

# Let the war games begin

Text by Tom Reed

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has left governing bodies and organisations worldwide in an unprecedented position. Never before in living memory had a situation like this occurred. Each organisation and governing body tried to put their best foot forward in trying to deal with the consequences of this global crisis, and some were more effective than others. Naturally, some constructive criticism arose within the equestrian world on how the FEI handled the situation. In the roundtable on the Coronavirus in Horse International issue 2 of this year, co-founder of the Warmblood Studbook of Ireland Thomas Reed, Ph.D., said; "The pandemic has confirmed for me that the IOC, FEI, certain governing bodies and federations, and certain departments of agriculture lack a strategic perspective and cannot be counted on to provide leadership in difficult times." We asked Tom to elaborate on how he would have liked to have seen the situation handled. Here is his response:

## War game scenarios

While the COVID-19 is a 'novel' coronavirus, the inevitability of so-called 'black swan' events is not novel. The FEI must enhance its strategic planning abilities and capacity to respond to major events, and war game scenarios are a very useful tool in this process. I have identified four scenarios that the FEI should war game. The scenarios should be developed further and gamed by FEI officials and outside consultants and advisors. Each game should result in a set of policies to address that type of scenario. Then a risk analysis should be conducted to identify which FEI affiliates should be invited to go through a war game with FEI staff and consultants. The result of these second-wave games must be the diffusion of improved policies throughout the entire FEI organisation.

Each FEI affiliate should be required to maintain a manual of policy responses for various scenarios to be implemented if and when a similar crisis arises, and to participate in appropriate war games and policy development.

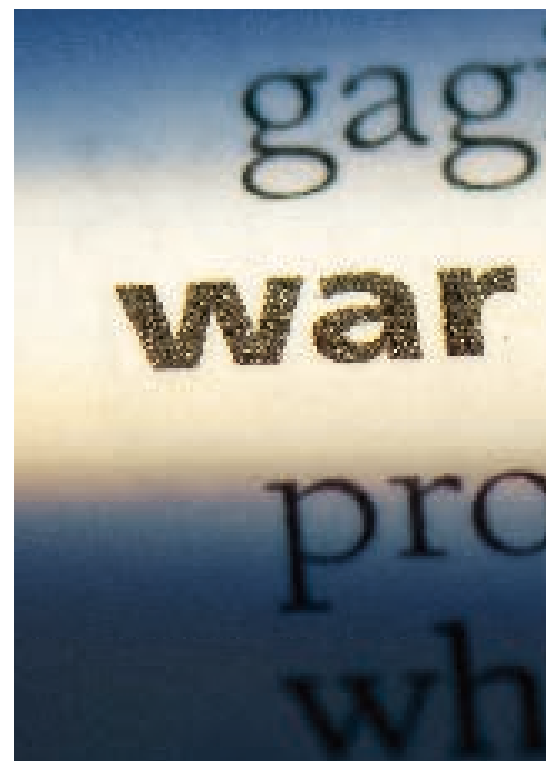
## Game 1: Outbreak of highly infectious equine disease

We are moving from winter to spring in 2021, and two months have passed in the three month CSI festival. Over 5,000 horses from North America, Central America, South America, and Europe have participated. On a Friday afternoon, grooms in Stable Block A discover that a dozen of the 200 horses housed in the temporary stables are coughing and have nasal discharges. None of the grooms or riders report the sick horses to the FEI veterinarians. By Friday night, fifty horses in Stable Block A are ill, and several of the initial dozen cases are showing signs of ataxia. By Saturday morning Stable Blocks B, C, D, and E also have sick horses. Several of the grooms and riders have reported the illnesses to the FEI vets and the show organisers, and the FEI vets and local vets work tirelessly all day to provide care to the horses. The head FEI vet rings the local government veterinary department but this is a long holiday weekend and the office is closed until the next Tuesday morning. An emergency contact number is disconnected. As word spreads about the sick horses throughout the compound, hundreds of riders begin to load their horses and evacuate them. Some riders begin the long trip back to their home stables in various parts of the country and in neighbouring countries; other riders are calling friends to secure temporary accommodation for their horses while they sort out flights home. More grooms note that their horses have symptoms. Three months later research reveals that the evacuation by riders led to the dissemination of the virus throughout the country and to several foreign countries. Twenty thousand horses were infected, and 1,000 horses died. Of the survivors, one-third sustained damage

to their organs that may prevent them from participating in sport in the future.

