In the past few weeks movie-goers have been turning out to see a show called "Rio Grande." Starring actor John Wayne, it is the most recent of a trilogy of screen epics depicting the cavalry's part in the development of our country's frontier. Teamed with "Duke" Wayne's fine acting is the fine touch of John Ford's directing. The whole adds up to a real contribution to the perpetuation of the history and tradition of American soldiery, a tribute to some of

The Men Who Put the Arm in Army

by John Wayne

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They may have changed Cavalry to Armor, but nothing can ever erase the great tradition of its heroic past. And in the very change itself the cavalry is living up to its famous heritage.

In spite of all the glamour of the name, the cavalry was never just an arm on which the lavender and old lace of chivalry could be draped. The American cavalryman has always been trained to fight as circumstances demanded. He was a first-rate infantryman when he had to fight on foot, and he quickly got the knack of artillery. As a member of the Armor Branch, the cavalryman is sure to give the enemy "hell on wheels."

And what does a movie actor know about the cavalry? You might say I'm a cavalryman by profession: a "veteran" dating back to the 1870s. You see, I was a cavalryman in "Fort Apache," in "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon" and recently in "Rio Grande."

Actually, I am in a unique position to be able to choose my favorite branch of service. In my film roles, I've been in the Army, the Navy, the Air Corps and the Marines. I've even been a rifleman in the Second Kentucky Regiment of Civil War days. If anyone were to ask which branch I choose, all I can say is "give me my boots and saddle."

It's no accident that a great producer such as John Ford at least three times chose the cavalry as the subject for great motion pictures. In selecting the cavalry, he chose a subject with built-in thrills, and with the drama and spine-tingling action recorded in history by men like "Light Horse" Harry Lee; Francis Marion, "the Swamp Fox" of Revolutionary War fame; J.E.B. Stuart and his Civil War raiders; Phil Sheridan and his "yellow-leg" troopers of the Army of the West. History has recorded them all: Custer, and Patton, and all those nameless heroes who helped mold this country's destiny.

My roles as a cavalryman awoke an interest in this great branch of our armed forces — an interest that led me to a new appreciation of the heroes who fought on horseback. Of the auxiliaries charged with the duty of assisting the infantry in accomplishing its mission, cavalry is the only one that has a military history as a self-sufficient fighting force.

The armies with which the Moslem conquerors, as well as Genghis Khan, carved out their empires were composed almost exclusively of cavalry. With the passing of the age of chivalry, along with the development of firearms, the cavalry inherited the pride and traditions of the ironclad knights. They developed the technique of using the mobility of cavalry for surprise, and its shock power for disrupting the enemy lines. The well-timed cavalry charge against vulnerable flank or line became the conventional knockout punch of competent commanders.

Even the so-called blitzkrieg is merely the cavalry tactics of the American Civil War, streamlined, and moved by machines instead of horsepower, supplied with increased firepower, tremendously speeded up and supported by planes.

In World War II, horse-cavalry troops with speed and daring carried out vital reconnaissance missions in the rugged mountains of central Italy. They penetrated ravines and reached precipitous mountain peaks inaccessible to mechanized troops. They gained information of unmapped trails and roads the infantry used in moving up to surround and capture objectives.

The cavalry has been an important part of the U.S. forces since the first dragoons of Washington's army. But it was in 1832, when the Sacs and Foxes became restive along the Upper Mississippi, and Scott was making the Army famous for its pacification measures, that the cavalry really came to the front. After the War of 1812, the cavalry had fallen into the discard. Now it was rejuvenated with a force of 600 mounted "rangers." From then on cavalry grew to its golden age. Cavalry was essential in pursuing the hard-riding Indians. First a full regiment of dragoons was drummed to the colors, and then a second regiment. When the new territories of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Utah and California came under the flag, with an army of but 8,000 men to cover and protect a vast area, the role of the cavalry was plain.

The 3rd Dragoons marched 2,500 miles from Leavenworth, KS, to Oregon, in those days. By 1855, the Army had five regiments of cavalry to 10 of infantry. After the Civil War, Indian tribes in the West began again a war of extermination against whites, and it was then that the cavalry came into its own. Ten regiments, the striking force of a small but tough and rigidly disciplined army, were placed in the field. There were 300,000 Indians facing Sheridan, who had but 1,300 cavalry and 1,400 infantry when the campaign started.

It was this great era of the cavalry that Ford chose for his pictures. And somehow, I feel that it was Ford's most recent, "Rio Grande," that made me a full-fledged cavalryman.

In early September 1947, Ford read a story called "Mission With No Record" in the ***Saturday Evening Post***. It was an amazing and little-known story of a heroic but unsung chapter in the colorful history of the U.S. Cavalry following the Civil War. Ford bought the rights to the story and then set it aside for the time when he could produce a picture based on the event.

The time came when Herbert J. Yates and Ford signed a long-term contract, and Ford chose this thrilling cavalry epic for his first movie for Republic Studios.

The movement of the film crew and cast to the location site resembled a cavalry and armored maneuver in itself. Thirty-two pieces of equipment transported cameras and lighting equipment. Five horse trucks transported 25 horses from Hollywood, and 90 more horses were obtained from surrounding ranches. The construction crew built in its entirety a mammoth cavalry fort.

Filming of "Rio Grande" began June 15, 1950; and to capture some of the thrills and action that are associated with a movie depicting part of the history of the cavalry, Republic spent $50,000 on stunts alone.

Months of preliminary research preceded the actual filming of "Rio Grande," and I spent many a fascinating hour with Ford reading up on cavalry lore, even to the music favored by cavalrymen of the past.

Back in 1870, for example, when Sheridan's outnumbered troopers waged their fierce battles against the Apache and Sioux, the ringing notes of "The Girl I Left Behind Me," played by the post band, would be the last thing the intrepid "yellow-leg" detachments heard as they galloped through stockade gates after the enemy.

But no single historian — least of all a movie actor — can put into words the whole thrilling story of the cavalry. No more than any legislation of Congress can ever change the true meaning of the word *cavalry*. They may have taken the word out of the Army, but they'll never take it out of our history.