

## Living Legends Never Quit

Years ago, Denny Emerson wrote a column for the *Chronicle*, with a theme along the lines of “a good portion of success comes from just showing up every day.” He was speaking to riders hoping to break into the top of the sport, advising them to stick it out even in lean times and keep slugging away (and working hard, etc.), despite all the setbacks that life with horses will certainly bring. Not everyone will end up earning a red coat, but you definitely don’t get a chance if you don’t keep playing.



As is usually the case, Denny is exactly right. As we brainstorm to come up with story ideas, we frequently say, “Whatever happened to so-and-so who was all the rage five years ago?” Some people seem happy to devote a few years of their lives competing at an elite level, then just walk away from it all to do something else. Competing horses is such an all-consuming pastime, it usually requires sacrificing a lot of other opportunities in life, especially when it’s done at the highest levels.

While some people can leave the sport behind and enter the “normal” world, others (including Denny himself) remain immersed for their entire lives, without seeming to lose any of their passion for it. These are the people who are likely to end up enshrined in Halls of Fame and who you might read about in our Living Legends series (see p. 30). This time we’ve featured Col. John Russell, who at the age of 91 is still working with horses and riders every day.

Russell competed in a fascinating time, as the sport was changing from a military endeavor to a civilian pastime. Seeing the sport—and world—as he knew it upended didn’t deter him, though. He adjusted to civilian competition and the entrance of women into the sport and continued to devote his life to it.

Throughout the decades, whether in Pennsylvania, Europe or Texas, Russell made the most of whatever situation he found himself in, and the common theme was always horses and show jumping. While stationed in Europe, Russell sought out top international instruction and competitive opportunities. Long before that, he showed his ingenuity and drive to be with horses by riding work horses and circus horses, jumping bars of fire or convertibles.

“To have been there in those times—it just seems like it would have been so amazing,” senior editor Kat Netzler told me as we discussed Russell’s story. “You never knew what was going to happen. You must have felt so alive every day. I wish our generation felt more alive. I really do wonder who we’re going to be calling ‘a living legend’ 60 or 70 years from now.”

Looking back at his life, Russell has no regrets. While he believes he could have advanced more within the military if he hadn’t spent so much time focusing on the horses, he knows there’s always a tradeoff; if he’d taken a path to become a general, he likely wouldn’t have earned the same level of fame in his sport.

We hope you enjoy reliving some of the highlights of Russell’s nearly nine decades with horses. Not many people could outdo his longevity. I’m sure that Denny is impressed.

BETH RASIN, Editor

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### LIVING LEGENDS:

# Col. John Russell Is Still Giving Orders

*He's competed in two Olympics, won international show jumping events and coached Olympic teams straddling the eras of military and civilian competition. And he's still going strong at age 91.*

Anne Lang

**I**N COL. JOHN RUSSELL'S birth year of 1920, Woodrow Wilson was in the White House, American women gained the right to vote, and Prohibition took effect. The average price for a new car was \$400, and a decent home could be purchased for \$5,000. At the 1920 Olympics Games in Antwerp, Belgium, Sweden took home the gold medal in show jumping.

On his family's dairy farm near Harrisburg, Pa., a young Russell had already begun his own journey toward the Olympics. Aboard a workhorse named Old Bill, the 5-year-old boy rode bareback all over the farm. And when he was 7, his

father drove home one day with a gift for his son in the back seat of his sedan: a Paint pony named Spot.

"I rode that pony everywhere," Russell recalled, "and I even did a little jumping on him. My father campaigned trotters and pacers at county fairs, and I tried to teach those horses to jump, too, but I wasn't too successful."

Russell's earliest riding education was mostly seat-of-the-pants, gained from galloping his pony in match races with local children and playing cowboys and Indians on the mountain behind the farm. A next-door neighbor, a colonel in the



At the age of 90, Col. John Russell embarked on his third marriage, to Shane Brasher, his long-time assistant trainer.



Col. John Russell competed extensively in Europe during his military career, including at the Aachen show in Germany aboard Rattler.

National Guard, provided Russell's first lessons in basic equitation. But jumping remained the boy's passion, and when he turned 16, his father bought him a Thoroughbred named Scarlett O'Hara, acquired from a circus where her specialty had been leaping over bars of fire.