## Game 2: Political instability

In the summer of 2021, as riders, grooms, and horses began arriving for the 50th anniversary of the CDI show in this grand European capital city, tensions on the street were palpable. The COVID-19 pandemic caused sharp increases in unemployment and deprivation. Despite the strong safety net that provided significant income support to displaced workers, glaring inequalities in society were exacerbated and highlighted as workers saw stock markets rebound and conspicuous consumption among the wealthy increased to even greater levels than before the outbreak of COVID-19. On the second day of the four-day show protesters began circling the venue and impeding entry and exit of spectators. By the evening of the last day of the show thousands of protestors had encircled the show venue. The stands were empty of spectators because people stayed away. The competitions continued, with the empty seats hidden from television camera by drapes hastily hung around the perimeter of the arena. An hour after the final class ended riders were



preparing to exit the show venue with their horses. But violence had broken out on the streets. Neo-nazi and other white supremacist groups had descended upon the show venue, and what had been a peaceful protest turned into running street battles between white supremacists and security forces. Rider and grooms could not depart the venue with their horses. Later that night the police began using force against not only the white supremacists but also the peaceful protestors. Rather than quelling the unrest, by the next morning the entire city centre, where the show venue is located, was locked down. The streets were in chaos, and tear gas and pepper spray were in the air. Water and electricity to the show venue were cut: In the fog of unrest it is not known whether these cuts were engineered by the white supremacists or municipal workers as an act of class solidarity. In any event there is no water for horses or humans, everyone is running out of hay, and nobody has any idea when the streets will be opened up so the riders and their horses and grooms can safely leave the city. Many horses have hurt themselves after becoming upset from breathing tear gas.

### **Game 3: Cyber attack**

It all started with a link sent by email to every FEI affiliate one Monday at 9:10 CET. The email looked like it had been sent by the FEI, and it contained a link for an 'Important FEI Announcement'. But in fact the email came from a criminal group that had chosen the FEI and its affiliates as potential soft targets for extortion. The criminal group's hope was that in each affiliate at least one staff person would open the innocuous-looking email and click the link. The link would cause two files to be downloaded: a pdf file on what looked like FEI letterhead instructing the reader to log in to the FEI system to read the 'Important FEI Announcement', and a malware programme that would take control over the computer, all other computers on the same network, and on the FEI's network. The first person to receive the email and download the malware was not even an official of the FEI or an employee of an FEI affiliate. She was a former executive of an affiliate that had been locked out of her office and fired 18 months ago following a simmering dispute with the affiliate's relatively new CEO. But due to poor cyber hygiene by this affiliate, the fired staff person still had 'viewing access' on the FEI system and still received FEI emails. This person not only infected her own computer but also her new employer's network and the

FEI system because she used her continuing access to the FEI network to read the 'Important Announcement'. Within 24 hours at least one staff person in every FEI affiliate had clicked on the link and downloaded the malware, or had accessed the already infected FEI network. And at 9:10 CET on Tuesday, the next day, the malware was activated. The networks of the FEI and every affiliate were locked and held to ransom, along with the computer and network of the fired executive. A ransom equivalent to CHF 1 million, payable in Bitcoin, was demanded from the FEI and each of its affiliates by the criminal gang. The FEI's lawyers were concerned that the organisation faced legal exposure because of the harm caused outside of the FEI from the actions of the former employee of the affiliate and its poor cyber hygiene practices.

### **Game 4: Climate change**

'But did you know you can charge your phone with horse poo?' asked the FEI in a tweet sent on 5 June 2020. Approaches like this to dealing with the global climate crisis were insufficient, and by January 2021 climate change activists, several important sponsors and potential sponsors, and the organisation representing horse owners were demanding that the FEI become at least carbon neutral, if not carbon negative. International press covering the spectrum of informed analysis and opinion, from the New York Times to The Economist to Der Spiegel to China Daily, recently had begun publishing in-depth articles on the carbon imprint created by FEI sport. The next month, the FEI's biggest sponsor contacted the organisation and confidentially communicated its decision that all support would be withdrawn, and the reason for the withdrawal would be made publicly known, unless the FEI published by 1 January 2022 and implemented by the end of that year a plan to become carbon negative.

### **For the better**

Other scenarios should be developed for the FEI to war game. Experiences and lessons from the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic should be incorporated into a game with a view toward developing sophisticated policies for the FEI and affiliates. Former White House Chief Of Staff and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel says we should "Never let a good crisis go to waste." While the FEI did not have an adequate strategy to deal with COVID-19, the crisis did lead the FEI to develop a good policy for the return to sport. More crises are on the horizon. Let's hope the FEI agrees with Rahm Emanuel and uses this crisis for strategic policy development. Let the war games begin.

Thomas Reed, Ph.D. is an Irish Warmblood breeder who helps organisations in the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors plan for and create change. ■

