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In infantry, McGee is happy to learn 'from the ground up'

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Montpelier Police Chief Dan McGee started a second career this year, as a soldier in the Ohio Military Reserve.

Dan McGee is a 21st Century Rough Rider, like Arizona Sheriff Bucky O'Neill who answered the call to duty and fought alongside Teddy Roosevelt at the Battle of San Juan Hill in 1898.

McGee, the police chief for Montpelier, enlisted with the Ohio Military Reserve (OhMR) on May 16, and currently serves as a specialist with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Combat Service Support Brigade, in Norwalk. The unit provides civil support for the state's Operation Steady Resolve during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"My intent after high school was to join the Marine Corps but I didn't," he said. "After the Gulf War in 1991 I regretted that immensely. I started my career as a police officer and when the second Gulf War came around I was like, 'Here's my chance,' but my lieutenant and another patrol officer got called up. I looked at it and I just couldn't do that to my department. I've been moaning internally since then, especially now that I'm 48 and aged out of the regular Army and all that stuff.



"People thought I was nuts for signing up at my age," he said. "I had the opportunity for a commission but I chose to enlist and I'm completely happy with that. It's a golden opportunity to learn everything from the ground up and I love being a grunt (infantryman)."

OhMR is one of three components in Ohio's State Defense Force (SDF), alongside the Ohio Naval Militia and the Cyber Reserve. All three fall under the command of Ohio Adjutant General John C. Harris Jr., as does the Ohio National Guard and Ohio Air National Guard. The only difference in uniforms is that SDF soldiers wear the state flag instead of the United States battle flag (which looks backwards until you realize that's how it waved as soldiers carried them into the fight during the Civil War).

SDF soldiers typically respond to natural disasters within the state or adjoining states. "We're a military force tasked with civil support and we have people deployed right now," McGee said. "People may not realize it but we've had soldiers in Williams County twice this year — once in Bryan right when COVID started and three months ago in Montpelier to assist one of the nursing homes."

SDF soldiers go through their own basic training complete with angry drill sergeants and sergeants major who instill military discipline. "Our command sergeant major is a true combat veteran and he scared the living crap out of me the first time I met him," McGee said. "Command sergeants major are scary in all directions. Even the officers quake at CSMs.

"I've enjoyed every bit of it so far, from the front leaning position to marching — lots and lots of marching — to understanding honors, it's been a very good experience," he said. "The only thing is I wish I would have done it sooner.

"For anybody who wants to find out what soldiering is like, this is a good opportunity to do that and we're always looking for more people," he said. "Some of the best people you'll ever meet are in the military. When you get to know them, what they've been through, you see they bring so much to the table."

At present, McGee is the only SDF soldier from Williams County and only one of six from northwest Ohio. But, he said, "It would be great to say we have a number of people from the area."

Lynn