"Scarlet was brave. She was very hot, and she could really jump," said Russell, who also taught the mare to jump over his convertible. "At the local one-day shows, we won a lot of high-jump classes and the old-time triple-bar classes. They'd set just four or five fences in the ring, all of them triple bars, and they'd just keep raising them higher and higher."

Russell received instruction from notable horsemen Morton "Cappy" Smith and Joe Green. But when he turned 18, a wider world was beckoning him off the farm. In 1938, he joined the 104th Cavalry National Guard Regiment in Pennsylvania (led by the neighbor who had schooled him in equitation). Two years later, Russell was sent to the cavalry unit at Fort Riley, Kansas.

The assignment couldn't have been a better fit for the horse-minded Russell. In keeping with decades-old tradition, the cavalry unit rode in mounted drills.

"Even though we went to camp with the horses, they soon 'mechanized' us and moved us onto motorcycles," Russell said. "Still, we had a couple hundred horses out there, and we could ride any of them whenever we wanted to, day or night, because there were lights on the field. And we continued doing the mounted drills."

But drills were soon replaced by a flurry of reassignments as the United States entered World War II. Russell was sent to Army Officers Candidate School, graduating as a second lieutenant. He ascended to the rank of captain as he served in combat zones in North Africa and Germany.

Russell was in Casino, Italy, recovering from bullet wounds, when a Colonel arrived and said he had orders to take Russell to join a special unit.

"My commander said: 'Well, he's got a couple of holes in him, but I guess you can have him.' The colonel took me and several other officers to a big dinner and a nice hotel, then the next day he told us we were flying to Tel Aviv to attend intelligence-support school," recalled Russell, who served the remainder of the war as an air-support specialist, guiding planes near the front lines.

## Rising Star

Following the war, Russell took over command of the 88th Reconnaissance Company (aka the Blue Devil Cavalry Division). The unit was based in a castle in northern Italy and included a string of about 20 horses.

## TIDBITS



- Col. John Russell received a 2010 Lifetime Achievement Award from the U.S. Hunter Jumper Association, was inducted into the Show Jumping Hall of Fame in 2001, has been awarded the International Medal of Honor for Pentathlon, is a member of the Pentathlon Hall of Fame, and was a 2001 recipient of the FEI Silver Badge of Honor in Show Jumping for having completed 20 Nations Cup competitions. He was an official at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, has been a judge and course designer at the Pennsylvania National Horse Show, a technical delegate in eventing, a dressage judge, and holds an international judge's card with the FEI.
- Russell's decorations and medals from the military include the Soldier's Medal, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, African Defense Medal (with five Campaign Stars), WWII Victory Medal, European Defense Medal, National Defense Medal and Armed Forces Reserve Medal. Russell retired from the Army in 1980.



## HORSE SHOWS



The 1952 Olympic show jumping squad included (*from left*): Arthur McCashin, William Steinkraus, John Russell, Hugh Wiley and Bert de Nemethy. The first team open to civilians earned the bronze medal.

"We were out there by ourselves with all these horses," said Russell, "and we were given permission to train them and take them to horse shows. So we showed all over Austria and Italy. Two of them developed into pretty good horses, including one named Blue Devil, who I later took to the 1948 Olympics as a reserve horse and who won a three-day event in Vienna.

"We weren't spending all our time riding, of course," Russell added. "We also ran patrols from the castle."

Taking advantage of the access to Army-owned horses, Russell continued to hone his equestrian skills, training with the Italian Equestrian Team under Count Keckler, who'd ridden with Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini's Black Shirt Riders. In 1946, Russell became the first American to win the Nations Cup in Milan—and the next year, he reigned as northern Italy's leading rider. In 1948, Russell was reassigned to Fort Riley, where he taught advanced horsemanship and became a member of the fledgling U.S. Equestrian Team, which would soon replace the Army in selecting Olympic equestrian squads.

Russell earned a coveted spot on the U.S. show jumping team for the 1948 Olympics in London, and one of his most

vivid memories involved the opening ceremonies for those Games.

"As we walked into the stadium," Russell said, "I noticed that a lot of the other athletes were carrying newspapers. I had no idea why, until they released thousands of white pigeons toward the end—and we all got splattered. So at the 1952 Olympics, I made sure to carry a newspaper for protection."

For the first year or two after the 1948 Summer Games, Russell said, "The U.S. Olympic team horses were all in Munich at V Corps Army Headquarters, where we trained. And they were all under my command as the headquarters commandant of the brigade, so that worked out pretty well. I was able to keep Blue Devil for a good while."

