

**Ensuring survival: how Mexican border service and World War I was vital for the
survival of the National Guard system**

by

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Abstract

Historians and military officials often consider the National Guard as the direct descendent of the colonial militia, and the transition between the two is described as natural. However, the Guard was not the only option available to replace the militia, and many Washington officials and prominent civilians supported European style replacements based on universal military training for all able bodied men. The National Guard maintained a successful lobby and Congress redefined and solidified the new National Guard system with a series of laws during the first two decades of the twentieth century. However, detractors continued to attack the new system and the Guard needed to prove its value. Mexican border duty and service in the First World War provided the Guard with this opportunity. The training the Guard received at the border provided the Guard with the skills necessary to perform in the trenches in France, and the Guard performed better than anticipated. The border duty proved vital for the overall survival of the Guard and it allowed the Guard to provide a quickly mobilized and highly trained force to aid in the American war effort.

Introduction

After marching over 166 miles through intense heat and a hurricane, troops from numerous states' National Guards stood proud of their achievement.¹ One might expect this was the result of some great battle, but such was not the case. Instead this was a scene at New Braunfels, Texas in 1917 during a training exercise near the Mexican border. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson activated the National Guards of every state for Mexican border service after years of hostile relations with Mexico and a failed expedition to capture Pancho Villa. The Guard's mission was simple: to protect the border from bandits such as Villa. Yet, the day to day lives of these troops did not reflect their original mission. While government mobilized the troops to protect against further Mexican incursions into the nation, they seem instead to have participated in an unplanned mass training exercise for a greater war.

The troops at the border received weapons training, performed marching drills, participated in simulated battles, and the troops received valuable camp life experience.² This training allowed the Guard to prepare for massive movements and military actions which proved vital for the Guard's performance in the First World War. Existing histories of the National Guard mention the border duty in passing, and consider it a small part of a much larger narrative. Troy Ainsworth published, "Boredom, Fatigue, Illness and Death: The United States National Guard and the Texas-Mexico Border, 1916-1917." Yet, Ainsworth makes little mention of missions or how the troops spent their leisure time. Instead,

¹ Col. Moses Thisted, *With the Wisconsin National Guard on the Mexican Border, 1916-1917* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Journal, 1917) 78-9.

² Cpt. Irving G. McCann, *With the National Guard on the Border: Our National Military Problem* (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby Company, 1917). This memoir of border duty outlined the day to day activities of the 1st Illinois Infantry on the Mexican border. Captain McCann detailed the training he and his brigade received at the border.

Ainsworth argues that the border duty was in essence a failure and only served to train the troops.³ He does not account for or mention the long-term survival of the National Guard. The training at the border was directly tied to the long-term survival of the guard because it prepared the troops for wartime service, and those who did not immediately go overseas provided valuable guidance for raw recruits into the Guard. Ultimately, this training provided the National Guard with the skills necessary to fight alongside the regular army in Europe. The Guard performed better than expected in Europe, and service in the Great War helped to ensure the Guard's survival as a piece of the American military system.

In 1916 the United States Army was undergoing a modernization and reorganization process which eventually prepared it for the trials and necessities of modern warfare, and the National Guard was no exception. The United States maintained a state-controlled militia force since its founding, but that system proved itself inefficient by the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ The U.S. government took steps to reform the militia and the National Guard's existence was not a foregone conclusion, as political leaders proposed numerous plans based on universal military training (UMT), a system in which all men of military age would receive some amount of military training and could be activated for service at any time.⁵ Even as late as May 1916, 800 of the 970 commercial organizations holding membership in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce voted in favor of UMT. The prevailing notion was that a volunteer force consisting of "amateurs" could not adequately compliment the regular army.⁶ In many ways though, the National Guard system of the twentieth century was a new system

³ Troy Ainsworth, "Boredom, Fatigue, Illness and Death: The United States National Guard and the Texas-Mexico Border, 1916-1917," *The Journal of Big Bend Studies* 19 (2007): 95-6.

⁴ Charles Sydney Clark, "The Future of the National Guard," *The North American Review* 170 (1900) 732-3.

⁵ "Senate Debates the Militia," *The New York Times*, January 16, 1902.

⁶ "Defense Sentiment Shown by Poll of Businessmen," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 26, 1916.

as well. While the name, “National Guard” survived the transition from the old militia system, the new Guard was a replacement of the militia. The Militia Acts of 1903 and 1908 and the National Defense Act of 1916 established and solidified the Guard system, but the National Guard needed to prove itself. Indeed, many guardsmen, politicians, and civilians were unsure as to what role, if any, the Guard would play in the twentieth century American military.

When a large defensive force was needed at the Mexican border, the Guard was the only military element at the president’s disposal with sufficient numbers for this task. The border service provided the Guard system with its first opportunity to prove itself, and World War I provided its second. Eventually, advocates of the Guard responded that World War I had proven the importance of having a large, trained force ready for quick mobilization; therefore, officials in both state and the federal government decided not only to retain the Guard system, but to strengthen and solidify its position in the post-war American military system.

The American military system of World War I consisted of the regular army, the National Guard, and drafted troops. And while the National Guard made up only one piece of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), it served a dual role as a combat force and a reserve force.⁷ The actions and service of Iowa and Illinois guardsmen during the World War I period offer a prism through which to view the Guard system of the early twentieth century. A key aspect of the National Guard is its connection to state governments; therefore, the experiences and expectations of Iowa and Illinois guardsmen may differ than

⁷ Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) 61-3. The AEF consisted of three main parts: the regular army, the National Guard, and drafted troops

those of other states, but the Guards of the upper Midwest are representative of the greater Guard in a general sense, as their personal experiences epitomize the Guard's role at the border and in France. Further, the Guards of Illinois and Iowa represent a fairly large portion of the American population (Illinois was the third largest state in the nation in 1910) and made up roughly ten percent of the entire force at the Mexican border.⁸ Essentially, by examining these two states' Guards, one can gain an appreciation and an understanding of the state of the organization before, during, and immediately after World War I.

While the National Guard has existed in its current form, with some minor changes, throughout most of the twentieth century, numerous misperceptions regarding the National Guard exist today, and those same misconceptions existed just prior to World War I. During the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, mobilization of the Guard was met with some criticism, as many felt the Guard's role was to serve as a state relief organization and a defensive force on the home-front. In fact though, there was a long-standing historical precedent for the use of the Guard in international conflicts. Prior to 1916 and 1917, the Guard's role in the American military system was somewhat confusing and vague, but the National Defense Act of 1916 as well as the massive mobilization for the Great War established the Guard as not only a reserve force, but also a key component of the American Army. The Guard's action during the First World War period helped to ensure its future, and the Iowa and Illinois Guards are part of the larger story.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: Taken in the Year 1910* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1913) 21-3. The 1910 census, released in 1913 declared that Illinois had 995, 198 citizens in 1910, third in the nation behind New York and Pennsylvania, and, "Gov. Dunne Mobilizes Illinois' 8,000 Guards at Night Conference." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 June 1916, and Louis Lasher, Adjutant General, *Report of the Adjutant General of Iowa: For the Biennial Period Ended June 30, 1918* (Des Moines: State of Iowa Printing Press, 1919) 43. The combined number of the 8,000 Illinois troops sent to the border and the 4,300 Iowa troops amounts to roughly 12,300 of the roughly 120,000 Guardsmen at the border.

Historiography

Numerous historians have studied the American military and American society during World War I. Of course, many historians have included the National Guard in their studies of the AEF and of American military actions in Europe, yet most of these works only include the Guard as a small part of the larger narrative.⁹ Many other historians have focused on the entire history of the National Guard.¹⁰ Therefore, the historiography of the American military during World War I is much larger than Guard historiography and often includes minor mentions of the Guard, whereas the historiography of the Guard often mentions World War I as a small part of a larger narrative.

The historiography of World War I is incredibly vast. People directly involved in the conflict wrote many early histories of the war, and professional scholarship on the American experience of World War I began during the 1930s. Frederick Paxson's *America at War: 1917-1918* served as the standard history of America during the war for decades. This work summarized the political, social, economic, military, and diplomatic history of the United States during belligerency. Paxson's work also served another purpose, as he placed the American military in the larger narrative of the war, and explained how America emerged as a world power.¹¹

⁹ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, Chapters III and V explicitly detail the formation of the AEF and only mention the Guard in passing. Major mentions of the guard are noted when Coffman examined the National Defense Act of 1916. Similarly, John S. Eisenhower with Joanne Thompson Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I* (New York: The Free Press, 2001) 23. This work also examined the American Army of World War I, but the Guard is majorly mentioned as a small portion of that army and is only noted distinctively when the National Defense Act of 1916 was detailed.

¹⁰ John K. Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983) and Jim Dan Hill, *The Minute Man in Peace and war: A History of the National Guard* (Harrisburg: The Stackpole Company, 1964) and Michael D. Doubler, *Civilian in Peace, Soldier in War: The Army National Guard, 1636-2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

¹¹ Frederic L. Paxson, *American Democracy and the World War*, vol. II, *America At War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936) 7, 11-13.

