

American Dressage Legends: Maj. Gen. Guy V. Henry Jr.

Small in stature, the cavalry-era Olympian was a giant in equestrian sport

This month's featured member of the Roemer Foundation/USDF Hall of Fame is a reminder of our sport's military roots.

Their numbers have sadly dwindled, but there was a time when most American-born judges and trainers in equestrian sport had military titles. Today's younger dressage, jumping, and eventing enthusiasts may not know

Stockholm Olympic Games—the first modern Olympics to include equestrian sport. The slightly built Henry, who stood just five feet six inches tall, went on to have enormous influence on the Olympic equestrian disciplines of dressage, eventing, and jumping, both in the US and internationally.

Henry was the director of equestrian activities for the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, at which he also served as a judge; and he judged at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, as well. He was the *chef d'équipe* of the 1936 and 1948 US Army Olympic equestrian teams. Henry helped to write the rules for the dressage sport, and he served as a director of both the American Horse Shows Association (now United States Equestrian Federation) and the United States Equestrian Team (now USET Foundation) in their formative years post-cavalry mechanization. He remains the only American ever to serve as president of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI).

Henry's military career was equally long and impressive. An 1894 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, NY, he was a career cavalry officer. Among his career highlights were stints as director of equitation at USMA, chief of the US Cavalry, and commandant of the US Cavalry School. He was the first US Army officer to attend the French Cavalry School at Saumur, and he used his newfound knowledge in developing the equitation curriculum at the Mounted Service School at Fort Riley, KS. In his "Salute" in *Armor* magazine, General of the Armies John J. Pershing is quoted as calling Henry "a splendid Commandant"; and General of the Army Douglas MacArthur said Henry was "one of the best officers in the Service."

Military Might

By Jennifer O. Bryant

Maj. Gen. Guy V. Henry Jr. was one of the most influential names in shaping not only the Army's horsemanship of the day, but also the success of the US Army Olympic equestrian teams. Fielded from 1912 to 1948, these teams were for military officers only—no civilian riders or even enlisted men—and therefore for males only, as women couldn't serve in the military.

Henry's name figures prominently in my book *Olympic Equestrian: A Century of International Horse Sport*, from which the article below is adapted. I'm happy to share here some of this great military officer and horseman's accomplishments.

Guy V. Henry Jr.: Leading the Way

In December 1944, Maj. Gen. Guy V. Henry Jr. began dictating his memoir, *A Brief Narrative of the Life of Guy V. Henry, Jr.*, to a military stenographer at the Pentagon. Of his equestrian endeavors, he wrote:

[I]n August 1902, [I] was sent to Ft. Riley, Kansas, as Squadron Adjutant, Adjutant of the Cavalry Post, and member of the Cavalry Board...I felt that the general horsemanship and horsemastership of our mounted service was considerably below the standard it should be and did not hesitate to say so. Finally this talk had an effect on the Commanding Officer who asked the War Department that it send a then noted horseman of the Army, Captain Walter C. Short, to Ft. Riley. Captain Short...established a horseshoer school and a farrier school for enlisted men.

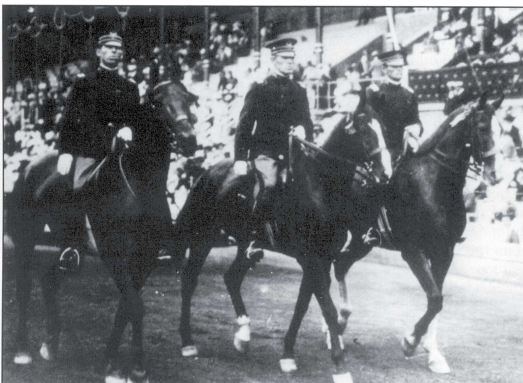
In 1905, Henry and some other cavalry officers "succeeded in getting adopted for the Cavalry, the double bridle" to replace "a very severe single curb bit known as the Shoemaker bit" that led to the Cavalry's being "filled with broken-jawed runaway horses." He also "succeeded in getting the Field Artillery to do away with this severe bit on its teams and replace it by [sic] the straight snaffle bit."



IN COMMAND: Maj. Gen. Guy V. Henry Jr. astride Grey Falcon in an undated photo

that these disciplines stemmed from the mounted cavalry. The Military, as the three phases of eventing were once called, was a test of cavalry horses' obedience, conditioning, endurance, and athletic ability—dressage, cross-country jumping, and show jumping.

