an open book for interpretation. Lastly, a big thank you goes out to Ron Vido for being so diligent in making sure everything went smoothly. He served as a Liaison for the site and made sure we had firewood, food, hay for horses, pasture space, places to park, his own house to sleep in and just about everything else. This event surely could not have happened if not for him. Thanks Ron for your hard work.

To everyone involved, it was a pleasure to work with you and I will see you in the saddle soon.

Cheers-

Joel Anderson