

World War I and Beyond (1916 – 1947)

Peacetime soldiering came to abrupt end on 19 June 1916 when Capt. John Kenney received orders at 2400 hours to mobilize Troop A for duty in Texas. This was the first Federal mobilization of the National Lancers in its history. The entire National Guard, except for coast artillery, was ordered into active Federal service by President Woodrow Wilson as a precautionary measure after the raid on Columbus, New Mexico on 9 March 1916 by the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa. To prevent the Mexican revolution from spilling over into the United States, President Wilson decided to seal the border with the National Guard. Massachusetts fielded a brigade with supporting arms including the 1st Squadron Cavalry.

The 1st rode to Camp Framingham and departed for Texas by train on 28 June. The 1st Squadron arrived at El Paso, Texas and occupied tents at Camp Pershing which was adjacent to Fort Bliss. The squadron began a rigorous training schedule which proved to be hard on trooper and mount. Heat, wind and sand added to their misery. The Lancers, who have always prided themselves on their horsemanship, proved themselves ready to take the field and conduct patrols in New Mexico and Texas. In a sign of modernization, the National Lancers Assoc. sent a check for \$500 to Troop A to purchase a Ford truck which was used to pick up supplies.

The Troop A Lancers continued to train and conduct patrols until November 1916 when they received orders to return to Boston where they mustered out on 18 November. Troop A returned to weekday drills through June when orders were issued for its second Federal mobilization.

After the United States declaration of war against Germany on 6 April 1917, Troop A was authorized to recruit to war strength of three officers and 105 enlisted men which it achieved within days. On 13 May 1917 the troop wore olive drab uniforms instead of the customary red full dress

when it escorted Marshal Joseph Joffre, Chief of the French Military Mission to the U.S. during his visit to Boston. The troop was on unpaid fulltime duty while it ordered uniforms and equipment and trained recruits.

On 25 July Troop A was ordered into active Federal service under the command of Capt. Kenney at Commonwealth Armory. The troop was busy taking physicals, filling out forms and taking care of their mounts. The troop went by train to Camp Framingham on 18 August and four days later found out that the 1st Cavalry had been reorganized and redesignated as the 102d Machine Gun Battalion, an element of the 26th Division.

It was a shock for the Lancers to find out that they had been dismounted and transferred to the infantry. Company A, as it was now designated, consisted of six officers and 172 enlisted men. A detail of 61 men from the 1st Vermont Infantry brought Company A up to strength.



Soldiers of Company A (National Lancers), 102d Machine Gun Battalion changing positions near Chateau Thierry, France on 19 July 1918

The 26th Division, composed of units from the National Guards of the six New England states, was the first infantry division to deploy to France. Company A left on 22 September and landed in France on 7 October. The 102d Machine Gun Battalion trained until 1 February 1918 when the 26th “Yankee” Division went into the front lines.

The 102d was assigned to the 51st Infantry Brigade of the 26th and supported operations of the 101st and 104th Infantry Regiments by providing heavy machine gun support. Company A and the 26th were transferred to various sectors as part of the acclimation to trench warfare. Company A helped repel the surprise German attack on the 26th on 20 April at Seicheprey.

Company A was credited with six World War I campaigns as part of the 26th. The company saw heavy action in July, September, October and November. It returned to the United States on 17 April 1919 and demobilized at Camp Devens on 29 April.

The company fought with great courage and distinction during the war. But it came with great cost; 27 Lancers died and 62 were wounded. Virtually everyone was gassed. Three troopers were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Army's second highest award for gallantry in action: Corp. Harold Batten, Sgt. Cola Gray, Pvt. Charles Toy.

While the active duty Lancers were in France, National Lancer veterans organized the 1st Provisional Cavalry Troop, Massachusetts State Guard in May 1918. The State Guard was the replacement militia formed for state service while the Massachusetts National Guard was in Federal service. The 1st Troop was called into active state service in September 1919 during the Boston Police Strike. The troop remained on duty for several weeks.

Prewar Lancers of Troop A and Company A, a few young troopers from the 1st Troop and new recruits reorganized Troop A, 1st Squadron Cavalry in March 1920. In November 1921 the 1st Squadron was reorganized and redesignated as the 110th Cavalry Regiment. Troop A was issued surplus Army uniforms, saddles and Federal horses. There were not enough red full dress uniforms so the dress uniform was the olive drab blouse. Troop A did have a few red full dress uniforms for special occasions. At this point in its history, the National Lancers split into two units.

Troop A, the National Guard unit, concentrated on its military duties. While it took part in 110th Cavalry social events and fielded a polo team, the troop was first and foremost a military unit. The Lancer heritage was heraldically displayed on the 110th uniform in 1930 when the Army authorized a distinctive unit insignia that displayed crossed lances with red pennons and the motto “Union, Liberty and the Laws.”

The National Lancers Association wanted to retain the social and ceremonial side of the Lancers. There were enough red uniforms in their possession so that they could carry out escort duties for the governor and VIPs but with fewer Lancers. For the next 25 years there would be two National Lancers: Troop A and the National Lancers Association which began calling itself simply the National Lancers.

The National Lancers took part in parades and provided the mounted escort to Vice President William Dawes, a descendent of the 1775 dispatch rider William Dawes, and General John J. Pershing in 1925. In 1926 the escort to the governor for the Harvard Commencement was reinstated. In 1936, just before the centennial observance, the Lancers modified their full dress uniform which remained largely the same since 1845.

Instead of a swallow-tail coat, a red tunic with a blue plastron was adopted. Officers wore gold shoulder knots with a gold cavalry officer's belt. Enlisted men wore red shoulder knots with the traditional white leather belt. Both wore the cipher N.L. on the collar. The blue breeches and lancer czapka were retained.

A grand banquet was held on 14 June 1936 marking the Lancer's 100th anniversary. Times had changed and so had the Lancers.

The heyday of the horse cavalry in the US Army was over. As World War II approached, the Army began converting cavalry regiments to other branches. In the late summer of 1940 Troop A turned in their mounts, saddles and cavalry equipment and was reorganized and redesignated on 9 October 1940 as Battery A, 180th Field Artillery Regiment, 26th

Division. The 110th Cavalry was no more; it was now a 155mm artillery regiment. It was a sad day in the history of the Lancers.

In January 1941 the 26th was ordered into active Federal service and stationed at Camp Edwards. In January 1942 the 51st Infantry Brigade with supporting units was detached from the 26th Infantry Division, designated as Task Force 6814 and shipped to the Pacific Theater. The 180th Field Artillery was redesignated as the 200th Field Artillery in February 1942 and in August as the 221st Field Artillery Battalion, an element of the Americal Division.

The former Troop A was redesignated as Battery A, 221st Field Artillery Battalion and landed on the island of Guadalcanal where the Americal reinforced the 1st Marine Division in its epic battle against the Japanese. The 221st took part in campaigns in the Northern Solomons, Leyte and the Southern Philippines as well.

The Lancer lineage continued after World War II in the National Guard when Battery A, 180th Field Artillery Battalion was reorganized at Commonwealth Armory in 1946. Few if any of its soldiers knew anything about the Lancers. In 1959 the 101st Field Artillery and 180th Field Artillery Battalions were consolidated to form the 101st Artillery Regiment. Battery A lost its identity in this reorganization.