

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF CAVALRY IN HISTORY,  
WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE STATE DEFENSE FORCE  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY<sup>1</sup>**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

For the most part the horse cavalry has passed into the history books. Once such an integral part of the forces of every army, they have been consigned to the elucidations of authors and the visual panorama of artists and film makers. Those World War Two soldiers for whom “taps” has not yet been sounded may still remember the day in the United States Army, when thousands of horse soldiers, dressed in khaki breeches and brown campaign hats, passed in review to the triumphant sounds of the military band.

This article is concerned with briefly discussing the role of cavalry in the armies of the 18<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and then making a connection with the modern day military emphasizing missions that can be successfully accomplished by the State Defense Force (SDF). Given the lack of equine expertise of most officers possess, the SDF might present a way for keeping the cavalry tradition alive.

These activities, though not regularly sanctioned, may be authorized given the appropriate situation. This article is not directly concerned with the author’s modern day unit, Cavalry Troop A of the Maryland Defense Force (MDDF) (Roberts, 2007). However, it is the intention of this article that other SDF units will see the benefit to be derived from constituting a horse formation and will emulate what has been done in the State of Maryland.

## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF CAVALRY**

### **1750-1854**

As Napoleon stated so well, “Cavalry is useful before, during and after a battle” (D’Aguilar, 1902). The armies of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries could not wage war successfully were it not for a proficient cavalry arm, and bold and courageous cavalry leaders. The armies of this time had many uses for cavalry, and some of these uses were paramount to winning not only a battle, but a campaign.

#### *Reconnaissance*

Where is the enemy? In what strength is he? Where are his weak points? What will the terrain be like that our army will have to traverse? These and a myriad of other questions will need to be answered by the leader of a cavalry troop that is scouting in advance of the army, gaining vital information to be transmitted to the commander.

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<sup>1</sup> Dedication: To the brave and noble horse, which has served throughout history at man’s side, with a record that will never be forgotten.

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### *Line of Supply Protection*

Although armies of this time period occasionally “lived off the land,” which they passed through, an army’s line of supply and communications must be protected, as not all supplies are obtainable “on the spot.”

### *Flank and Rear protection*

While some commanders of the period were not as concerned with protecting their flanks, cavalry functioned as a mobile force that can be rapidly moved wherever there is a weakness.

### *To fall on the enemy when he is wavering*

An astute commander knew exactly the right time to employ his cavalry in a massed charge to break the enemy’s squares or line of battle. During the Napoleonic Wars in particular, massed cavalry charges influenced or decided the outcome of many battles. At the battle of Eylau in Poland in 1807, Napoleon ordered Marshal Joachim Murat to deliver such a charge when the French center was threatened. He charged the Russians at the head of 11,000 cavalrymen to stabilize the lines and preserve a sanguinary victory (Petre, 1901).



Figure 1: The French Cavalry Charge at Eylau

### *Pursuit of a beaten enemy*

Cavalry is useful to follow up a victory by moving with swiftness, to capture demoralized prisoners and much needed supplies, often turning a defeat into a major rout.

This period, 1750-1854, was the height of the mounted cavalryman, where the charge with drawn saber would play a decisive role in the outcome of a battle and where the paucity of cavalry could lead to an army’s quick demise. There would be few times again where the cavalry would be utilized as the arm of decision, and could impact the outcome of the day of battle so decisively.

## **1854-1914**

It began with one of the most celebrated and criticized actions in history, the Charge of the Light Cavalry Brigade at Balaclava in the Crimea, in 1854. Some of the finest light cavalry in the world charged into a valley bristling with Russian artillery and were subsequently decimated. French Marshal Pierre Bosquet, an eyewitness, commented “It is magnificent, but it is not war” (Woodham-Smith, 1953). Most of the British cavalrymen who participated in that action understood the recklessness of their charge, and many paid with their lives for the folly of the decision. It would not be the last time however, that cavalry would be used in a situation where the tactics were lagging behind



Figure 2: The Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava

the technology. With the advent of advanced weaponry (rifled artillery and small arms), with a greater range and rate of fire, the cavalry charge was a decidedly risky tactic that had to be used wisely, and at exactly the right moment.

