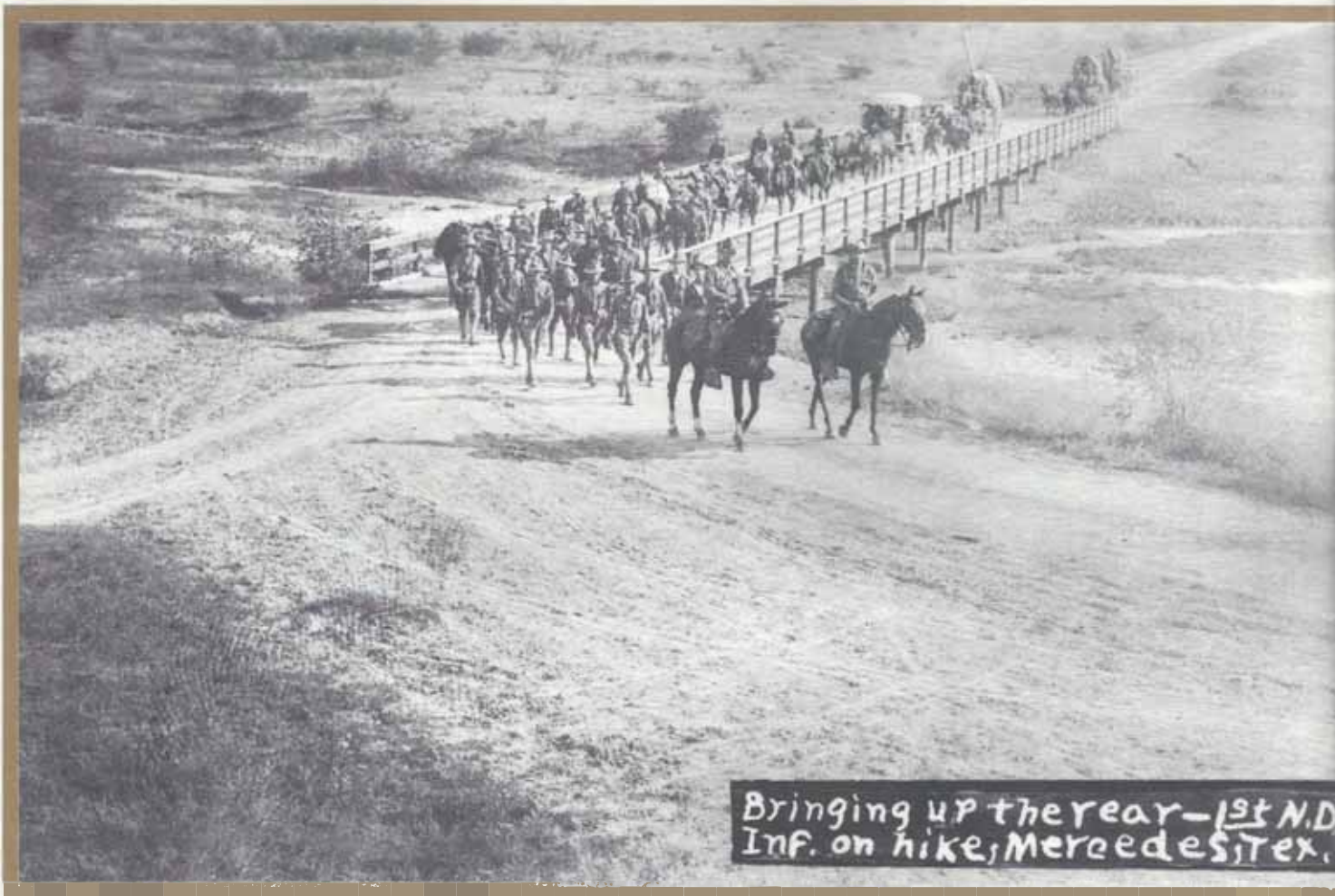


Dakota Doughboys in the Desert

The Experiences of a
North Dakota National Guard Company during
the Mexican Border Campaign of 1916-1917

by Richard K. Stenberg



SH5ND 0907-02

First North Dakota Infantry participates in field exercises along the Mexican border, 1916. Civil war in Mexico and a bloody cross-border raid prompted President Wilson to call the National Guard into service. Though the nickname “doughboy” is often associated with World War I, the Mexican border experience bestowed the moniker on American soldiers. In Texas the soil, when dry, crumbled into a white powdery dust that covered the soldiers like flour and gave them the appearance of doughboys.

“We fellows are pretty tired of this border stuff,” sighed Hjalmer Rud, a private and bugler of E Company, First North Dakota Infantry, as he wrote from a camp near Mercedes, south Texas, in 1916. “At the same time I don’t believe a man amongst us would balk if orders came tomorrow to cross the border,” he added.¹ Corporal Thomas B. (Bev) Randolph, also of E Company, wearily noted, “We have guard duty and plenty of it.”² Rud and Randolph were members of the North Dakota National Guard unit from Williston, in northwestern North Dakota. E Company, like other guard units from across the state and nation, had been called into active service in response to the growing tensions with Mexico. In all they would spend eight months along the southern border, where they received, along with plenty of guard duty, invaluable “boot camp” training under the tutelage of the regular army. E Company would return to Williston a more competent and professional force than they had been at the time of their June 1916 call-up.³

Members of E Company recounted their experiences in letters that were sent back home and published by two Williston newspapers and the small-town weeklies of the surrounding area, where the guardsmen lived. Interest in the correspondence was particularly strong because this was the first major mobilization E Company had experienced since its establishment in January 1907.⁴ Prior to 1907 the company had been assigned to Langdon, North Dakota, but that community had failed to field enough men, so it was disbanded and reassigned to Williston. This was an all-too-common occurrence for many National Guard companies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

American military presence along the border had been increasing for some years, as relations with Mexico deteriorated after the 1911 Mexican Revolution that overthrew long-serving president Porfirio Diaz. Francisco Madero, who had assumed the presidency of Mexico and brought back some stability, was assassinated in a coup led by General Victoriano Huerta on February 22, 1913. This precipitated a full-scale civil war between Huerta’s forces and a loose coalition called the “Constitutionalists,” led by Venustiano Carranza and aided by Emiliano Zapata in southwestern Mexico and by Pancho Villa in the north.⁵

President Woodrow Wilson disapproved of the manner in which General Huerta had come to power. He declined to recognize Huerta and ordered an arms embargo on Mexico.⁶ In April 1914 Wilson ordered American forces to seize the ports of Tampico and Veracruz.⁷ A diplomatic solution that resulted in the American evacuation of the two ports, Huerta’s resignation, and the assumption of the

Mexican presidency by Carranza did not bring stability to Mexico. Both Zapata and Villa revolted over the issue of land reform, and Villa came to dominate most of the borderlands with the United States. Several raids onto U.S. soil compelled a further increase in American cavalry patrols along the border from mid-1915 into 1916.

