

Doug Calton's McClellan Saddle

By John K. Haws Jr.

When Doug Calton was a boy living in Cedar Fort, he enjoyed all the outdoor activities that a life in Cedar Fort provided. The open fields provided all kinds of adventures. It was the period after World War I but before World War II that Doug grew up in Cedar Fort. Doug loved life to the fullest.

One of his best friends who loved the out-of-doors as much as he did was my mother. Shirley Smith (Haws) was best buds with Doug. He reported that she was the only person that could whip him. She would often ride horses behind him. They had great fun growing up and they were always in trouble.

One of the problems of riding horses was that he didn't have a saddle. His father Kelsey Calton either wanted to provide him one or was tired of him using his, purchased either through trade or money this used saddle. The saddle was from a Lehi World War I veteran who had used the saddle in the war. Doug does not know the name of the veteran, but he was thrilled with the saddle.

The McClellan saddles were first designed for the Civil War. It was limited because most soldiers had to provide their own saddles. In 1863, the Confederate army issued the lighter and better-contoured McClellan saddle to its cavalry. Because leather was scarce in the South during the Civil War, many of the McClellan saddles had skirts of painted canvas.

The saddle Doug's father purchased was to the best of our research is a 1904 McClellan Saddle. The design underwent modifications over time, although in many ways it remained remarkably unchanged. The saddle was simple and less expensive than existing saddles, light enough not to burden the horse, but sturdy enough to give good support to the rider and his gear. It supported a rawhide covered open seat, a thick leather skirt, wooden stirrups, and a girth strap of

woolen yarn. Added accessories to the saddle sometimes included a nose bag for horse feed, a curry comb to groom the horse, a picket pin and lariat to tether the horse while grazing, saddlebags, and a "thimble" that held the muzzle of the cavalryman's carbine. The McClellan saddle was placed on top of a saddle cloth, shabrack, or saddle blanket¹

The use of horses in World War I has recently been featured in the movie, "War Horse", made by Steven Spielberg. They were the unsung heroes of the Great War, and nearly 100 years later their sacrifices are finally being recognized. Up to a million horses were killed serving with Allied troops in the war. Despite the brutal trench warfare, the cavalry still charged into battle on horseback. Their loyal steeds were used to dispatch messages and take guns, men and supplies to the front and casualties back to safety. In fact during the four-year campaign, more animal food was shipped overseas than ammunition.²

By 1916, the United States Cavalry consisted of 15,424 members organized into 15 regiments, including headquarters, supply, machine-gun and rifle troops. Just before formally joining the war effort, the US had gained significant experience in 1916 and 1917 during the Pancho Villa Expedition in Mexico, which helped to prepare the US Cavalry for entry into World War I. In May 1917, a month after the US declaration of war, the National Defense Act went into effect, creating the 18th through the 25th US Cavalry regiments, and later that month, twenty more cavalry regiments were created.³ The McClellan Saddle was the official saddle of such units.

This was the saddle that Doug's father bought for him. He used it all of his teen years. Doug married his sweetheart Colleen Slater and moved to Lehi. He has worked for Utah Power and Light a majority of his life. This longtime Lehi resident and Civic Leader (City Council, Civic Improvement Association) recently donated the saddle to the Lehi City Historical Archives. It is included with the Lehi Roundup Rodeo collection. This is a beautiful saddle with Lehi historical roots.

¹ Information received from the Society of the Military Horse. 1990.

² The Sun Newspaper: July 12, 2013.

³ Urwin, *The United States Cavalry*, pp. 174–176

The John Hutchings Museum also has a McClellan saddle that was used by a Black soldier during the Utah War. Bud Lott has two McClellan saddles in his collection. The McClellan saddle is not unknown in these parts. The McClellan company still produces saddles today.

The only thing not known is whom the soldier was that Doug's dad purchased the saddle from. If anyone knows if their veteran served in the calvary, please give the Archives a call at 801-857-8120.