After the Second World War, a new wave of scholarship on World War I emerged. Many studies which focused on the political and diplomatic aspects of the war emerged in the 1950s.¹² This once again shifted during the 1960s, when scholars began to re-examine the American military in the greater context of the war. Edward Coffman wrote *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* during a shift in the emphasis of military history, and he examines the development and deployment of the AEF. Coffman attempted to expand his work beyond the “old” style of military history, such as *Eye Deep in Hell: Trench Warfare in World War I* by John Ellis, which focused on the strategies and tactics of the armies on the Western Front.¹³ By looking at many aspects of the war, Coffman expressed the complexities of the greater wartime experience.

Coffman’s work fit into what had become the standard style of military history after the 1960’s. By focusing on the social and cultural aspects of warfare, historians placed military actions in the context of social development. David M. Kennedy specifically placed World War I in the context of American development in his 1980 work, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*. While this work does include some military aspects, the focus was not on American military actions. Rather, Kennedy examined the American home-front and the social, political, cultural, and economic realities during the war. Writing less than a decade after the Vietnam War, which had caused a great level of social unrest in the United States, Kennedy looked at the divisive nature of the World War I and the cultural and social rifts the war created.¹⁴

¹² Coffman, *War*, 388.

¹³ John Ellis, *Eye Deep in Hell: Trench Warfare in World War I* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976)

¹⁴ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, 2004) 371.

Social and political histories of the World War I period also examine the development of the AEF and the lives of American troops overseas. John Chambers released *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* in 1987, where he examined the draft system which emerged after the Selective Service Act of 1916.¹⁵ Recent studies have re-examined the wartime experience of the American military. Robert Zieger, for example, adds new elements to an old discussion when he explored race, class, and gender during American belligerency, and his work tied the American experience during the war directly to the ideas and principles of the Progressive Era.¹⁶ Jennifer Keene examines the American doughboy in the Great War, but her focus on the National Guard regarded struggles with the federal government, and she particularly noted the army's condescension toward the Guard.¹⁷ These works, among others, placed military and economic developments of the war in a broader ideological context.¹⁸

The historiography of World War I is certainly much larger than that of the Guard, but the historiography of the National Guard is extensive. However, most studies of the Guard are focused either on the larger narrative of the Guard's activities or are regimental

¹⁵ John Chambers, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: The Free Press, 1987).

¹⁶ Robert H. Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) 1-3.

¹⁷ Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) 16-9.

¹⁸ John S. Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I* (New York: The Free Press, 2001) and John S. Eisenhower, *Intervention: The United States and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1917* (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1993). These two recent studies examined this time period. Eisenhower also examined the situation between the United States and Mexico and ended with the Punitive Expedition to capture villa. However, the National Guard received only marginal mention in these two works. Similarly, much has been written about the expedition to capture Villa; however, little has been written primarily about the National Guard's border duty. An early example is, Louis Teitelbaum, *Woodrow Wilson and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1916* (New York: Exposition Press, 1967), which gives extensive details about the events which led to Pancho Villa's raid on Columbus, New Mexico and General Pershing's expedition to capture Villa. Clarence C. Clendenen, *Blood on the Border: The United States Army and the Mexican Irregulars* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1969). However, unlike Teitelbaum and many authors after, Clendenen does dedicate an entire chapter to the National Guard at the border.

histories, such as James Cooke's *The Rainbow Division in the Great War, 1917-1919*, which examined the actions of the 42nd Infantry Division during American belligerency.¹⁹ Some historians, such as Eleanor Hannah, have studied the social perceptions and realities of Guard troops rather than the military aspects during the Gilded Age. Hannah argues that many men valued militia and later Guard duty as patriotic and masculine identities.²⁰ She points out that during the late nineteenth century industrialization blurred the definition of masculinity and post-war freedom, while mass immigration obscured the meaning of citizenship.²¹

Other historians such as John K. Mahon and Jim Dan Hill broadly examined the history of the National Guard, but consider the World War I period as only a step in the Guard's evolution.²² Conversely, Jerry Cooper examines the relatively short period between 1865 and 1920, by specifically focusing on the power struggle between the federal government and state governments.²³ In 2008, Barry Stentiford published "The Meaning of a Name: The Rise of the National Guard and the End of a Town Militia," which detailed the mentality of guardsmen during a time of transition. According to Stentiford, this transition severed the direct ties Guard troops had to their community, while expanding their ties to the nation. Yet, the old hopes and expectations of a local military organization directly tied to a

¹⁹ James J. Cooke, *The Rainbow Division in the Great War, 1917-1919* (Westport: Praeger, 1994).

²⁰ Eleanor Hannah, *Manhood, Citizenship, and the National Guard: Illinois 1870-1916* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007) 1-2.

²¹ Hannah, *Manhood*, 231-216., and Eleanor Hannah, "From the Dance Floor to the Rifle Range: The Evolution of Manliness in the National Guards, 1870-1917," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 6.2, (2007) 176-7.

²² Mahon, *History of the Militia and National Guard* and Hill, *Minute Man*. (See note 9).

²³ Jerry Cooper, *The Rise of the National Guard: The Evolution of the American Militia, 1865-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) xiii and xvi.

community persisted.²⁴ A vast literature deals with the Guard, World War I, or the situation with Mexico; however, few tie the three together in any detail.

²⁴Barry Stentiford, "The Meaning of a Name: The Rise of the National Guard and the End of a Town Militia," *The Journal of Military History* 72 (2008): 728-730.

Existing Notions of the Guard

After the Civil War, men from all walks of life who were fulfilling what they considered their patriotic duty comprised the militia. When militia units needed men and money to continue from year to year, parades and patriotic displays placed local militias at the forefront of common imagination, and became a major factor in attracting men of military age to militia service. Because of the local nature of these units, they were representative of the class system in the community which furnished the unit.²⁵ The Guard also reflected racial aspects of communities, but throughout the First World War Guard units remained segregated; although, the Guard provided eight of the twelve black units who eventually served overseas during World War I, including the Eighth Illinois.²⁶ The relatively high proportion of African American troops in the Guard versus the regular army demonstrates how the Guard's nature also appealed to minorities who hoped to establish themselves as equal citizens in their communities.²⁷ The public nature of the militia drew growing numbers of men to their ranks during the last decades of the nineteenth century, and as the militia gave way to the National Guard, this spirit of patriotism and civic duty persisted.²⁸

Patriotism was not the only sense of duty that drew men to service in local militia units. For many volunteers, the militia and later the Guard offered men a way to prove their

²⁵ Hannah, *Manhood, Citizenship, and the National Guard*, 33-5. Hannah's work was based on the Illinois National Guard and militia, but her focus on class distinction within the Guard also appeals to studies of other states.

²⁶ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 159 and Zieger, *America's Great War*, 103. It should be noted that Fort Des Moines was the official Officer Training Center for the small amount of black troops who gained commissions throughout the war.

²⁷ Hannah, *Manhood*, 33-6. Hannah notes that in the 1870s, African Americans began forming militia units, which tied to ideas of citizenship and masculinity. Therefore, the Guard appealed to minorities seeking equality in the eyes of their neighbors in the same way it appealed to native-born Americans.

²⁸ Hannah, *Manhood*, 58-9.

masculinity, because public displays allowed the troops to put their manhood on display for the larger community.²⁹ As the militia system declined and the National Guard system rose, the public parades and displays which were popular immediately after the Civil War diminished. A 1915 article declared, “the public should bear in mind that the National Guard is no longer a social institution, upon whose dandified uniforms, which were anything but practical, money was lavished, and which devoted its time to acquiring proficiency in fancy drills and evolutions that made a pretty display at times of public ceremony, but had little connection with the stern duties of a real soldier.”³⁰ The author then noted that the Guard was becoming a practical fighting force which encouraged marksmanship and military discipline, but remained a part-time commitment.

In many ways, the Guard offered men an arena in which to prove their masculinity while not having to live the life of a regular soldier. Therefore, that sense of masculinity and patriotism shifted away from public events toward proof of ability, often displayed within the unit itself. This was evident during marksmanship competitions and other training routines, which offered troops a way to display their “manliness” to their fellow troops.³¹ Further, ideas of Futurism permeated the minds of young men in the first decades of the twentieth century. F.T. Marinetti called to all “*living* men of the earth” to glorify the love of danger and glorify war, “the only true hygiene of the world.”³² While this was generally a European movement, young American men lived in the same industrial world, and sought the adventure associated with warfare. The Guard provided this avenue without forcing men to

²⁹ Hannah, *Manhood*, 59.

³⁰ Wilbur F. Sadler Jr., “Efficiency in the National Guard,” *The North American Review* 202 (1915) 545.

³¹ Sadler, “Efficiency,” 103-5. and Stentiford, “Meaning of a Name,” 728-30.

³² Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism,” (1908, published 1909) Originally published in *Le Figaro* (Paris) (20 February 1909). First English translation from *Poesia* (April-June 1909).

make a fulltime military commitment. Yet, the National Guard also appealed to tradition and allowed men to pursue their civic duty while maintaining close ties to their community.

The National Guard is arguably the oldest American military organization, having its origins in the colonial militia system.³³ Prior to the militia reform acts of the early twentieth century militia mobilization for service in the U.S. Army was determined by the raising of volunteers specifically for army service or was at the discretion of the state governors. This system transformed into the National Guard system between roughly 1870 and 1903. During this time, the federal government increased funding to the state militias, and had more impact on the militia's training and standards of uniformity.³⁴ However, this was not an immediate or official transition, as some states adopted the term "National Guard" before it became official practice, such as the Iowa State Militia which was re-designated as the Iowa National Guard in 1877. This was done in an effort to break the embarrassing connection the term "militia" had with drunkenness and inefficiency which the decades immediately following the Civil War produced.³⁵ Yet, simply changing the name from the militia to the National Guard did not redeem its public perception. The Spanish-American War demonstrated the Guard's poor state of readiness.³⁶ Only after Congress passed the Militia Act of 1903 (commonly referred to as the Dick Act for Congressman Charles F. Dick, who was also a general in the National Guard), did the National Guard transform into an effective reserve

³³ Nationalguard.com/what-is-the-guard.

³⁴ Stentiford, "Name," 729.

³⁵ Stentiford, 741.

³⁶ William H. Riker, *Soldiers of the States: The Role of the National Guard in American Democracy* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1957) 69.

force for the nation.³⁷ This transition was not an easy one though, and the first decade and a half of the twentieth century proved to be significant for the National Guard.

Questions arose by 1900 about the future state of the National Guard and whether or not it would play a role in the twentieth century American military. In a 1900 article, Charles Sydney Clarke proposed that the Guard should be eliminated and all civil associations “who supported the Guard too much” should also be abolished.³⁸ According to Clark, Guard deficiencies ranged from poor officer training to power struggles stemming from state control.³⁹ Opponents of the Guard began proposing alternatives plans based on UMT, and varied in execution. One proposal called for the expansion of the regular army, and each state would receive two regiments of regulars who would carry out the Guard’s role during peacetime.⁴⁰ However, the most notable and advocated proposal was the “continental army plan,” which involved the creation of a federal force of all able bodied men between the ages of 18 and 45, and this proposal was still alive just prior to the passage of the National Defense Act in 1916.⁴¹ These alternatives were based on European models and required the federal government to take control of the militia, with the states “borrowing” militia troops in times of emergency.⁴² These plans gained steam based on misperceptions regarding the

³⁷ U.S. Congress, *Militia Act of 1903: An Act to Promote the efficiency of the militia and for other purposes* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904) section 1 and Stentiford, 740.

³⁸ Clark, “Future of the National Guard,” 734-5.

³⁹ Clark, “Future,” 732-3.

⁴⁰ W. Davies, “A Substitute for the National Guard,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 1902.

⁴¹ “The Militia Question,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 1916.

⁴² John F. O’Ryan, “The Role of the National Guard,” *The North American Review* 202 (1915) 364 and 370-2.

existing militia.⁴³ Misperceptions aside, the inefficiencies and poor perception of the Guard gave its opponents political ammunition.

The National Guard maintained a strong Washington lobby in the form of the National Guard Association (NGA); yet, the Congressional actions which saved the Guard in essence created a new military force. While the NGA fought to retain the Guard, they were essentially proposing another alternative to the old militia system. The NGA and its Congressional allies, such as Charles Dick, proposed creating a state force with federal oversight.⁴⁴ Instead of the militia acting independently of the federal government, with federalization based on volunteerism, the federal government could activate the National Guard in the event of national emergencies.⁴⁵ However, the question of how to achieve this was not easily answered.

The Dick Acts of 1903 and 1908 (amendments to the original act were enacted in 1908) were the initial Congressional answers to the militia question. These Acts not only increased federal funding to the Guard and created a set of standards for all Guard units; they also defined a new role for the militia. The National Guard now made up the “organized militia,” while all other men between the ages of 18 and 45 would compose the “unorganized militia,” both of which could be activated in the event of emergencies.⁴⁶ This not only

⁴³ Hill, *Minute Man*, 214-215. Essentially, opponents argued that the Guard played no role in the Mexican, Civil, and Spanish wars. While this was technically true (state volunteers were part of the federal army), state volunteer regiments and units did in fact have their origin in what became known as the National Guard.

⁴⁴ U.S. Congress, *Efficiency of the Militia: Report to the Whole House Committee* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1902) 1-2.

⁴⁵ U.S. Congress, *Efficiency of Militia, 1902*,” 3-4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-20. The unorganized militia was conscription based and was a precursor to the Selective Service Act.

redefined the American militia system, but also raised Constitutional questions.⁴⁷ The problems associated with the Dick Acts allowed opponents of the Guard to continue their opposition.⁴⁸ Therefore, the NGA and Congress continued their efforts of solidifying and reforming the newly created Guard System, and these efforts culminated in the National Defense Act of 1916.⁴⁹

In June, 1916, Congress passed the National Defense Act of 1916, which allowed the regular army to double its size to over 200,000 men, and the National Guard to increase its strength to 17,000 officers and upwards of 400,000 men.⁵⁰ This law redefined the parameters of which the National Guard could be federalized, and placed the Guard firmly within the American military system.⁵¹ Yet, even this third attempt at Guard reform legislation came under scrutiny. Legal reviewers such as B.M. Chipfield believed the National Guard under the new law to be, “most indefinite and uncertain and but little improved over what it was before the passage of that bill.”⁵² Chipfield further listed constitutional discrepancies of the law, specifically in regard to the federalization without state approval, but detractors had little time to voice their concerns over the new law.

⁴⁷ B.M. Chipfield, “The Legal Status of the National Guard Under the Army Reorganization Bill,” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 7 (1917) 674-6. This article examined the Dick Acts of 1903 and 1908 as well as the National Defense Act of 1916.

⁴⁸ “War Experts Indict System of Militia,” *The New York Times*, April 16, 1916. This article states that the Army War College considered the Guard worthless when compared to regular troops, and would require countless hours to train the Guard to become an effective fighting force. This article came only months before passage of the National Defense Act of 1916, and prior to border duty.

⁴⁹ The National Guard Association of the United States, *The Nation's Guard* (Washington D.C.: The National Guard Association, 1954) 29.

⁵⁰ Newton D. Baker, “Analysis of Army Reorganization Bill: Letter to Mr. Chamberlain,” (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1916) 5.

⁵¹ U.S. Congress, *An Act for Making Further and More Effectual Provision for the National Defense, and for Other Purposes* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1916) Sections 1 and 3.

⁵² Chipfield, “Legal Status of the National Guard,” 688.

President Wilson activated the National Guards of every state for Mexican border service less than a month after passage of the 1916 law. The National Guard's role in the defense of the nation was somewhat blurred in 1916 and 1917, so too was its role in domestic affairs. Prior to American entry into World War I, working class Americans as well as business leaders viewed the National Guard as a tool of corporate interests. The primary role the Guard played at the turn of the twentieth century led to this perception.⁵³ Between the Gilded Age and the Mexican Border duty, the Guard was often used to break up labor strikes and riots.

For example, in 1894 state governors responded to a massive coal miner strike by mobilizing guardsmen from eight states, including Iowa and Illinois. During that same year, guardsmen from twelve states responded to the Pullman Railroad strike, when officers ordered guardsmen to fire into rioting crowds in a few instances.⁵⁴ In fact, the Illinois National Guard performed strike duty more than any other state's National Guard due to Chicago's volatile labor situation and close ties to the railroad industry.⁵⁵ Numerous similar cases from the pre-World War I era reflected the inclination of politicians and businessmen to mobilize the Guard on the side of capital interests, which created hostility between labor unions and the National Guard as an organization. In 1910, Colonel E.M. Weaver, head of the Division of Militia to the Chief of Staff, stated, "The hostile attitude of labor unions towards the organized militia has created a very pessimistic feeling among officers of the army and the National Guard."⁵⁶ Unions came to view the Guard as an enemy to their

⁵³ McCann, *With the National Guard*, 174 (see note 2) and Hannah, "Dance Floor," 166.

⁵⁴ Hannah, *Manhood*, 162-4.

⁵⁵ Hannah, "Dance Floor," 166.

⁵⁶ "Says Unions Hurt Militia," *The New York Times*, November 15, 1915.

cause.⁵⁷ This hostility greatly hurt morale within the Guard, as many troops came from the same communities and social class as the laborers they were mobilized against.⁵⁸ When border duty came, the newly created Guard system faced many unresolved issues, and its place in the American system was not a foregone conclusion.

⁵⁷ "Guardsmen Made to Resign," *The New York Times*, July 24, 1903. According to this article, Texas guardsmen were forced to resign from their units if they wanted to maintain their status in a labor union. This demonstrates a general resentment toward the Guard by various unions.