Matters came to a head when Villa raided the small community of Columbus, New Mexico, on the morning of March 9, 1916. The town was burned, and seventeen people were killed. Troopers of the Thirteenth Cavalry, who were camped nearby, drove off the raiders. With Carranza’s permission, President Wilson ordered Brigadier General John J. Pershing into Mexico, and on March 15, 1916, American troops crossed the border in pursuit of Villa in what was known as the “Punitive Expedition.”⁸ Pershing never caught Villa, but Pershing’s men dispersed his forces in a number of engagements, and more than six thousand American troops

penetrated over three hundred miles into Mexico. Carranza soon requested that Pershing’s expedition be withdrawn, but this was not accomplished until February 1917, after several clashes had occurred between Mexican regulars and U.S. troops. Meanwhile, the regular army had demanded a force of 150,000 additional men to guard the American border against any further incursions.⁹

To support the regular army actions, President Wilson requested, on May 10, 1916, the mobilization of the National Guards of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. Additional manpower to protect the Mexican border was made available in early June by passage of the National Defense Act of 1916, which gave the president direct authority to call out the National Guard in time of emergency. Wilson exercised this authority on June 18, 1916, issuing an order that applied to all those states whose guards had not been called up earlier except Nevada, which did not have an organized National Guard.¹⁰

On that date, Governor Louis B. Hanna received a telegram from the secretary of war ordering North Dakota’s National Guard into federal service. On June 19 the regimental commander, Colonel John Fraine, directed all guard members to report to their armories by 9:00 p.m. that same day. The North Dakota National Guard was then organized as the First North Dakota Infantry Regiment, which consisted of twelve infantry companies, a machine gun company, a regimental band, and a Hospital Corps section. The minimum number of enlisted men required by the United States Department of War for the entire regiment was 895. However, a recruiting document noted that “On June 19, 1916, the consolidated strength report for the 1st N.Dak. Inf. showed a strength of 55 officers

On June 19 the regimental commander, Colonel John Fraine, directed all guard members to report to their armories by 9:00 p.m.

[and] 681 enlisted men which was well below the authorized strength.”¹¹ The Adjutant General of North Dakota, Thomas Tharalson, therefore directed all company commanders to immediately recruit up to the minimum authorized strength of sixty-five enlisted men.¹² E Company captain Henry R. Evans went a step further, issuing a call for recruits to bring the company to its war strength of 150 men, but in this he was unsuccessful.¹³

While E Company was required to report to its armory on June 19, it remained in Williston for another six days before departing for the state mobilization center. Community-wide fund-raising efforts to support the guardsmen began almost immediately. On June 23 E Company presented a play entitled *At Tampa Bay*, a story of the Spanish-American War, to help with their armory building fund drive.¹⁴ The play was followed by a banquet held in the company’s honor by the Williston Community Service Club.¹⁵ The practice of local communities raising a commissary fund to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, condiments, tobacco, and writing and reading materials to supplement army rations and supplies had been quickly revived with this mobilization. At the banquet the various ladies’ organizations from the community donated a total of \$28.55 to the company’s fund. The Williston Elks presented the guard with a special five-by-ten-foot flag to serve as company colors, although it was not received before their departure.¹⁶

Fund-raising continued after E Company left Williston. Thomas F. Craven, president of the Williston Board of City Commissioners, pledged that the community would raise \$750 for its guardsmen.¹⁷ Williston’s newspapers, the

Graphic and the *Herald*, organized and sponsored a baseball game, urging the community to buy tickets for either twenty-five cents “or as much as you wish to pay.” The game was started at 6:30 in the evening of July 6, but due to darkness only four full innings were played, with the final score being eleven to eleven. A good crowd was entertained, and E Company received \$31.40 for its fund.¹⁸ Community dances were also held to raise money, and by mid-September the company had received more than three hundred dollars from the people of Williston.¹⁹

E Company departed Williston by a special troop train at 5:00 a.m. on June 25, 1916, for Fort Lincoln, south of Bismarck, North Dakota, the mobilization point where all the state’s guard companies were to assemble.²⁰ Hundreds of people turned out to wish the company well. “Never in the history of Williston has a similar scene been enacted,” declared the *Herald*.²¹

Fort Lincoln was officially named “Camp Lincoln” by Regimental Order No. G.O. 2 on June 26, 1916, and military protocols, including standing guards around the camp, were authorized.²² North Dakota guardsmen assembled for inspection and mustering into regular army service, but lack of supplies and equipment problems slowed the mobilization.²³ The War Department was disappointed, as it had hoped to see a well-trained force quickly mobilized. The supply problem was later identified as originating from the department’s own obsession with paperwork and from the centralized supply system, with two depots for the entire nation trying to deliver equipment to guard units that had doubled their manpower in less than a month.²⁴

Courtesy of the Friends of the Old Armory



E Company at the ceremony dedicating the new armory in 1915. Most of the guardsmen in this photograph would have been called into active service in 1916. Local support was essential to build and maintain facilities like this armory. One of E Company’s last actions before leaving for Fort Lincoln was to raise money to pay off the remaining debt for the armory construction.

At Camp Lincoln, E Company was regarded as the best-drilled company in the regiment, with Grand Forks' M Company a close second.²⁵ Corporal Randolph described the routine at the camp for the folks back home: "At this moment Co. D (Minot) is staging a prize fight. Co. M (Grand Forks) is tossing 'rookies' in a blanket. The regimental band is playing. Co. A (Bismarck) is giving a dance. So you see if one wants amusement he doesn't have to look very hard to find it." Guardsmen attended a circus in Bismarck and, when they were not fighting mosquitoes, indulged in other off-duty pursuits. But Randolph also noted that "\$75,000 worth of equipment has been received since camp was established, so it looks like the real stuff."²⁶

Due to the high death rate from disease in the 1898 Spanish-American War, great emphasis was placed on health conditions in the camp. Guardsmen at Camp Lincoln were given the same thorough physicals that were required in the regular army. Nine men in E Company failed to pass and were sent back to Williston. However, this was a better record than that of either Grand Forks' M Company, which had its ranks depleted by twenty-two men, or Minot's D Company, which lost more than thirty men to the exams.²⁷ Those who passed were immediately given typhoid inoculations and vaccinated for smallpox. Of 681 enlisted men examined, 114 failed; this left 567 fit for duty. Later recruitment added 395 to the regiment, which meant that the First North Dakota had 962 enlisted men when it left for Texas.²⁸

After extended drills and inspection, the First North Dakota Infantry started entraining in battalion-sized groups on July 22, 1916, and set out for the south Texas community of Mercedes. During their departure several members of the company noted the presence of a "movie man" filming drills, marches, inoculations, and the company striking tents. The man was Frithjof Holmboe, a Norwegian immigrant who was one of the state's first motion picture makers; he had a studio in Bismarck.²⁹

E Company was part of the Third Battalion, which was commanded by Major James M. Hanley and also included Companies D of Minot, C of Grafton, and M of Grand Forks. The Third was the last battalion to leave Camp Lincoln. Privates Hjalmer Rud, Clarence Personius, and Corporal Thomas Randolph each described the rail trip for readers back home. Rud and Personius commented on the