Every minute that Russell wasn't engaged in Army duties was devoted to equestrian pursuits. He won the Nations Cup in Lucerne, Switzerland, and the Nations Cup and Puissance class in Dublin. He also became the first American to win the Aga Khan Trophy at the Dublin Horse Show. In 1949, Russell won the Prize of Paris and helped his U.S. teammates win the Puissance class in Vichy and the Nations Cup in Paris.



Juggling his Army career with international show jumping could get tricky, Russell admitted. The support and freedom he was granted for attending shows varied, “depending on who was General at the time,” Russell said with a chuckle.

Fortunately, Russell wasn’t going broke in the process. “At that time in Europe,” he said, “the horse shows paid the travel expenses for you, your horses and your groom, because they wanted good riders at their shows. So I was able to afford to show, especially when I would win prize money.” (Russell remembers some European jumping events in which the purse split between the top eight riders was \$25,000—enormous money in those days.)

Russell rode into the 1950s at the same blazing pace as the previous decade. In 1951, he won the West Point Challenge Trophy in New York aboard Blue Devil. The following year, he captured the Nations Cup in Mexico on an Army-owned horse named Swizzlestick. That same year Russell became the first non-German to win the ruggedly challenging Hamburg Spring Derby, on the first-ever American-bred horse to win it. That horse was Rattler, a Texas-bred Quarter Horse sired by Rattle Snake Tom.

“Rattler was a horse that I rode a lot at Fort Riley in 1947 and 1948,” Russell said. “The team captain, Col. Earl Thomson, had stopped doing the jumpers, so he turned Rattler over to me. I used him as a reserve horse on the 1948 Olympic team. Rattler was barely 16 hands, but he was built like a Mack truck and all muscle. He was very agile and very brave.”

The Hamburg Spring Derby organizers weren’t happy that a non-German had captured the prestigious event—or that the winning horse was an outsider as well.

“It was funny,” Russell said, “because at first the Germans tried to claim that Rattler was actually a captured horse, which would mean that a German horse had really won. But we were able to produce papers that proved Rattler was bred and born in El Paso, Texas. Then, because there were a lot of Russells living in Germany, they claimed that surely I was a descendant of one of them, which would mean that a German rider had really won. But of course we were able to prove otherwise.”

## Innate Intuition

Later on that year, Russell was reassigned to Pennsylvania, where he successfully tried out for the 1952 Olympic show jumping team (see sidebar). His mount was Democrat, a carryover from the 1948 team, who now was 19 years old and showing the effects of navicular disease.

“The big challenge was keeping Democrat sound enough to compete,” said Russell. “He got around the Olympic courses, but he had some rails, and I didn’t have the heart to get after him. In those days, we didn’t have things like Bute. We had to treat him with antiphlogistine, mothballs melted in the foot and white gas to stand him in. It didn’t help that the ground in Helsinki [Finland] was hard as rock. But Democrat made a tremendous effort.” (The horse was retired the next year to Whitney Stone’s Virginia farm.)

Col. Earl Thomson and Col. John Wofford, also the first president of the new USET, coached the 1952 Olympic team, which earned a bronze medal. Both men were former Olympians, Thomson having won eventing and dressage medals in three previous Games.

“I liked being trained by people who had done the Olympics,

who really had a feel for it,” Russell said. “Tommy didn’t say much; the main thing he taught you was control and to get there at a nice spot. He also did something that I don’t see much of today: Everybody walked the course alone with him, for their individual horses, not all at once as a group.”

Wofford passed away in 1955, but his family’s history with Russell runs deep. After retiring from the Army in the late 1940s, Wofford bought a horse farm that backed up to Fort Riley. Wofford’s son James followed in his father’s footsteps, becoming a three-time Olympian in eventing.

“Jimmy” Wofford said he doesn’t remember a time when Col. Russell wasn’t in his life. “From 1969-70, Johnny was my coach while I was running the modern pentathlon training

## Modern Pentathlon: A Different Kind Of Olympic Foray

In 1948, while Russell was in London to ride with the Olympic show jumping team, trainers for the U.S. Modern Pentathlon team asked for his aid in sharpening their athletes’ equestrian skills. (In addition to show jumping at 1.20 meters, they compete in fencing, pistol-shooting, swimming and cross-country running.)

