
RAISING & ORGANIZING THE REGIMENT

1861

In a country like ours was in 1861, accustomed to a long series of years of peace and composed of a people not at all habituated to the performance of any military duty, the mobilization of a large force in a short time was a problem not easily solved.

History relates the story of the arousing of public sentiment in the North on the attempt of the Southern States to withdraw from the Union. I shall confine this narrative to the more personal story of the raising of the Volunteer Company and the organization of the Regiment to which I belonged, the 20th Indiana Volunteers, and shall follow this with an account of the Regiment's experiences, the whole intended to be my own personal experience as well as the movements of the Regiment during the War.

The story of raising one Company or one Regiment from county districts was like the story of each one so raised.

In 1861, I was living at Valparaiso, the County seat of Porter County, Indiana. Like the majority of the great mass afterwards formed into the gigantic Volunteer Army of the War of the Rebellion, the people of this county were living with no thoughts of the possibility of such events as came to them in the following four years.

We, who became members of the Volunteer Army from that county, were entertaining only hopes for the future bounded by friends, neighbors and our immediate surroundings.

I wished only for a light which would guide me to a way by which I could care for my mother, her daughter and other son.

I had begun to study law in the office of Mark L. DeMott, Valparaiso, Indiana, who later became Colonel in the Volunteer and held many offices including that of member of Congress. My law study had progressed to such an extent that I had hopes of being admitted to practice at the Bar after a few more months' work.

The War alarm was sounded. President Lincoln called for 75,000 Volunteers. I paid little attention to the matter except to keep posted by the newspapers as to the excitement of the country, and certainly had little thought of going into the Army myself.

On the 4th of June, 1861, J. W. Lytle, a personal friend of mine and of my mother, came to Valparaiso from a visit to his old home and the home of his father at Logansport, Indiana. At the latter place, he had come in contact with W. L. Brown, a Mexican War Veteran, and had been asked by Brown to help raise a Rifle Regiment which Brown had authority for from the Secretary of War at Washington.

Lytle had been a Civil Engineer and I had worked under his orders for some time while he was building a railroad from Logansport to Valparaiso, Indiana. I met him quite by accident, as he stepped off the train at Valparaiso. His first exclamation was, "You are just the one I wanted to see, for you are going to War with me." I was surprised, and refused. I pass the personal and affecting incident following his arrival, and say that on the 5th of June, Mr. Lytle and myself begun work raising a Company.

To do this, we simply rode through the country, informing everyone of our desires and sending out information that we had fixed on the 15th day of June for a grand meeting at the courthouse for the purpose of organizing a Company for the War under the call of the President for 75,000 men.

On the day fixed, the 15th day of June 1861, nearly everybody in the county came to Valparaiso, and so great was the enthusiasm that, in an hour after the meeting was called, we had enrolled 150 men or 50 more than we needed. So little did we know about military affairs that we supposed we could keep all of these men with us.

When the time came at that meeting for the selection of Officers, everybody was good-natured and Lytle urged me for Captain while I urged him to take it. Either one of us would have been satisfied with any position in the Company.

Lytle was made Captain by vote of the 150 enrolled. I was elected 1st Lieutenant. The 2nd Lieutenant and 1st Sergeant, Sergeants and Corporals were also elected, and, after a day of pleasurable excitement, we began our preparation to leave home.

We had fixed on the 4th day of July as the day for starting for the rendezvous. This day was fixed by Col. Brown for each Company to start from home.

Lafayette, Indiana was the place at which all the Companies were to assemble and the Regiment was to be organized.

On the 4th day of July, the day fixed for the men to get together, almost every man, woman and child in Porter County was at Valparaiso.

The only music in town was a fife and drum. The former was played by M. Cook, the Sheriff, and the latter by Jacob Brewer, the blacksmith. These gentlemen played all day and were only too anxious to march us to the railroad Station and to go with us to Lafayette.

The crowd at the Depot was very extensive, and we had plenty of time to say good-bye to all our friends. We went without change of cars to Lafayette, and so on the 5th of July marched into camp.

Other Companies came in from time to time until on the 6th all had assembled.

The Col., W. L. Brown, had some experience of war and, being a very energetic man, began at once to get his men in shape as well as he could. It was no easy matter to form the Regiment, as so few had any notion of what was to be done.

The number of the Regiment was given from the office of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana.

The Colonel gave the letters to the Companies, and the Captains, 1st Lieutenants, and 2nd Lieutenants each took rank from the place the Company occupied as to the alphabet. Captain & etc. of Company A, was senior Captain followed by Captain of Company B, and so to the last, or Company K.

The Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, Major, Adjutant, Regimental Quartermaster, the Surgeon and Assistant Surgeon were all appointed by the Governor.

This form of organization was only for the first formulation of the

Regiment. As vacancies occurred, the Lieutenant Colonel was promoted to be Colonel, the Major to be Lieutenant Colonel and the senior Captain was promoted to be Major.

In Companies when a vacancy in the Captain's place happened, the 1st Lieutenant of the Company was promoted and he was followed by the 2nd Lieutenant and by the 1st Sergeant of the Company. The Captain promoted in his Company took his rank with the rest of the Captains according to the date of his commission, and was promoted to be Major in that order, without reference to the original letter of the Company.

Our Company was lettered I, next to the last of the 10 in the Regiment. This was given because Capt. Lytle called Logansport his home, and that being the home of Col. Brown, the latter thought best to give us a low place. He was confirmed in this no doubt because Logansport Company was F.

