

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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Home Guards

When the news reached Iowa that on April 12, 1861, the Confederates had fired upon Fort Sumter, a wave of patriotism swept over the State. Preservation of the Union became almost a religion. In the counties along the southern border of Iowa this patriotic fervor, plus fear of invasion by Secession forces, led to the immediate formation of several home-guard companies. Uneasiness was particularly acute in Taylor and Page counties in southwestern Iowa which bordered on Nodaway and Worth counties in Missouri where southern sympathy was strong. In these two Iowa counties home-guard companies formed the nucleus of the First Regiment of the Western Division of the Iowa Volunteer Militia, an organization which during its brief existence in 1861 played a conspicuous and interesting part in the southwestern border disturbances.

That the anticipated struggle was considered by some to be of little importance is evidenced by the first announcement of the formation of a military company at Bedford, the county seat of Taylor County. In the Taylor County *Tribune* for April 18, 1861, appeared this notice: "MILITARY COMPANY.—It will be seen by reference to a notice elsewhere, that Taylor County is about putting herself in a fighting attitude. Quite a large number have already enrolled their names as the bravadoes of some war which will never take place. The present distracted state of affairs has had the tendency to exert our citizens to such an action. Some of our patriots are scarcely able to keep their position any longer, and unless they soon get organized, equipped and something to do, they will certainly do something desperate. Gov. Kirkwood should immediately send a strong regiment to Mt. Pleasant, to protect the insane asylum, and also to Ft. Madison, to defend the penitentiary, for if the secessionists come into Iowa, their first attack will be at these two points; and if they once obtain possession, will fill them to overflowing." The sarcastic remarks of the editor, however, did not deter the organization of a local company on April 20th, under the name of National Frontier Guards. L. T. McCoun, a veteran of the Mexican War and a former soldier in the regular army, was elected captain.

Ten days later the citizens of Clarinda and vicinity in Page County met at the courthouse to

organize a military company for home protection. Patriotic addresses were made and the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

“WHEREAS, Our Country is now involved in a Civil War, and we as citizens of Page County feel that we and our property relations are unsafe and that as we are liable to suffer from the depredations of lawless bands.

“THEREFORE be it resolved that we as citizens of Page County, without distinction of party, recommend the organization of a Military Company for the express purpose of home protection.

“*Resolved*, That our action is not intended as aggressive or that we intend to aggress upon the rights of our neighbors, but act solely for our own safety.”

Twenty-eight men, young and old, came forward and declared that they were ready to defend their homes and friends from the attacks of all desperadoes and marauding parties. The meeting then adjourned until the next day in order to secure more volunteers. On the following afternoon, May 1, 1861, the organization of the company was completed by the enrollment of fifty-two members, and the adoption of the name Clarinda Home Guards. Thomas M. Bowen was elected captain.

Early in May a company of cavalry which took the name of the Taylor County Light Horse Company, No. 1 was recruited at Bedford under the command of Captain Douglas Dale, and likewise a

company of dragoons was organized at Clarinda under Captain J. Cramer. The Page County dragoons adopted a uniform consisting of a blue roundabout coat, a blue cap, a red leather belt, and black pants with a red stripe one inch wide on the outside of each leg.

Nor was the interest in home protection confined to the county-seat towns of Bedford and Clarinda. At Lexington in Taylor County — a town that has long since disappeared but which in the sixties was a rival of Bedford for county-seat honors — a military company was formed which took the name of Lexington Home Guards. At the town of Amity (now College Springs) in Page County the citizens met, drew up patriotic resolutions, and organized a company called Border Guards, No. 1. This company adopted a uniform consisting of a black glazed cap, blue pants with a red stripe one inch wide down each outseam, and gray or steel-mixed overshirts with red collars and ruffles.

At the little village of Platteville in Taylor County a company of Independent Riflemen was organized, while the citizens of Harlan Township in Page County met at Olive Branch School and enrolled a home-guard company under the name of Harlan Blues. On May 8, 1861, citizens from Amity and Buchanan townships in Page County met to devise ways and means for home protection. It was agreed to organize a company and the following resolutions were adopted with ringing cheers.