⁵⁸ Hannah, *Manhood*, 59, 78-9, and 158-61.

Mexican Border Service

After years of strained relations between the United States and Mexico, violence eventually broke out. In March, 1916 Francisco “Pancho” Villa raided the 13th U.S. Cavalry camp near Columbus, New Mexico with nearly 250 men. Villa caught the troops completely by surprise, but American forces turned the Mexicans away. During the raid, Villa’s forces killed nine civilians and eight U.S. troops and wounded many others and destroyed Columbus. President Wilson immediately decided upon retaliation, and ordered a punitive expedition to capture Villa.⁵⁹ Newly appointed Secretary of War, Newton Baker, recommended Brigadier General John “Black Jack” Pershing to lead the expedition, and Baker ordered Major General Frederick Funston to create a force large enough to facilitate the capture of Villa and the destruction of the band that raided Columbus. President Wilson and the War Department clearly stated to Mexico and the military that the mission was to capture Villa and not to attack the Mexican government.⁶⁰ This expedition proved a massive failure.

Failures of the expedition stemmed from various reasons. For one, most of the U.S. Army was stationed in the Philippines, Hawaii, and the Panama Canal Zone. National Guard units (not part of the expedition) of various strengths and levels of readiness made up the bulk of land forces within the United States. Therefore, most of the troops who went on the expedition were members of the cavalry from around the country, and though they encountered little resistance they also received no help from the local populace. More often

⁵⁹ Joseph A. Stout Jr., *Border Conflict: Villistas, Carrancistas, and the Punitive Expedition, 1915-1920* (Texas Christian University Press, 1999) 32-39.

⁶⁰ James Hurst, *Pancho Villa and Black Jack Pershing: The Punitive Expedition in Mexico* (Westport: Praeger, 2008) 38-41.

than not, the expedition would arrive at a small town only to realize that the Villistas had left days earlier.⁶¹ No decisive battle ever occurred, and more importantly, Villa was never captured. The lack of an adequate expeditionary force hindered the punitive expeditions progress.

Unpreparedness was another major setback of the expedition. For the first time in American history, the army utilized new technologies such as airplanes and motor vehicles, including trucks, motorcycles, and tanks.⁶² Unfortunately for the soldiers though, the new equipment was untested and unproven. Logistics simply broke down. The Army proved it was unready to handle issues of supply, communication, and transportation.⁶³ The expedition embarrassed the Army, but more importantly did not succeed in capturing Villa, and the border remained unsecured. President Wilson needed to do something, and he opted to use the National Guard as a defensive force between the United States and Mexico.

For many guardsmen, service at the Mexican border provided a welcome change from strike duty. Therefore, the troops of Illinois and Iowa were generally happy to be called into service.⁶⁴ Many troops hoped to answer the nation's call to arms, as they considered themselves descendants of the minutemen of the American Revolution.⁶⁵ When war fever struck, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported, "[at] All of the armories of the Illinois National Guard, the scenes of such bustle and activity has not been witnessed within them since the Spanish American War," the headline of that same article was, "'On to Mexico' Spirit

⁶¹Stout, *Border Conflict*, 45-52.

⁶² Ibid., 45.

⁶³James Hurst, *Pancho Villa and Black Jack Pershing: The Punitive Expedition in Mexico* (Westport: Praeger, 2008) 45.

⁶⁴"Illinois' 7,000 Militia Ready; Officers Elated By Call" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 19, 1916.

⁶⁵ McCann, *National Guard*, 179.

Sweeps Over Chicago: Recruiting Stations Swamped and Militia Armories Crowded by Eager Civilians.”⁶⁶ One such soldier was Irving Goff McCann. McCann served as a chaplain with the First Illinois Infantry Brigade of Chicago during the border service and was promoted from the rank of captain to major prior to wartime service. McCann’s memoir of his service in Texas, *With the National Guard on the Border: Our National Military Problem*, detailed the First’s (as well as the greater Guard’s) service at the border, and outlined many weaknesses the Guard faced prior to border service. McCann wrote of a hypothetical conversation with a civilian, stating that if a National Guardsman was asked about Mexico, the trooper would reply with a grin, “There is no such thing as being too proud to fight.”⁶⁷ According to McCann, guardsmen were willing to put former hostilities and struggles aside in exchange for carrying their flag into battle.

Troops began arriving at the border on June 30, 1916 eager to go to war, but border duty did not meet their expectations. While the war in Europe was on the minds of many Americans, the troops of the National Guard had been mobilized to fight a “war” with Mexico, and numerous troops hoped to “follow Old Glory into battle.”⁶⁸ Also, many prominent civilians, Guard officers, and members of Congress favored intervention in Mexico to restore order.⁶⁹ Of course, the troops did not know what was in store for them, and service at the border provided the troops with valuable training needed to succeed in future operations. General Funston laid out the overall mission of the Guard by declaring

⁶⁶ “‘On To Mexico’ Spirit Sweeps Over Chicago,” *The Chicago Tribune*, March 12, 1916.

⁶⁷ McCann, *National Guard*, 90.

⁶⁸ McCann, 126.

⁶⁹ Intervention Grows in Favor,” *The Chicago Tribune*, June 24, 1916 and Senator Lawrence Sherman, Letter to the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, June 24, 1916, Papers and Correspondence of Lawrence Sherman, Lincoln Presidential Library, Illinois Historical Society (Springfield, IL).

that coast to coast patrols would commence upon arrival.⁷⁰ These patrols stretched from the Pacific in California to the Gulf of Mexico in Texas, but the troops needed to establish camps first.

When the troops arrived at their respective base camps, they proceeded to dig their latrines, set up their pup tents, secure the perimeter, and build mess areas. However, due to the new legal status of the Guard as a federalized force, the federal government helped with the construction. When the Illinois troops arrived, they found the government constructing bathhouses and making a water connection to a nearby town.⁷¹ The officers who slept in larger private tents had cots to sleep on, while the ordinary soldier used a bed and blanket roll and slept on the ground.⁷² While all these provisions were made, some troops were in Texas nearly a month before receiving a government issued blanket. There simply were not enough to go around to the huge amount of troops at the border, and cots, tents, and pistols were a hard commodity to come by due to shortages.⁷³ This again demonstrated the U.S. government's level of unpreparedness as World War I approached.

Overall, border duty was a massive, long term training mission. The troops drilled for nearly a month prior to their first long-distance patrols. Part of this daily drilling consisted of short hikes which lasted roughly two hours, and were carried out in hard marching order, which meant the troops had full backpacks, a nine-pound Springfield rifle, a fixed bayonet, and all of their other equipment.⁷⁴ The intention of these marches was to condition the troops to the heat as well as the longer hikes ahead. The First Illinois embarked

⁷⁰ Col. Moses Thisted, *With The Wisconsin National Guard on the Mexican Border, 1916-1917* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Journal, 1917) 29.

⁷¹ McCann, 129.

⁷² Ibid., 124-5.

⁷³ McCann, 131.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 152.

on their first long march on July 24, 1916, and it was about twenty-five miles in length from San Antonio to Leon Springs, Texas. The intense heat immediately took its toll, and troops began falling out of the march in droves. Some regiments had as many as 250 men fall out, which caused ambulances to clog the streets, and the poor performance of the Illinois troops on this first march broke the spirits of many troopers and left the brigade in a state of embarrassment.⁷⁵ However, there was a positive outcome of the disastrous first march. If anything, it served as motivation for the men of the First Illinois as well as other states' units to improve. The *Milwaukee Journal* reported, "Longer and faster hikes were taken by all 3 Wisconsin regiments today. The poor showing of the Illinois troops in their first day's hike Monday, July 24th, has aroused the Wisconsin officers and enlisted men to greater effort."⁷⁶

The marches continued, and gradually grew in length. The first march consisted of two days of roughly fourteen miles. Eventually a day's march could be as long as seventeen or eighteen miles. Captain McCann declared the men "hard as rocks" after only three months at the border.⁷⁷ The culmination of these marches took place in mid-September, 1916, when 14,000 troops from Illinois, Wisconsin, Kansas, Texas, and Missouri embarked on a fifteen day, 166-mile march from San Antonio to New Braunfels, Texas. Even though the weather shifted from intense heat to hurricane-like conditions, the troops moved forward. Colonel Moses Thisted of the Third Wisconsin wrote, "The march also demonstrates how skillfully these civilians were transposed into an army of fighting men after a preparation of only 2 ½ months," and that "another outstanding feature of this great March was the splendid manner

⁷⁵ Ibid., 153-8.

⁷⁶ Thisted, *Wisconsin Guard*, 61.

⁷⁷ McCann, 161.

in which the Supply Trains have been kept moving day and night.”⁷⁸ One initial failure of the Punitive Expedition had been rectified, and the Guard was proving its ability to adapt and prepare.

