

Tartar the War Horse

([https://heritage.utah.gov/history/uhg-slt-](https://heritage.utah.gov/history/uhg-slt-tartar-war-horse)

tartar-war-horse) <http://www.sltrib.com>

(<http://www.sltrib.com>)

Hal Schindler **Published:** 09/04/1994 **Category:** Feature **Page:** F1

This is the tale of a war horse named Tartar.

Tartar was purchased by the U.S. Army at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, in July 1857 to serve in Battery B, 4th Artillery. He was 4 years old. Being part of the frontier Army was not an easy lot for man or beast in the mid-1800s, and it was especially grueling as an artillery horse; esthetically, the Dragoons, the Cavalry, even the Mounted Rifles, would have been better equine duty. It certainly would have seemed more dashing. In any of those branches a horse would be assigned as a mount, not a draught animal. But the artillery! The options were slim and none.

A horse likely would be chosen to pull a field piece and limber (its ammunition carriage), or a caisson; and that was exhausting business in the mountains, even for a horse. Then, of course, there was the matter of being conditioned to the roar of cannon re. (Which did not include having its ears stu ed with cotton). All this is moot, however, since horses had no say in the matter.

It happened that Tartar was picked by 1st Sgt. James Stewart to be his mount: "There was something about the animal." So when the 4th Artillery was assigned to duty with the Utah Expedition that July of '57, it meant a journey from Fort Leavenworth to Great Salt Lake City of some 1,200 miles over South Pass of the Continental Divide.

Tartar's rst taste of action came when Stewart took him on a but also hunt to supply meat for the battery mess. Herds were plentiful in the 1850s, and the sergeant was anxious to test his marksmanship—and courage—against the celebrated American bison. "Riding up close to a young bull, I shot him in front of the shoulder. As soon as I saw he was badly hit, I tried to drive him toward the battery. But he came for me and Tartar and that settled it. I gave him four more shots

and down he went.” The battery had no steaks for dinner. After that, Stewart remarked, not a day went by that Tartar and he didn’t bag a buffalo or two for the regiment.

But by October, Tartar came down with “malignant distemper” near Green River in what is now Wyoming. Since the expedition expected trouble from Brigham Young, who was being replaced as governor of Utah by another presidential appointee, Alfred Cumming of Georgia, Capt. John W. Phelps, 4th Artillery commander, ordered that Tartar be abandoned, left to fend for himself, while the expedition moved on.

Winter was extraordinarily brutal on the Wyoming plains that year. Temperatures plunged to minus 45 degrees in November, and Stewart recollected the expedition, in one terrifying night, lost 600 animals, horses, mules and oxen to cold and starvation. When spring finally struggled to the surface, Brig. Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston, commanding the expedition, was short of horses and offered a \$30 bounty for each stray carrying a government brand that was returned to camp. Indians brought in the first horses; one of which Stewart recognized as Tartar. “They said they found him last fall near Green River and had used him all winter to haul tent poles,” the sergeant told the aide-de-camp Maj. Fitz-John Porter, who paid the reward. Phelps returned Tartar to duty, remarking the horse had fared better with the Indians than other animals had with the battery.

In the summer of 1860, the 8-pounder and 12-pounder field cannon were left at Camp Floyd west of Provo, and the men of Battery B formed into a Provisional Cavalry Company, serving double duty as mounted infantry in keeping the mail routes open and free from hostile raids between Salt Lake City and Carson City. Tartar’s average work included 40 to 50 miles a day.

Then, early in 1861, in response to the Civil War, the battery marched from Camp Floyd to Kansas, then went by rail to Washington, D.C., and the Army of the Potomac. Tartar and Stewart, now a lieutenant, found themselves at the second battle of Bull Run. In the considerable cannonading that followed, Tartar was struck by a shell fragment that tore both ankles and carried away his tail. Stewart marked Tartar off as a casualty: “I turned him into a small farmyard and left him.” The next morning, the gallant Tartar had jumped a fence and followed the battery. Tartar, it seemed, liked the Army.

At Fredericksburg, Va., scene of one of the most ferocious battles of the war, President Lincoln had come to review the troops. He noticed Stewart riding Tartar and commented on horse’s wound. “Reminds me of a tale,” he joked. Tartar was wounded again at Fredericksburg and from then on, not surprisingly, it was difficult to get him to stand under musketry. “The day we reached Gettysburg,” Stewart related, “Tartar was lamed by running a nail into a forehoof and did not go into battle.”

In the pursuit of Robert E. Lee after the fight, Tartar could not keep up the pace and once more Stewart was forced to leave him with a farmer on the road, along with a note explaining what command he belonged to. A month later, Stewart heard Tartar was with another division. It was August 1863 before the officer located his now celebrated horse. “He had no further war wounds but served to the end of hostilities.”

Tartar, who had earned his place in the Army with the Utah Expedition, and whose record showed service at Camp Floyd, Indian-fighting on the Overland Trail to Carson City and several

major engagements of the Civil War, wounded on three occasions, now became one of the most celebrated horses in the military. He was present at Appomattox Court House when the surrender was signed. “When I was promoted and transferred to the 18th Infantry in 1866,” wrote Stewart, “I left Tartar with the battery, in the 10th year of his honorable and distinguished service.”

So ends the tale of this war horse.

This entry was last updated in History (<https://heritage.utah.gov/category/history>), History to Go (<https://heritage.utah.gov/category/history/programs-history/historical-society/history-to-go>), UHQ (<https://heritage.utah.gov/category/history/uhq>), Utah Historical Quarterly (<https://heritage.utah.gov/category/history/programs-history/historical-society/utah-historical-quarterly>), Utah State Historical Society (<https://heritage.utah.gov/category/history/programs-history/historical-society>) and tagged History to Go (<https://heritage.utah.gov/tag/history-to-go>), Salt Lake Tribune (<https://heritage.utah.gov/tag/salt-lake-tribune>), Tartar the War Horse (<https://heritage.utah.gov/tag/tartar-the-war-horse>), UHQ (<https://heritage.utah.gov/tag/uhq>), Utah Historical Quarterly (<https://heritage.utah.gov/tag/utah-historical-quarterly>), utah state historical society (<https://heritage.utah.gov/tag/utah-state-historical-society>) on June 8, 2016 (<https://heritage.utah.gov/history/uhg-slt-tartar-war-horse>).