“Resolved, That we deem it necessary to form ourselves into a Military Company for Home protection and for the purpose of dispersing all Guerrilla Parties or Bands of thieves that may infest our county. And we will hold ourselves in readiness to coöperate with other like Companies in this and adjoining counties of Iowa.”

For a uniform this company adopted gray shirts with collars and cuffs trimmed with red and black, blue denim pants with a red stripe on the outside of each leg, and hats instead of caps.

Gratifying it was, indeed, to the village and town folk in the counties of Page and Taylor to witness the weekly drills of the local companies on Saturday afternoons or evenings. The gaudy uniforms pleased the eye and no one thought of the fact that the bright touches of color made fine targets. Lack of arms and ammunition, though, was a source of worry and uneasiness. A Taylor County delegation secured sixty muskets in Des Moines and these were hauled in a wagon from the State capital to Bedford. A Page County delegation procured some arms in Council Bluffs. Many members of the home guards furnished their own rifles and muskets, and the appearance of these weapons was far more formidable than their effectiveness in warfare. Nevertheless the sight of armed men drilling in the village square gave to the citizens a sense of security and kept their patriotism alive and vigorous.

On May 23, 1861, an excited messenger brought

word to Clarinda that the Secessionists were assembling in Missouri some six miles below Amity and were preparing to capture the Iowa village and burn it to the ground. Captain Bowen marched at once with his Clarinda company to the threatened community. Captain John McCormick rushed over with his Harlan Blues and Captain Joseph Smith with the Home Guards from Braddyville hurried to the defense of Amity. The threatened attack failed to materialize, and the assembled companies marched back to their homes without firing a shot.

This alleged danger led the Clarinda editor to remark, "The reported plan of attack on the town of Amity was well founded. A reliable gentleman of our own County has been into Missouri, and obtained definite information of the organization of Secessionists below the State line and of their preparation for an attack on Wednesday night of last week. Our informant says that they still swear they will make the attack upon Amity and burn it to the ground before frost comes again. And who can doubt but that they will execute their murderous threats, when a favorable opportunity presents itself. . . . Let our people be vigilant, and ever guarded against their enemies at home and abroad, regardless of the sneers that may confront them from neighboring counties. Do nothing offensive; keep on in the even tenor of your way; but be prepared for any emergency; and if attacked, 'welcome them with bloody hands to hospitable graves', that

they may go direct to his Satanic Majesty — the first disunionist of whom we have any account.

“But we should say, in this connection, that our people should not unnecessarily neglect their business. There is no occasion for much bluster. It is necessary that companies drill, but as a small portion of our time is occupied in this way the remainder should find us at our business, accumulating something for our families to subsist upon, should we be called into service.”

The Amity scare resulted in an increased number of drills on the part of the companies in Page and Taylor counties, and led to additional enlistments in these home-guard organizations. In the meantime the uneasiness caused from fear of invasion by Secessionists and the stories of persecution related by Union men who had abandoned their homes in northwestern Missouri and had fled into the border counties of southwestern Iowa caused the formation of additional home-guard companies. Two such organizations were created in Montgomery County to the north of Page, officers were elected, and the usual patriotic resolutions were adopted.

Plans were made to bring the companies in Taylor County together at Bedford on Saturday the first of June for a military parade and drill so as to prepare them to defend their communities from any attacks of the sort which menaced Amity. The day for the assembly dawned cloudy, and rain threatened to mar the success of the proposed maneuvers. By noon,

however, the sun had broken through the clouds and hopes of a clear day were brighter. All during the morning wagon loads of country people had rumbled into town, and vacant lots were filled with wagons and horses. While the horses munched their oats and corn over the end gates of the wagons, the men, women, boys, and girls from the country ate their cold lunches under the trees in the courthouse square. By noon the streets were thronged with people eager to see the soldiers.

