

## MARYLAND DEFENSE FORCE CAVALRY TROOP A

Lieutenant Colonel (MD) Ron Roberts

### INTRODUCTION

The State Defense Force of the United States is a group of men and women who perform a myriad of missions in support of the military and civilian infrastructure. The Maryland Defense Force (MDDF) undertakes missions in support of the Maryland National Guard and the citizens of the state. To that end, MDDF Cavalry Troop A was formed and recruited with highly specialized personnel who can make a difference.

This article describes the missions of MDDF Troop A. The intention is that other organizations may see the benefit to be derived from forming a horse formation and will emulate what has been done in the State of Maryland. The MDDF's current Headquarters is located on the Pikesville Military Reservation, a facility initially constructed to house a troop of the Maryland National Guard's (MDNG's) horse cavalry.

### TROOP A, MARYLAND NATIONAL GUARD

The MDDF Cavalry Troop A was named to honor the MDNG Cavalry Troop A although no direct lineage to this unit is implied. The MDNG Cavalry Troop A (Balkoski, n.d.) was formed on December 23, 1897, and was comprised of expert young horsemen who lived in the Greenspring Valley area of Baltimore County. The first real tour of duty for Troop A was at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War when it was ordered into camp at Pimlico only a month after being issued their uniforms and equipment. The Troop made such a profound impression on the regular US Army officers stationed with them, that they petitioned the Federal Government to form a new US cavalry regiment, with Troop A populating the officer ranks. This very flattering request was, however, denied; and Troop A returned from the mobilization soon after.

Troop A was next called to service in 1904, during the great Baltimore city fire. It patrolled the streets of the city for two weeks, restoring order and guarding against looters. In 1904, the Troop A Armory (now called the Pikesville Armory) was built on Reisterstown Road in Pikesville as a home for Troop A. Located to the rear of the riding hall were stables and a polo field, which saw many matches. Troop A was the sole occupant of this building, which was used as a riding hall until 1917, when Artillery Battery A was formed as a counterpart. Eventually Batteries B and C were added. The former Headquarters of the MDDF was a building constructed on the Reservation to house Battery A.

Troop A deployed to the Mexican Border in June of 1916 and was attached to the 2nd Squadron of the 14th US Cavalry stationed at Eagle Pass, Texas. Troop A formed details that were assigned to various local ranches, from which they conducted regular patrols along the Rio Grande. Troop A returned to Maryland just



Troop A of the Maryland National Guard photographed on July 24, 1915

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prior to Christmas of the same year. With the advent of the American involvement in the First World War, Troop A was amalgamated with Troops A and C of the 1st Squadron, New Jersey Cavalry, to form the 104<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company (MP Co). The 104<sup>th</sup> MP Co was assigned to the 29th Division, American Expeditionary Force. After the war, the remnants of Troop A were joined with the 110<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, which for many years called Pikeville Military Reservation its home. However, former members of Troop A continued to hold reunions into the 1970's.

## TROOP A, MARYLAND DEFENSE FORCE

On January 8, 2004, the Mounted Troop of Maryland Defense Force was formed with the swearing in of its first and current commanding officer, then MAJ (MD) Ron Roberts. MDDF Cavalry Troop A was attached to the Headquarters component of the MDDF. The Troop's initial mission was to form a ceremonial mounted color guard for the organization. Recruiting was undertaken focusing on retired military and non-military personnel who had equestrian skills and were of a patriotic mind.

The Troop was not afforded a budget necessitating that prospective members pay for all of their own uniforms and equipment. A decision was made to carry the M1913 saber designed by then Second Lieutenant George S. Patton, Jr., of the 15<sup>th</sup> US Cavalry. A very fine reproduction was found, along with the requisite hanger to carry the saber on the saddle. The uniform at the time was the Battle Dress Utility (BDU) in woodland camouflage pattern with the MDDF's non-subdued insignia and name tapes. The Kevlar Helmet (PASGT) was decided upon as distinctly military and for head protection while riding. The National and State Standards The term "Standard" applies to flags carried by a mounted military formation; when a flag is carried in a dismounted role it is termed a Color.<sup>1</sup> were issued to the Troop in addition to the Organization Standard and Guidon. The Troop received the organizational designation "CAV" and that is what is represented on its Guidon. On May 1, 2005 the Mounted Troop's name was changed to Cavalry Troop to reflect the increased number of Troopers in the unit and the envisioned expanded role.



The Mounted Troop passing in review at its first MDDF Muster on May 15, 2004

In the spring of 2006 a proposal was made that the Cavalry Troop's name be changed to honor Troop A, MDNG, which for many years was the State of Maryland's sole cavalry unit. This was granted and on May 1, 2006, the MDDF Troop was granted the privilege of changing its name to Troop A, Maryland Defense Force.

On May 1, 2006, Troop A was granted the authorization to create a Regimental Distinctive Insignia. A final design was created and was approved on July 12, 2006.



Members of Troop A at the Rededication Ceremony for the Maryland Monument at Antietam

<sup>1</sup> The term "Standard" applies to flags carried by a mounted military formation; when a flag is carried in a dismounted role it is termed a Color.

With continued recruiting and increased support from MDDF Command, it was decided to supply the Troop with the Army Dress Blue Uniform, which was authorized for the The term Standard applies to flags carried by a mounted military formation; when a flag is carried in a dismounted role it is termed a Color. Maryland Defense Force to wear with such modifications as state seal buttons and teal branch insignia. The Troop first fielded this uniform at the Maryland Monument rededication ceremony at Antietam National Battlefield Park on June 3, 2006.