Weapons training was another important aspect of the border duty, and consisted of bayonet training, pistol training, and “fire distribution” practice. This aspect of training fit well into a long-standing Guard tradition. When the Guard replaced pageantry with efficiency near the end of the nineteenth century, marksmanship competitions provided a way for a trooper to prove his worth and establish his place within his unit.⁷⁹ Indeed, after reorganization, many Guard units were comparable to regular troops in marksmanship drills.⁸⁰ Also, the National Guard leadership decided to combine the marches with weapons training. Rather than riding to places such as Leon Springs (a rifle and pistol range), the troops marched two days to the range and two days back to camp after completion.⁸¹ After the roughly twenty five mile march the troops would spend anywhere from two to ten days at the range. This training familiarized the troops at the border with their rifles, pistols, and machine guns, and the troopers became well trained and adept at weapon drills.

Another staple of the border duty were simulated battles. Some of these battles became competitions between companies, giving the victorious company bragging rights, which again tied to a sense of masculinity among the troops. Often, hidden targets were set up in certain areas, and as a company advanced the officer in charge would signal someone

⁷⁸ Thisted, *Wisconsin Guard*, 78-9. It is important to note that this was not a direct route between the two Texas towns, because the towns are only forty miles apart. The training route likely moved toward the coast and then back to New Braunfels, but Col. Thisted did not lay out the route in his memoir. However, the importance of this mission relates to how it was carried out, not the course it took.

⁷⁹ Hannah, *Manhood*, 129-32.

⁸⁰ Mahon, *History*, 145-6.

⁸¹ McCann, 140.

down range to open the targets, and the companies engaged the targets as they would a human enemy. The company with the best score and fire distribution won.⁸² Other types of simulated battles added a human element to both sides. Two companies or brigades would engage each other, with one company in the defense and the other on the offense. A large scale simulation took place during the longest march of the year. When one general took 14,000 troops to New Braunfels, another general utilized 4,000 of the troops to defend New Braunfels. Upon completion, over 80,000 rounds of blank ammunition had been fired, and the *Milwaukee Journal* reported the battle to be a “magnificent spectacle.”⁸³ While they were training for defense against Mexican incursions, a battle with over 14,000 troops engaged was much larger than anything the Mexicans could muster. These movements prepared the Guardsmen at the border for large scale, defensive and offensive engagements. The Army was determined not to repeat the mistakes of the Punitive Expedition, and the border situation provided the Army with a large training arena.

Camp life outside of drilling also prepared the troops for an important element of wartime service. Insects and bugs such as chiggers, scorpions, ticks, and tarantulas pestered the troops continuously. Irving McCann remembered hearing sounds of scratching within the pup tents after taps (no talking was allowed after taps played). He also joked that, “I once had half of the jiggers in Mexico on me at one time.” McCann further wrote that brushing against a tree or resting in by a bush could “gather you a crop of ticks.”⁸⁴ Further, the lack of action created a sense of boredom within the camps. In response to a letter, Illinois Senator Lawrence Sherman wrote, “My friends, Walter A. Ronenfield, R.R. McCormick, and Col.

⁸² Ibid., 142.

⁸³ Thisted, 78-9.

⁸⁴ McCann, *Illinois Guard*, 234.

Milton J. Foreman of the First Illinois Cavalry are stationed at or near your place. If you could call around sometime it might break the monotony of their camp life for them to know one of their friends is in that part of the country.”⁸⁵ While it may have seemed uncomfortable and dull, this too provided the troops with valuable experience because camp life on the border was filled with many of the same irritations of life in Europe. Many guardsmen found life in the trenches filled with the same insects and filth associated with the border, and other guardsmen experienced the same kind of monotony at home-front camps and reserve lines during the war.⁸⁶

The troops returned from the border in increments. Some units, such as the First Illinois returned to Chicago after only 3 months at the border out of fear of labor disputes in Chicago, though this was not a typical case. As 1917 began, all but one of Iowa’s Guard Units remained federalized at the border.⁸⁷ However, by March, 1917 President Wilson had halted General Pershing’s push into Mexico and American entry into World War I seemed imminent.⁸⁸ Therefore, all of the Iowa and Illinois troops had returned home, but pre-border perceptions of the Guard proved difficult to reverse. While the troops who returned from the border were certainly prepared for war, their negative public image remained, and the poor

⁸⁵ Senator Lawrence Sherman, Letter to Mr. Hainsworth, July 24, 1916, Papers and Correspondence of Lawrence Sherman, Lincoln Presidential Library, Illinois Historical Society (Springfield, IL). Note the influential names of McCormick and Ronenfield named by Senator Sherman. This letter notes the monotony of camp life, but also demonstrates how service in the Guard appealed to members of all classes, and many officers came from leading roles in their communities.

⁸⁶ Cecil Clark Diary, May 2, 1918, Diary of Cecil A. Clark, Iowa National Guard Archives, Camp Dodge, IA (Johnston, IA). This entry describes the filth of the trenches and is a day of note because Clark received his first bath in over seven weeks.

⁸⁷ Louis Lasher, Adjutant General, *Report, 1918*, 7.

⁸⁸ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, vol. I (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931) 10. And Hill, *A History of the National Guard*, 264-5 (See note 9).

public image of National Guard grew to such proportions that when America entered the war, the Guard's ability to recruit the necessary number of men seemed in doubt.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Lasher, *Report, 1918*, 43-5. Iowa Adjutant General Louis Lasher pointed out that the main obstacle to World War I recruitment in the Iowa Guard was public perception based on labor union hostility. In order to come to an agreement, letters were circulated to labor members, and the Iowa government encouraged unions to put hostility aside out of hopes for national unity. McCann, *Illinois Guard*, 66 also noted that labor entanglements were a major concern of his unit prior to and after border duty.

Recruitment and Wartime Mobilization

In order to reach wartime strength, the federal government required Guard units to raise the numbers of each company to 100 men, and a state's population determined its overall numbers. For instance, the federal government required Iowa to supply roughly 10,000 guardsmen to aid the war effort. But given the Guard's negative image as strikebreakers, relatively few working-class men were willing to volunteer for service.⁹⁰ As a sign of national unity and patriotic duty, the Executive Board of the Iowa State Federation of Labor sent a circular letter to 40,000 union members in 1917 urging them to answer the call to arms. This plea noted that the Iowa National Guard was "the only organization which will carry the name of our state into the conflict," and added:

There is no good reason why union men should not answer their country's call and join the National Guard, and every reason why they should. Let all ill feeling, sentiment or opposition be swept aside in this hour of our country's crisis. Trade unionists do and will stand shoulder to shoulder with other defenders of this republic's liberty, regardless of class or calling.⁹¹

The Iowa state-government also helped encourage recruitment by pressing major employers to publicly pledge that workers who enlisted in the National Guard during the war would regain their positions when they returned home.⁹²

While unions seemed at least willing to put some hostility aside during the war to ensure national unity, confusion about the Guard's role in the American Army continued. Confusion over federal oaths of service epitomized the lack of clarity in regard to the role of

⁹⁰ Lasher, *Report, 1918*, 43. Lasher noted that the Guard attempted to appeal to workers by arguing that being drafted could break their ties to the community.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 44-5.

the federalized Guard. The National Defense Act of 1916 allowed the president to call the National Guard into federal service for any national emergency; however, due to the state-controlled nature of the Guard, guardsmen had to take a separate oath of service that placed them under federal jurisdiction.⁹³ The nature of the Guard under the new system meant the Guard was a state force until federalized in events of national emergencies; therefore, all Guardsmen took an oath to their state upon enlistment, but were required to take a federal oath if mobilized.⁹⁴ Further, when the Mexican conflict ended and guardsmen returned from the border, they were technically mustered out of Federal service. However, the National Guard was denied the role of “active service” during the border crisis and was once again asked to take another oath of federal service upon the American declaration of war. Many guardsmen simply did not understand this new law and responded with much hostility to the insistence that they take another federal oath.⁹⁵

More contention during World War I also arose from a deeper confusion over the role of the Guard in federal service. The law of 1916 established that the U.S. Army would consist of the “Regular Army, the Volunteer Army, the Officers’ Reserve Corps, the Enlisted Reserve Corps, and the National Guard.”⁹⁶ This not only established the Guard as part of the U.S. Army, but it also meant that guardsmen would fall under the same laws and regulations of the regular army when they were in federal service.⁹⁷ Once again, many guardsmen opposed this new role in which they found themselves, with some even risking

⁹³ “Dual Oath Necessary for National Guard,” *The New York Times*, June 18, 1916 and Coffman, 16-7.

⁹⁴ Baker, “Analysis of Bill,” 9-10 and U.S. Congress, *Provision for the National Defense, 1916*, Sections 3 and 4.

⁹⁵ “National Guard: The Status of the State Militia Under the Hay Bill,” *Harvard Law Review* 30 (December 1916) 191-2. According to the article, a guardsman sued the federal government based on the new oath of service because he had enlisted under the Dick Act and not the new National Defense Act.

⁹⁶ U.S. Congress, *To Increase the Efficiency of the Military Establishment of the United States* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1916) 1.