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Tossing "rookies" in a blanket was one way in which North Dakota guardsmen amused themselves when they assembled at Fort Lincoln.

harvest that was underway in South Dakota and Iowa. "As far as the crops are concerned I can say that we have better crops in our own McKenzie county," reported Rud.³⁰ The trains rolled through Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and then into Texas, making only a few short stops. Sometimes the guardsmen got good meals, but often they



Soldiers on parade ground, Fort Lincoln, south of Bismarck, North Dakota, 1916. Before being deployed to the Mexican border, National Guard companies from around the state assembled at Fort Lincoln for training, inspection, equipment, and mustering into regular army service.

simply ate beans. Private Personius noted that E Company was thankful for the boxes of cigars sent to Lieutenant Emery Jeffrey and that all members “had a smoke.” But he also recorded the company’s disgust over the fact that they had not been paid: “Very few of the boys have money and the Company fund is d— short at present.”³¹

Once into Texas, these North Dakota guardsmen noted changes. “We have all seen, most of us for the first time, cotton, sweet potato and sugar cane fields. There is much else different in Texas than in North Dakota,” Corporal Randolph reflected.³² Rud told of squads of soldiers guarding bridges and ranches, and of Mexican girls who “are very pretty and believe me they can flirt too, but so few speak American that its no fun conversing with them.” He noted that “peaches can be bought for 60c a bushel and all you want of them,” which prompted their sergeant to warn them about overeating.³³ In Waco, Texas, Major Hanley gave the battalion a wagonload of watermelons to enjoy. “About all you can see are seeds and chins soaked with melon juice,” reveled Personius. “Wish some of the people in Williston who like fruit were here today.”³⁴

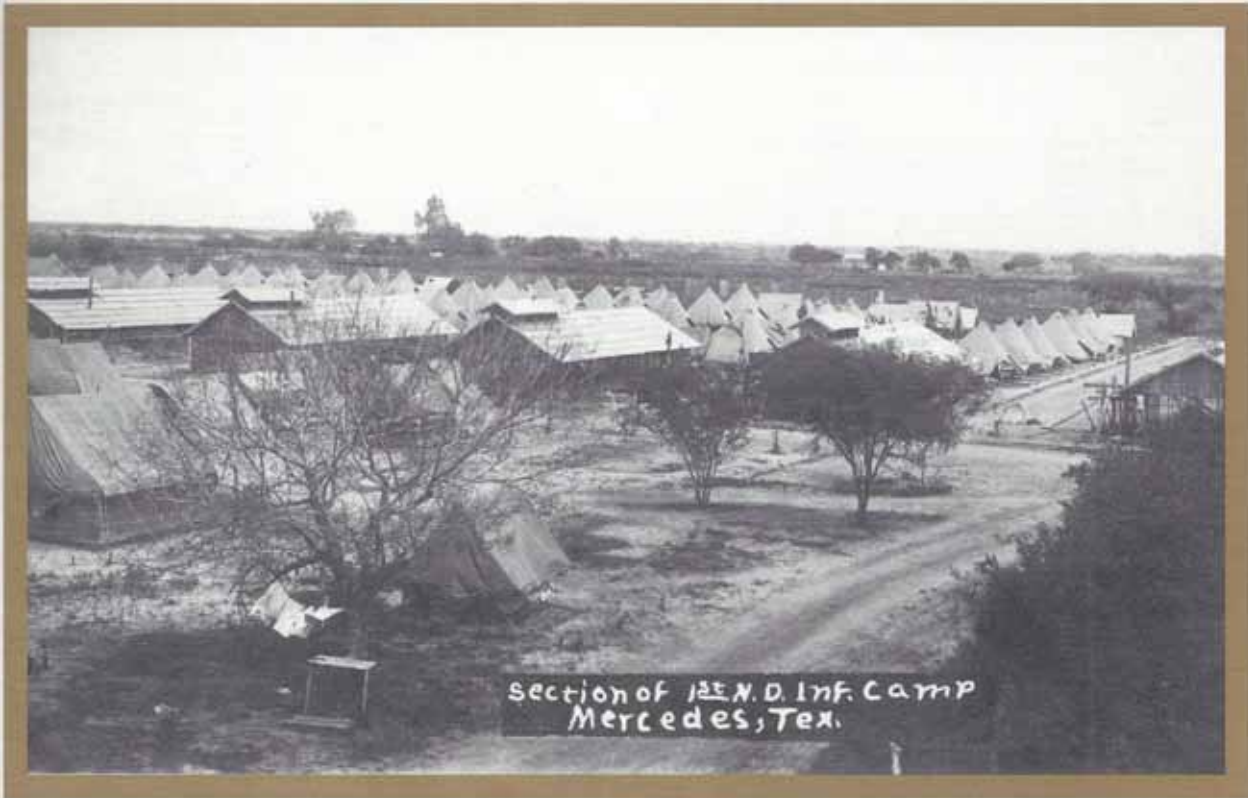
The Third Battalion reached Mercedes on July 26 in the midst of a rainstorm, and rain continued for most of the first six weeks the guardsmen were in Texas. Great effort was expended in getting equipment over muddy roads to the campsite selected for them on the outskirts of the city. “After we got the cook’s tent up we had coffee and hard tack. We made our beds on the ground and though wet managed to sleep,” scrawled Rud. Randolph declared that “Our first night in camp was a continual uproar. . . . We imagined everything in the insect line had bitten us.” Personius concluded, “We are only four miles from the border and about half a mile from Mercedes, which will be our

address for some time to come.”³⁵

Since no preparations had been made for arriving units at Mercedes, each had to create its own encampment. Unfortunately, the grounds on which the North Dakota National Guard encamped had been used for many years as a dumpground by the locals, and the site was covered with chaparral, mesquite, and rubbish.³⁶ “Most of the time has been taken up in clearing the grounds, and grubbing out grass and cactus, to lessen the dangers from tarantulas, scorpions and ‘rattlers,’” reported Personius. He stated that after ten days in camp they had “things in fine shape,” but that there was “considerable rain and mud.”³⁷ On the night of August 16, E Company and the rest of the regiment experienced a Texas “norther,” a tremendous rain and wind storm that blew in, downed most of the tents, and soaked everyone. When Captain Evans’s tent went down, it was not caused solely by the wind: some of his men had helped the process, and they “heard some of the choicest language ever uttered.”³⁸ In addition to the mud, high temperatures were a serious concern. “Yesterday it was 80 degrees F. Eighty here is like 100 in N.D. They say it gets to 104—deliver us,” anguished Randolph.³⁹

The cross-country deployment of the North Dakota National Guard occurred without much mishap. This was not the story for many other states’ guards, who encountered transportation delays that tied up arrivals for many weeks. By July 31, however, 112,000 guardsmen had been transported to the borderlands.⁴⁰ Mercedes was located in the Brownsville District, which was commanded by Brigadier General James Parker. The Brownsville District was part of the Southern Department, which, in turn, was commanded by Major General Frederick Funston. General Parker’s command included all regular and National Guard troops from

