

The Bellwood Elk



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The Bellwood elk are well known throughout the Department of Defense, Defense Logistics Agency, and around the nation. They are often the first feature visitors ask to see. The elk are a living link to historic Bellwood Farms and show the post's commitment to retaining the cultural, historic and environmental landscape.

James Bellwood was the last private owner of the land that Defense Supply Center Richmond occupies. Bellwood was a highly respected and successful farmer. He was also an animal enthusiast, so he set aside acreage on his property for a wooded park where deer, rabbits, and other wildlife could live and roam freely.

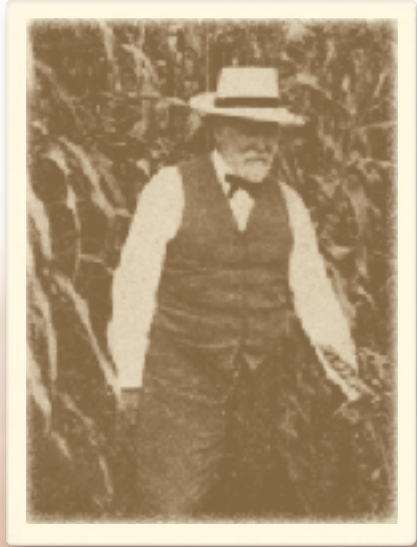
Around 1900, Bellwood imported a pair of elk from Yosemite National Park and Washington State to start a herd on his land. According to newspaper and magazine articles of the time, the elk became an

immediate hit with both the family and the community. With plenty of forage and room to graze, the herd multiplied to more than 20 during the time Bellwood owned the land. On weekends, hundreds of visitors would take the Richmond-Petersburg trolley to picnic and enjoy Bellwood's animal park.

After Mr. Bellwood's death, his family decided to sell the land;



Richmond trolley



Mr. James Bellwood



however, they were concerned about the future of their father's beloved elk. The Army was interested in buying the property, so the Bellwood family agreed to the sale on the condition that the Army would continue to keep the elk on the property and provide for their care. The officer negotiating the land sale for the War Department was sensitive to their concerns. A handshake completed the deal and the Army purchased 647 acres in 1941 and built a supply depot.



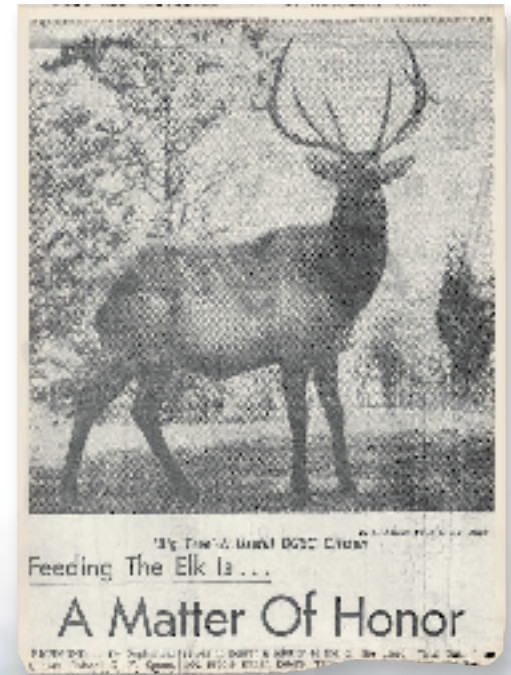
1942 image of construction on the Depot

During World War II, the elk grazed on grass growing in the open pasture set aside for them near the southern boundary of the installation along Kingsland Creek. In the winters, their diet was supplemented with forage purchased for the Army horses used by the installation's mounted security force. As horses were phased out of the service, the post was faced

