



About a year ago, an older man in civilian clothes brought his camper to a stop outside the *ARMOR* Magazine offices and walked in, carrying a large cardboard box. It was stuffed with old, dog-eared copies of *ARMOR*.

"I'm too old to keep up with this stuff anymore, and I was wondering if you people might have a use for these," he said, plopping the first box down. "There's a lot more in the truck."

A long-retired field grade officer, he had saved his issues of the magazine all through the years. "I got a lot out of these old magazines," he said. "Maybe someone else can..."

What brings this to mind is the recent news that the Air Defense Artillery Branch has decided to end paper publication of their branch journal and publish their articles in electronic form only. Driving the decision was cost, although some optimists see an up-side in the new, and much larger, potential audience the "publication" may now reach on-line.

Lately, at the *ARMOR* office, we've been gearing up to put the Armor Branch journal on-line, too, although there are no plans to eliminate the paper version. It might seem real high-speed and techno-modern to go on-line-only, but we have serious doubts about whether the two media are really interchangeable. True, reading is involved in both processes, but is the *learning* experience the same? Can reading three or four paragraphs at a time, on the screen, effectively transfer the same information as having a story spread out before you, where you can thumb back to the preceding page, check ahead to see where an argument is going, see pictures, captions, and maps in true relation to text, all in the glide of an eye? Will the server be up when you want to read *ARMOR ONLINE*? Will computers ever be as portable as a magazine? Will you have to put a modem line into

your bathroom in order to read *ARMOR* on your precariously balanced "kneetop"?

But what about cost? Ending paper publication would save some money, but in an era of thousand-dollar main gun bullets, is \$40,000 a year really *that much money* in the scheme of things? That's roughly *ARMOR*'s printing bill each year. About the cost of 20 mid-level computer systems or 40 main gun rounds. Actually, because of the impact of the personal computer, our cost has been dropping since the late 1980s, when *ARMOR* became one of the first periodicals in the nation to be produced on a desktop publishing system. Doing our own typesetting and layout radically reduced the cost of the magazine. Prior to that revolution, two issues cost as much as six today, and that's not factoring in the plunging value of the dollar. So, we're not against progress, and we're sure not against saving money, not these days. But you have to be sure that when you're buying an apple, you're not actually getting a pear.

Finally, there's this problem of tradition. It stares at us from the shelves of the big, green fire-proof safe in the *ARMOR* office, where we keep the old, leather-bound volumes of *ARMOR* and its predecessors — *The Cavalry Journal* and *The Armored Cavalry Journal* — going all the way back to the beginning, to 1888. Very few magazines in America, a handful, go back that far. Which gives you a new respect for those old cavalrymen who got together and decided, 110 years ago, that trading ideas in a branch journal might be a good way to enrich their knowledge and professionalize their careers. Of course, there were no computers then; hell, there weren't even telephones, but there were soldiers who needed to communicate across the frontier's dusty miles.

They had a good idea then. And it may still be.

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