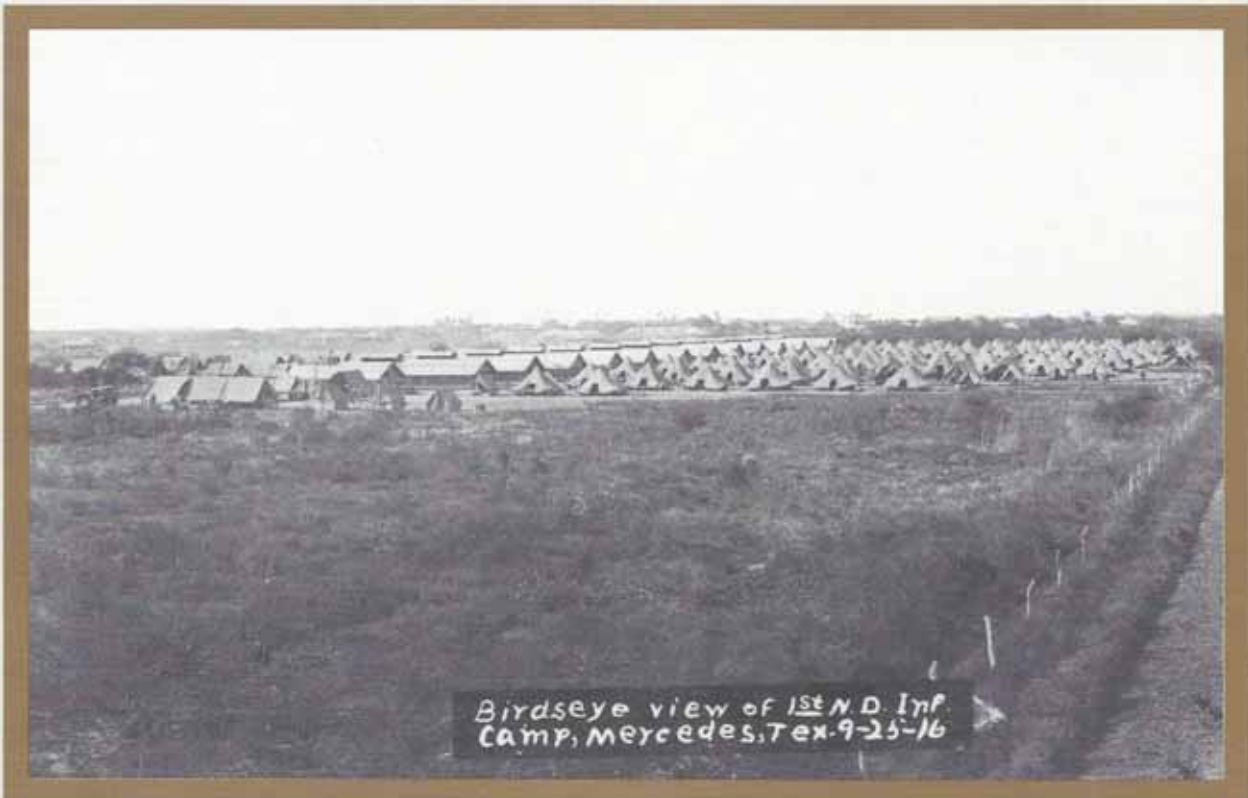
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Section of 1st N.D. Inf. Camp
Mercedes, Tex.

Two views of the First North Dakota Infantry camp in Mercedes, Texas. The camp was constructed on what had been a local dumpground. Much effort was required to clear the ground and grub out grass and cactus so as to decrease the danger from tarantulas, scorpions, and rattlesnakes.

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Birdseye view of 1st N.D. Inf.
Camp, Mercedes, Tex. 9-25-16

Mercedes east to the Gulf Coast. The Third United States Cavalry Regiment and the Twenty-sixth and Twenty-eighth United States Infantry Regiments were the regulars in this district; they were reinforced by guardsmen from fourteen states.

While regulars patrolled the border and guarded key bridges over the Rio Grande, the state soldiers began an intensive six-month training program.⁴¹

“The schedule which we are following is one that is known in the regular army as intensive training schedule,” wrote Sergeant

Herbert Metzger. “We have four hours drill a day, together with two hours school and ceremonial drills. It is a rather hard schedule but I enjoy every minute of it. On Fridays we have a hike which is not less than ten miles, and believe me, it is some little affair. But after we come in and get a good shower bath it makes one feel like a million dollars.” Regarding the men of the Third Battalion, Metzger noted, “Some people crab because its nature, some people because they see others do it, and some because they can not find anything else to do. . . . The only kick that any man in this regiment can make is that we have not been paid at all since [we] have been mustered in, and I don’t blame them for kicking about that.”⁴²

The company experienced shortages not only in monetary terms, but also in basic clothing and hygienic items. This prompted Commissary Sergeant James Thiessen to write to the president of the Williston Commercial Club, J. W. Jackson, urging the community to

help fill the soldiers’ needs. Lightweight underwear, stockings, handkerchiefs, soap, towels, sleeping garments, salves, magazines, Spanish books, castor oil, and postage stamps were just some of the items in demand.⁴³ When a malaria epidemic later broke out, the contagion was soon checked through the use of quinine. The army did not provide this antidote, however. The First North Dakota had to buy its own supply with money that had been forwarded by Governor Louis B. Hanna as a gift to the regiment.⁴⁴

E Company received a jolt on September 6, 1916. Corporal Christian E. Boe of Alexander, North Dakota, one of the company cooks, died four days after being admitted to the regimental hospital because of a stomach ulcer. Regarded as one of the most dependable men of the company, Boe was commemorated in a special service in Texas. His body was escorted to Alexander by First Lieutenant Emery Jeffrey. There, a huge crowd was on hand for the funeral service held in the Lutheran church.⁴⁵ Boe’s untimely death would be the only casualty that the entire regiment incurred during its Mexican border service.⁴⁶

On a happier note, hardly an evening passed in the Mercedes camp in which there were not concerts given by bands from various regiments. Corporal Randolph also reported that “each regiment in the Brownsville district has a ball team. They have organized a league and arranged a schedule. We figure on playing all

winter.”⁴⁷ Groups of guardsmen were occasionally allowed to travel to Brownsville for short trips, and some went fishing in the Rio Grande.

After several field maneuvers the Third Battalion received orders to move up to the border.⁴⁸ They relieved the Second Indiana and took over patrol duty, with E Company guarding an irrigation pumping station.⁴⁹



Sergeant Herbert Metzger in civilian attire and in uniform, above left, with an unidentified fellow soldier.