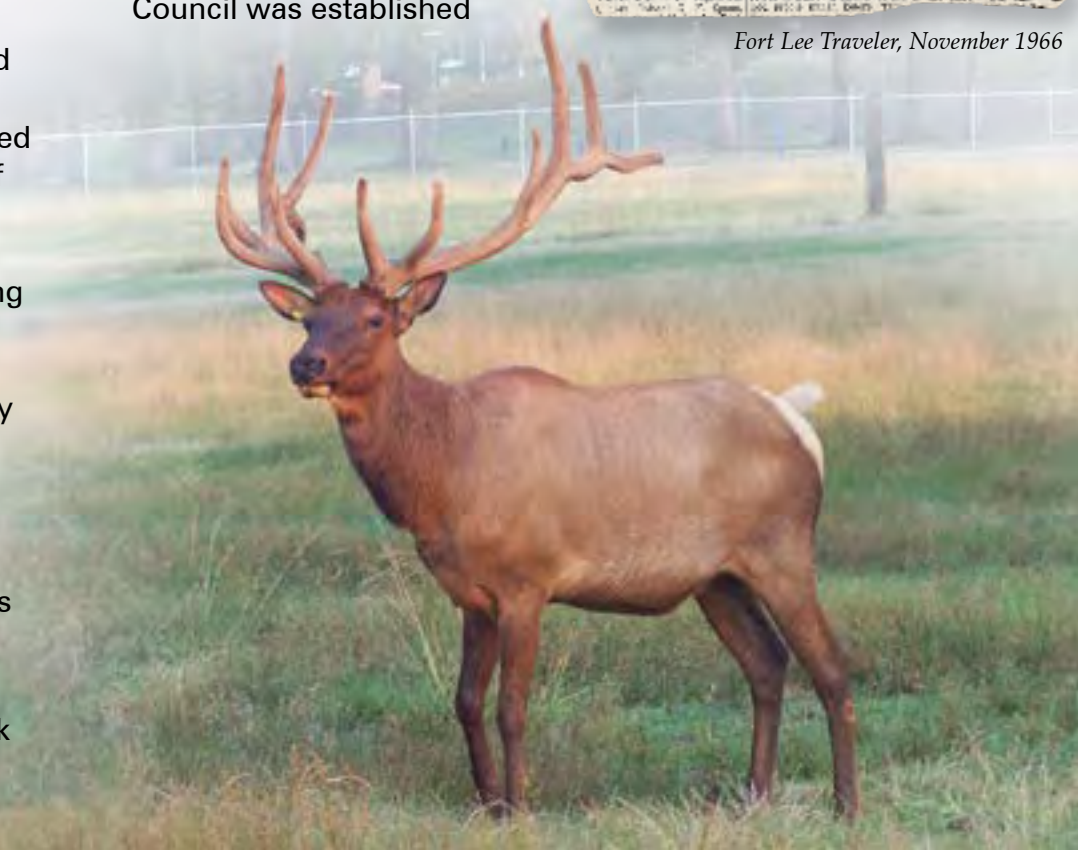
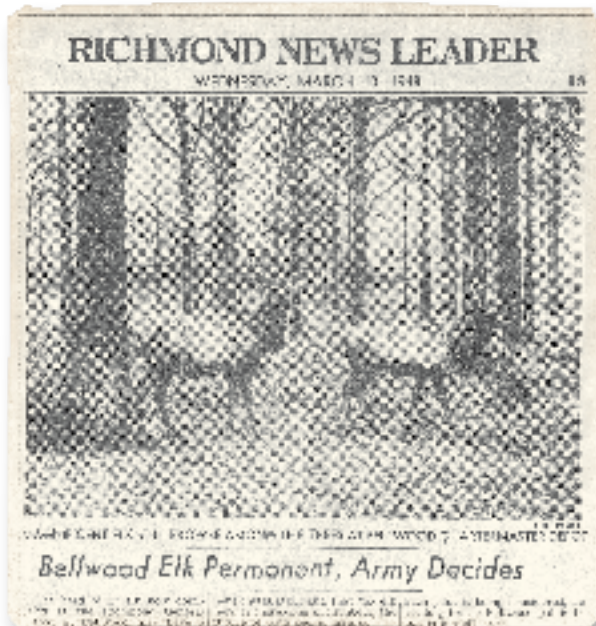
with the quandary of how to feed the elk. Some consideration was given to donating the herd to the state or to a conservation agency, but the Army insisted on honoring its commitment, despite having no appropriated funds allocated for the elk's care and upkeep.