The cavalry at this time period is characterized by and significant for the creation of the mounted infantryman, a highly mobile soldier with mounted skills, who can dismount and fight on foot. While there were some isolated charges during this period such as during the American Civil War and British Wars of Colonization, the cavalry charge was for the most part over. The armies of this period used their cavalry for screening and foraging operations and for scouting and raiding the enemy's rear areas and line of supply such as General J.E.B Stuart's famous raid around the Federal Army of General George McClellan in 1862.

### 1914-1945

The invention of the machine gun and the static trench warfare that developed in World War One heralded the beginning of the true demise of the cavalry on the modern battlefield. Barbed wire and quick firing artillery and rifles meant that the cavalry could only function in those theaters of war that had more open space, such as the desert or the vast expanses of Russia. By 1918 most of the European armies has dismounted their cavalry and used the vitally needed manpower as infantrymen. A notable exception was the four mile mounted charge of the 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Light Horse Brigade at Beersheba in Palestine in 1917 where they captured the town and routed the Turkish forces there. The 800 cavalymen took 38 officers and 700 other ranks prisoner as well as four field guns. In the two regiments, only 31 men were killed and 36 men wounded (Bou, 2006). On the Western Front, the birth of the tank meant that a highly mobile and survivable force capable of breaking through the enemy line and causing havoc was now available to the commander who saw its worth. The cavalry's historical role was passed on to the armored force.



Figure 3: The 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Light Horse Brigade  
Charge at Beersheba

In World War Two, many nations still saw the value in having mounted troops. Contrary to popular conception, most of the supplies and artillery of the armies of the world in 1941 were in fact horse drawn. Many countries in Europe continued to use horse cavalry, including Germany, Russia, Italy and Poland. A popular myth is that Polish cavalry armed with lances charged German tanks during the September 1939 campaign. This arose from misreporting of a single clash on 1 September near Krojanty, when two squadrons of the Polish 18th Lancers armed with sabers scattered German infantry before being caught in the open by German armored cars (Zaloga, 1990). Most countries by the end of the war had mechanized their cavalry. The United States began dismounting its cavalry in the 1930's and the last unit was reorganized in 1944. The last charge of the U.S. Cavalry took place by the 26<sup>th</sup> Cavalry (Philippine Scouts) on the Bataan Peninsula in 1942 (Glueckstein, 2005).

This period was characterized by the use of large masses of cavalry in a mounted infantry role in coordination with motorized units, most primarily on the Eastern Front. Those enterprising and adaptable commanders utilized the horse, especially when the extreme weather of the Russian winter rendered the panzers and other vehicles immobile. The horses showed that they could still get through.

## 1945-2007

In the post World War Two era to the present day, some “low intensity” conflicts have seen the use of cavalry in challenging terrain and where the logistical or cultural situation makes it advantageous to use mounted troops. Examples of these would be the Portuguese army in Angola, Rhodesian cavalry and the Chinese army in Vietnam in the 1970’s. U.S. special operations personnel deemed it efficient to use horses in Afghanistan, as the terrain is difficult and it made them better able to assimilate with the Afghan tribes. Apart from ceremonial units which exist in many nations, China and many Central and South American countries still have active cavalry units.



Figure 4: U.S. Special Forces Personnel Conducting Mounted Operations in Afghanistan

This period was characterized by the innovative and limited use of the horse to meet the needs of a certain tactical situation with success and the formation of ceremonial cavalry units to carry on the tradition of the time when cavalry played an integral part in every army. At the present time, with the ongoing technological innovations that have shaped the battlefield, it is important to see that anachronisms such as horse cavalry will have a place when the correct situation presents itself.