Mexican soldiers patrolled the river opposite their position. "We are about seven miles southwest of Mercedes and on the banks of the Rio Grande. We can throw a stone from the doors of tents into Mexico," wrote Corporal Randolph. "Everyone is perfectly satisfied here. All the 'hikes' as well as most of the ceremonial drills have been discontinued. . . . Of course we have guard duty and plenty of it." Sentinels were posted every night, with each man going on duty one night in three. "About the only thing that really is bothering us is the mosquitoes," he added. "Mosquito stories here are like fish stories in the North, and there are some good ones too." After four weeks of such duty, the Third Battalion rejoined the rest of the regiment. "I can't say that we are glad to get back, but then, our feelings would not be considered anyway," Randolph later remarked.⁵⁰

Field exercises and training continued. On November 6, 1916, the Fourth and Fifth Nebraska, along with the First North Dakota, began a four-day, fifty-mile road

march to test the soldiers' endurance. The units marched twenty-five miles to San Benito, Texas, in two days and began their return trip on day three.⁵¹ Large maneuvers were also held close to the border. The field exercise known as the "Brownsville Maneuvers" began on November 16, with two forces—the White and Brown armies—operating against each other from Mercedes to Brownsville. All troops engaged in forced marches, reconnaissance, and trench work, with day and night operations.⁵²

Private Hjalmer Rud recounted the war games in two lengthy letters. "Well, we are on our big maneuver at last and are certainly getting our hides full of it," he lamented. "It is interesting but awfully hard work. When you have hiked all day and finally come to a canal where a bridge is supposed to have been blown up by the retreating enemy and have to hike several miles around when the bridge is in plain sight, I'll tell you it is certainly tough." Referring to one day in which twenty-two miles were covered, Rud



First North Dakota Infantry band, Mercedes, Texas. Band concerts and baseball were popular diversions among guardsmen assigned to border duty. Hardly an evening passed in the Mercedes camp in which there were not concerts given by bands from various regiments.

The Robert Ruyon Photograph Collection (01744), courtesy of the Center for American History, the University of Texas at Austin

boasted, “This one days hike is the worst forced march with full packs that was ever pulled off. Not a man from the 1st N.Dak. fell out. That’s some record and we are proud of it. When you carry about 55 lbs of equipment and march 22 miles in seven hours on hard tack, etc., you will know it, ask it from me. If some one had told me I could do that six months ago I’d said, ‘you’re crazy.’” After recounting several mock engagements, he continued, “We fellows are pretty tired of this border stuff and at the same time I don’t believe a man amongst us would balk if orders came tomorrow to cross the border.”⁵³ As the First North Dakota neared its camp after the maneuvers, the cooks were sent ahead. That night the regiment enjoyed its first meal in a mess hall in fifteen days. The regiment had arrived back in time for Thanksgiving. “There wasn’t a sign of red-horse or hard-tack, but the real stuff. Turkey and all that goes with it,” Rud delighted. “Also got a real cigar after dinner and now its ‘bunk fatigue’ [duty] till we get orders to resume our drills, go home or cross the border.”⁵⁴

Rud’s letter, though appearing weeks after the event, was the last printed account of E Company’s exploits. The

War Department had issued a general order in August forbidding officers and enlisted men from writing “alarming stories, either by private letter or otherwise, concerning conditions” in Texas.⁵⁵ Despite the order letters continued to be sent back to North Dakota, where they appeared in print. Corporal Randolph noted, “We have a general order that prohibits anyone from writing alarming stories to newspapers under penalty of court martial, so I have to be very careful.”⁵⁶ The order was rigidly enforced after Captain A. B. Welch, A Company (Bismarck), allegedly violated it by doing an interview with the *Bismarck Tribune*, thereby provoking the wrath of Adjutant General Tharalson.⁵⁷ Captain Welch denied having given the interview, but the incident ended the printing of guardsmen’s letters.⁵⁸

General James Parker reviewed all of the troops who had been involved in the Brownsville Maneuvers. He honored the First North Dakota Infantry as the prize regiment in the parade, and E Company was named the best company in the regiment.⁵⁹ In thanking the troops involved in the maneuvers, Parker stated, “The deficiencies that we have discovered during this maneuver will guide our course of training in



The inadequacy of army rations and supplies prompted E Company’s home community of Williston to raise a commissary fund for their guardsmen, who used it to buy things like fresh fruits and vegetables, condiments, and tobacco.

the future, but it has been sufficiently demonstrated that the command would give a creditable account of itself in actual combat.”⁶⁰

With the removal of American forces from Mexico in February 1917 and the growing threat of war with Germany, National Guard units began to be withdrawn from the border and returned to state control. The guard units in the Brownsville area learned that they would be shuttled back to their respective states in three stages as soon as trains could be arranged. The First North Dakota was assigned to depart with the third group for Fort Snelling, Minnesota.⁶¹ On January 23, 1917, the movement was started, and the North Dakota guardsmen were given a written testimonial of thanks from the citizens of Mercedes: “The citizens of Mercedes having been witnesses of your daily drill—your fidelity to work—your soldierly qualities and manly bearing under the restraint of inaction—desire to compliment you upon these facts and desire to congratulate your governor and the people of your home state upon the splendid military efficiency you have shown under circumstances most exacting.”⁶² They arrived at Fort Snelling on January 28, 1917, detrained, then marched to the barracks in waist-deep snow and temperatures well below zero. Two weeks of processing followed, in which all officers and men were examined and paid off and all property was inventoried.⁶³

Due to the news blackout neither guardsmen nor their families in the Williston area knew when the homecoming would happen. While speculation about the definite date of E Company’s return continued, Williston prepared a great reception for their arrival. The city’s Commercial Club made arrangements that all members of the company would have jobs once they got back.⁶⁴ (The entry of the United States into World War I soon made this promise moot.) A citywide banquet was planned for the evening after their return.

Word was received of the First North Dakota Infantry’s mustering out of national service on February 14, 1917. By the next day all companies were en route to their home stations after eight months of active service.⁶⁵ A tremendous outpouring of emotion greeted E Company as the Great Northern train pulled into the Williston station in the early morning hours of February 16, 1917. More than two thousand residents were on hand. A *Williston Herald* account of the scene told that “In spite of the hour the station platform was packed with friends and relatives of the young men. . . . The first few minutes after

the arrival of the train was an impressive reunion of families.” After greetings were delivered, a parade formed and escorted E Company back to its armory, with the city band leading the way. “Under the direction of the Commercial Club a supply of fire works was on hand,” the account continued, “and rockets and Roman candles illuminated the frosty winter sky as the company marched up the street.”⁶⁶

At 6:30 that evening a formal banquet was held at the Odd Fellows Hall for the guardsmen of E Company, with the meal prepared by various women’s organizations. The guests of honor were not only E Company personnel, but past guardsmen and all Civil War and Spanish-American War veterans in the community. After the meal prominent members of the Williston community made brief addresses, to which Captain Evans responded: “Some of you gentlemen have said how glad you were to have us back. I want to say for myself and my boys that compared to us, you do not and cannot know the meaning of the word *glad*.” Following the reception the guardsmen were treated to a concert by the Chicago Male Quartette at the armory, and the night was capped off by a dance, with music provided by the Onstad Orchestra.⁶⁷

The same scene was replayed on February 20 for the guardsmen from McKenzie County. Alexander’s Commercial Club and Women’s Club prepared a banquet in the Lutheran church honoring the troops, followed by a dance at the Gem Theater. Many spoke at the reception, and a special tribute was held for Private Christian Boe.⁶⁸