⁹⁷ U.S. Congress, *Efficiency of the Military, 1916*, 50.

court-martial.⁹⁸ This opposition to the regular army stemmed from the traditional nature of Guard service being separate from the federal government, but the new National Guard system required the integration of the Guard and the army.

⁹⁸ "Will Court-Martial Texas Guardsmen," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1916.

The Guard in the Great War

Only months after the completion of border duty, the Guard began the new system of army integration. After nearly three years of American neutrality, the United States declared war on Germany and its allies on April 6, 1917. While the war had been raging in Europe since August 1914, the United States was still largely unprepared for a large scale war. Not only did the American government need to mobilize its existing troops for war, but the government estimated an additional 800,000 men were needed to meet the needs of the Western Front.⁹⁹ Accordingly, Woodrow Wilson and Congress decided to utilize conscription, based on the experiences of the British and French. The Selective Service Act, passed in April, 1917, created over 4,600 local draft boards. These boards were not made up of military personnel, but rather consisted of influential local citizens.¹⁰⁰ The drafted force came to be known as the “National Army” and was only one component of the larger American Army.¹⁰¹ By doing this, the United States had implemented its first modern draft; however, training a large, conscripted force was a long and arduous process.¹⁰²

Conscripted troops did not make up most of the AEF. Volunteerism was still a leading factor in raising the American Army, and nowhere was the spirit of volunteerism more prevalent and long-standing than in the National Guard. On March 25, President Wilson recalled into federal service a small number of guardsmen from each state in preparation for a possible European war, and by July 15, 1917 all of the National Guard had been called into federal service. Guardsmen reported to their respective duty stations over the course of the next two weeks, and on August 5, 1917 the government officially removed

⁹⁹ Eisenhower, *Yanks*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Zieger, *America's Great War*, 58-9.

¹⁰¹ Coffman, 24-5.

¹⁰² Arthur Bullard, *Mobilising America* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1917) 110-111.

the Guard from state control.¹⁰³ Within months of the declaration of war, the National Guard had become part of the AEF, and the Guard did a more efficient job of quickly providing trained units for service than could the National Army, which struggled to organize and train large numbers of raw conscripted men.

Border duty prepared the troops for service, and ensured their quick mobilization. However, not all of the troops who returned from the border remained in the Guard due to their refusal to take a second oath of service. For instance, only 2,200 Iowa troops out of the 4,300 Iowa Guardsmen who returned from the border agreed to take the oath; yet, these troops were more prepared for service than new volunteers and those drafted into service.¹⁰⁴ Essentially, the 2,200 troops who remained after the border duty were reorganized and moved into the 3rd Iowa Infantry, which was renamed the 168th U.S. Infantry and became part of the 42nd Infantry Division (or the Rainbow Division, made up primarily of Guardsmen from across the nation who returned from the border), which was one of the first divisions to arrive in France.¹⁰⁵ The 168th was mobilized in April of 1917, and by mid-October, the unit had received orders to go “over there.”¹⁰⁶ Because the guardsmen were already trained, the Rainbow Division was able to arrive in France along with the first regular army troops.

¹⁰³ Lasher, *Report, 1918*, 7 and Hill, *Minute Man*, 262-3. Though the Guard was federalized in July, it was not until August 5 when the Guard was officially drafted into the Army as it fit under the Selective Service Act. Guardsmen removed state affiliations from uniforms and replaced them with U.S. Army insignia, and Guard units were re-numbered from state regiments to national ones to fit into the new American Army.

¹⁰⁴ Lasher, *Report, 1918*, 43. Many troops who had been stationed at the border were denied active duty status during their tour in Texas, and were required to take a third oath of service. Many guardsmen refused this third oath and left the guard. Many of these who refused to take the oath were required to enroll in the selective service and were eventually drafted into the AEF.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁶ Pvt. Everett Wright, Journal, October 19, 1917, Papers of Everett Wright, 1999.33.2 Iowa National Guard Archives, Camp Dodge, IA (Johnston, IA).

A small number of guardsmen who continued serving after the Mexican border conflict and were not transferred to the Rainbow Division provided valuable guidance for the new recruits just joining the guard. These units with untrained recruits required more time for preparation, and the military assigned them to extended duty at the home front. For instance, the first battalion of Iowa's Field Artillery was sent to Fort Roots near Little Rock, Arkansas and later to Camp Cody, New Mexico. The field artillery was later joined at Camp Cody by the rest of the newly organized Iowa Guard units as part of the 34th Infantry Division.¹⁰⁷ The Illinois Guard not included in the Rainbow Division formed the 33rd Infantry Division and moved to Camp Logan near Houston, Texas for advanced training.¹⁰⁸ Many of these troops did not receive overseas orders for nearly another year. While this experience was similar to that of conscripted troops, it was also shared by new volunteers of the regular army. Therefore, guardsmen who did not participate in the border duty were as prepared for overseas duty as new volunteers.

After a long journey, the troops finally arrived in Europe, but did not head immediately to the front lines. The first stop was a short layover in England, where the men underwent further drills. American troops received a welcome and motivational letter from King George V, who offered his support and thanks to the American soldiers.¹⁰⁹ Many men enjoyed their brief time in England, such as Iowa guardsman August Smidt who remarked in

¹⁰⁷ Lasher, *Report, 1918*, 38. and "History of Battery 'C' 126th Field Artillery"

¹⁰⁸ Adjutant General's Report, *Roster of National Guard and Naval Militia as Called for World War Service* (Springfield: Illinois State Government Press, 1918) ix and Hill, *Minute Man*, 272 and Paxson, *America at War*, 316.

¹⁰⁹ King George V, Letter to American Troops, January, 1918, Papers of August Smidt, Correspondence, 4: 1995.131, Iowa National Guard Archives, Camp Dodge, IA (Johnston, IA).

a letter to his girlfriend that his stay was in a “very good place, also good mess, but I think we will be leaving here before very long, but this is sure a beautiful country.”¹¹⁰

Upon leaving England for France, guardsmen spent more time drilling and training for the front. For instance, the 168th Infantry arrived at La Havre on December 9, 1917 and moved to a rest camp, which Cecil Clark described as a “Hell hole.”¹¹¹ Two days later, the troops moved out at dawn for Rimencourt, when they had the pleasure of passing Versailles. The troops stayed in Rimencourt for over a month, where they spent their time drilling and undergoing inspections. Finally, on February 1, 1918, after nearly two months in France, the troops of the 168th hiked toward the front lines. Throughout February these troops spent their days maneuvering, hiking, and parading through the streets of France for official reviews. However, the lives of these troops changed forever in March. Cecil Clark noted in his diary that the Germans raided two sister companies on March 5. He further noted that Company M along with two French companies went “over the top” on March 11, where an Iowa corporal was killed. The next week was filled with German artillery barrages, and on the March 17 Clark’s company made their first raid against the German lines.¹¹²

Sergeant Charles Kosek was also in the trenches during the first weeks of March, 1918, and his highly personalized diary entries noted the strains and emotions of wartime. Kosek perceived a level of hypocrisy on the part of commanders. According to Kosek, a company of the 168th had been awarded war crosses even though they were a mile in the rear of the trenches. Conversely, “We ran out and repulsed the Hun attack as soon as the barrage

¹¹⁰ August Smidt, Letter to Agnes, Oct 1918, Papers of August Smidt, 4: 1995.131, Iowa National Guard Archives, Camp Dodge, IA (Johnston, IA).

¹¹¹ Cecil A. Clark Diary, December 9, 1917, Diary of Cecil A. Clark, Iowa National Guard Archives, Camp Dodge, IA (Johnston, IA).

¹¹² Cecil Clark, Diary, February to March, 1918.

lifted; we got nothing. B Co. waited till they were sure it was all over and when they came out the Huns were in their trench and they had to run them out, result they got three medals.”¹¹³ While this account probably contains levels of truth, it is also partial and B Company troops likely maintained a different opinion. Private Alfred Bowen stated in a letter, “You really cannot believe anything you hear in the army, as you hear all kinds of conflicting rumors.”¹¹⁴

World War I served as an eye-opening experience for Guard troops, because guardsmen never saw actual combat at the border. The realities of trench warfare and modern weaponry created devastation, destruction, and pain foreign to most young troopers, but border duty lessened the learning curve, as guardsmen already held the basic skills necessary for combat. Further, the war changed the way many saw warfare, erasing what many admired in retrospect as the old spirit and glory of war. Indeed, Marinetti’s call to glorify war was put to the test. Life in the trenches, which consisted of constant shelling, machine gun fire, mortar attacks, air and tank warfare, and the painful reality of gas warfare replaced pre-war ideas of heroism. As Paul Fussell argues, “Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected.”¹¹⁵ The Guard troops, particularly those in the Rainbow Division, soon faced this reality in daily combat actions, but they were extensively trained for combat operations.