Between twelve and one o'clock the company from Lexington, the one from Platteville, and the two Bedford companies were formed into line on Main Street under the command of Captain McCoun. Headed by the Bedford Sax Horn Band — recently organized and masters of a few tunes — the parade moved forward with military pomp to the schoolhouse where the speaking exercises were to take place. By the time the column reached the schoolhouse, the building was already filled with ladies so that the chairman was compelled to take a stand outside the door in order to make himself heard by those inside as well as by the soldiers and the throng of people in the yard. L. Lingenfelter of Sidney was introduced as the speaker of the day and he launched forthwith into a perfervid, patriotic oration. Despite the fact that soon after his speech began thickening clouds obscured the sun and intermittent showers soaked the outdoor audience, his remarks were heard with rapt attention and fre-

quent applause bespoke the telling effect of his defense of the North and verbal attack on the South.

At the conclusion of the speaker's oration the four companies were marched to the hotel for a flag presentation by the ladies of Bedford. Mrs. E. T. Smith presented a home-made American flag to the Bedford Frontier Guards with an appropriate speech, and it was received by Lieutenant G. W. Friedley who thanked the ladies in behalf of the company. Mrs. Ira Harrington then gave a similar flag to the Taylor County Light Horse Company which was received by Lieutenant L. M. Cox for his fellow troopers. Three rousing cheers were given for the Stars and Stripes and for the visiting companies from Lexington and Platteville. The patriotic speeches, the new flags, the assemblage of some two hundred soldiers in gaudy uniforms, and a wide assortment of arms made a scene never to be forgotten by the wide-eyed boys and girls of Bedford on that day.

Because of the increasing belief that southwestern Iowa was in danger of invasion from Missouri Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood authorized John R. Morledge of Clarinda to organize a regiment to be composed of ten companies from the counties of Page, Taylor, Montgomery, and Adams for the purpose of protecting the border. Accordingly Morledge published a notice in the Clarinda and Bedford papers notifying the commanders of volunteer companies in these counties to fill up the ranks of their

commands to at least forty men and to report with their men and muster rolls at Clarinda on July 4th to organize a regiment.

Meanwhile the Bedford companies continued their weekly drills, and their enthusiasm for military service was whetted by the arrival of several stands of Enfield rifles. Lieutenants G. W. Friedley and B. Arterburn of the Guards, and Lieutenant L. M. Cox of the Light Horse troop fired twelve shots with the new rifles at a target three hundred yards distant and lodged ten of the twelve shots in a mark the size of a man's hand. The editor of the *Taylor County Tribune* remarked that a strange thing about these guns was the fact that when you took hold of one it invariably pointed to the South.

Bedford women, too, took to marching in military formation and evoked the following facetious comment: "Military affairs are assuming a new and prominent phase in Bedford. We were surprised last Tuesday evening at seeing quite a formidable array of ladies parading our streets in military order. They presented a very gal—lant appearance. They were not well equipped, however. We think some of the gents might encourage them in their military efforts by properly arming them."

Under the date of June 24, 1861, there appeared in the newspapers of Page and Taylor counties the official call for the meeting of the volunteer regiment at Clarinda. Phrased in formal military language, the document read:

MILITARY ENCAMPMENT

CLARINDA, Page Co., Iowa,

June 24th, A. D. 1861.

GENERAL ORDER No. 1.

To the Officers and Companies of the Iowa Volunteer Militia in the Counties of Page, Taylor, Adams and Montgomery:

You are hereby commanded to meet, in Companies, under command of your chosen officers, at Clarinda, Page county, at nine o'clock A. M. on the 3d day of July 1861, and report your respective commands to the undersigned precisely at 10 o'clock A. M., for the purpose of forming a Regiment for the protection of the border, at which time and place you will proceed to elect one Colonel, one Lieutenant Colonel and one Major for said Regiment, and go into a temporary encampment until 4 o'clock P. M., and after the election you will be required to hold a Regimental drill, on the evening of the 3rd, and the morning of the 4th, and to remain in camp on the night of the 3rd.

Each company is directed to bring with them such temporary camp equipage, as will serve for one night, say one tent for each mess of eight men, and two days rations for each man, and those companies who have been armed by the State will come properly armed and equipped, and each man in Companies that have not yet received State arms, is requested to bring his rifle and such arms as he can best procure for the occasion.