The stormy Nonpartisan League-dominated 1917 State Legislative Assembly also paused to honor the guardsmen of the First North Dakota Infantry. Legislation was introduced to appropriate the sum of fifty thousand dollars to be paid out to qualified guardsmen in the amount of ten dollars for every month served during the border mobilization. It was passed and signed by Governor Lynn J. Frazier on March 12, 1917.⁶⁹

The Mexican border deployment of 1916-1917 is not often decried positively. The chaos of mobilization, the low level of training, and the lack of planning and equipment were frequent targets for criticism.⁷⁰ The War Department had not adequately planned for the mobilization of the guard, nor for its use on the border.⁷¹ Many guardsmen went to the border hoping to get into a quick fight and go home covered with glory. Instead they drilled—and so gained, however reluctantly, a great deal of valuable experience.⁷² Military training allowed guardsmen

“Some of you gentlemen have said how glad you were to have us back. I want to say for myself and my boys that compared to us, you do not and cannot know the meaning of the word *glad*.”

to become integrated into the regular army system, and this included the Dakota Doughboys. Absent for nearly nine months, eight of which were spent in national service on the Mexican border, E Company returned as tanned, trained soldiers. An unpublished history of the company stated that "In all, the border months were part of a real experience."⁷³

On March 26, 1917, several North Dakota guard companies under Major Dana Wright were ordered into service as guards at bridges and tunnels along the Northern Pacific Railroad from Fargo to Missoula. They remained in service until the entire North Dakota National Guard was drafted under another presidential call, which came on March 29, 1917.⁷⁴ When war was declared on Imperial Germany on April 6, 1917, the mobilization of the guard units went far more smoothly than it had in June 1916. It is quite true that the United States was woefully unprepared for a war against a major power in the spring of 1917, but not nearly as ill prepared as it would have been had the Mexican border mobilization not occurred.⁷⁵ The National Guard had its dress rehearsal on the Mexican border during 1916.⁷⁶

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World War I soldiers at Fort Lincoln, circa 1917. President Wilson called the entire North Dakota National Guard into service on March 29, 1917. Eight days later, the U.S. declared war on Germany. Thanks to the Mexican border experience of the year before, the guardsmen were now trained soldiers, and the mobilization went more smoothly this time around.

Roster of Company E

Maintaining manpower levels during the Mexican border campaign was a continual struggle for all National Guard units. The entire First North Dakota Infantry Regiment was confronted with the expiration of enlistments, as well as with student and economic hardship releases. Like the other units, E Company experienced variations in its makeup while called up for national service. On July 22, 1916, the day E Company boarded the train bound for the border, muster records showed the company strength at three officers and sixty-six enlisted men. This was the strongest the company would be during the border campaign. Recruitment and retention became such a problem for some units that personnel were sent back to North Dakota to undertake enlistment drives.

Like most guard units, E Company represented the area from which it was drawn. An analysis of the company from 1916-1917 shows that it was predominantly Anglo-American (especially the officers), with a good sprinkling of Scandinavians—as one would expect from the northwestern quarter of North Dakota. There were a few Germans and at least one naturalized Syrian. Several members of the company had the same last name, and there was at least one pair of brothers. The most common occupation among E Company guardsmen was farming and ranching. Second was being a “clerk” (eight members), with “student” next in line (seven). Other trades listed were civil engineer, bank teller, pharmacist, musician, barber, blacksmith, well-driller, butter-maker, machinist, electrician, railroad worker, and cook. (The civilian cook was not assigned cooking duties for the company.)

OFFICERS:

Capt. Henry Rosengarten Evans: Born Pottsville, Pennsylvania, 1878, of American parents; civil engineer; enlisted in E Company in 1906; promoted to captain.

1st Lt. Emery W. Jeffrey

2nd Lt. William Walter Jeffrey: Born Osceola, Nebraska, 1884, of American parents; clerk; enlisted in E Company in 1906.

SERGEANTS:

1st Sgt. [later Lt.] **George Gerald Harvey:** Born Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1886, of American parents; clerk; enlisted in E Company in 1907.

Quarter Master Sgt. Otto Wannagat

William Morton Woolridge: Born Avon, Montana, 1886, of English-American parents; electrician; enlisted in D Company, NDNG, at Minot in 1909 [drilled with E Company until mobilization, then left with unit].

Edward Oscar Anderson: Born Cresco, Iowa, 1892, of Norwegian-American parents; hardware clerk; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

Carl Henry Erickson: Born Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1888, of Swedish parents; bank teller; enlisted in E Company in 1914.

James Louis Thiessen: Born Leeds, Wisconsin, 1881, of American parents; pharmacist; enlisted in E Company in 1914.

Cyril Dyke Page: Born Larimore, North Dakota, 1895, of American parents; printer; initially enlisted in machine gun company (added at Fort Lincoln).

CORPORALS:

[later Sgt.] **Herbert Allen Metzger:** Born Williston, North Dakota, 1895, of French-American parents; student; enlisted in E Company in 1911.

George Frederick Wilkinson: Born Minot, North Dakota, 1893, of English parents; clerk; enlisted in E Company in 1912.

Lester Arthur Jeffrey: Born Silver Creek, Nebraska, 1893, of American parents; farmer; enlisted in E Company in 1912.

Ben J. Craven: Born Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1895, of American parents; student.

Elmer O. Halverson

Harry J. Halverson (brother)

CORPORALS & COOKS:

Christian E. Boe: from Alexander, North Dakota; died while on border duty.

Ernest August Nehring: Born Berlin, Germany, 1893; naturalized citizen; farmer; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

PRIVATES:

Jesse Vern Alexander: Born Bangor, Wisconsin, 1883 of American parents; fireman; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Robert D. Barnfather

Clarence Arthur Bell: Born Thompson, North Dakota, 1891, of American parents; clerk; was part of I Company but drilled with E Company.

Austin Belyea (added at Fort Lincoln)

Charles O. Bradley

Malcom G. Brawley

Arthur E. Brooks

Phillip J. Carpentier

Wilfred Joseph Carpentier: Born Belford, Dakota Territory, 1885, of Canadian-American parents; plasterer; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

William J. Chambers

Walter Ferdinand Charnholm: Born Necedah, Wisconsin, 1894, of Norwegian-American parents; hotel clerk.

Mike F. Clark: Born New Richmond, Wisconsin, 1893, of American parents; barber; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Thomas Clausen: Born Ostark, Denmark, 1888; naturalized citizen; blacksmith; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Edward Bernard Craven: Born Chaska, Minnesota, 1897, of American parents; student; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

John Patrick Dwyer: Born East Grand Forks, Minnesota, 1893, of Canadian-American parents; laborer; enlisted in E Company in 1914.

Clarence E. Evans

Frank W. Evans

Harry P. Evans

Steve W. Field

Arthur Carl Gardner: Born Crowell, Michigan, 1896, of German-American parents; buttermaker; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Leslie C. Grover

Casper Edwin Gunderson: Born Rugby, North Dakota, 1893, of American parents; rancher; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

Christie Phillip Hahm: Born Kane, Pennsylvania, 1893, of American parents; musician; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Logan Miller Hardaway: Born Williston, North Dakota, 1894, of American parents; student.