Over the years, efforts to feed the elk were also supported by donations from

employees, through an annual fund drive by the Elk Relief Association, called the Elk's Bawl. This practice was discontinued in 1972 due to Army regulations against solicitations. In that year, funds were donated by employees through the use of jars placed around the post. In 1975, the Officers' Wives' Club took over the fundraising; a 1980 article in the post's Elkhorn newspaper announced a bakeoff to raise money for the herd. A few years later, a Wildlife Management Council was established



Fort Lee Traveler, November 1966



and a facilities engineer was assigned as the installation's wildlife conservation officer. In past years, the elk were cared for through an Elk Feed Fund Council, with money for their care coming from the proceeds of recycling, private and civic organization donations, and the occasional sale of one of the animals.

As proceeds for aluminum recycling decreased through



the years, Defense Logistics Agency's Office of General Counsel reviewed historical documentation of the sale of the land and agreement to care for the elk. In 2013, Counsel determined appropriate funds could be used to care for the elk. Today, management and

care of the elk is overseen by Defense Logistics Agency Installation Support at Richmond. Through the years the Bellwood Elk Herd has been an important part of the installation's culture and a source of great pride among the workforce as the Department of Defense continues to honor the original agreement made with the Bellwood Family.

The elk live in a 25-acre fenced preserve, with vegetation consisting of low grasses and a dense stand of oak trees. Although the Bellwood elk live near people, they are still wild animals and are not handled unless they are being treated by a veterinarian.



Elk Horn story, a center publication for many years, from 1968 about reducing the herd size on center.



Employees who feed the elk have no direct contact with the animals. The elk remain wild creatures and those who work around them respect that. Elk are predominantly grazers and eat grass and alfalfa hay. They also eat grains, such as corn and oats. During morning feedings the elk cows greet the people feeding them with



high pitched screams, while the bulls joust for a prime spot at the feed bin. The feeding is done from inside the barn, with grain dumped into a feed shoot and hay slid into the rack.

A veterinarian keeps inoculations up to date on the herd and ensures each animal is registered with an ear tag, as required by the state. In order to treat the elk, the veterinarian must put them to sleep with a tranquilizer shot from a special gun. Elk are hardy creatures, with a natural immunity to most



diseases. Tuberculosis, or TB, has been found in some domestic elk herds, so the Bellwood elk are tested and vaccinated to eliminate the disease.

Elk are curious animals and sometimes get themselves into trouble. A bull named Junior had a reputation of being overly curious. His care takers say Junior once got his head stuck inside a red feed bucket and couldn't get it off. The veterinarian had to pay a visit, tranquilize him and pry it off. An observer said the bucket was on so tight that the poor elk looked cross-eyed. On another occasion Junior got fabric tangled on his antlers and ran through the field with a banner streaming behind him. Then there's the case of the elk that did battle with a barbed wire fence; he ended up tangling the wire on his antlers so badly that the vet had to be called in. Another bull attacked a tractor left in its pasture while the crew took a lunch break, puncturing the radiator and doors.

The elk captured the attention of people across the country in 1953 when the Saturday Evening Post magazine ran a story about "The Elk that Joined the Army." The post's archives contain letters between the commander and Arthur Godfrey, a famous radio and television personality of the time. In 1950, Godfrey adopted several Bellwood elk and moved them to his farm in Leesburg, Virginia. Situation reports, prepared by military duty officers during the post's first two decades, include items on elk escapes, battles and deaths. The post's newspapers are filled with stories on elk births, naming competitions and fundraising efforts. The elk are also featured in holiday artwork, comics and instruction materials. Local newspapers,



including the Independent Virginian, Richmond News Leader, Times Dispatch and Fort Lee Traveler, have stories about the elk.

