

Accepting Challenges, Reaching New Heights

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They're called the militia, the state guard or the defense force. Sometimes, they're known as the home guard or state military reserve.

Whatever the name, they are citizen soldiers in the purest sense of the term, a well kept military secret and America's last line of defense.

These are modern-day minutemen and women — volunteers who provide their own uniforms and equipment, train without pay and stand ready to answer any call for help.

In Maryland, they are the Defense Force: roughly 350 troops who serve in units located all throughout the state. Maryland Defense Force troops, along with the Army National Guard and Air National Guard, make up the state's organized and *authorized* militia.

There may be no such thing as a typical Defense Force soldier. They're men and women, young and old, veterans and individuals with no prior military service. They come in all shapes and sizes; some are fit, some are out of shape and some have physical limitations.

What they have in common is a willingness to serve — to give of themselves, to help their neighbors, to devote time and energy to the good of a state they love — and to be there in times of crisis and need.

"We're all volunteers, and we do it for a couple of reasons," said 1SG Guilford Hicks, formerly the senior enlisted officer for the "Charlie Cobras" of Company C, 3rd Battalion, based at the

Olney Military Reservation in Montgomery County.

"First, we're doing something important. If there's an emergency anywhere in our area, we can respond," Hicks said.



"I'll make it. We'll all make it" -- CPL Joseph B. "Bernie" Greyz of Company C, 3rd Battalion, works his way up a tower on the confidence course" at the White Oak Armory in Montgomery County while fellow members of the "Charlie Cobras" look on.

"Second, it's a lot of fun. And it will be even better when we've got more people involved. I guess that's a hint that we'd welcome more volunteers."

Defense Force Trains for Multiple Missions

It's a cold, damp Saturday night in the first week of April — the kind of night people would rather be inside and warm, watching a movie television.

But 60 Maryland Defense Force troops are sitting under shelter, eating off their metal mess kit plates while they get a refresher course in land navigation.

These soldiers are taking part in a weekend training exercise in search and rescue. And they don't mind the fact that they're in less than comfortable surroundings.

"Hey, I could be sitting in an easy chair at home, reading a book or watching TV. But you know what? This is fun!" said LTC Victor Metta of Columbia, one of the training officers for the exercise.

"Besides," he added, "you never know when some sheriff's office or the state police are going to call up and say, 'We're got a child lost in the woods, and we need your help.' So we better be ready. And that's what this is all about."

It's another weekend preparing for a call that may never come, but a task Maryland Defense Force troops take seriously. After all, they've made a commitment to carry out the orders of the governor to protect lives and property within the state of Maryland.

That's their overall mission, and they don't mind



"We're right here, and the search area is ..." — MAJ Paula Woods of the MDDF Medical Command checks map coordinates during a search-and-rescue field training exercise.

United States, it is authorized under Title 32, Section 109, of the United States Code.

The Maryland Defense Force is a purely state force with no federal service obligation. Its operations are restricted primarily to within the borders of Maryland.

While its overall mission is to protect lives and property within the state, the MDDF can be called upon to fulfill this assignment in three distinct areas.

One of these more specific missions is **support of the Maryland Army National Guard** — which may require armory operation and security when MDARNG troops are in federal service, assistance to the dependents of military personnel on active federal duty, and the replacement or reinforcement of the National Guard in state service.

Another mission area is **emergency response**, with the Defense Force providing trained volunteers and units to support civil authorities — state and county police, fire and rescue, emergency medical services — during local or statewide emergencies. MDDF troops may be called upon to perform various specific missions in coordination with other agencies such as the MDARNG, MEMA and the Department of Natural Resources and with such other entities as the Civil Air Patrol, Coast Guard Auxiliary and the American Red Cross.

Activities may include but are not limited to such assignments as damage assessment surveys; ground search-and-rescue operations; providing medical, legal, administrative and logistic support at emergency shelters and processing centers; manning control points



"Here's what's happening" — The operations officer briefs MDDF unit commanders during a 1st Battalion search-and-rescue field training exercise at Potomac Park in 1996.

getting a little uncomfortable in order to carry it out.

Established under Article 65 of the Maryland Code, the Defense Force is part of the state Military Department (as are the Army and Air National Guards and the Maryland Emergency Management Agency) and is under the command of the Adjutant General.

Along with state defense forces elsewhere in the

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Defense Force Service Means Accepting Challenges

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What do Defense Force soldiers do? Consider the activities of Hicks' unit in one year, alone:

The "Cobras" won trophies for their color guards and marching units in parades, twice provided honor guards for civilian events, directed traffic and provided security for a community festival, conducted an 80-hour traffic safety mission over the Memorial Day holiday weekend and still found time for a family picnic, unit CPR certification



"Get down and keep it down!" -- A Defense Force soldier goes under the barbed wire while running the White Oak Armory confidence course.

and, of course, weekend drills once a month.