Ernest A. Harris

Frank Sheridan Harvey: Born Ogden, Utah, 1890, of American parents; express messenger; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

Roy Milton Hendricks: Born Northwood, North Dakota, 1897, of Swedish-American parents; machinist.

Reginald Randolph Holland: Born Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1895, of Canadian parents; farmer; enlisted in E Company in 1914.

John W. Holloway

Cecil Stanley Jackson: Born Sanborn, Iowa, 1889, of American parents; student; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Ira Lester Jaynes: Born Roberts, Wisconsin, 1894, of Canadian parents; rancher; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Percy Reginald Jaynes: Born Roberts, Wisconsin, 1896, of Canadian parents; student; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

Peter D. Johnson: Born Cooperstown, North Dakota, 1891, of Norwegian parents; farmer; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

Leo Boyer Kingston: Born Arthur, Iowa, 1890, of American parents; welldriller; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Holver K. Koppang**Nicholas J. Lahr****William B. Law****Benjamin Leifson**

George N. Low: Born Turtle Lake, North Dakota, 1894, of American parents; farmer; enlisted in E Company at Bismarck in 1916.

Howard Earnest McDonald: Born Woodstock, Ontario, 1896; naturalized citizen; railway clerk; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

Robert D. Mansfield**Dewey E. Marston**

John Clarence Mathews: Born Williston, North Dakota, 1896, of Canadian-American parents; clerk; enlisted in E Company in 1914.

Robert E. McWilliams

Luther John Monson: Born Wausau, Wisconsin, 1894, of Norwegian-American parents; mechanic; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Clarence G. Personius

Hughie Archer Puffer: Born Glendive, Montana, 1897, of American parents; painter; enlisted in I Company in 1915.

Thomas Beverly Randolph: Born Estherville, Iowa, 1894, of American parents; rancher; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

Gerhard A. Roed

Hjalmer Fridtjof Rud: Born Grand Forks, North Dakota, 1894, of Norwegian parents; postal clerk; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

John Hubberth Ruetten: Born St. Anthony, Minnesota, 1891, of German parents; farmer; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

Henry John Schutt: Born Hamburg, Germany, 1889; naturalized citizen; farmer; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

Axel Selseth**Littleo Shanks****Gerard P. Sheldall**

Shaker A. Shikany: Born Zahlic, Syria, 1897; naturalized citizen.

John M. Shue: Born Port Leydon, New York, 1890, of American parents; farmer; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Ellis Ray Slater: Born Toronto, Ontario, 1897, of English-Canadian parents; student; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

Charles Ernest Smith: Born Valley City, North Dakota, 1895, of American parents; railway worker; enlisted in E Company in 1913.

Lester S. Taylor

John T. Thompson: Born Washburn, Wisconsin, 1894, of Norwegian parents; cook; enlisted in E Company in 1916.

Walter (Leo) Warner

Claire Almond Wilder: Born Walker, Iowa, 1893, of American parents; farmer; enlisted in E Company in 1915.

This roster of the officers and men of E Company was compiled from listings found in the *Williston Graphic* and *Williston Herald*; *North Dakota: History and People, Outlines of American History*, Vol. 1, by Clement A. Lounsberry (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1917); the Carleton Elliot Simensen Military Heritage Collection, 164th Infantry Association Records, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota (Box 1, Folder 3 has an alphabetical roster of E Company which appears to include all individuals who put in time with guard during its call-up); and *Roster of the Men and Women who Served in the Army or Naval Service (including the Marine Corps) of the United States or its Allies from the State of North Dakota in the World War, 1917-1918*, prepared and published under the direction of Brigadier General G. Angus Fraser, Adjutant General of North Dakota, by the authority of the Legislative Assembly of North Dakota (Bismarck: The Bismarck Tribune Company, State Printers and Binders, 1931).



First North Dakota Infantry Regiment, Mercedes, Texas, 1916.

NOTES

1. *Watford Guide*, December 28, 1916, 4.
2. *McKenzie County Chronicle*, October 12, 1916, 1.
3. For a more in-depth overview of the National Guard in North Dakota, see Jerry Cooper and Glenn Smith, *Citizens as Soldiers: A History of the North Dakota National Guard* (Fargo: North Dakota Institute of Regional Studies, 1986). For a history of the National Guard as a whole, see Jerry Cooper, *The Rise of the National Guard: The Evolution of the American Militia, 1865-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).
4. See *History of Company E National Guard*, an undated and unpublished typewritten manuscript found by the author in the Old Armory in Williston (the first armory of E Company). The manuscript has no stated author and appears to have been compiled by a number of former E Company members. It was donated to the Veterans & Friends of the Old Armory by the family of William W. Jeffrey.
5. See Frank McLynn, *Villa and Zapata: A History of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2001).
6. Maurice Matloff, ed., *American Military History, Volume 2: 1902-1996* (Conshohocken, Pa.: Combined Books, 1996), 12. For an in-depth look at President Wilson's policies toward Mexico, see Kendrick A. Clements, "Woodrow Wilson's Mexican Policy, 1913-1915," *Diplomatic History* 4.2 (1980): 113-136.
7. See Robert E. Quirk, *An Affair of Honor: Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of Veracruz* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962) and Jack Sweetman, *The Landings at Veracruz: 1914* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1968).
8. See Clarence C. Clendenen, "The Punitive Expedition of 1916: A Re-Evaluation," *Arizona and the West: A Quarterly Journal of History* 3.4 (Winter 1961): 311-320; John S. D. Eisenhower, *Intervention! The United States and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993); and Haldeen Braddy, "Pancho Villa at Columbus: The Raid of 1916 Restudied," *Southwestern Studies* 3.1 (Spring 1965): 3-43.
9. Jim D. Hill, *The Minute Man in Peace and War: A History of the National Guard* (Harrisburg, Pa.: The Stackpole Company, 1964), 232; John P. Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon: The Campaign for American Military Preparedness, 1914-1917* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1974), 165.
10. Benjamin R. Beede, ed., *The War of 1898 and U.S. Interventions 1898-1934: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 358.
11. Carleton Elliot Simensen Military Heritage Collection, 164th Infantry Association Records, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Collection 1278, Box 1, Folder 2 (hereafter referred to as First North Dakota Infantry Records).
12. First North Dakota Infantry Records, Box 1, Folder 2.
13. *Williston Herald*, June 22, 1916, 1.
14. Williston's brand-new armory had just been completed in 1915, but there was still a debt that needed to be retired. It has since been preserved and is the home of a local theatrical group called Entertainment, Inc.
15. *Williston Graphic*, June 29, 1916, 1; *Williston Herald*, June 29, 1916, 1.
16. *Williston Graphic*, June 29, 1916, 1.
17. *Williston Graphic*, July 6, 1916, 1; *Williston Herald*, July 6, 1916, 1.
18. *Williston Graphic*, August 17, 1916, 1; August 24, 1916, 1.
19. *Williston Herald*, September 14, 1916, 1.
20. First North Dakota Infantry Records, Box 1, Folder 2, General Order No. 10, dated June 23, 1916. Fort Lincoln is often confused with Fort Abraham Lincoln, which was established south of what became Mandan in 1872 and closed in 1891. Fort Lincoln was built in 1902 on the east side of the Missouri River. Since then it has served as a National Guard and regular army facility, as a Civilian Conservation Corps camp, as an internment camp for German and Japanese nationals during the Second World War, as a Job Corps center, and finally, as the campus for United Tribes Technical College, which resides there today.
21. *Williston Herald*, June 29, 1916, 1.
22. First North Dakota Infantry Records, Box 1, Folder 2.
23. *Ibid.*, document entitled "Ammunition, Supplies and Equipment." Upon assembly at Camp Lincoln, the companies found that there was no ammunition on hand, that clothing was in very limited supply, and that most of what was in supply was unserviceable. Hence many guardsmen wore civilian clothes. Mess equipment, blankets, and tents were likewise at a minimum. The officers were in better

