

Militia Soldiering (1866 – 1915)

With the end of the Civil War, the National Lancers renewed its ties with elite militia units in other cities. In October 1865, the Lancers visited Chicago where it was hosted by Ellsworth's Zouaves. On 22 June 1867 the troop escorted President Andrew Johnson from the train depot to the State House. Annual inspections were held every May on the Boston Common and the troop attended five-day camps every summer. The annual celebration on 14 June was the highlight of the year with a ride through the city and a banquet in the evening attended by the governor, his military staff, the mayor and other political and military officials.

The Lancers escorted President Ulysses S. Grant several times. He usually came to Boston every year and in 1875 the Lancers escorted him during ceremonies marking the 100th anniversary of the Battles of Lexington and Concord and the unveiling of the Minuteman statue in Concord on 19 April.

The Lancers dedicated their own armory on 18 December 1872 at 1 Bullfinch Street with a ceremony and a ball. The Harvard Commencement escort detail continued every year. In June 1877 the troop escorted President Rutherford B. Hayes and President Chester A. Arthur in October 1882.

The troop attended Mardi Gras in New Orleans in February 1881. The troop chartered a train that transported the unit to New Orleans. The Lancers were hosted by the Continental Guards and attended a banquet hosted by the Louisiana Division, Veterans of the Army of Northern Virginia. This was a time that Northern militia units, now increasingly called National Guard, visited Southern militia units as part of the effort to renew ties and heal the rift created by the Civil War. In June 1883 the Continental Guards visited Boston as guests of the Lancers.

In 1886 the Lancers visited units in Washington, DC, Richmond, Virginia and Charleston, South Carolina. While in Washington, the Lancers visited the White House where they met President Grover Cleveland. In Charleston the Lancers were royally feted by the elite city militia units such as the German Artillery, Charleston Dragoons and the Washington Light Infantry. In recent times the National Lancers have renewed their friendship with the Washington Light Infantry.

The Lancers marched through the streets of Charleston onto the parade ground at The Citadel where the Lancers were formally greeted by the Corps of Cadets. (In 2010 a National Lancer officer, in formation with the Washington Light Infantry, reviewed the Corps of Cadets on the parade ground at The Citadel)

Muster rolls available in the archives of The Adjutant General's Office give us a snapshot of the membership of Troop A in the 1880s and 1890s. troopers enlisted for three years and most reenlisted. Thirty troopers were in their 20s, 50 in their 30s, and 30 in their 40s. The troopers were from Boston and surrounding communities. While most were engaged in horse-related businesses, there were professionals such as businessmen, insurance salesmen, lawyers, merchants and other professions.



Mounted Lancer in state issue uniform, dismounted Lancer in troop full dress uniform 1894

In October 1891, the Lancers travelled to Washington, DC where they were hosted by the National Rifles. The group photo and presentation certificate are on display in the National Lancers Museum. The troopers visited the White House where they were received by President Benjamin Harrison.

Troop A concentrated on its military duties in the period between the Civil War and the Spanish American War. There was an emphasis on

marksmanship in the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia as well as in other state National Guards. Both drill and tactical skills were stressed. Curtis Guild, Jr. joined the Lancers and became a skilled marksman. In 1897 1st Lt. Guild was appointed Inspector General of Rifle Practice in the grade of brigadier general. He served on active duty during the Spanish American War and in 1906 was elected governor. Guild's contribution to the marksmanship program was honored in 1926 when the new state marksmanship center was designated as Camp Curtis Guild.

Peacetime soldiering and social events were suspended on 26 April 1898 when the United States declared war on Spain. A detachment from Troop A was ordered to state active duty on 3 May and assigned as military police at the state mobilization center at Camp Framingham. Massachusetts was not tasked to provide cavalry for the war so Troop A

remained on alert but was not called into Federal service. The troop wore the Army blue uniform instead of the red full dress uniform when it escorted the governor to the Harvard Commencement indicating that the troop was prepared for active service.

After the war, the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia (redesignated as the Massachusetts National Guard in 1907) made strides toward becoming a professional military force. The Militia Acts of 1903 and 1908 gave the War Dept. greater supervision over the National Guard in return for increased Federal funding.

Military training for Troop A, 1st Squadron Cavalry took priority over escort duties and social events. The social side of the Lancers was formally incorporated in 1903 as the National Lancers, Inc. The troop commander remained as president, however, officers and members were current, former or invited members. The club took over responsibilities for the social events so that the officers and NCOs of Troop A focused on their military duties.

Both club members and Troop A cavalrymen wore the red full dress uniform during escort duties so that the National Lancers turned out 60 mounted riders. In September 1909 the troop escorted President William H. Taft during a visit to Boston.

As part of the supervision of the Guard, Troop A was inspected annually by a Regular Army officer. In 1911 all three Troop A officers were placed on Federal active duty to attend the Cavalry School at Fort Riley, Kansas. In February 1912 Troop A was called into state active duty during the Lawrence Mill Strike. It was unpleasant duty as many of the strikers were women. Nonetheless, troopers had to perform their duty.

The two mounted organizations of the Massachusetts National Guard, the 1st Squadron Cavalry and the 1st Field Artillery, had advocated for a large armory specifically designed for horse-mounted organizations to be built. Their efforts successfully culminated on 30 December 1915 when

the Commonwealth Armory was dedicated. It was the largest armory in New England and served both organizations for many years Both Troop A and the National Lancers, Inc. had excellent quarters in the new armory. The Bullfinch Street Armory, the Lancers' home for 44 years, was vacated in March 1916.