## Heraldry

MDDF Cavalry Troop A's motto is in Latin, PRODEO (Go Forward). This motto was copied from the Commanding Officer's family motto in Welsh, EWCH YMLAEN (Go Forward). Its Regimental Distinctive Insignia (RDI) is a white rampant horse, bridled for discipline, as it appeared on the entrance to the MDNG Cavalry Troop A riding hall (currently the Pikesville Armory). The shield is emblazoned with the Calvert Arms of Maryland as in the state flag of Maryland and contains the colors of this flag: black, gold, red and white.



MDDF Cavalry Troop A  
**Figure 6** Regimental  
Distinctive Insignia

## Ceremonial Mission

Troop A's first mission is to function in a ceremonial role for the Maryland Military Department as an aid in recruiting and public relations. The Troop's mounts provide an immediately recognizable aspect which the public invariably respects and appreciates. Due to the bellicose nature of any military organization, this fact serves to enhance and encourage interaction between the public and the military department in a friendly and non-threatening environment (Roberts, 2007). The following are some precepts of Troop A's ceremonial mission:

- Troop A, as already mentioned, outfits its troopers with the Army Dress Blue Uniform. The Troop has custom made riding breeches which use the same color as the dress blue pant with the correct gold lace. The use of the Dress Blue Cape has been investigated for use by the Troop in inclement weather situations.
- The Troop carries a reproduction of the M1913 Saber which was designed by then Second Lieutenant George S. Patton, Jr. It was felt that the carrying of a saber would reinforce the history and traditions of the US Cavalry, which Troop A is attempting to honor. In addition, Troopers perform the Manual of Arms on horseback as delineated in *Saber Exercise*, published by the US War Department, 1914. Troop A conducts mounted saber training exercises utilizing a course based on the U.S. Army's saber qualification course specified in TR 50-70 (1926) (Hammond, 2007).
- Both ceremonial and search and rescue missions require fit and obedient mounts that have no vices and are willing and calm. Troop A trains its troopers and mounts in a "School of the Platoon" process where they can learn by doing alongside veteran troopers and horses



Color Guard of Troop A at the Avenue  
at White Marsh Parade on November 10, 2007

accustomed to riding in formation. It also uses a drill manual modified from the US 1938 Cavalry Field Manual. Having said this, it is also true that certain breeds of horses are more likely to be successful in this type of equitation than others. While there are always exceptions, this has proven to be true.

### **Search and Rescue Mission**

In September 2006 a suggestion was made by the Superintendent of the Maryland State Police to train MDDF Cavalry Troop A as a rural mounted search and rescue asset. This was accepted and Troop A began training for this mission. As of the date of this article, Troop A continues to train for this demanding mission.

Troop A's second mission is to partner with Maryland agencies as a rural terrain mounted search and rescue (SAR) asset. Horses are uniquely suited for rural search and rescue because of their ability to negotiate hazardous terrain, going where vehicles cannot, their capacity to withstand inclement weather and their capability to live off the land. The following are some precepts of the Troop's SAR program:

- Troop A has pursued certification for Team members with the nationally accredited organization for SAR, the National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR). This prepares the team with the requisite set of skills to take part in a SAR incident as a member of a search team. The three levels of certification (National Association for Search and Rescue, 2007) are:
  - SARTECH III: This certification is the beginning level for SAR personnel.
  - SARTECH II: This certification is the intermediate level for SAR personnel functioning as field searchers.
  - SARTECH I: This certification is the advanced level for SAR personnel who may function as a Crew Leader.
- Troop A's training schedule for SAR includes the following subjects:
  - Land Navigation, both with the US Army lensatic compass and hand-held GPS.
  - First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).
  - Wilderness survival and tracking using the US Army Survival Manual 21-76 and the NASAR text *Fundamentals of Search and Rescue*.
  - Packing a 24 hour field load in order to remain in the field searching for missing persons a minimum of 24 hours, regardless of the weather.
  - Search patterns and clue acquisition in order to give the searcher details about the lost person leading to their recovery.
  - Crossing difficult terrain on horseback to become adept at crossing the quite often challenging terrain that can be expected to be encountered in an SAR incident. Training



in varied Maryland State Parks increases the confidence of the rider and the fitness level and surefootedness of the horse.

- National Incident Management System (NIMS) Incident Command System (ICS) – Troop A members are required at the minimum to pass NIMS ICS courses ICS-100 and ICS-200.
- Communications – Team members train with radio communications in order to interface successfully with Maryland Emergency Agencies.
- Create a manageable and trainable structure, such as a two-man team supported by a small Base Camp of 2 Troopers to handle communications, technology and logistical support. Currently there are four such teams that can be deployed on a Search and Rescue Incident.
- Create a realistic response time of one hour after receiving the deployment order from the emergency management agency for a Trooper to depart the farm with his or her mount en route to the incident site.
- Identify specialized equine equipment needed to carry out SAR operations efficiently – The following items are recommended to be carried in the teams inventory:
  - Lightweight nylon saddle bags
  - Equine first aid kit
  - Easy boot for hoof injuries, when a shoe is lost or for increased traction.
  - Collapsible water bucket
  - Lightweight protective saddle pad
  - Hoof pick with hammer for fixing nails
  - Clinchers to tighten nails
  - Dunking sponge on a leash

## CONCLUSION

In the future, Troop A looks to increase its strength by recruiting in areas of the state that have no representation. The Troop's squads are currently grouped geographically by county. With the advent of the Governor's proposed increase of the Maryland Defense Force by 2009, Troop A is planning to increase its complement of troopers and officers while performing its unique dual missions in support of the Maryland National Guard and the citizens of the State of Maryland.

Other professional activities contemplated by Troop A for the future is to establish a skill-at-arms competition for other modern day cavalry units which will encourage the development and proficiency of these units through friendly competition.

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