- shape, since they were required to clothe and equip themselves.
24. Cooper, *The Rise of the National Guard*, 164.
 25. *Williston Graphic*, June 29, 1916, 1; *Williston Herald*, June 29, 1916, 1.
 26. *McKenzie County Chronicle*, July 6, 1916, 1.
 27. *Williston Herald*, June 29, 1916, 1; July 13, 1916, 1.
 28. First North Dakota Infantry Records, Box 1, Folder 2, tally sheet of the regiment based on company rosters.
 29. *Watford Guide*, August 10, 1916, 1; *Williston Herald*, July 6, 1916, 1. Bill Snyder Films of Fargo produced a series of restored Holmboe films in conjunction with North Dakota's bicentennial celebration. One from 1977, entitled *Frithjof Holmboe: Pioneer Movie Maker*, has the segment described at Fort Lincoln in 1916.
 30. *Watford Guide*, August 10, 1916, 1.
 31. *Williston Herald*, August 3, 1916, 1; the guardsmen were not paid until September 10.
 32. *McKenzie County Chronicle*, August 3, 1916, 1.
 33. *Watford Guide*, August 10, 1916, 1.
 34. *Williston Herald*, August 3, 1916, 12.
 35. *Watford Guide*, August 10, 1916, 1; *McKenzie County Chronicle*, August 3, 1916, 1; *Williston Herald*, August 3, 1916, 12.
 36. Cooper and Smith, *Citizens as Soldiers*, 163; *Historical and Pictorial Review, National Guard of the State of North Dakota, 1940* (Baton Rouge, La.: Army and Navy Publishing Co., 1940), 31.
 37. *Williston Herald*, August 10, 1916, 12; August 17, 1916, 1.
 38. *History of Company E National Guard*, 6; *Williston Herald*, November 23, 1916, 1.
 39. *McKenzie County Chronicle*, August 3, 1916, 1.
 40. Hill, *The Minute Man in Peace and War*, 237.
 41. Cooper and Smith, *Citizens as Soldiers*, 163.
 42. *Williston Graphic*, September 7, 1916, 4.
 43. *Williston Herald*, August 31, 1916, 1.
 44. *Historical and Pictorial Review, National Guard of the State of North Dakota, 1940*, 31.
 45. *McKenzie County Chronicle*, September 14, 1916, 1; *Williston Graphic*, September 14, 1916, 1; *Williston Herald*, September 7, 1916, 1; September 14, 1916, 1.
 46. *Historical and Pictorial Review, National Guard of the State of North Dakota, 1940*, 31
 47. *McKenzie County Chronicle*, August 31, 1916, 1.
 48. First North Dakota Infantry Records, Box 1, Folder 2, copy of "Out Post Duty," Headquarters of Thirteenth Provisional Division, G.O. 29, September 27, 1916.
 49. *History of Company E National Guard*, 4; *Williston Graphic*, October 5, 1916, 3; *Williston Herald*, October 5, 1916, 1.
 50. *McKenzie County Chronicle*, October 12, 1916, 1; November 9, 1916, 1.
 51. Douglas R. Hartman, *Nebraska's Militia: The History of the Army and Air National Guard, 1854-1991* (Virginia Beach, Va.: The Donning Company, 1994), 89.
 52. Cooper and Smith, *Citizens as Soldiers*, 165. The First North Dakota was part of the Third Brigade, with the Fourth and Fifth Nebraska Regiments part of the White Army.
 53. *Arnegard Call*, December 7, 1916, 1; *Watford Guide*, December 28, 1916, 1, 4.
 54. *History of Company E National Guard*, 6; *Watford Guide*, December 28, 1916, 4.
 55. Cooper and Smith, *Citizens as Soldiers*, 166.
 56. *McKenzie County Chronicle*, August 31, 1916, 1.
 57. Cooper and Smith, *Citizens as Soldiers*, 166.
 58. First North Dakota Records, Box 1, Folder 2, copy of telegram sent from First North Dakota Infantry Headquarters, Mercedes, Tex.
 59. *History of E Company National Guard*, 7.
 60. First North Dakota Infantry Records, Box 1, Folder 2, copy of G. O. 59, Headquarters, Brownsville District, November 25, 1916.
 61. *Williston Herald*, December 21, 1916, 1.
 62. Cooper and Smith, *Citizens as Soldiers*, 171; *Williston Graphic*, February 15, 1917, 1; *Williston Herald*, February 27, 1917, 1.
 63. Cooper and Smith, *Citizens as Soldiers*, 172.
 64. *Williston Herald*, January 18, 1917, 1.
 65. Cooper and Smith, *Citizens as Soldiers*, 172; *Historical and Pictorial Review, National Guard of the State of North Dakota, 1940*, 32.
 66. *Williston Herald*, February 27, 1917, 1.
 67. *Williston Graphic*, February 27, 1917, 1.
 68. *McKenzie County Chronicle*, February 8, 1917, 1; February 22, 1917, 1.
 69. *Laws Passed at the Fifteenth Session of the Legislative Assembly of the State of North Dakota (January 2nd, 1917-March 2, 1917)* (Fargo: State Printers Walker Bros. & Hardy, 1917), 6-7.
 70. Lt. Col. Marvin A. Kreidberg and 1st Lt. Merton G. Henry, *History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army 1775-1945* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1955), 196-201.
 71. Richard C. Roberts, "The Utah National Guard on the Mexican Border in 1916," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46.3 (1978): 280.
 72. Cooper, *The Rise of the National Guard*, 166; John K. Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983), 152.
 73. *History of E Company National Guard*, 6.
 74. Cooper and Smith, *Citizens as Soldiers*, 180-181; *Historical and Pictorial Review, National Guard of the State of North Dakota, 1940*, 32.
 75. Clarence C. Clendenen, *Blood on the Border: The United States Army and the Mexican Irregulars* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1969), 297-298; James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1966), 310.
 76. Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 13.