Four years later, when Russell was at Fort Riley and preparing for his second Olympics, pentathlon team members were once again sent to him for riding training, and Russell continued to assist the team at the Games.

“After the 1952 Games,” Russell said, “the Department of the Army told me that I needed to get away from the horses and start doing some Army stuff if I wanted to keep getting promoted. But I had just become stationed in Maryland when I got word that I was being sent to San Antonio to work with the U.S. Modern Pentathlon Team. The general who sent me told me that if I succeeded in straightening out the pentathlon team, he would see to it that I’d be promoted—and sure enough, he did.” (Russell became a colonel after arriving in San Antonio in 1956.)

In 1956, he was named the Officer in Charge of the U.S. Pentathlon Team. (He remained as the team’s civilian coach after retiring from the Army in 1980.)

In 1959, Russell organized the pentathlon portion of the Pan American Games and the first Pentathlon World Championship at Hershey, Pa.

“We bought the world championship horses here in Texas for \$150 each,” Russell recalled. “Can you imagine that? These cowboys would bring ‘em in, and we’d lay down a couple of telephone poles. If the horses jumped those well, we’d buy ‘em—and if they didn’t, they went back on the truck. They weren’t bad horses, and afterward we sold the whole bunch to trainer Si Jayne for \$1,000 a head. One of those horses became a show jumping national champion.”

Russell served as the chef d’equipe for the pentathlon team at the 1967 Pan American Games in Canada. Every year through the 2004 Olympics, along with wife Shane Brasher, Russell continued to train pentathlon team members (some of whom became world champions and Olympic medalists).



Col. John Russell and Rattler, a Texas-bred Quarter Horse, were the first non-German pair to win the Hamburg Derby, in 1952.

stables as part of my Army duty at Fort Sam Houston," said Jimmy. "At that time, Johnny was the pentathlon team's head coach and its riding coach [see sidebar], so I was the non-commissioned officer in charge. I handled the day-to-day stable management and was the team's assistant coach."

Jimmy said he's long admired Russell's skills as a horseman. "Johnny has the uncanny ability to know what horses and riders are capable of doing," Jimmy said. "And despite knowing all he knows, he rarely makes what I would call 'technical' comments. George Morris is a technical coach; Johnny is an intuitive coach. You don't hear Johnny talking about keeping a straight line from horse's mouth to rider's elbow, or riding deeper in your heels, that sort of thing.

"Instead," Jimmy continued, "it's quite common to see one of Johnny's students approach a jump and make an error that I would describe in technical terms, but Johnny will just say: 'Don't let him do that,' without explaining what 'that' is. He wants the rider to figure it out. He'll just keep saying, 'come again' to the jump, and eventually the rider will hear him say: 'There, that's right.'"

The result, Jimmy said, is the student

### Back In The Day: When The Military Ruled Show Jumping

Prior to 1952, Olympic equestrians were required to be commissioned military officers in their respective countries. This worked out well for Lt. Col. John Russell, who in 1948 rode on the (unplaced) U.S. show jumping squad in London on an Army-owned horse named Air Mail. His Olympic teammates were Col. Franklin Wing on Democrat and Col. Andrew Frierson on Rascal.

"We were all pretty unhappy when they stopped using Army officers exclusively for the U.S. show jumping teams," Russell said, "because at the time of disbandment, we had a really good team and lots of good horses."

But the policy change didn't stop Russell (an Army captain at the time) from trying out for the 1952 team, this time on Wing's horse Democrat. He placed first at the trials, earning the distinction of riding on the last all-Army team as well as on the first team open to civilians.

Russell's teammates on the 1952 bronze-medal show jumping team in Helsinki, Finland, were Arthur McCashin on Miss Budweiser and William Steinkraus on Hollandia. Steinkraus, who would ride to three more medals (including individual gold) in four subsequent Games, had served in the Army's last mounted cavalry regiment.

Steinkraus and Russell have remained good friends. "Johnny was a typical Army rider," Steinkraus recalled, explaining that Russell and many other Army officers had been trained in the style of Brigadier General Harry Chamberlin, a 1932 Olympic show jumping champion who introduced the European forward-seat type of riding to officers at Fort Riley and Fort Bliss, having learned it while training in Italy.

"Harry Chamberlin was the architect of the cavalry school manual, and he wrote his own books on forward seat riding as well," Steinkraus said. "So Johnny's riding style was characteristic of an Army legacy that was exemplified at the cavalry school at Fort Riley. Johnny was a very good product of a very good system."

