

## THE THIRD IOWA ANSWERS THE CALL

LIKE a giant devilfish stretching out its tentacles to ensnare the whole of the civilized world, the terrific conflict that had been raging in Europe for three long years was drawing inexorably closer to America.

The successive tragedies of Belgium — Louvain and Cavell — the *Lusitania*, and Reims had been viewed on this side of the water with horror, and there were many who felt from the first that the place of the United States was at the side of the Allied nations. But the time was not yet come. However, the continued acts of barbarism on the part of the Germans and their disregard and unveiled contempt for the rights of neutrals were gradually molding public sentiment into fair unanimity, and there finally came a day when Americans could once more hold their heads high. That day Woodrow Wilson went before Congress and asked it to declare that a state of war existed between the United States and the German Empire.

So, on the 7th of April, 1917, the wheels of a powerful war machine that was steadily to gain in momentum were set in motion. The entire nation was united behind its President, and no State was more ready to throw the weight of its wealth and resources into the balance than Iowa. Its National Guard was immediately placed on war footing, and recruiting stations were opened all over the State to bring it up to full strength. Among the organizations thus called into service was the Third Iowa Infantry.

As an entity this regiment had existed only since 1892 when, in the reorganization of the State Guard, eight companies of the Fifth Iowa Infantry were combined with four of the old Third to form the present unit. But many of the individual companies had existed long before this time. Company L, locally known as the Dodge Light Guards, had the distinction of being the oldest military organization in Iowa, having been formed in Council Bluffs in 1855 by General Grenville M. Dodge with the primary motive of protecting the community against attacks by the Sioux Indians. It later served with distinction all through the Civil War.

Called into service by President McKinley on the 26th of April, 1898, the regiment served until the 2nd of November, 1899, as the 51st Iowa Volunteers, seeing in the meantime much active service against the Philippine Insurrectos. Upon its reorganization it became known as the 55th Iowa Infantry, which remained its official designation until July, 1915, when it resumed that of the Third Iowa Infantry.

In the summer of 1916, when war with Mexico seemed imminent, the Third Iowa Infantry was called into Federal service and sent with other units of the National Guard to the Border, where it remained on duty until February, 1917. The men had scarcely been mustered out when they were drawn back into the service.

The first few months were occupied with recruiting and training new men. Then on the 15th of July, upon the call of the President, the regiment was assembled at its home stations, and by the 5th of August it had again been mustered into Federal service.

Its personnel was, of course, composed wholly of volunteers, and enough of the parent organization was

still serving with it to keep alive its spirit and to carry on its traditions. For of that band that had set out so confidently for the Philippines in June, 1898, there remained a small but loyal representation. The erstwhile lieutenant of Company H was now its commanding officer; his lieutenant colonel, the three battalion commanders, the chief of the Medical Detachment, five company officers, and a number of enlisted men, all had been members of that original expeditionary force.

Early in August the War Department announced the organization of a purely National Guard division which was to include the Third Iowa as one of its four infantry regiments. But not as the Third Iowa, for from now on it was to be known as the 168th U. S. Infantry.

Now that the disposition of the regiment was settled, Colonel Ernest R. Bennett directed the outlying units to assemble at Des Moines. So, on the 17th of August, the command was united at the State Fair Grounds. Machinery Hall, where the local companies had been quartered, was needed for exhibits for the fair which was to open in ten days; so it was necessary to look for a new camp site. Space was offered at Camp Dodge, a few miles to the northwest, where a huge cantonment for the draft army was under construction. But sentiment outweighed all other considerations — it was from the Fair Grounds that the regiment had left in 1898, and from the Fair Grounds it should leave in 1917.

Accordingly, arrangements were made to pitch camp on the hill east of the exhibition grounds, on land belonging to the State Game Farm. It was almost with pleasure that the men faced the discomforts of an unprepared location rather than the accommodations of a cantonment, as a concession to regimental tradition.

As far as natural beauty was concerned, the situation could not have been improved. On a high hill reached by a winding roadway up through the Fair Grounds Grove, it extended from the edge of the wood into a little valley to the east — on either side great reaches of fertile fields merging into the distant horizon, and to the west the active capital city of the Commonwealth of Iowa.

