

Marching as to War

In view of apprehended outbreaks on the southern border of Taylor and Ringgold counties in southwestern Iowa, Colonel John Edwards, aide-de-camp to Governor Kirkwood, ordered various home-guard companies into camp near the State line late in July and early in August, 1861. Edwards instituted strict military discipline in these camps and began to systematize the training of home-guard companies so as to make them more effective fighting units for the defense of the border.

The Frontier Guards of Bedford went into camp on the fourth of August, while the Taylor County Light Horse troop pitched camp on Honey Creek east of Bedford a few days later. Forty additional stands of Enfield rifles recently obtained for the cavalry and twenty-six for the infantry, together with the acquisition of a considerable amount of ammunition, made these companies well-equipped for service. Although the weather was uncomfortably warm the men enjoyed the experience of camping in the open. Drill began at five o'clock in the morning and lasted an hour. Breakfast was followed by another hour of drill. Then the men were free to do as they pleased until five-thirty in the afternoon when drill was again resumed.

Visitors from Bedford came daily to both camps

bringing baskets filled with cakes and pies and fried chicken. Every day was, in fact, a sort of holiday. One enjoyable event of the encampment period was the visit of the Frontier Guards to the camp of the Light Horse Troop. Led by their fife and drum corps playing a martial air, with colors flying and bayonets gleaming, the infantry company marched into the camp of their fellow townsmen. In the afternoon the athletes of the two companies engaged in wrestling, jumping, and running contests while the marksmen showed their skill in target practice. Honors were practically even when the setting sun of late afternoon made necessary the return of the infantry to their own camp. Escorted by the cavalymen who loaned their mounts to their visitors, the Frontier Guards rode back to camp whence the troopers in a swirl of dust galloped back to their own establishment on Honey Creek.

By the middle of August, 1861, peace seemed to be established between the Union and Secession factions in northwestern Missouri. Contrary to common opinion in southwestern Iowa the treaty of peace drawn up near Gentryville in July seemed to be observed by both sides. Consequently Colonel Edwards, ordered the encampments along the border to be abandoned.

It was with considerable regret that the two Bedford companies folded their tents and packed up their equipment, for their fifteen days in camp had been an enjoyable outing. They looked forward,

however, with pleasant anticipation to the proposed encampment of all the companies of the First Regiment of Western Iowa Volunteer Militia to be held at Bedford early in September. Although most of the men in this regiment had taken part in the trips over the border in July, first to Maryville and then into Gentry County, the regiment as a unit had not been together since its organization at Clarinda on the third and fourth of July. The postponement of the contemplated regimental muster from the first Tuesday in September to the third Tuesday of October on account of a shortage of arms and camp equipment was a severe disappointment to the Bedford contingent. With affairs on the border in a peaceful state, many of the militia felt that their home-guard service was more or less unnecessary.

But the quiet below the border was only the calm that precedes a storm, and late in August Colonel Cranor of Gentry County again faced a desperate situation. The Secessionists were on the rampage, threatening to annihilate the Union home guards and to destroy the property of all Union men. Many families fled across the line into Iowa, taking a few possessions in wagons and driving their live stock before them. Again Colonel Cranor dispatched messengers for help to Colonel Edwards at Chariton, to Lieutenant Colonel McCoun at Bedford, and to Colonel Morledge at Clarinda; and again his call met with a prompt response.

Colonel Edwards ordered out all the troops he

could collect and arm — between seven and eight hundred from Lucas, Ringgold, and near-by counties — and ordered them to concentrate at Allendale, Missouri, across the southern border of Ringgold County. Colonel Morledge sent couriers to the captains under his command ordering them to start at once with their companies for the scene of trouble. The messenger from Colonel Cranor reached Bedford on Thursday, August 28th, and the next day Lieutenant Colonel McCoun with three Taylor County companies set out for Missouri.

On Sunday, August 31st, the Taylor County reinforcements joined Colonel Cranor's command near Albany in Gentry County, Missouri, and the combined forces pushed on toward the Secession encampment. The Confederates, who still outnumbered the Union men, advanced to the attack. A few shots were exchanged at long range, whereupon the Union forces decided to fall back and await the coming of other Iowa volunteers. For a day and two nights the retreat continued — a distance of almost forty miles. Just below the State line in Worth County the Union troops halted and threw up formidable-looking sod breastworks on which were mounted maple logs made to resemble cannon. The fortification was named Fort Cranor by some but Fort Sod came to be the more common designation. The Confederates hesitated to attack this bristling rampart, and while they hesitated Colonel Morledge arrived with four hundred men.