Steinkraus added that Russell was a pragmatic horseman, in addition to having a good theoretical background.

"If the Army way didn't produce good results, Johnny would find a way that did," Steinkraus said. "He was a very versatile rider, because in the Army, you learned to ride a lot of different horses. And he made do with all of them, no matter what they were. That's what made Johnny such a good, practical horseman as a civilian. He had great success with all kinds of horses, whether they went the Army way or not."



ends up with an answer based on his own feelings, instead of on mechanical explanations. "Johnny has a very unusual teaching style, and not one that many of us could copy, but I've seen it work," said Jimmy. "It's an almost magical insight. Johnny's strongest suit has always been his intuition about horses and riders."

Jimmy describes Russell as "charming, with a real twinkle in his eye. He's the consummate horseman, a true icon and absolutely horse-crazy. To this day, Johnny wakes up every morning thinking about plans for his horses and his riders."

## Switching Gears

In 1953, Russell (by then an Army major) was still immersed in international competition. He rode Lonie on the U.S. World Championship team in Paris and in 1954 was the fourth-leading rider in Germany. A year later, he competed in the World Cup at Aachen and as a member of the USET (with Bill Steinkraus and Hugh Wiley) at the Nations Cup in London.

The team was coached by Bertalan de Nemethy, described by Russell as "a down-to-basics kind of coach and a very good stable manager. Bert had a good way of putting a team together and preparing it well for a big event."

The squad toured Europe in preparation for the 1956 Stockholm Olympic Games. But military duties (and lack of a qualified horse, since Lonie broke a bone in her hoof) prevented Russell from trying out for his third consecutive Olympics, and he subsequently retired from competitive riding. (Then-rising equestrian legends George Morris and Frank Chapot stepped in to fill the void.)

By that time, Russell had been called upon to take a major leadership role in Olympic modern pentathlon. His involvement with that sport placed him in Texas in the mid-1950s and carried him well past his retirement from the Army in 1980.

Today, Russell presides over the 60-acre Russell Equestrian Center in San Antonio. The years have caused him to slow down, but he still trains his riders—most often from a golf cart—at home and at the shows. One of Russell's long-

time students is Gayle O'Rear, an adult amateur whose horse competes in the pre-green hunters. In the early 1950s, O'Rear's father (an Army dentist) was stationed in Germany. Her family lived across the street from Russell, his wife and their two sons.

"The earliest memory I have of John is when he and my father took me to the Army stables and put me on one of John's horses, which was in the stall," O'Rear said. "I was only 5 years old, too small to actually ride."

O'Rear became an Army nurse and, like Russell, traveled the globe for her job. Their paths crossed again in 1971, when O'Rear was stationed in the burn unit at Brooke Army Medical Center located near San Antonio.

"One day my roommate invited me to go with her to ride at a local stable," O'Rear recalled, "which she said was owned by a Lt. Col. Russell. As soon as I saw John, I knew who he was. Even back when I was only 5, he'd made an impression on me. I rode with John throughout my career and now into my retirement. I'd be assigned to different places all over the world, but when I had the opportunity to be assigned to San Antonio, I took it. Every time I returned, John was at a different location, but I was able to find him each time and rejoin his riders."

The lessons O'Rear has learned from Russell over the years "may not be in the books," she said, "but the skills and philosophies have worked for me. First, he teaches us to keep things simple. When I complained that I was having trouble seeing my 'spot,' Colonel said: 'The horse has eyes.' In the same vein, he also said: 'If you can't see your spot, it's probably not there, so just sit and wait until the horse jumps.'"

"Secondly," O'Rear added, "he teaches us to ride every horse as though it's going to be the best horse you've ever ridden. He feels that preconceived notions about how bad a horse may be will cause you to ride defensively instead of confidently, which will then cause the horse to react negatively. Finally, he tells us that if we fall off, 'Get back on, unless you're dead. If you're lucky, a friend will drape you across the saddle.' John's taught me that the only way to learn to ride is by doing it and by riding a variety of horses—good, bad and indifferent."

O'Rear also admires Russell's "charisma, loyalty and trust. Wherever John goes in the world, people always flock to 'The Colonel.' Everyone wants to talk to him, to listen to his advice, or just be in his presence. Although he's very quiet, he can be very entertaining because he's led such a full and exciting life. And once you're his friend, you'll always be his friend, no matter what—rich or poor, famous or infamous, young or old.