A story in the June 23, 1955, Times Dispatch newspaper highlighted a calf naming contest on post. The winning name

was Jeribell, which turned problematic when the calf turned out to be a bull. The prize winner received \$10. The elk herd lineage is annotated in documents noting births and deaths from illness, old age and battle wounds. Letters discussing trades of elk to and from local nature parks. Records track the names of reigning bulls, including Big Sam, Big Tree, Jerry, Jeribell, Elmo, and Junior.

Male elk are called bulls, females are cows, and



babies are calves.

Bulls mature at age seven, weigh 800 to 1,100 pounds, and stand five to six feet tall at the shoulder.

Cows mature at age three, weigh about 550 pounds, and stand about four feet tall at the shoulder.

Cows give birth after approximately 246 days. The calves are born in mid-May through July and spend the first week of their lives in tall grass, usually getting up only to nurse. Calves are born with spots and develop brown coats in six months. Cows are good mothers and keep watch on their calves from a short distance away and will protect their calves when they are threatened.

Only bulls grow antlers; the number of points is influenced by genetics, feed and age. They grow their first set at age one. Elk with six points on each antler are called Royal elk; seven point elk are Imperial; and those with eight points are Monarchs. Antlers fall off in March and re-grow every year. A mature bull's antlers weigh 20 to 30 pounds. As antlers grow, they are surrounded by a soft tissue called velvet. The bulls scrape the velvet off when the antlers stop growing. Bulls compete for dominance through powerful vocal calls or bugling, sparring, and chasing competitors away.



Today all records of an Army chase to Maj. Everett K. Miller.

The Elk That Joined the Army

Of all the Army's varied personnel, the least military are those who live at the Regiment Quartermaster Depot just south of Richmond, Virginia. These civilian veterans do nothing but eat, multiply and look out at pigs.

Paroled into duty, glimpsing them from U.S. Route 7, sometimes figure them as secret weapons, sometimes guess they are there to keep the grass down. But the real explanation of their presence is much more simple: The Army is stock with them.

In 1911 when the Army bought the 400-acre Bellwood Manor tract from Frank Bellwood for \$150,000, the sales agreement included a provision that some elk always would be kept on the property. This "condition" was first made in an oral contract between Frank Bellwood and an Army purchasing group. The fact that it is permanently binding has since been included in written commitments from the Department of Defense to the Quartermaster Depot at Bellwood.

To fulfill the agreement, a twenty-acre pasture in the depot was fenced and turned over to the elk. Since then they have been regularly inventoried by reports and as regularly fed a balanced diet of fodder, oats and grain mixtures. The elk, at present, add game to this diet.

The herd was originally started in the early 1910's by Frank Bell-

wood's father, who imported a mated pair of elk from the Northwest, and watched hazing as its herd grew to seventeen. Army officials were less happy about feeding seventeen wild elk. To comply without breaking their promise, they shipped all but five of the animals to a Virginia game preserve. In the future, the Army plans to keep the herd close to its present figure.

Usually the elk and the military get along fine. But there have been some unexpected incidents. One was commanding officer, making his first inspection, was visibly shaken when he was confronted by a large elk peering at him around the corner of a warehouse.

"What's that?" he demanded. "It seems to be an elk all right," one of his aides replied.

Pulling himself together, the commanding officer selected a crier, "So it is," and proudly strode into the warehouse to inspect more people than.

Official records also note that the Army once assigned a veterinarian to Bellwood to attend to the birth of new elk. Today the post keeps double as elk, an institution. Recently, he was named in the officers' club for bringing into the world a five-thousand-pound boy elk, an exception of personnel kind was carefully noted by the officer of the day and duly reported to the press.

—GAILLEN McDOWELL, JR.