You will be discharged on the 4th when you can return to your respective homes.

By order of the Governor,

JNO. R. MORLEDGE,
Commanding

This first general order aroused keen anticipation in the various home-guard companies concerned, and the day set for the rendezvous was awaited with eagerness. Although Captain Bowen's infantry company at Clarinda had left for Omaha late in June to enter the United States service, another home-guard company was soon organized with N. B. Moore as captain. Infantry companies from a distance began to arrive at Clarinda in wagons on Tuesday evening, July 2nd, while the members of the cavalry companies rode their mounts to the Page County capital. The Bedford infantry company was the first to arrive, and by 10 o'clock on July 3rd most of the volunteers were in camp.

The Clarinda editor remarked, "as the novelty of the encampment brought with each company swarms of civilians, our town was as well filled with patriots, as Baltimore with Plug Uglies, or Purgatory with Secessionists. During the continuance of the encampment everything was stir and bustle; night and day either the tread and tramp of horses and men, or the sound of martial music filled our ears. It was march and counter march from early morn until the shades of evening. Squads, platoons, and companies going through all the manoeuvres of well drilled soldiers presented an aspect indeed imposing."

The regiment was composed of ten companies of infantry and five of cavalry, ranging in size from forty-one men in the smallest to sixty-four in the

largest company. Officially the companies were designated by letters according to military custom, but popular usage retained the more euphonious names previously adopted. The National Frontier Guards, Harlan Blues, Border Guards, No. 1, Independent Riflemen, Nodaway Home Guards, Clarinda Home Guards, Union Guards, Montgomery County Tigers, Union Rangers, and Highland Blues constituted the infantry units of the regiment; while the mounted riflemen were known as the Taylor County Light Horse, the Page County Rangers, the Nodaway Rangers, the Independent Eagle Company, and the Montgomery Rangers. Two of the companies came from Montgomery County, Taylor County furnished three, and the other ten were from Page County.

On the afternoon of July 3rd came the election of regimental officers. John R. Morledge of Clarinda was chosen colonel; L. T. McCoun of Bedford, lieutenant colonel; and David Ellison of Frankfort, major. Thus Page County secured the office of colonel, that of lieutenant colonel went to Taylor County, while a representative of Montgomery County became major. All of these men possessed the proper qualifications for successful officers. Of the three L. T. McCoun had had the most military experience, first in the Mexican War, then in the regular army, and also in a regiment of volunteers in Indiana. The captains, too, were leaders worthy of the honor. Captain John B. Van Sant, for ex-

ample, had spent two years at West Point before coming to Iowa to settle on a farm.

The presence of some seven hundred and fifty armed and uniformed men made the Fourth of July at Clarinda in 1861 a memorable occasion. The largest crowd ever assembled in southwestern Iowa up to that time thronged the town and thrilled with patriotic pride when the newly created First Regiment of the Western Division of the Iowa Volunteer Militia led the procession from the public square to the fair grounds for the exercises of the morning. Over three thousand people, declared a local paper, listened to the program which began with prayer by the chaplain, followed in turn by "Hail Columbia", the reading of the Declaration of Independence, and the "Marseillaise". A stirring, patriotic address was delivered by B. Rector of Sidney, Fremont County, Iowa, and the formal program ended with the singing of "The Red, White, and Blue". A bounteous picnic dinner at which the soldiers were honored guests was a testimonial of the hospitality of Page County citizens. The day was hot, the roads were dusty, but everyone enjoyed "a glorious celebration of the nation's birthday."

At three o'clock in the afternoon the procession was formed to return to the public square and, led by the soldiers, the crowd returned to the center of the town. Here the regiment was dismissed and the out-of-town companies began to depart one by one for their homes. The presence of the First Regi-

ment of the Western Division of the Iowa Volunteer Militia, the men armed with a wide assortment of rifles and muskets, and each company uniformed in a different style had made the Fourth of July in 1861 a gala day at Clarinda. Little did the departing soldiers realize that within twenty-four hours they were to be called upon to invade Missouri.

BRUCE E. MAHAN