The company strength, originally set at 100, was later increased to 150 men per line company; and now at the last moment, upon the recommendation of our experts in France, it was decided to further increase it to 250. Had this recommendation been approved a month earlier, it would have been an easy matter to fill up the ranks by enlistment, for there were many eager applicants clamoring for admission at the time recruiting was suspended. There was no time for that now, however, and the difficulty was solved by transferring a sufficient number from the First and Second Iowa Infantry Regiments to bring up the total enlisted strength of the 168th to 3605 men. This necessitated the transfer of 813 from the First Iowa, and 840 from the Second. All grades were included, each company furnishing its proportionate share to the corresponding letter company. By this transfer every section of the State, and practically every town, was represented in the regiment.

On the 20th the new members, in groups of from one to 250, began to arrive at camp. Some had traveled a long distance, carrying heavy packs. They came straggling in at all hours of the day and night, and the already overworked company officers had to be on constant duty. There was a woeful lack of equipment, not only in uniforms and ordnance, but in tents as well; and to house them all, a line of pup tents was set up below the pyramidal.

Much work had to be done, and at breakneck speed, for the order transporting the regiment to the eastern coast was expected at any moment. The records of the transfers had to be brought forward, and numberless requisitions had to be filled; those who had been overlooked before were now inoculated against typhoid, paratyphoid, diphtheria, smallpox, and for every other disease for which a serum had been discovered; and further physical examinations were given. On the other hand, little attention was paid to training. On one side of the camp was the State Game Farm, cut up into pens for game and ponds for fish breeding. To the west were the exposition grounds, and to the north and east, woods; so there was no opportunity for drill, even of a preliminary nature. The officers were so occupied with administrative duties that they scarcely found time for the few lectures and hikes scheduled.

The tented city within the State Fair Grounds proved by far the greatest attraction of the 1917 exposition. At the call of a bugle from the hilltop, thousands forgot all else but the soldiers. As yet the general attitude of enthusiasm was undamped by casualty lists. Not many pictured these very much alive, altogether cheerful youngsters on the battle field, wounded and dying.

The 168th made its first and final appearance as a whole before its own people at a review on the 29th of August. Although they had been gathered only recently from the four corners of the State, and had never had an opportunity to drill together, the soldiers marched like veterans around the half-mile track in a column of platoons. An enormous crowd, one of the greatest ever gathered in Iowa, thundered out cheer after cheer. There could be no doubt that the State was proud of the 168th.

The Colonel, who had left his place at the head of the column to join the Governor in the reviewing stand, was justifiably proud of his command.

It was not until the first trains backed into the terminal at the Fair Grounds that the members of the 168th learned what leaving home was to mean to them. War, until then, had seemed such a remote and nebulous possibility that few had ever thought of themselves as actually in it. But now they realized, as did their friends and families, that every move was a step nearer to the uncertainty of the battle line. The fear that this might be the final parting, that this might be the last embrace, made more bitter the ordeal of farewell. It was amid smiles forced through tears, and stifled sobs from breaking hearts, that the crowded trains moved slowly out and disappeared in the distance. By noon of September 10th the camp on the hill was deserted.

Before they were well across the State of Iowa, the men of the 168th had settled down to make the best of a three days' tiresome trip, and they found much to occupy their attention. These lads, many of whom had never set foot beyond the limits of their own State, were on their way to tread the very battle fields of Caesar and of Attila, of Louis XIV, Napoleon, and von Moltke, and in their turn they, too, were to help make history. This was the beginning of a strange adventure, indeed, for those who had known only the placid life of the peaceful prairie — a stranger adventure than even the most imaginative mind among them could have foreseen.

Great crowds met the seven sections as they halted for short periods at Chicago, Fort Wayne, Buffalo, Elmira, and Scranton; and many a man of the regiment has reason to remember the generosity and good will of the

people that welcomed them en route. Finally, after an all-night wait on a siding near Jamaica, Long Island, the first three sections moved out in the early morning of the 13th of September to Garden City, and there disgorged themselves of their human freight. It was but a short hike to Camp Albert A. Mills.