

## MOUNTED DETACHMENT, MARINE GUARD

### AMERICAN LEGATION, PEKING, CHINA

The Mounted Detachment, also known as “Horse Marines” was the first and only officially designated cavalry detachment in the Marine Corps. The Mounted Detachment was considered to be the elite unit of the China Marines. Although formed as a courier service during the Chinese Revolution of 1911, it was not officially designated a unit of the Legation Guard until February 1912. Originally, the total strength was 16 men, but by the middle of 1930’s the Mounted Detachment had increased to thirty-two. The Detachment also had a guidon bearer.



Marines of the Mounted Detachment in 1912 wearing summer uniforms. Their mounts are equipped with Army-issue tack.



Mounted Detachment, Legation Guard, Peking, in winter uniforms, 1913



1<sup>st</sup> Lt Edwin McClellan and the Marines of the Mounted Detachment, Winter 1912/13

The principal duty of the Mounted Detachment was to keep in contact with the American citizens residing in or near Peking. A census of all American citizens was compiled annually and kept up to date by weekly checks. In addition to drills, parades, inspections, cross country hikes, scouting and patrolling, the Detachment performed various duties such as Mounted Orderlies,

Stable Patrols, and Coal Guards. They continued their original courier service of delivering dispatches to other legations and also rode with the officers' wives and children whenever requested. In 1925, some of the Mounted Detachment Marines were briefly sent to protect an American mission on the outskirts of Peking. In 1933, City Patrol was added to their duties. In 1937, they were tasked to assist in recalling American citizens to the embassy following the outbreak of Sino-Japanese hostilities. Included among their commanding officers were James Devereux, the commander of the Marines on Wake Island, and Chesty Puller.



Lt. James Devereux, Commanding Officer, Mounted Detachment and Lady Marguard. 1931



Captain Chesty Puller. 1933

The Mounted Detachment also participated in drills, maneuvers, parades, mock cavalry attacks, races and steeplechases.



The Mounted Marines in Dress Blue Parade. 1927



Parade in summer uniforms. 1936



The Mounted Detachment returning from maneuvers. 1934-35



A Marine jumps his horse over an obstacle during a steeplechase event.

The horses ridden by Marines of the Mounted Detachment were primarily Mongolian ponies, weighing between 650-725 pounds and averaging about 13 hands in height. The Marines were selected by their light weight (140-170 pounds), knowledge of horsemanship and clean service record. The Mounted Detachment trained as a cavalry unit. All members ran pistol and saber courses for record, including the USN Corpsman who accompanied them on their cross-country rides.



Typical Mounted Detachment Marine and his mount. 1936



The Mounted Detachment was armed with eight Browning automatic rifles, three Thompson sub-machine guns, one heavy Browning machine gun and twenty M1903 service rifles. The members of the machine gun crew did not carry rifles.



Horse, saddle, and saber used by John Angstadt



Mounted Detachment with Patton Sabers.

Additionally, every member was armed with a .45 Colt automatic pistol and a U.S. Army Cavalry Model 1913 saber, commonly referred to as the “Patton” saber. One of the advantages of this saber was that it could be worn attached to the saddle of the horse instead of the waist of the rider. The Model 1913 Cavalry Saber was the last saber issued to the U.S. cavalry and the Mounted Detachment was the last American military unit to actually use this saber.

McClellan saddles, the same type as used in the Civil War, with hooded stirrups were standard equipment. A blanket roll consisting of a complete change of clothes, including footwear, was secured to the canticle of the saddle. Saddle bags containing toilet articles and mess gear and a rifle boot were carried on the near side with grooming gear, feed and horse shoes on the off side.



Philips pack saddles (pony type) were used to transport the machine guns and their

The Mounted Detachment wore the regular forest green winter and khaki summer service uniforms with regulation caps. The cover of the cap was white, green, blue or khaki, depending on which uniform was being worn. An addition to the winter uniform was a fur cap. In 1930, riding breeches replaced trousers. Mounted Detachment Marines wore riding boots and hard-shell leggings when they wore their dress blue uniforms.



