



# The End of the Trail

By: Thomas H. Mungeer, PBA President

As many of you who read the pieces I have penned have realized, I am always interested in the story behind the story or photo.

This is true about the image that has come to represent our Troopers who have lost their lives in the line of duty. The image of the Trooper astride his horse with their heads slumped in grief is etched in at least two monuments outside Troop Headquarters in both Troops C and NYC. What is the story behind this symbolic image?

One of the favorite pieces of artwork of Captain Daniel E. Fox, the Troop C Commander, was "The End of the Trail" by James Earle Fraser (1876 - 1953). A reproduction of the famous sculpture hung in his office in Sidney as a testament of his fondness for horses.

Fraser sculpted "The End of the Trail" for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition held in San Francisco in 1915. The doleful work depicts an American Indian brave and his horse, their heads bowed but not defeated, at the realization that their way of life has come to an end. Other famous works Fraser is known for are the Indian Head (or Buffalo nickel) in 1913, the Victory Medal in 1919 to commemorate the closing of World War I and the Navy Cross.

In 1932, Captain Fox conceived an idea to bring Fraser's sculpture to life and summoned Trooper Bill Mossman to complete the task. Under Mossman's skillful training, his horse Wondrous soon learned to imitate the artwork, and horse and rider performed "Trail's End" with Mossman slumped dejectedly on the horse's bare back.

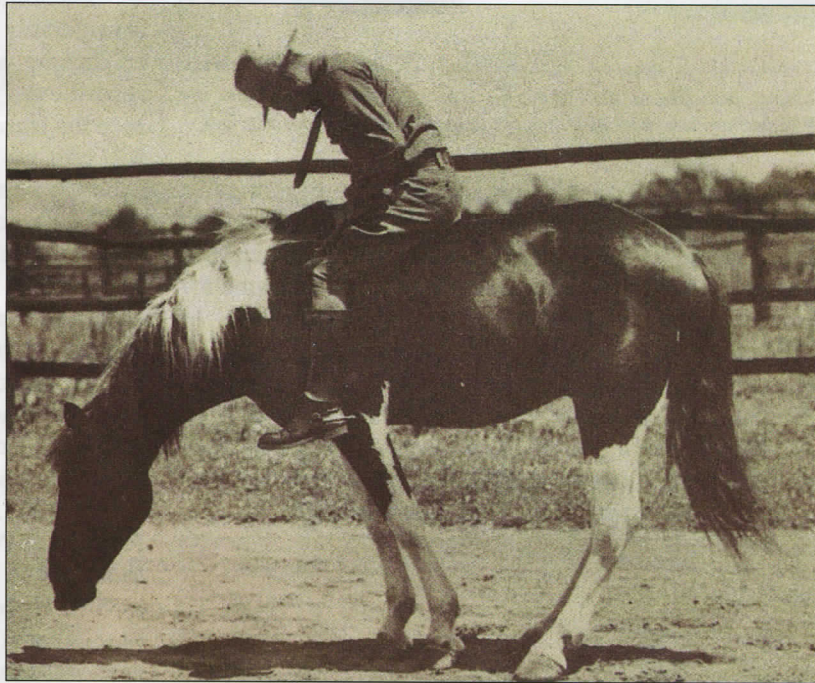
The act was performed numerous times during the many Troop C Rough Rider performances throughout the 1930s to thunderous applause. Mossman once stated that his chief delight was in seeing his horses work well. "The greatest thrill in handling horses is not in the hand you get

from the crowd yourself, but rather in the applause the good work of your horse draws."

William McKinley Mossman was born on Sept. 2, 1896 in Lexington, KY the seventh of nine children of George Andrew and Mollie Mossman. Bill, as the reader can discern, was named after the 25th President of the United States and who was in office when he was born. George, a native of Germany, was a butcher by trade. When Bill was 4 years old, the family moved to Richmond, VA where they resided for a couple of years before returning to Lexington.

At a young age Bill had dreams of being a jockey and

set his sights on a career as a horseman. However, his parents disapproved of his chosen career path, most likely because of what they saw as the "seedy" characters who typically frequented the stables. In the middle of the night during the summer of 1910, the nearly 14-year-old Mossman crept out of his house and ran away with a traveling carnival. He was made a "pony boy" and over the ensuing weeks the show made it as far as Texas before circling back to Kentucky. About this time the carnival went bankrupt and Bill was forced to walk 100



"The End of the Trail" recreated by Trooper Bill Mossman and Wondrous

miles back to his home in Lexington, and the probable whipping that awaited him.

Bill started working for some of the more prominent horse owners in the Lexington area as a rider but he soon grew to 5'9" so his youthful ambition to be a jockey was all but lost. He still, however, loved the equestrian lifestyle and soon joined another Wild West show doing mostly odd jobs. When needed, he filled in for the horsemen and eventually became a regular show rider. With this promotion he started earning \$15.00 a week and as he stated years later, thought he "was a millionaire."