## DEVELOPMENT OF MISSION IDEAS FOR THE STATE DEFENSE FORCE

### Ceremonial

As previously mentioned, many countries currently have ceremonial formations of cavalry. Two of the most famous are England’s Horse Guards (Life Guards and Blues and Royals) and France’s Garde Republicaine. Sadly, the United States, with its rich heritage of horse mounted units, has no officially recognized cavalry regiment, other than a few small detachments at the unit level, most noticeably that of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas. The United States Army does have an infantry unit, the 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), which carries on the traditions and heritage with ceremony utilizing horses. They are most visible as the guardians of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, as well as providing funeral duties for soldiers interred at Arlington National Cemetery. From 1921 until 1941, the 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Cavalry Regiment provided ceremonial functions at Arlington and for a time was under the command of Colonel George S. Patton, Jr.



Figure 5: The Life Guards, Part of Britain's Ceremonial Cavalry

It is advisable for any SDF unit that has an equestrian bent to begin by embracing a ceremonial mission. This is especially true of states with a pronounced military history or a large equine population. A ceremonial unit forges a link with tradition by continuing the history of a certain unit by maintaining the presence of it in the public eye. The SDF unit can have a spiritual connection to the original unit (difficult for a State Defense Force unit to prove) or can choose to honor the original unit by recreating the name, with or without the duplication of a historic uniform. It is recommended that the state begin by forming a ceremonial color guard. The advantages of forming a unit with a ceremonial mission are as follow:

### *Public Relations*

It is generally accepted that horses are appreciated and respected by the general population. This fact serves to enhance and encourage interaction between the public and the military department in a friendly and non-threatening environment. This positive exposure will increase the unit's public visibility.

### *Work with children*

Children love animals and most have affection and interest for horses. Animals teach children responsibility and patience, as well as developing in them a work ethic. It is highly advisable that the unit engage in programs with children where the troopers model ethical behavior while teaching a no tolerance for drugs policy and other initiatives.

### *Military Department Recruiting*

A mounted unit is immediately recognizable. The advantage for recruiting is that this serves to put the soldiers in the public eye. It is desirable that the unit liaise with the National Guard (NG) and SDF recruiting personnel so that appropriate materials and correct contact information can be forwarded to those interested parties.

### *Working with the Governor and other VIP's*

It is worthwhile that the SDF unit undertake missions for the Office of the Governor and other important personages. This will create goodwill and help to reinforce relations between the state administration and the military department. Recommended events include parades, ceremonies, historical activities, equestrian related competitions and exhibitions, school and summer camp programs, support for state military and political officials, and state and county fairs.

## **Rural Search and Rescue**

Search and Rescue (SAR) is a humanitarian mission and can be immediately useful in those states which have terrain that is very rural, and where horses can be utilized to their best ability. In creating a Standard Operating Procedure, several important concepts come into focus. Firstly, it is suggested that certification for the members be pursued with a nationally accredited organization like the National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR).<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the training regimen should include emphasis on those essential skills that make up search and rescue. These include:

- Land Navigation with compass and hand-held GPS
- First Aid and CPR
- Wilderness survival and tracking
- Packing a 24 hour field load
- Search patterns and clue acquisition
- Communications

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<sup>2</sup> The National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR) website can be accessed at [www.nasar.org](http://www.nasar.org).

These subjects should be constantly reinforced by continued training to insure that a high level of competence is established, and continues to be met.

The highly specialized field of equine SAR requires that team members and their mounts are adept at negotiating difficult terrain on horseback. It is the complex terrain normally encountered in wilderness areas and state parks in which persons normally get lost. To perform this mission successfully, specialized equine equipment, such as lightweight saddlebags, collapsible water buckets, electrolytes, and tools to either pull or tighten a loose shoe while in the field is necessary.