In the formation of the Companies at Lafayette, each Captain selected his own 1st Sergeant, Sergeants, Corporals, Musicians, and so on, making his choice generally of those picked out by the men.



THE CAMP AT LAFAYETTE WAS AN AMUSING PLACE to think of now after the lapse of years. There were 1100 untrained Hoosiers there who had camped out often enough, no doubt, but never before under any restraint whatever. Guards were stationed around the camp, but their old style Harper's Ferry smooth-bore muskets without any ammunition were of little avail to keep men in bounds. Everybody was good-natured and having too much fun to get real mad about anything. Sentinels did not yet know that such a thing as military dignity could be in existence.

The men had great bunks in sheds with one side open and plenty of straw. No clothing was issued, so they all had to depend on what they brought from home.

Company messes were formed, and each Company was drilled in such movements as the Officers had mastered. The Colonel even essayed to move the whole crowd out as for Battalion drill, but this did not amount to as much as the other.

The Officers were as zealous and enthusiastic as we could be, and were

very busy preparing to be mustered into the U.S. Service. With all our efforts, however, I think of the camp at Lafayette is [as?] one of the greatest turmoil I can now imagine.

On the 22nd day of July 1861, we were gotten ready to be mustered in the United States Service. The Officers and men were not submitted to any medical examination. The Mustering Officer simply walked along the line of each Company, looked at the man's hands and general appearance, asked him if he were all right and sound in every way, and passed on. The Mustering Officer took his place in front of the Company after inspection and, calling on the Officers and men to hold up their right hands, read or administered to them the usual oath of enlistment.

Each Company was mustered in separately and was then dismissed.

The officer who mustered in our Regiment was Major Thomas J. Wood, 1st Cavalry, U.S. Army, a very dignified old soldier who had been in service since 1845. He was a graduate from West Point and from Kentucky.

As he passed around the line of Company I, he found a thin 6 footer in the second file from the right, in the rear rank, named John Smith. Smith had lost the index finger of his right hand. This was a serious defect. As Smith held out his hand, Major Wood said, "You can't shoot a gun with that hand." "Yes, I can," said Smith. Major said, "Do you think you could hit a man at 400 yards?" Smith replied, "I wish you would step out and let me try."

The Major went on. At the left of the Company he found a young boy with blocks placed under his heels to make him tall enough to pass muster. The blocks were taken away, and young Boulson went off crying like a child.

Smith was sworn in. Boulson went with me as sort of a servant until he became large enough to enlist, when he became a fifer of the Company and later the Chief of Field Music in the Regiment. He is now a prominent physician in Jackson, Michigan.

It may be well observed at this place that the 20th Indiana Regiment was composed of quite young men, most all from life in the country. I, myself, was only 21 years old in the month of May 1861. All trades were represented in the Regiment. The Captain of Company F was a Methodist Minister, while the Captain of Company A was a shoemaker; Captain of Company I was a Civil Engineer.

There were no strictly town or city Companies in the Regiment, but

each Company represented some County. There was a Company from each of the following Counties: Marion, Tippecanoe, Porter, Lake, La Porte, Carroll, Cass, Marshall, Jasper and Howard.

The Officers of the 20th Indiana at the time of the Muster in were as follows:

Field and Staff

William L. Brown, Colonel, Logansport
Charles D. Murray, Lieut. Colonel, Kokomo
Benjamin H. Smith, Major, Logansport
Israel N. Stills, Adjutant, Lafayette
Isaac W. Hart, R. Q. M, Attica
William C. Porter, Chaplain, Plymouth
Orpheus Everts, Surgeon, La Porte
Anson Hurd, Asst. Surgeon, Oxford

Company A

John Van Valkenburg, Captain, Peru
William B. Rayburn, 1st Lieutenant, Peru
John Hoover, 2nd Lieutenant, Peru

Company B

John Wheeler, Captain, Crown Point
Charles A. Bell, 1st Lieutenant, Corydon
Michael Sheehan, 2nd Lieutenant, Crown Point

Company C

Oliver H. P. Bailey, Captain, Plymouth
William C. Castleman, 1st Lieutenant, Plymouth
Joseph Lynch, 2nd Lieutenant, Plymouth

Company D

George F. Dick, Captain, Attica
Charles Reese, 1st Lieutenant, Attica
James A. Wilson, 2nd Lieutenant, Attica

Company E

James H. Shannon, Captain, La Porte

John W. Andrews, 1st Lieutenant, La Porte

John E. Sweet, 2nd Lieutenant, La Porte

Company F

John Kistler, Captain, Danville

John H. Logan, 1st Lieutenant, Logansport

Edward C. Sutherland, 2nd Lieutenant, Logansport

Company G

Nathaniel C. Herron, Captain, Delphi

William C. L. Taylor, 1st Lieutenant, Lafayette

William H. Brittingham, 2nd Lieutenant, Lafayette

Company H

George W. Geisendorff, Captain, Indianapolis

George W. Meikel, 1st Lieutenant, Indianapolis

William O. Sherwood, 2nd Lieutenant, Indianapolis

Company I

James W. Lytle, Captain, Valparaiso

Erasmus C. Gilbreath, 1st Lieutenant, Valparaiso

William I. Carr, 2nd Lieutenant, Valparaiso

Company K

Alfred Reed, Captain, Monticello

John I. Richardson, 1st Lieutenant, Monticello

Daniel D. Dote, 2nd Lieutenant, Monticello