Over the next 17 years Bill was a horse trainer and handler with all of the leading circuses of that era including

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The Troop NYC memorial monument, featuring an etching on the side of the monument with the "Trail's End" pose of Trooper Bill Mossman, is a focal point for the annual Memorial Day services.

Ringling Brothers, Hoagland's, Sparks, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sells-Floto and Howes' Great London. He performed with the famed, self-proclaimed "King of the Rodeo" Tex Austin's Imperial Rodeo in places such as Chicago Stadium, Madison Square Garden, and in 1924, traveled to London, England and performed in newly opened Wembley Stadium. He also rode for a time with both the famed Montana Belle Wild

West show and the 101 Ranch Wild West Show and Circus based out of Oklahoma. Barnstorming throughout the country, he made quite a name for himself in the trick riding circles.

It was with George Hoagland's Circus that Bill learned the art of Roman Riding, in which the rider stands atop a pair of horses with one foot on each horse. It was also during such a performance that he almost lost his life.



Trooper Bill Mossman and Major in 1932



The image etched into the Troop NYC monument at SP Manhattan

At a fair in Tampa, FL, Bill's Roman team set a new half-mile track record of 56 seconds under wet conditions.

The following day, the weather was considerably better and Mossman decided that he wanted to try to lower the record even further. At the start of the race his team left the pole with a rush. Bill had no sooner stood up when a rope that had been strung across the track for an earlier performance caught him under the chin, sending him flying through the air and to the ground with a sickening thud. He was rushed to the hospital where it was feared that he had broken his back, but an x-ray confirmed he suffered only a dislocated jaw. The next morning Bill was back at the circus stables ready to work.

In 1921, Bill joined Jack King's 1 X L Ranch Wild West Show which was touring with the Rubin & Cherry Shows in New Haven, CT. There he met a 17-year-old girl named Marie B. Pulaski, who was employed as a knife maker at the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. It is unknown what attracted young Marie to Bill. Perhaps it was his daredevil stunts.

About this time, Bill was a headline performer. He could crawl under a horse's stomach and around his neck at a full gallop. One of his most dangerous feats was when he would stand up in the saddle of a galloping horse and turn a complete somersault without the aid of the reins. Or maybe it was the way he could use a rope, swinging loops around his head, jumping in and out of them or lassoing a horse or some unsuspecting comrade.



"The End of the Trail" by James Earle Fraser (1876 - 1953)

Whatever the draw, when the show pulled out of Connecticut, it had one additional person on its roster. At first Marie didn't know the first thing about horses but with Bill's patient tutelage, she was soon one of the best show jumpers on the circuit. On Sept. 13, 1921 Bill and Marie were married in Reading, PA. Two children soon followed; William in 1922 and Helen in 1924.

In 1922, Bill and his new wife joined Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus where Bill trained the first Roman team to clear a hurdle in a running stretch. He also rode two of the most famous jumping horses, King Cole and Sunny Brook, clearing a six-and-a-half foot hurdle twice daily with the latter. The life of a circus performer was always a tough one filled with bumps and bruises, but with a family in tow it became much more taxing.

In June 1927, Ringling Brothers was performing in Elmira, NY with Bill and Marie billed as two of the star attractions. Bill happened to strike up a conversation with a local State Trooper and the conversation turned to Captain Daniel E. Fox and his famous Troop C Rough Riding Team, and its Spotted Ponies that had created quite a buzz amongst those in the horsemen industry with their recent performance at the National Horse Show at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

An introduction was soon made



Trooper Bill Mossman and Wondrous in 1938

between Bill Mossman and Captain Fox, who was always looking for good horsemen to complement his pet project. Fox was instantly sold on Bill's demeanor and abilities as a horseman and recruited him on the spot. As the soon-to-be 30 year old Bill stated soon thereafter, he had "lost all desire to follow the sawdust ring of a circus" and was tired of "almost breaking his neck" and he accepted and enlisted on July 1, 1927 as a New York State Trooper. Working exclusively out of the Sidney barracks, Bill's main purpose was to train riders and horses, not conduct police work. He rented a small bungalow in Sidney and settled down with his family for the first time.

Bill soon trained a number of horses to do tricks. For a few seconds

of delight for the crowd, it took hours and hours of training. His system was simple as he stated, "Show them what you want and then make them do it. And you don't have to get especially tough about it either."

Adhering to this principle to wow the crowds at the fairs throughout the

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The Troop C Memorial - Trooper Bill Mossman worked in this troop for 17 years



AFTER GETTING A FOUNDATION in the harness Jargo is being trained by Trooper William C. Mossman to do all the tricks expected of a well-handled "manage" horse in the average American circus. This is step number one.