Finally, team members should take classes in the National Incident Management System (NIMS) (National Incident Management System, n.d.) and Incident Command System (ICS) (Introduction to Incident Command System, n.d.), which will facilitate integration of the team with other state agencies and their command and control system. A manageable and trainable structure, such as 2-3 man teams with base camp logistical and communications and information technology (IT) support should be established. A realistic response time, such as rider and mount departing the farm one hour after receiving the deployment order, should be implemented. The suggested sustainability of the teams in the field is 24 hours.

### **Urban Crowd Control**

Some cavalry units, most prominently the excellent cavalry unit from the State of Connecticut, the Governor's Horse Guards (The First Company Governor's Horse Guards, n.d.), do train for a mission of Urban Crowd Control. This is a mission that is most commonly utilized by federal, state and local law enforcement agencies that have mounted patrol units. It involves the control and manipulation of hostile crowds by forcing the horses in tight formations. This is obviously a mission that requires a great amount of training, both for the horses and troopers. Additionally, there is a risk to the safety and security of both in an intimidating environment. Some factors that must be considered are, first to train horses and riders in formation riding and then in special crowd control formations, as follow:

- Line
- Column
- Wedge
- Left and Right Diagonal
- Box
- Diamond
- Obliques
- Side Pass

Next, it is important to use desensitization training to familiarize horses to the sight and sounds of the crowd; any horse that has been conditioned to be comfortable with a multitude of distractions and frightening circumstances will be easier to deal with, no matter what his job (Pelicano, 2004). Lastly, the command cadre must appreciate the need for specialized equipment to be able to carry out urban crowd control operations efficiently.

### **Remote Access Medical Team**

The principal of the Remote Access Medical Team (RAMT) can be best utilized in a state that has a large amount of wilderness areas without easy access by improved roads. The RAMT would give



a four-man medical team the ability to provide medical and logistical assistance to those persons in need at the time of a state emergency. The Team principle is copied from the U.S. Special Forces Team, and cross training of the team members is a necessity:

- *Team Leader*: Responsible for decision making, expert at communications and land navigation, extremely competent equestrian
- *Assistant Team Leader*: Best equestrian, responsible for the horses' welfare, trained as veterinary technician, handles pack animal
- *Physician*: Responsible for medical care, trained as equestrian
- *Nurse or EMT*: Assists Physician whenever needed, trained as equestrian, cross trained in communications.

A feasibility study was undertaken and it was determined should the need arise that it was possible to transport a four man RAMT team by airlift using a C-130E aircraft in the same way that sport horses are transported by passenger jet everyday around the world.

## **Security and Homeland Defense**

With the current level of threats to America's homeland, it would behoove the military hierarchy to take full advantage of the SDF as a trained pool of manpower within each state that maintains a United States Code Title 32 authorized SDF unit. It is especially noteworthy that the NG currently comprises approximately 40% of the deployed military forces. With the NG's homeland mission being severely strained by these deployments, it is natural that the SDF within the state fill the void.

Specifically, a mounted unit could be used in a variety of ways: The unit could guard national and state monuments and historic sites; reinforce, at their request, the U.S. Park Police Horse Mounted Unit; guard sensitive sites where the visibility of a mounted patrol would be a deterrent; augment local and state police mounted patrols, at their request, to enhance those that have been stretched thin by budgetary constraints; augment, at their request, the NG and U.S. Border Patrol forces deployed during Operation Jump Start due to the rural nature of the terrain along the border with Mexico (and Canada as well).

Generally, SDF units are not armed and typically have been given missions that support the NG's homeland security and disaster mitigation missions, which support this precept. The rules of engagement are so complex as to make the arming and training of these forces a prohibitive undertaking unless more means are made available, vis-à-vis, the State Defense Force Improvement Act H.R. 826 and there is support for this in the literature (Brinkerhoff, 2007). One source of literature presenting the history of the SDF movement, SDF activities, plans, and thoughts for the future can be found in the State Defense Force Publication Center (Hershkowitz, n.d.). One of those articles presents a guide to the many different homeland security activities for which a SDF unit might undertake in support of their NG unit (Hershkowitz, 2005).