"Finally," O'Rear concluded, "John has the utmost trust in anyone he asks to do

Col. John Russell takes a break between classes in his office at his San Antonio farm, surrounded by photos and memorabilia from decades as a world-class rider and coach.



(Anne Lang Photo)



(Anne Lang Photo)

Col. Russell, still teaching today at the age of 91, offered words of wisdom to student Brigid Dobbs.

one. "C'mon, I know you know how to fix that."

Russell had set a challenging course and expected 100 percent effort and focus from every rider. There were mistakes, to be sure, but Russell's calm voice and steady presence helped the young riders work through their issues. When Russell would compliment a rider on her progress, she would beam with pride. That included 17-year-old Brigid Dobbs, who's ridden with Russell since 2005.

"With Colonel, there's nothing that can't be done," Dobbs said. "For example, if you saw my horse two years ago doing the 2'6" hunters, you'd never think she could have come out with a second-placed finish in a \$15,000 Grand

something for him, whether they're adults or young people. As a result, everyone does their best to succeed and not disappoint him."

## Life's Been Good

At Russell's equestrian center one hot, sunny Saturday morning in July, Russell was schooling a half-dozen teenage girls on their jumpers. He kept his comments simple and sparse, allowing the riders to figure out (and correct) their problems without micromanagement from him.

"Get your approach a little straighter," he would tell some-

Prix this past June, but Colonel never thought otherwise. He puts no limits on a horse's heart, mind or talent."

It's that same gumption that's led Russell himself through a lifetime of thrills. Later, in the air-conditioned oasis of his photo-lined office, he reflected on his long and storied career, as well as the path not taken.

"I've just been damned lucky all my life," he said. "I really have no regrets. Of course, if I hadn't done the riding, I might have been promoted more within the Army, and it might have been nice to retire with a couple of stars. But then I wouldn't have had all these incredible experiences with horses. So I don't think I'd change a thing." 🐾

## Making Room For Family

Despite the time that Russell devoted to the Army and his equestrian career, he did manage to marry three times. Russell has two sons: John Jr., who used to race horses in partnership with his dad and is now a cattle rancher in San Antonio; and Doug, who lives in West Palm Beach, Fla., and is a nationally-known course designer. Russell has three grandchildren.

In 2010, Russell married Shane Brasher, his longtime assistant trainer, in a low-key ceremony. The two met at the 1979 U.S. Olympic Festival, a now-defunct showcase for emerging American athletes, in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"I was working for a barn in New Mexico at the time," Brasher said. "I had been looking for a place to live with more equestrian activity than existed in Albuquerque back then, so I struck up a conversation with Colonel. After the Festival, we spoke on the phone several times, and in 1980 I accepted an offer to work for him in San Antonio."

As a horseman, Brasher said her husband is "really competitive, has a lot of drive and a lot of horse sense. So I think the combination of all that has always made everything work for him. He teaches forward thinking, forward riding and positive attitudes. And he instills something in these kids that somehow makes them uninhibited and very brave."

Occasionally, Brasher added, "Colonel will push you farther than you might feel you should go on a specific horse, and sometimes that does backfire a bit. He encourages you to ride outside your comfort zone, but when you do finally get comfortable, you've become a confident rider."

Speaking of Russell on a personal level, Brasher smiles. "You know the saying: 'You can take the person out of the Army, but you can't take the Army out of the person?' Well, that's him! He's still very much the colonel. He's definitely going to give the orders, and he's not going to take any flak. But in the overall picture, that's a good thing."



cient number of references to obtain a small “r” license, which then entitles him to judge unrecognized divisions at any “A” show and any divisions or classes at a “B” show. He must then repeat the same process to be promoted to a large “R.” Meanwhile, a small “r” judge may officiate at any “B” show and judge all the same divisions and classes he could not judge at the “A” show. However an “A” or “AA” rated show *must* hire large “R” judges, again, only for the recognized divisions. The same requirements apply to stewards and course designers.

The U.S. Hunter Jumper Association has implemented a new set of requirements, effective Dec. 1, 2011, to bring all shows, regardless of rating, up to a better standard. It's possible that this will help sort shows out and define them by their excellence, not just the money and points offered. This would be a major step forward.