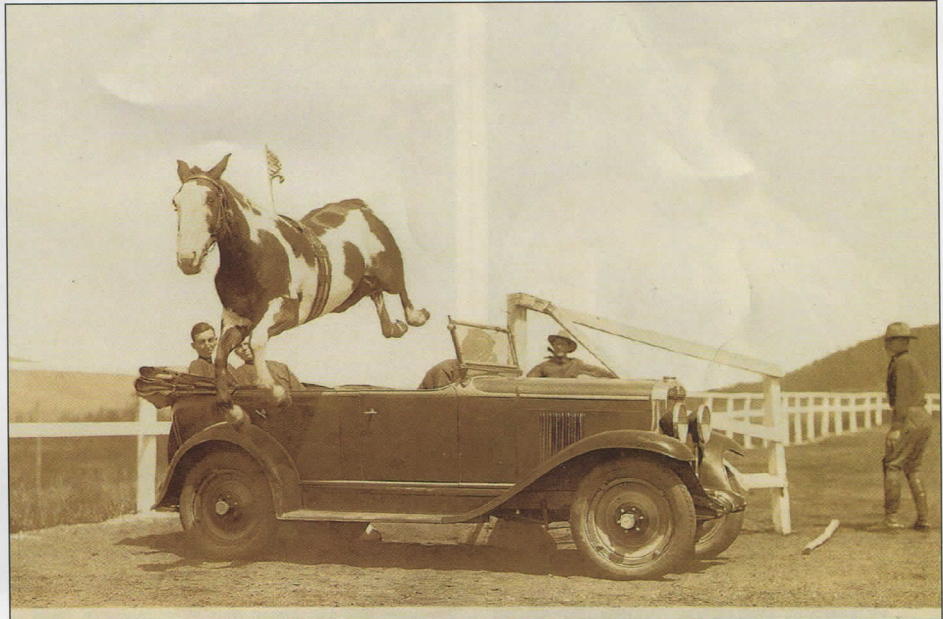
Trooper Bill Mossman with Jargo the Elk

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state his pupils shined. Chesterfield would clear an automobile in a single leap, Major was known as the dancing horse and Muggins was Troop C's talking pony because he would nod and shake his head to Mossman's questions. He also would "count" by dragging his front foot in the dirt and would lie down and roll over. Besides the "Trail's End" routine, Wondrous could do trick steps and pick up a handkerchief with his teeth. This was in addition to the normal repertoire that the Rough Riders did.

Troopers such as William Waldron, Guy Moore, Cody Compton, William O. Packard, Russell McLennan, Gene Palumbo, Matthew Haskins, Harry Shepard and Robert Flynn would thrill the crowd with different maneuvers and tricks while galloping full speed. For nearly 20 years, probably nothing promoted the image of the State Police more than the trick riding of Troops C and D.

Besides caring for the Spotted Ponies, Bill also cared for other animals including some steer in Captain Fox's menagerie at Sidney. One animal Mossman couldn't train was an ornery buffalo named Zack that Fox had acquired. It would chase anyone who dared enter its corral, leaving Troopers scurrying for higher ground. He did train an elk named Jargo to pull a sleigh, but received some bumps and bruises in doing so. One day as he came out of the barracks driveway with the elk pulling the sleigh, it became fright-



Trooper Bill Mossman, at far right, during a performance with Chesterfield

ened and bolted for home. The sleigh went one way and the elk another, with Bill still holding the reins. He was pulled, face down, through the hedge surrounding the barracks until some of his fellow Troopers were able to halt the runaway.

In May 1939, Superintendent Warner issued an order to eliminate all horses not essential to police work, effectively ending the trick riding team. Citing the need to cut every non-essential detail in order to have enough Troopers on the highways to assist the thousands of motorists who would be traveling to the World's Fair in New York City, Warner insisted the decision was not budget related.

Captain Fox asked for and received special permission from Superintendent Warner to perform one more time during the summer of 1940 at the Boy Scout Jamboree in Cooperstown. It appears as though this was the last public performance of the team. The horses were kept, however, at the Sidney barracks and Bill Mossman tended to them. They were brought back into service briefly during the summer of 1942 because of the tire and gasoline shortages, which made motorized patrols more difficult. Captain Fox garaged four Troop cars and replaced them with a four-man mounted patrol under the command of

Bill Mossman, and included Troopers Shepard, E. Palumbo and Packard.

After Governor Dewey took office in 1943 he initiated an investigation into the Division of State Police and the result was the retirement of nearly every Troop Commander and the Headquarters Command staff. After becoming involved in a power struggle with the head of the Troop C BCI, Inspector Ernest A. Maynard, Captain Fox was abruptly transferred to Troop B and filed for retirement within months.

Following Fox's exodus and the ensuing investigation, Troop C saw the departure either by resignation or retirement of 35 of its members by spring 1944. One of these men was Bill Mossman. Citing ill health, he resigned on May 1, 1944 and promptly moved with his wife, son, daughter-in-law and grandson William Mossman III to Binghamton and opened and operated Mossman's Restaurant on West Railroad Street in nearby Norwich for many years.

Bill Mossman died on May 19, 1983 at the age of 86. He once said, "Circus life, wild west shows, running horses, jumping horses, trick horses, Roman-racers, I tried 'em all, but the greatest job I ever had was working among the spotted horses here at the Sidney barracks." □



Trooper Bill Mossman, Horse Trainer Extraordinaire, in 1940