## Large Animal Rescue

During a state disaster, such as a hurricane, flood or tornado, that necessitates the evacuation of citizens homes, persons owning large animals (i.e., horses) would face the agonizing decision to abandon them. The other alternative is that they flout the local authorities' edict, in which case their lives are in danger. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the fine Army Reserve cavalry unit from Michigan, the Blue Devils Horse Platoon, undertook to rescue these animals (Alan, 2005). They performed admirably, thereby presenting a mission concept that highly specialized cavalry personnel could perform competently. Increased training in handling animals and a thorough equine first aid course would be appropriate.

## Cavalry Troop A, Maryland Defense Force, An Example

The Maryland Defense Force is part of the Maryland Military Department. Cavalry Troop A currently consists of twenty officers, troopers and their mounts, and reports directly to the Chief of Staff. The Troop has two missions: (1) Function in a ceremonial role for the Maryland Military Department as an aid in recruiting and public relations; and (2) Partner with Maryland agencies as a rural terrain mounted SAR asset.



Figure 6: Maryland Defense Force Troop A Regimental Distinctive Insignia

It is advisable that the commander of a cavalry unit vary the unit's training schedule so that mounts get exposed to different schooling opportunities. In this vein, MDDF Cavalry Troop A has developed a specialized and historical training program. The Troop is undergoing a saber qualification course based upon the 1926 U.S. Army course. This course has twenty targets and measures swordsmanship and horsemanship equally. Troop Deputy Commander Captain (MD) R. Hammond wrote "Troop A will never draw its M1913's in combat, real or simulated, since the Troop members are neither combat soldiers nor living historians. Nevertheless, the Troop requires confident riders and obedient, fit mounts for the missions we do have. There is already a great deal of training in the Troop's annual cycle, but there are few things that match the saber qualification course for confidence building and unit pride." (Hammond, 2007). Furthermore, the United States Cavalry Association<sup>3</sup> annually hosts a National Cavalry Competition. This is an event where riders can improve their equitation and skill-at-arms on horseback by competing against like minded individuals.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 7: Maryland Defense Force Troop A at the Hereford 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Cavalry will continue to be of use, contrary to its detractors. Naturally, the cost of forming a mounted unit is considerable. It is this author's opinion that the positives outweigh the negatives. While a logistically daunting undertaking, Maryland's MDDF Cavalry Troop A began with one man and one horse.

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<sup>3</sup>The United States Cavalry Association website can be accessed at [www.uscavalry.org](http://www.uscavalry.org).

<sup>4</sup> For further information, the Maryland Defense Force website may be accessed at [www.mddefenseforce.org](http://www.mddefenseforce.org).

Safety should be the paramount consideration for those in a position of leadership of a fledgling mounted unit. This leader must possess a strong equestrian background of skills, and ideally should be a certified riding instructor or have a degree in an equine field as well as extremely strong organizational and communications ability.

The reinstatement of a US Army ceremonial cavalry unit, like the former 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Cavalry Regiment at Fort Myer, Virginia from 1921-1941 is strongly urged. Additionally, a national cavalry school and course could be constructed, not unlike in some respects the Army's Basic Airborne Course. This intensive riding and leadership course would be no less challenging and it may be discovered that certain arcane arts, such as horsemanship and swordsmanship, can still imbue young leaders with élan and dash, just as subalterns of the cavalry have embodied for hundreds of years. The ceremonial unit and school could be housed in the same location, for maximum efficiency.

Hopefully, the horse cavalry can continue to serve a useful purpose within SDF units and in other areas of the U.S. military, carrying on the outstanding traditions of the United States Cavalry, of which this nation is so proud.

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