I believe the reason more show managers don't offer “B” and “C” shows is because of the stigma attached by the exhibitor. This also carries over to many organizations that will not even consider allowing their special events (medal finals, championships, etc.), at anything less than an “A” show.

When “B” and “C” shows are offered, managers know that they will be considered a lesser quality event and fewer people will attend. I think more managers would be happy to offer them if exhibitors would support them. After all, it would be far less expensive to management, and they could then, hopefully, offer their product to you for less cost. Possibly it would be worth your while to speak to the managers in your area about these differences and encourage them to lower their ratings and their cost to you. Who knows? Stranger things have happened.

*Peggy Fackrell  
Sacramento, Calif.*

**Progress In Hindsight**

I feel the photo (“Don't Worry Blythe, We'll Never Do This To You,” Sept. 12, p. 66) does look staged, what with the guy's very obvious stance. However, it is such a sad commentary, isn't it?

On a brighter note, every time I feel like women really haven't progressed that much in the world, something like this, or an ad/article of 30 years ago, crops up, and indeed, we have.

Thanks for this.

*Diana Heagarty  
Lexington, Ky.*

**A True Hero**

Thank you for Ms. Lang's delightful article about Col. Russell (“Col. John Russell Is Still Giving Orders,” Sept. 19, p. 30). It brought back such fond memories of the years I got to train with him in San Antonio.

Back in the day he allowed some of his students and sons to school the U.S. modern pentathlon horses at Fort Sam Houston. Talk about Mr. Toad's Wild Rides! He trained us on donated horses from the government, which we jumped over

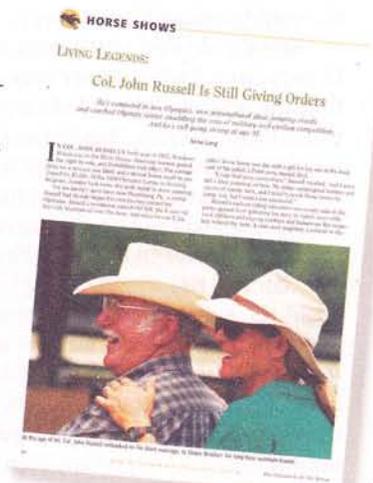
1.20-meter courses, banks and open water. Needless to say this gave us some great experience and sometimes bruises.

Jimmy Wofford hit it on the head when he described Col. Russell's unique teaching phrase of “come again.” I laughed out loud when I read this, because Jimmy summed it up perfectly with his description. It was just as he said: Col. Russell showed you how to basically teach yourself and in the process develop a real feel for the horse. His style and following hand as shown in the jumping pictures are textbook.

After moving away I had the privilege of riding with some great teachers, one of which was my late husband Ronnie Mutch. However, one never forgets a first mentor. I shall always be grateful to Col. Russell for his time and patience and most of all the basic horsemanship he instilled in me. He was a minimalist in every way, from medicating to the use of bits. He believed that a fit horse was a sound horse, and his theory has served me well all these years later with my own horses.

He is and will always remain a true hero to me, not only as a war veteran, but in many other ways as well.

*Martha Hall  
Mill Spring, N.C.*



**Serious Survival Instincts**

Bravo to George Morris (“An Education From Two Superstars,” p. 10) and Molly Bailey (“Heels Down In The Hunting Field,” p. 8) for their articles in the Oct. 3 *Chronicle*.

I so wanted to say the same comments but thought, “Who wants to listen to an old fox hunter?” When will the praying mantis position disappear and be unacceptable? Pam Carmichael's daughter Lillie Keenan could learn a thing or three from her mother about form, elegance and safety over fences.

God forbid any of the “up the neck, legs swung back” crowd steps in a hole, has a rider fall in front of them or a hound dart out of the woods. They are halfway to the ground already!

I'm not a great or particularly brave rider, but 45 years of foxhunting has instilled serious survival instincts. As Mark Phillips said in a clinic at Live Oak, “The crest release has ruined a whole generation of riders.”

If the position is correct, the horse can be removed, the rider set on the ground, and the rider will fall neither forward nor backward. The brilliant clinician Jimmy Wofford could be a huge help to a lot of show ring riders. When was the last time you saw an eventer lying practically on the horse's neck unless an involuntary dismount was in progress?

*Daphne Flowers Wood  
MFH, Live Oak Hounds  
Monticello, Fla.*