Other reënforcements reached Fort Sod, and the Bedford Sax Horn Band joined the camp. Word came that Colonel Edwards's volunteers would arrive soon. Now the tables were turned, and when the enlarged Union army took up the march southward on Saturday, September 7th, the Secessionists beat a retreat. Although a few shots were exchanged between the Union scouts and the Confederate rear guard the main bodies of troops failed to make contact. A ten mile advance was made the first day, and camp was pitched for the night below the town of West Point. During the night four hundred volunteers from Harrison County, Missouri, came into camp, increasing the Union force to nearly two thousand men.

On Sunday a fourteen mile advance brought the expeditionary force to the vicinity of the village of Gilford where camp was made for the night. The army marched eight miles farther the next day and camped on Colonel Cranor's land where serious inroads were made on his cornfields. A detachment of cavalry sent ahead to explore the enemy country captured eight Confederate pickets and brought them back to camp.

On Tuesday Colonel John H. Davis of Nodaway County, Missouri, arrived with sixty men and reported that he had been driven out of his home county by some three hundred Secessionists. Forty more men from Page and Taylor counties came into camp during the day, and on Wednesday morning

one hundred volunteers from Davis County, Iowa, joined the ranks.

Thursday, September 12th, saw the march southward resumed. Early that morning a detachment of three hundred men under Captain T. T. Kimball was sent on a side trip into Nodaway County to quell the revived Secession sentiment there. During the day the main body of troops proceeded ten miles in the direction of Rochester, Missouri; and in the evening a detachment of Captain Doug Dale's cavalry made a flying visit to Savannah, Missouri, to capture a certain minister who had been outspoken against the Union. On that evening, too, Colonel Edwards arrived in camp and reported that his men who were encamped six miles away would join the expedition in the morning. Without adequate camp equipment and commissary stores he had hastened forward from Allendale to catch the advancing Union forces.

Captain Dale's cavalry detachment returned Friday morning with their prisoner; Colonel Edwards's volunteers, between seven and eight hundred in number, arrived in camp; and the chase of the Secessionists was resumed at noon. Nine miles more were made by late afternoon, and camp was pitched below Rochester. In the evening some of the Union men raised the Stars and Stripes over one of the prominent buildings in the town.

On Sunday morning, September 15th, the march was continued toward the city of Saint Joseph which was reached in the afternoon of that day. Deafen-

ing cheers from men, women, and children who lined the streets of that city greeted the Union volunteers as they marched to Camp Curtis, led by the Bedford Sax Horn Band.

Saint Joseph presented a desolate appearance. Whole blocks of business houses were closed and many of them had been broken into and plundered by the retreating Secessionists. The city had been ransacked for supplies and booty, and consequently the arrival of a strong Union force was greeted with great rejoicing by the loyal citizens.

By this time the Confederates had retreated still farther south and were reported to be in the vicinity of Lexington, Missouri. They were so far in advance that it was considered useless to try to overtake them. Many of the prisoners who had been captured on the march were released after taking an oath of allegiance to the United States, but others who were old offenders and outspoken in their denunciation of the Union were sent under guard to Saint Louis.

Colonel Edwards received orders to leave three hundred of his men on guard at Saint Joseph and to advance with some four hundred and fifty to Chillicothe on the Hannibal and Saint Joseph Railroad. The rest of the Iowa troops remained in Saint Joseph until Wednesday, September 18th, when they set out for home. The Taylor County contingent reached Bedford on Friday, September 20th, and the Page County soldiers arrived in Clarinda one day

later. Colonel Edwards was soon relieved at Chilli-cothe by the arrival of Federal troops, and he marched his men back to Iowa in four days.

One month had been spent on this expedition. Untrained volunteers endured the fatigues of the campaign with light hearts and patriotic zeal. The loyal men of northwestern Missouri expressed their gratitude to the people of southwestern Iowa for their ready response to the call for help by offering free of charge anything they possessed. Several Missourians not only made contributions of food for the soldiers and provender for the horses, but spent hundreds of dollars in buying supplies from those less generously disposed.

Three times during the summer of 1861 had come the call for help from below the State line, and three times the volunteers of southwestern Iowa had responded. But that service was ended, for the year 1862 saw the creation of the Southern Border Brigade — one company from each county along the border — an organization which served as a border guard during the remainder of the war. Many members of the home guards went into the Iowa regiments of the Union army and others joined the Border Brigade, but never did they serve their country more cheerfully than they had as raw volunteers in the summer of 1861 when, marching as to war, they crossed the line into Missouri to lend a hand to comrades in distress.

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