Training at drills included traffic control, first aid, search and rescue — and enough practice at marching

to bring home those trophies!

MDDF soldiers wear the Army uniform (with a red name plate rather than black to differentiate themselves from federal troops)

and receive the same pay as members of the National Guard when called to paid state active duty by the Governor. They serve without pay at all other times.

Why do they do it? Why spend one or more weekends a month (and not getting paid for it) to train for missions you may never be called upon to perform?

Why learn first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation and search-and-rescue techniques? Why spend hours marching or crawling, climbing, leaping and balancing your way through an obstacle course?

"Because you get a lot more out of it than you ever put in," said SGT Elizabeth Lohr of Company C. "I've learned things and done things I never dreamed of doing.

"You build pride and self-respect, and you earn the respect of others," she said. "The Defense Force has done a lot for me. I owe a lot to the Defense Force."

Missions Are Many and Varied for Defense Force Soldiers

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along evacuation routes throughout the state and relieving police at detours and security points in order to free them for more critical duties.

The third category of missions performed by the Maryland Defense Force is **community service**, in which the MDDF provides local communities and county or municipal governments with a trained, organized and disciplined force to assist them in performing numerous functions.

These may include visitor assistance and guidance during community festivals and other civic

events, directing vehicles in parking areas at community festivals, county fairs and similar activities, providing medical teams to augment local emergency medical services at public gatherings, furnishing personnel to augment local Emergency Operations Centers and communications centers during emergencies and supporting charitable organizations and environmental/community cleanup activities.

Most recently, and also as part of its community service mission,



"This is how we do it." -- MDDF troops get a briefing during search-and-rescue field training at Elk Neck State Park in 1998.

the MDDF has initiated a Cadet Program to involve young people in community service and to help them complete the state-mandated community service credits which are required for graduation. The program is open to junior, middle and high school students.

Defense Force Service Has Many Benefits

Ask any Maryland Defense Force member what he or she gets out of the service, and the answer will probably be “self-satisfaction.”

But when you give of yourself, you also get something back. Here are some of the benefits of service:

- **Training**

A variety of courses can teach you new skills and expand your civilian knowledge and leadership abilities.

The Defense Force offers basic, advanced and command/staff courses, plus training in such subjects as first aid, CPR, search-and-

rescue and land navigation.

Troops are also eligible to take applicable military correspondence courses and both resident and home-study courses from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

- **Financial Advantages**

All the expenses you incur as a Maryland Defense Force volunteer, such as the cost of uniforms, travel and related items, are tax deductible.

- **Worker’s Compensation**

State worker’s comp coverage is in effect while you are on active duty and during all training periods.

- **Awards**

Besides self satisfaction, recog-



Meeting Challenges -- Two MDDF soldiers overcome personal obstacles: swinging their way along the confidence course

ognition comes in the form of state military awards and decorations.

Among the awards for which you may qualify are emergency and community service, basic training, professional development, achievement and recruiting ribbons, and state medals or ribbons for service, National Guard recruiting, meritorious service and valor.

- **Challenge**

Many individuals need challenges in life that are different from the daily routine. They need to have goals that will build self-confidence. Successfully completing MDDF missions satisfies those needs.

- **Pride**

As an MDDF volunteer, the Defense Force soldier is part of the total military force protecting our state and nation. A few hours a month is not too much to ask of any individual to help preserve our freedom.

- **Advancement**

Just as individuals advance in their civilian careers, the Maryland Defense Force offers similar opportunities. Continuing service, increasing one’s skills and making valuable contributions to an individual’s unit, can result in regular promotions.

MDDF Offers Cadet Program For Young Marylanders

While the minimum age of enlistment in the Maryland Defense Force is 17, boys and girls as young as 13 may become part of a unique MDDF program established to help them complete the requirements for graduation from high school.

Students from each of Maryland’s 24 public school jurisdictions are eligible to enlist in the MDDF Community Service Candidate Program in order to earn their needed Student Service Learning hours.

Upon acceptance, these young volunteers become cadets and are assigned to one of five MDDF battalions located throughout the state. Within a battalion, cadets are attached to a company near their home, school or other convenient location.

Cadets train with their battalions or companies, may earn promotions (from cadet private to cadet private first class, cadet corporal, etc.) and, under some circumstances, may be called to state active duty. Service is for an indefinite period concluding upon graduation from high school unless discharged sooner. At age 17, a cadet who has earned his or her community service hours can then become a regular member of the Defense Force.

The Cadet Program not only helps young men and women fulfill their community service requirement for graduation but has another benefit: Parents can join the Defense Force with their sons or daughters, which makes state service a way to spend time together as a family in an interesting, challenging and constructive manner.