

# South Africa Loses Noted Horseman

## Harold Poil

by Bob Funkhouser

January 1, 2018 was the date highly respected American Saddlebred trainer Harold Poil passed away. He would have been 72 this November 7th. Poil was a legend in South Africa where he has trained for the past 44 years, but before moving there he was a highly regarded student of the master himself, Garland Bradshaw, in Danville, Kentucky.

Having spent nearly eight years with Bradshaw, Poil had a friend who trained American Saddlebreds in South Africa and was on his way there to visit him. While Poil was in the air that friend, Dick Collins, was killed in a car wreck.

"Harold jumped in and helped work Dick's horses and ended up liking it there and decided to stay," explained Neil Visser who later spent several years working for Poil. "People don't realize how good a trainer he was. He is as good as anyone I've worked for and I've been fortunate to have worked for some good ones."

Poil was a tough guy and that served him well here and when he moved to South Africa. That toughness came from being a U.S. Marine and having been shot in the stomach while in Vietnam, before moving to the somewhat safer confines of a horse barn.

Unlike Kentucky, in South Africa he had to do much more than train horses. He was the blacksmith, the farrier, the vet and the trainer. "Harold floated teeth, castrated the colts, did tails, shoeing, all of it," said Visser. "When I worked for him we would shoe in the morning while the guys were doing stalls and then we would shoe at night after working horses. I lived with him for five years.

"He was tough to work for, very demanding, but when we went to the house at night he was a completely different person. He was a nice man, a good man."

Visser also credits Poil as the man who brought "fancy turn out" to South Africa. "I was about 14 when I first saw Harold and there was something different about his horses. Their tails, their coats, he was so superior in how he turned out and presented his horses."

The late horseman settled in Hekpoort, Gauteng, South Africa and established Harold Poil Stables. For more than four decades he revolutionized the sport of showing American Saddlebreds there. Poil is survived by his wife DeJane and their daughter Garland who continue the family legacy.

He will forever be remembered as a complete horseman. He won the Five-Gaited Grand Championship at Bloemfontein with three different horses: Steppin'



Harold Poil pictured with one of his three Bloemfontein Five-Gaited Grand Champions, Kojak.

High; Rose Street, who went on to be a top breeding stallion; and the high powered gelding, Kojak. Poil also won the Three-Gaited Grand Championship there five times with Delta's New Dawn, Mr. De Gaulle, Jim Dandy, Big Town and Goshawk, a horse that was later sold to the U.S.

and in 1999 garnered the World's Champion of Champions Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 14-17 honors with Calhoun Clifton under the name of CH K-Mon.

Some of Poil's other Bloemfontein standouts included the Single Harness Grand Champion Nite

Of Roses and the Fine Harness Grand Champions Genghis Khan and Mandate.

Not only could he train a horse for himself, he could also teach others to ride and drive. His riders won the Champion of Champions titles several years in a row. That title is like the World's Champion of Champions Saddle Seat Equitation honors at Louisville. Nearly every year for a long time you could count on four out of the five age groups being won by Poil riders.

And when it came to young horses, nobody did it better. He won the Three-Year-Old Five-Gaited Stake at Bloemfontein more than 20 times. If he wasn't busy enough he also stood the number one rated breeding stallion Hell-Of-A-Nite and more recently his son, Stake Nite.

His influence will continue to be far reaching for some time, both at home and abroad. One horse-crazy New Hampshire young lady had the opportunity to spend some time with Poil and his family in South Africa.

"I was lucky enough to spend a month at Harold Poil Stables with Harold, DeJane and Garland, learning about the South African horse industry and getting to show at Bloemfontein under their name," said Cater Stables' Cailin Bridges. "They are family to me. Harold had a huge personality and an even bigger heart. He was a great horseman;



With his wife, DeJane and daughter, Garland, Poil was the leading face of the American Saddlebred industry in South Africa for many years.

he knew how to get the best out of every horse he worked.

"He taught me a lot and I'll miss him dearly."

Few people have made an impact and earned such respect in the horse industry on two Continents,

but it comes as no surprise it was one of the Bradshaw boys. Sadly, we not only lost a good man and good horseman with Poil's passing, we also lost a direct line to arguably the greatest of all time.

## Virginia Horseman *Thad Williams* Passes

by Bob Funkhouser

"He was a true gentleman, popular, a really nice guy," said Smith Lilly. "He was a southern gentleman who would tip his hat to the ladies."

Thaddeus (Thad) Williams passed away Monday, January 1. He would have been 97 this coming April. He lived his entire life in Wythe County where he raised and trained horses and gained the friendship of many. Williams was best known for 1967 Reserve World's Champion Five-Gaited Stallion Super Command, a son of world's grand champion CH Wing Commander and Herschella's Happy Birthday (BHF). They were also



At the age of 82, Williams' last show ring appearance was at ASHAV where he was third with Stonewall's Captain Courageous.

three-time winners of the stallion stake at Lexington Junior League.

Williams went to Dodge Stables and picked Super Command out of a field of yearlings for H.P. Hunnicutt. He was well known for his gaited horses throughout his career. He also was successful crossing American Saddlebreds with Standardbreds before it was required for American Saddlebreds to be purebred to show.

"He was an honest guy in the background who was a dang good horseman," said Fred Sarver. "Most of his horses wore a half round with no pad. People like Bill Waller, Shirley Trail, Karen Sarver and Wayne Walter spent time learning from Thad. In addition to Super Command, a couple of his top horses I remember were Hayfield's Captain Guy and Mighty Guy."

"When I was a kid the first time I saw a horse really slow-gaiting it was a horse Thad was showing. He had that horse rocked back. I don't remember if it was full-bred American Saddlebred or one of his Saddlebred/ Standardbred crosses but he would show it in five-gaited and roadster classes. He continued to train Standardbreds up until a few years ago.

"Thad was a real legend in the area. He was also a real horseman. He grew up in a time when horses were used for plowing, all aspects of agriculture, as well as transportation. He knew horses and got along with them well.

"I remember his horses always being exciting to watch because they went hard. They had speed and drive."

Williams was preceded in death by his wife, Poly C. Williams; parents, Corbett and Carrie Williams; sister, Marie W. Walters; and brothers Robert Williams and Lee Williams. He is survived by his daughters Wanda W. Groseclose and husband Mike and Nancy W. Corvin and husband Larry, in addition to grandchildren and great grandchildren.



Thad Williams was best known for Reserve World's Champion Five-Gaited Stallion, Super Command.