Of the new weaponry of the First World War, perhaps none was as devastating as the effects of poisonous gas on the soldiers in the trenches. Soldiers had some protection,

¹¹³ John Kosek, editor, *The Iowa Boys: A Remembrance of a Killing Contest, The Diary and Letters of Sergeant Charles Kosek Company D, 168th Iowa Infantry, 42nd Rainbow Division, American Expeditionary Force France, 1917-1918* (Copyright, Las Vegas NV 2010: Iowa National Guard Archives) 13.

¹¹⁴ Alfred Bowen, Letter to Alice Woolston, July 10, 1917, Papers of Alfred Bowen, 2000.48.4, Iowa National Guard Archives, Camp Dodge, IA (Johnston, IA).

¹¹⁵ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 7.

including gas masks, which they tested in specially designed chambers to the rear of the trenches.¹¹⁶ But even gas masks could not ensure safety; Iowa Guardsman Lloyd Ross, who was a Captain during World War I in the 168th and a veteran of the Spanish-American War, noted on one occasion that after seeing gas pouring into his trench, he gave the call of “gas” to warn others before putting on his mask. The result was incredibly painful.

I could feel the gas burning my throat and lungs and then I knew that I didn’t get my mask on in time and that I was gassed. I stood my post for a few minute and then I began to get dizzy and couldn’t stand up anymore. Corporal Kelly took me to my bunk and tole me not to move around. The next morning I was taken to the hospital where I found several of my pals who were gassed the same night.¹¹⁷

Francis Webster, who was also a member of the 168th Infantry, noted in a letter to his parents, that he had also been gassed and was recuperating in a hospital.¹¹⁸

While the Guard troops of the 42nd Division saw extensive combat in Europe, much of the National Guard did not share this experience. The Rainbow Division saw action in every major U.S. engagement of the war, and it included Guard troops and officers from 26 total states and included many distinguished officers such as then Colonel Douglas MacArthur.¹¹⁹ However, most guardsmen involved in combat operations did not arrive in France until the middle of 1918; yet, seven of the eleven divisions poised for an American

¹¹⁶ Cecil Clark, Diary, May 22, 1918.

¹¹⁷ General Lloyd D. Ross, Report: Fifty Germans and How They Fared, June 1918, Papers of General Ross, WWI Box, 1999.113, Iowa National Guard Archives, Camp Dodge, IA (Johnston, IA).

¹¹⁸ Francis Webster, Collection of Sympathy Letters, November 1918, Papers and Items of Pvt. Francis Webster, 2005.107.30, Iowa National Guard Archives, Camp Dodge, IA (Johnston, IA). Webster was unfortunately killed only weeks before the official end of the war.

¹¹⁹ Zieger, 107-8 and 42nd Division Headquarters “General Orders No 22.” Issued by Major General Menoher and written by Colonel Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff, Documents of General Ross, WWI Box, Iowa National Guard Archives, Camp Dodge IA (Johnston, IA).

advance in August were Guard divisions.¹²⁰ Other Guard divisions, such as the 34th (containing Iowa's Guard) were not sent directly to the front, but did see some combat as reserve organizations.¹²¹ Unlike the wartime experience of troops in the Rainbow Division, monotony exemplified life at the camps and away from the front lines, and border duty familiarized officers and troops with the monotonous lifestyle associated with camp life away from the front lines.

The monotony of camp life is apparent in the official history of the 126th Field Artillery (formerly the First Iowa Field Artillery). The 126th arrived at Fort Roots, Arkansas early in July 1917 and left for Camp Cody, New Mexico in October 1917. The official history then noted months on end which consisted of "usual camp duties."¹²² The 126th remained at Camp Cody until July 1918, when they embarked for training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, which continued for three months. The 126th arrived in France on October 18, 1918 where they once again "took up usual camp duties."¹²³ The monotony of usual camp duties was seemingly only interrupted for transportation to other stations, training of a specific nature, and official reviews of the 34th Division.¹²⁴ The experience of these Iowa troops was drastically different than those of the 168th who were actively engaged in combat; however, their service was still important to the war effort because these troops provided the regular army with the reserve force necessary to carry out combat operations.

¹²⁰ Paxson, *America at War*, 341.

¹²¹ Lasher, *Report, 1918*, 33-4. It should be noted that some of the troops from Camp Cody did eventually see line duty after being transferred out of their original units to supplement other National Guard and Army units already in the trenches.

¹²² "History of Battery 'C' 126th Field Artillery, June, 1917" Kershenski Box, Iowa National Guard Archives, Camp Dodge, IA (Johnston, IA) 1.

¹²³ "History of Battery C," 1-2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

While the Guard served an important role in the war effort, political tensions and internal struggles continued. A series of telegrams and letters between Iowa Governor William Harding and U.S. Senator Albert B. Cummins (Iowa) show those men's anger when the military decided to break up Iowa units stationed at Camp Cody. In order to keep the camp at its strength of 5,500 men, some Iowa guardsmen were sent overseas with other units, while their officers remained in New Mexico to train the new arrivals.¹²⁵ The Guard used community connections as a recruitment tool, and this separation of units angered many guardsmen because the Guard generally resented military policies which broke down local and unit connections.¹²⁶

Another prime example of political tension relates to the 33rd Division of Illinois troops. In October 1917, the Illinois troops at Camp Logan, Texas and the 32nd Division of Wisconsin and Michigan troops (stationed at Camp MacArthur, Texas) were preparing for combat operations in Europe. However, shakedowns and inspections proved that the Wisconsin and Michigan troops were at a higher state of readiness than the Illinois troops (though this was mostly due to the fact that the Illinois troops recently received a large contingent of "unfit" draftees from around Illinois), which postponed the Illinois troops' deployment.¹²⁷ Ultimately, the Army forced the Illinois unit to provide its ordinance and various wartime supplies to the Wisconsin and Michigan troops, who were given priority over the Illinoisans. Illinois officers objected to this transfer of supplies, but to no avail, and

¹²⁵ Senator Albert B. Cummins, Letter to Governor Harding, May 29, 1918, General Correspondence of Governor Harding, Box 27, Iowa Historical Society (Des Moines, IA) Also noted in a telegram to Senator Cummins from Governor Harding found in the same box of correspondence.

¹²⁶ Paxson, *America at War*, 313-314.

¹²⁷ Hill, *Minute Man*, 276-7.

the loss of ordinance delayed the Illinois deployment even further.¹²⁸ The examples of the Illinois troops at Camp Logan and the Iowa troops at Camp Cody demonstrate the Guard's inability to establish political dominance over the regular army.

As noted earlier, the role of the Guard in the larger American Army was not entirely clear. Prior to the war, military and government leaders seem to have expected that the Guard would serve primarily as a reserve force for the Regular Army. An official report in 1919 noted that the National Guard "...fulfilled, during the Worlds War, the expectations that it would accomplish what was claimed for it, i. e. that with the Regular army it would furnish sufficient first line troops to successfully engage the enemy until any larger force necessary could be reached and trained."¹²⁹ In the case of Iowa and Illinois, the Rainbow Division served this first line role, while the other troops who had been called into federal service maintained the role of a reserve force.

Whether on the front lines or the home front, Guard mobilization left the states without a local military force. In order to fill this void, Iowa created one regiment of infantry for state duty.¹³⁰ This regiment served the role the Guard had served prior to their deployment overseas, which was to quell any labor disputes, put down riots, and aid in recovery efforts after disasters. But the wartime shortage of supplies plagued even this temporary unit. In July 1918, a company of guardsmen from Sioux City, Iowa aided in disaster relief after the collapse of the Oscar Ruff Building, even though the men had not yet been supplied rifles. Locals worried that the lack of supplies might limit the guard's ability

¹²⁸ Paxson, *America at War*, 316.

¹²⁹ Lasher, *Report*, 1920, 1.

¹³⁰ Lasher, *Report*, 1920, 1. Of this new state regiment, the first company was eventually called into federal service.

to maintain order, especially during harvest season, when a large “floating population” passed through Sioux City to harvest fields.¹³¹

The service of the National Guard during World War I came in many forms. For some, combat and life in the trenches was a reality. For others, most of the war was spent drilling on the home front or filling roles as reserve troops. And for others, such as Company D of Sioux City, wartime service was related to home state service. Yet, the service of the Guard as a whole played an important role in the war effort, as each piece of the Guard played a role in the successful execution of the Army’s mission. At a time when the role of the Guard was still in question, the three roles played by the Illinois and Iowa Guards helped to solidify the Guard’s place in the American military. However, at the conclusion of hostilities, uncertainty returned about the role for the National Guard in peacetime, and indeed, questions about whether it could continue to exist.

¹³¹ Iowa Treasury Secretary, J.W. Porterfield, Letter to Governor Harding, July 5, 1918, General Correspondence of Governor Harding, Box 27, Iowa Historical Society (Des Moines, IA).