Pvt Gerald Mechant, Jr., in his summer service uniform. 1935



Cpl Clyde D. Thierrien in his winter dress uniform.



PFC Curtis Knight, the iconic Mounted Detachment Marine, in his winter dress blue uniform. 1935



TSgt Novac, NCO in charge of the Mounted Detachment in his dress blue uniform. 1938.

Note the spurs worn over his shoes.



Mounted Detachment guidon bearer in his winter uniform. 1935



Boots worn by members of the Mounted Detachment.

In the mid-1930s, after the Japanese began taking control of areas of China, Marines began wearing helmets as part of their uniform. An unusual feature of these initial helmets was the glossy finish. This was achieved by stripping the matte textured finish of their helmets and refinishing them with a coat of olive paint. The Marines then polished their helmets to achieve an even higher gloss.



Studio portrait of a China Marine wearing a glossy helmet.



The Mounted Detachment on parade in Peiping, 1938. Note the high gloss of their helmets.



One of the most distinctive China Marines insignia items worn during this period was the cap diamond. These diamonds were color coded to correspond to each Marine company assigned to the Peking Legation and later Tientsin. Diamonds were only worn on the winter fur cap. These diamonds with EGA were adopted in 1929. Prior to that year, Marines would punch an EGA through their winter fur caps. The Marines probably adopted the company diamonds after noting that both the British Legation Guards and the U.S. 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Tientsin wore their unit crests on their winter head gear. A white diamond was used to indicate Headquarters Company. Dark Blue was used by A Company. Company B used red and Company C used powder blue. The Mounted Detachment used yellow. (After the Mounted Detachment disbanded, D Company adopted their yellow diamond.)



Winter hat with Mounted Detachment's yellow diamond.



Mounted Detachment officer's hat diamond.



Mounted Detachment enlisted man's hat diamond.

The Mounted Detachment also had had a unique patch, although it is not known where it was worn. It measured 7 3/8 inches by 6 1/4 inches. The patch was a red piped shield with embroidered red crossed sabers over a red embroidered horse head. Between the top of the crossed blades are the gold embroidered letters "MTD." Between the outside of the blade on the left, is a gold embroidered "PEIPING", while the blade on the right has "CHINA." Under the horse's head is gold embroidered "U.S. MARINES."



This patch was brought home by John Angstadt when he returned home from service in China in 1937.

In 1938, following the Japanese offensive of 1937, Colonel John Marston, commanding officer of the Marine Embassy Detachment in Peiping, decided to send the Peiping Marines to take over the U.S. Army's mission in Tientsin. This included most of the Mounted Detachment, minus their mounts. On 20 February 1938, Colonel Marston issued General Order No. 9-1938, calling for the disbandment of the Mounted Detachment. On 22 February the Mounted Detachment's final commanding officer, Lt. Dewolf Schatzel, and his 31 men held a final review on the grounds of the American Glacis (parade ground). Shortly after the review, a number of the men and their mascot, Trooper, were sent to Tientsin to form the nucleus of Company D. Several horses joined them in Tientsin; some were sold and others remained at the stable for Marines to use during liberty through 1941.



Lt Dewolf Schatzel leads the Mounted in a final salute. 22 Feb 1938.



"Trooper," mascot of the Mounted Detachment who joined his Marines in Tientsin to become the mascot of Company D.

If you are interested in learning more about the experiences of a member of the Mounted Detachment and want to view several hundred previously unseen photographs of the Marines and mounts of the Mounted Detachment you will want to check out the following book by Richard Bonham, *CHINA HORSE MARINE: JOHN R. ANGSTADT U.S.M.C. AMERICAN LEGATION, PEIPING, CHINA, 1934-1937*.

