

ARMOR Magazine to Move Across Post...

...But Memories of Building 4401 Will Linger

by Jon Clemens, Managing Editor



For almost a year, bulldozers were working all around the John Lannen House, the *ARMOR* office building on Vine Grove Road. The two-story brick buildings that used to be the Gaffey Heights Housing Area are now gone, knocked down and trucked away, and a summer crop of weeds covered any evidence that thousands of military families once lived there.

ARMOR Magazine is moving across post to new quarters. Now the bulldozers await, and Building 4401 will be the next to go. It is a building with memories.

The John Lannen House was named for the 3rd Cavalry sergeant who posed for artist Frederic Remington's sketch of a mounted cavalry trooper, circa 1898. The sketch for many years appeared on the cover of the old *Cavalry Journal*, our predecessor. *ARMOR* moved into Building 4401 in 1973, when then-editor, LTC Burt Boudinot, moved the magazine here from makeshift offices in the old Weapons Department near the Armor School. He'd asked MG George S. Patton, then Assistant Commandant, for a better location, and the general's wife suggested then-vacant Building 4401, which had served as a billeting office and a nursery school. Aside from the security grilles added to the windows, it was a homey sort of place, more like a suburban house than a place of business. This impression was reinforced by the kitchen sink and cabinets, the '50s-era pink and black tile motif in the upstairs bath, with its full tub and shower, and the rolling lawn outside.

For more than 25 years, the staff edited the magazine here, from story acceptance to typesetting and page layout. But along with the serious stuff, working at Building 4401 had its lighter moments. The big bathtub, for instance, played a key role in a legendary incident back in the late 1970s, when the Editor-in-Chief stopped in on a Sunday morning to retrieve some papers he'd forgotten to take

home. As he came in the front door, he heard rock and roll on the radio and splashing sounds upstairs. It was a member of the staff, frolicking in the tub with his date of the night before. Suffice to say, counseling followed about responsible use of government property.

There was a narrow 50-foot strip of lawn between the *ARMOR* office and the first unit of the adjacent housing area, but this was not enough distance to separate us from an enlisted couple we came to call the "Battling Bickersons." Their marital discussions were always conducted at a scream, and were public information, winter and summer, with windows open or closed. On more than a few occasions, the "Bickersons" took their disagreements out to the front lawn. We'd call the MPs, then go live to the lawn to watch the wrestling as the Bickersons, in their camos, rolled around until the law arrived. Needless to say, it was a different Army then.

Families rotated in and out of the housing area all through the Cold War, leaving us with many memories...and occasionally a pet who missed his DEROS. One of these was a large gray tabby who appeared on *ARMOR*'s doorstep one morning, walked in with a customer, and decided to stay. He became our mascot for many years, dubbed "Sherman" for his rolling, determined way of walking, suggesting the WWII battlewagon of the same name.

It was hoped that Sherman might make a contribution by dealing with a particularly industrious gang of squirrels who had infested the building, but Sherman preferred wolfing down Friskies and sleeping on our desks, usually on his back, four paws up.

One morning, he was in this "hull-up" position on Vivian Oertle's desk, in full view of the front door down a long hallway. A tough-looking colonel,



ARMOR's new home will be in Building 1109, flanking Brooks Field on Fort Knox's Main Post. The offices will be on the third floor of the northeast wing, at upper left in this photo.

Photos by Robert L. Stevenson

replete with cigar stub and right out of Central Casting, swept in and spotted the inverted, snoozing cat. Before he'd even said hello, the O-6 marched down the hall to Vivian's desk, stopped, and started scratching the cat's belly. Sherman blinked, stretched, purred, then went back to sleep.

"What a *great* cat!" said the colonel.

A great cat perhaps, but a pacifist. He coexisted peacefully with the squirrels and with a squadron of barn swallows that made our front porch home every spring, arriving, nesting, and flight training in the busy weeks before Armor Conference in May. One by one, the young birds would mount the parapet of the nest. The adults would fly nearby, encouraging them to take the leap. Finally, reluctantly, they would. Except for one guy we called "Bolo," who resisted all peer pressure to act like a bird, staying in the nest about a week after the others had graduated. While we were at lunch, he made the leap and apparently didn't take to flying. He was on the sidewalk walking around when we got back. One of the editors picked Bolo up and air-evaced him back to the nest. He must have changed his mind later, because he was gone by closing time, a late bloomer.

In the early '80s, the staff was gathered in the editor-in-chief's office one afternoon when an Ohio Valley thunderboomer began outside. He was on the phone when a lightning bolt hit the phone lines, fried the entry box, and zipped into the phone's ear-piece. The phone flew one way, the lieutenant colonel's office chair the other...with him in it. He jumped up and began hopping on one foot, the zapped ear down, his finger jabbing it as if he were trying to free a water bubble after diving. Although his hearing was pretty dim for the rest of the day, no permanent damage seemed to

have been done (although the officer in question did take a public relations job upon retirement).

Although our building is marked for destruction, these memories will survive. We're moving on to Building 1109, where we'll occupy the top floor of the wing on the northeast end. This three-story brick structure, once the home of the 1st Cavalry in the early days of mechanization, has recently been restored. Along with the new fiber optic connections and energy-efficient windows and modern lighting, they've kept the best of the old building, restoring the arched brick porches on the back side, and the gray travertine marble in the rest rooms. The new free-standing elevator shaft at the rear of the building, needed to meet accessibility standards, was constructed of brick in a style that matches the old building.

Inside, the refinished walls and floors are set off by new oak doors and woodwork, and all of the halls in the building will feature Jody Harmon's artwork for *ARMOR*, enlarged and mounted in matching oak frames. The office area, which we'll share with the U.S. Armor Association, will include a reference library and a large production workroom, offices, and a reception area. It will be a big improvement.

As we go to press with this edition, it's unclear exactly when the move will come, but current plans call for early April. Our phone numbers at the new location are not supposed to change. When the move is set, we'll post details on the magazine's web site.

The magazine is also making another move, this one organizational. We have been reassigned to the Office Chief of Armor, which is also located in another wing of our new building.