Return from Europe and Post-war Reorganization

Debate surrounding the continued existence of the Guard reemerged when World War I ended. As previously noted, the National Defense Act of 1916 created confusion among the ranks of guardsmen, particularly dealing with federal oaths. A ruling by the Judge Advocate General of the Army declared that guardsmen who had taken a federal oath of service and were subsequently discharged from federal service were also discharged from any previous commitment or enlistment.¹³² However, there was little malicious intent from the federal government. Essentially, any guardsman who had taken the oath of federal service was discharged from the U.S. Army upon his return from Europe, and that discharge translated into a discharge from all military obligations: state and federal. For Iowa and Illinois, this meant the only remaining state troops were those in the regiments created after initial federalization, as well as those who had enlisted after the mobilization of the Guard.¹³³ This massive discharge had a devastating effect on the National Guard system as a whole.

This sudden hollowing-out of the entire National Guard dismayed American governors, who worried that their states would need a strong post-war Guard force to continue their previous peacetime duties on strike and riot duty. For instance, in April 1919, the Iowa government placed the state National Guard on alert in anticipation of any potential trouble at the International Workers of the World convention to be held in Des Moines.¹³⁴ At the same time, the pre-war negative image of the National Guard as anti-labor strikebreakers placed the future recruitment and survival of the Guard in jeopardy. Even the Guard's

¹³² Hill, *Minute Man*, 208.

¹³³ Lasher, *Report*, 1920, 1. And Hill, *Minute Man*, 298-9.

¹³⁴ Sheriff W.H. Jones, Letter to Governor Harding, April 18, 1919, Correspondence of Governor Harding, Box 19, Iowa Historical Society (Des Moines, IA). In this letter, Sheriff Jones asked the Governor on behalf of himself and the Des Moines mayor if the National Guard could be placed on alert for the I.W.W. Convention in late April.

extensive service during World War I did not automatically remove earlier tensions with working-class citizens. In one 1919 letter the Militia Bureau wrote that the Guard's mission should not be "for the purpose of aiding capital in its issues with labor but with a view to enforcing the law of the land and of preserving local communities from a reputation for lawlessness." The Bureau worried that members' "dislike of strike duty" and the "hostility of labor unions toward the National Guard" had contributed to low morale among Guard members.¹³⁵ Pre-war and pre-border duty perceptions of the Guard proved difficult to erase, and some Guard opponents still supported replacing the Guard with some sort of UMT.¹³⁶ However, the Guard's service in the war demonstrated that the new Guard system was effective.

Accordingly, state governors and legislators lobbied Washington to strengthen the National Guard system, to insure its continued existence, to raise members' morale, and to improve recruitment. The NGA maintained a strong lobby in Washington throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, and their efforts grew in strength after the First World War.¹³⁷ While the Guard itself pushed for more reform, regular army officers who worked closely with the Guard, such as Douglas MacArthur and General Pershing himself, praised the Guard's service in Europe.¹³⁸ General Pershing even declared that the National Guard never received full support from the federal government during the war.¹³⁹ While

¹³⁵ Louis Lasher, Adjutant General, *Report of the Adjutant General of Iowa: For the Biennial Period Ended June 30, 1920* (State of Iowa, 1920) 189. General Order No. 14.

¹³⁶ Hill, *Minute Man*, 293-8. Pre-war hostility to the Guard from the Army General Staff persisted, and hoped to re-address UMT in an effort to remove the Guard.

¹³⁷ "For the National Guard," *The New York Times* January 23, 1902 and Mahon, *History*, 143-7, 170-4, 199-201.

¹³⁸ Mahon, *History*, 169-71 and Hill, *Minute Man*, 304-7.

¹³⁹ U.S. Congress, *National Defense Hearings, Relating to the Reorganization Plans of the War Department and to the Present National Defense Act* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1927).

Pershing and MacArthur viewed the Guard favorably, the Army General Staff and officers who did not serve alongside guardsmen never viewed the Guard as true equals due to its role as both a state and federal force. Many in the General Staff favored UMT prior to American entry into the war, and they carried this opinion with them throughout the war.¹⁴⁰ However, the Guard's records as both combat troops and reservists provided the Guard with the political ammunition it needed to lobby senators and representatives.

Congress complied, and by June, 1920 they amended the National Defense Act to strengthen the new National Guard system. The federal government established new peacetime and wartime standards for the proper size of Guard units, with a minimum strength of fifty men and an operating strength of sixty five. The most important provision stated that troops who had served during World War I and were discharged before their original commitments expired, could re-enlist in the Guard for one year periods. This allowed guardsmen to return to the Guard, but they were not forced to re-enlist in typical three year increments, unless they wished to. Finally, the new law declared that guardsmen who had been drafted into federal service, then discharged when the emergency ended, would have to finish their term with the National Guard.¹⁴¹

The legislation of the National Defense Act amendments of 1920 ensured that the Guard would not disintegrate when massive deployments ended, while also creating a peacetime reorganization of the Guard as a whole. A corps system replaced the Army

¹⁴⁰ Hill, *Minute Man*, 291-5 and Mahon, *History*, 170-2. These authors outline the dissenting opinions between the Army's General Staff and the NGA. Staff officers believed Guard officers should be subordinate to regulars. Hill also notes that pre-war pressures from civilians to replace the Guard with UMT did not disappear after the war. This shows the importance of the testimony of regular officers who could vouch for the Guard. This is also related to the pre-war opinion of regulars, who believed the Guard to be inefficient and unprofessional.

¹⁴¹ U.S. Congress, *National Defense Conference Report, May 27, 1920* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1920) 26-30 and Lasher, *Report, 1920*, 6-7.

divisional system of World War I, with the National Guard providing eighteen divisions of infantry and two divisions of cavalry for the new Army corps.¹⁴² Military leaders aimed to ensure that the nation would have a fighting force of two million men by 1924, and their quota stipulated that each state provide a certain number of troops based on its population.¹⁴³ For instance, the Iowa was to provide more than 10,000 men to meet this goal, and the National Guards of Iowa, Minnesota, North, and South Dakota would compose one infantry division.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, the Illinois Guard made up another infantry division, and by 1920, the American military system officially included the National Guard for the long term.

¹⁴² Lasher, *Report, 1920*, 7. The Regular Army provided 9 divisions of infantry and 2 divisions of cavalry, and the Organized Reserve was to provide 27 infantry and 2 cavalry divisions as well.

¹⁴³ U.S. Congress, *National Defense Report, 1920*, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Lasher, *Report, 1920*, 7-8.

Conclusion

The future of the National Guard was in serious jeopardy at the turn of the twentieth century. Years of congressional debate created three pieces of legislation designed to integrate the unorganized state militias into the American military system. The militia system, which had existed in America even prior to independence, had been replaced with a National Guard system which allowed for guardsmen to be federalized for service whenever deemed necessary by the President or Congress. The Dick Acts of 1903 and 1908 replaced the old militia system with the modern National Guard system, and the National Defense Act of 1916 established the Guard as a key component of the American military. However, the new National Guard needed to prove itself capable of serving in a modern military system. After years of turmoil between the United States and Mexico, following a failed expedition to capture the outlaw Pancho Villa, President Woodrow Wilson called the National Guard to protect the border from further incursions. The troops answered the call; however, they never engaged the enemy. Instead, they spent most of their time training and drilling for future actions, but this training proved itself to be of great value, because when war service came, the Guard was ready and able to fight. The National Guard put this training to use in France and proved its abilities as a fighting force.

National Guard members of numerous states, including Illinois and Iowa were among the first American troops to reach the battlefields of Europe. Guard troops lived and fought in the trenches and dealt with the same horrors and hazards associated with modern trench warfare as the regular army. Any notion that Guard troops might be inferior or inadequate was quickly dispelled, once their Rainbow Division compiled an impressive service record in major military engagements. Even those guardsmen who did not see combat played a major

role in America's efforts to gain victory on the battlefield, as a valuable reserve force. The World War I period proved the new National Guard system was capable of quick mobilization and was indeed an efficient fighting force. The border duty provided the Guard the combat skills necessary to carry out operations in France, and without it, the Guard would have needed to undergo the same late train-up as drafted troops.

As World War I ended, National Guardsmen, including those from Illinois and Iowa, were suddenly discharged, meaning that Guard units had almost no men left. The survival of the new National Guard system was again in jeopardy. During the war the National Guard had filled a gap, as they were ready to move overseas and bolster regular Army units, long before the military could finish training its new raw conscripts. Observers appreciated the way the Guard had played an essential dual role, both as a front line organization and a reserve force. Accordingly, the War Department and Congress took steps to ensure the Guard would not disappear. The Guard system faced opposition from politicians and civilians alike after the Spanish-American War, and opponents made efforts to replace the existing system with UMT. The Guard maintained a strong lobby and survived initial attempts at replacement, but still needed to prove itself capable of serving as a valuable piece of the American Army. Guardsmen received valuable training at the Mexican border in 1916 and utilized this training in France during the First World War. The Guard performed better than expected in Europe (both as a front line force and a reserve force), and supporters of the Guard took steps to strengthen it after the war. Officials moved swiftly to reorganize and re-strengthen the Guard just at a time when it seemed to be collapsing on itself. Their move solidified the new National Guard system and clarified its future role, ensuring that the Guard would remain a major part of the American military to this day.

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