

# Saddle Up... Tonight We Ride

"Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a picture, the negligent rest on the saddles...." from *Cavalry Crossing a Ford* by Walt Whitman

Our last issue reported the jumping of our TOC, "ARMOR Magazine to Move Across Post." Jon Clemens noted that our previous home, the John Lannen House, was named for the 3rd Cavalry sergeant who posed for Frederic Remington's sketch of a mounted cavalry trooper, circa 1898. However, I suspect most mounted warriors know John Lannen better by his alias, "Old Bill," and while most of us know well Old Bill's visage, few know the story behind the famous image, or much about the man.



LTC William Gardner Bell, former *ARMOR* editor and historian, wrote, "Of the fine artists who turned their talents to painting the Great American West, Frederic Remington comes perhaps closest to being the United States Cavalry's own." The mounted fraternity recognized this kinship and made the artist a life member of the U.S. Cavalry Association, predecessor to the current U.S. Armor Association. Remington was also a close friend of Captain F. H. Hardie, who commanded G Troop of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment. Remington visited Hardie and his troop near Tampa, Florida in 1898, when the troop was preparing for movement. The Spanish-American War had begun, and G Troop was to take part in the Santiago campaign in eastern Cuba. Also heading that way was Remington, who would draw scenes of the war for *Harper's Weekly*.

During his visit, Remington was struck by the sight of the mounted John Lannen, an NCO from G Troop. "...Remington noted the ease and grace with which Sergeant Lannen rode and selected him as the most perfect type of the American Cavalryman he had ever seen. At this time Sergeant Lannen's hair and mustache were white. He had blue eyes and a dark, ruddy complexion. He was a superb horseman. His horse was his friend and comrade," said Lieutenant Colonel F.H. Hardie in a letter to the Editor of the *Cavalry Journal* in 1911. From Remington's rough sketches of Lannen in Florida, two finished works were produced and presented to the *Cavalry Journal* in 1902. The first, a sketch of a frontier cavalryman, appeared on the front cover of the *Journal* in 1903 and would ride in that position for another 40 years. The second sketch depicted the rear view of a cavalryman riding

away and appeared on the magazine's back cover for many years.

I'm not sure how Remington's depiction of John Lannen became known as "Old Bill." One theory is that "Old Bill" was actually Lannen's horse. Others argue the horse's name was "Scout." I'm not sure of this either, but that's a great name for that particular horse! Not so, says Major William K. Emerson in his 1978 *ARMOR* article. Emerson's research reveals that John or "Jack" Lannen was an alias for Canadian William Carroll, who borrowed his mother's maiden name when he enlisted in the Army. Emerson adds that the use of an alias to enlist was common in the late 19th century when many considered Army service undesirable and immigrants filled the ranks. Lannen was an immigrant, too, having migrated from Prince Edward Island, where he had been a carpenter. He enlisted in New York City.

Most telling about John Lannen/Old Bill are the words of his former commander, Captain Hardie:

"Aside from his horsemanship Lannen's most marked characteristics were his loyalty to his organization and his unflinching good humor under trying conditions. Ordinarily a stern disciplinarian, he was always ready with a smile and a jest when roads were muddy, skins damp and cold, and rations low. He accepted hardships as part of his day's work. There are too few of his kind. He was the epitome of soldier and cavalryman."

I imagine that Lannen, a.k.a. Old Bill, was both a good man to ride with and to share hard times with; certainly he is someone well suited to symbolize our heritage of mounted warfighting. Like hundreds of other soldiers in that fight, Sergeant Lannen contracted yellow fever and died at Santiago in 1898 after spending almost thirty years faithfully serving his country. Lannen's memory and legacy as a mounted warrior ride on.

I'm certain others can furnish varying accounts and tales of Old Bill, but I'm not certain there will ever be a complete, definitive history, and perhaps that's as it should be. Myths and mysteries should not be too specific, after all.

— D2

*Our thanks to several authors who documented the Old Bill/John Lannen saga and thus passed on his legacy over the course of ARMOR's 113 years — Colonel C.A Seoane, William K. Emerson, Lieutenant Colonel William Bell Gardner, and Lieutenant Colonel F.H. Hardie — Ed.*



By Order of the Secretary of the Army:

ERIC K. SHINSEKI  
General, United States Army  
Chief of Staff

Official:

*Joel B. Hudson*  
JOEL B. HUDSON  
Administrative Assistant to the  
Secretary of the Army

0105101