US Army Major General Guy V. Henry Jr. (1875-1967) organized the US team for, and won a team bronze medal in, the Military competition at the 1912



BRONZE MEDALISTS: *The 1912 US Army Olympic team: Benjamin Lear on Poppy, John Montgomery on Deceive, and Henry on Chiswell*

A stint at the famed French Cavalry School at Saumur influenced Henry's opinions on training methods, and he had to draw on his experiences in 1907 when he reported to Fort Riley to become senior instructor of equitation at the Mounted Service School and, as such, to develop a training system for US cavalry officers.

I had...previously received instructions under a Mr. Edward Anderson of Cincinnati ...[who] was a follower of the great French master of equitation, Bouchet [sic] (Baucher). I attempted to combine the best that we had in the United States with that of the French cavalry school, the German cavalry school, and that of Bouchet. It leaned, however, to the French system, with the exception of the use of the lower leg, where I followed Bouchet...A progressive system for developing both the horse and the rider was instituted. Instead of the western methods of breaking a horse, the system of gentling the young horse by use of the cavesson [sic] and longe and then gradually teaching him to bear the weight of the saddle and rider was instituted, and the student officers were taught the proper use of the aids.

That 1912 Olympic Military team bronze medal was a remarkable accomplishment for the Army equestrian team, especially considering that Henry got his orders to train and prepare a team a mere six months prior to the Stockholm Games. Henry, four other officers, and 18 horses were allotted just 90 minutes a day in which to school in the post's riding hall, and

there was no letup in the men's regular military duties and obligations.

In his 1931 *Cavalry Journal* article "Army Equestrian Teams in Past Olympic Games," Major William M. Grimes wrote: "A great deal of the training of this first Olympic team took place at four in the morning. Those readers who have spent a winter in Kansas will know what that means!"

Furthermore, although the Army had traditionally fielded a jumping team for the prestigious indoor competitions, such as the National Horse Show in New York and the Washington (DC) International Horse Show, the horses and riders had no formal dressage or eventing training or competitive experience.

They had no government funding, either. To raise money for training and expenses and to pay to send the equestrian team to Stockholm, the cavalymen organized a two-week fund-raising tour. Riders and horses traveled to Detroit, Cleveland, Louisville, Indianapolis, and Cincinnati to give a total of ten exhibitions, with all proceeds benefiting the team.

The inaugural US Army Olympic equestrian team finished the 1912 Games with impressive results. Under Henry's leadership, the Americans took home a bronze medal in the Military (the three-day event) and finished fourth in the Prix des Nations (Nations' Cup—the jumping competition).

But even at this first modern Olympic equestrian competition, there was criticism of the dressage judging.

Foreshadowing allegations of nationalism in judging that were to plague international dressage competition for decades to come, Henry wrote of the "training" (dressage) phase of the Military event,

In the Training Phase we did far better than the German team, but much to our surprise, when the final results were published, the German team was placed second and we were placed third. The nations that followed the French school of equitation such as France, Italy, Spain, and some others, were up in arms over it. Those that followed the German school were very satisfied. The majority of the judg-

es represented the German school...

It would have been a terrible slap at Germany for a novice team, as was the United State's, [sic] to have come to the Olympics for the first time and to have been placed ahead of the veteran German team in what was considered to be the main equestrian event. This is the only explanation which can be given for why Germany was placed second and ourselves, third.

(There's also nothing new about making snarky comments about competitors. US Army Captain Lara P. Good [Ret.] wrote a critical article about the dressage judging and competition at the 1932 Los Angeles Games for the January-February 1933 issue of *The Cavalry Journal*. Good especially disdained the dressage test of the eighth-placed competitor, Lieutenant Gustaf Boltensstern of Sweden and his German-bred gelding, Ingo: "Contrary to the French School of the use of the aids without a perceptible effort on the part of the rider, which method was followed by both the French and the American teams... one did not need to be an experienced horseman to note when and how Lieut. Boltensstern applied the aids—he was following his German schoolmasters.")

For his seminal contributions to dressage and to the whole of modern equestrian sport, Henry was inducted into the Roemer Foundation/USDF Hall of Fame in 2001.

The honor, one suspects, would not have surprised the great horseman in the least. After all, as Henry wrote in his memoir, "In the 1900s, 1910s and 1920s, I completely revamped the horsemanship of the United States Army and, incidentally, largely that of the civilian community." ▲

Jennifer Bryant is the editor of USDF Connection.

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