

The Provisional Brigade, the New York Guard on State Active Duty in WWI

Everyone has heard of the 1st Provisional Regiment, which benefits from annual remembrances, and had citizen committees that published a book of their exploits and pushed for the State Aqueduct medal. So much so that many think that Regiment "was" the New York Guard in World War I. While the 1st Provisional Regiment's story is compelling, noteworthy and well publicized, it was only half of the story of the New York Guard's state active duty in WWI.

Beginnings

The National Guard's 1st and 10th Infantry Regiments had been called to guard the aqueduct in February 1917, and upstate Regiments began guarding key Railroad bridges, critical industries and the Barge Canal in April 1917. With the withdrawal of the National Guard for federal service, the 1st Provisional Regiment was established on 6 August 1917 by Special Orders No. 198, from the office of the Adjutant-General, to guard the Aqueduct. Initially 1,000 troops were called from non-activated depot units that would become the framework of the New York Guard along with the Veteran Corps of Artillery. Upstate elements that were guarding the canals and bridges remained on duty with non-activated depot units during the activations, and constituted the 2nd Provisional Regiment in August 1917.

Organization

In accordance with Special orders No 311, A. G. O., dated December 11, 1917, a **Provisional Brigade** was created consisting of the First and Second Provisional Regiments, then in existence and on state active duty guarding public property. Brigadier General F. DeForest Kemp was placed in command with headquarters at 174 State Street, Albany.

The **First Provisional Regiment** guarded the water supply of the City of New York and was under the command of Colonel John B. Rose. Its territory extended from the northern boundary line of the City of New York along the line of the Croton Aqueduct to Croton Lake, from there to a point near Cold Spring on the east bank of the Hudson River at Breakneck tunnel where the Aqueduct crosses under the river to Storm King Mountain, and then along the Aqueduct to the Ashokan Reservoir. The total continuous extent of line covered by this regiment was 98 miles and 247 vulnerable points were guarded. The headquarters were at Pines Bridge Inn on Croton Lake for the greater portion of the tour, but were eventually moved to the former Holbrook Military Academy at Ossining (Briar Cliff).

The territory guarded by the **Second Provisional Regiment**, which was commanded initially by Brigadier General F. DeForest Kemp and then by Major George J. Winslow, was the New York State Canal System which consisted of: the Champlain Canal from Albany and Troy to Whitehall, the Erie Canal from Waterford West to Tonawanda, the Oswego Canal from Syracuse north to Oswego, and the Cayuga-Seneca Canal from Syracuse Southwest to Waterloo. Also manned were posts at the International Railroad Bridges at Buffalo and Niagara Falls, the bridge of the Central New England Railroad at Poughkeepsie, the Capitol and Executive Mansion and two New York Central Railroad bridges at Albany. Additional details of guards for short durations were as follows: Company G, 9 months guarding the plant of the Central Hudson Gas and Electric Company at Poughkeepsie; Company K, 6 months guarding the plant of the New York Air Brake Company at Watertown (ammunition); Company A, on duty to protect the plant of the Champlain Silk Mill at Whitehall; and Company G, guarding the property of the United States Ammunition Company at Poughkeepsie. The total continuous extent of line covered by this regiment was about 632 miles and 140 posts were guarded. Headquarters were located in the Troy State Armory. Additional duty locations had been covered in 1917 by the National Guard: Central RR Bridge at East Creek near Utica; Elmira 9 mile bridge, a Rail Road bridge in Watertown; Trenton Falls Power Plant; Salmon River Power Plant; Solvay Power Plant; Oswego Power Dam; Adams Power Plant at Niagara Falls; State Fairgrounds in Syracuse; Watervliet Arsenal; Remington Arms Factory in Ilion; and Savage Arms Factory in Utica. Many of these were later dropped in 1918.

Strength

The average total daily strength of the brigade was 91 officers and 1,960 men. The officers and men were obtained by the volunteer system from members of the inactive NYG and represented practically every unit in the New York Guard. The 1st Provisional Regiment was 57 officers and 1,210 men, so the 2nd Provisional Regiment would have been 33 officers and 750 men. There was a problem of release and replacement as many men were not desirous of losing their identity with their home organizations even for a temporary period. After many Conferences with the Brigade and Regimental Commanders, and The Adjutant General, men were transferred and placed in companies which were representative of their home regiment and under officers from their own regiments. On February 1, 1918, and again on April 18, 1918, The Adjutant General directed that "Inasmuch as New York City, is paying the bill for the maintenance of the guarding of the Aqueduct, preference be given to men from New York City units." This plan was followed until later in the year when the policy was changed and men from up-state were utilized as replacements to the 1st Provisional Regiment.

After one or two months of service men became imbued with a desire for Foreign Service and many enlisted in the United States forces. When the Selective Service law became effective, men were taken from the brigade in great numbers. Due to replacements made necessary by the above cases a total of 8,860 men were on duty during this brigade's existence. The training men received enabled them to become noncommissioned officers upon entry into Federal service, and from reports received it would appear that 95 per cent of men entering that service were promoted to corporals or higher within ten days of their entry. Figures show the personnel to have changed five times. Eighty-five per cent of these changes were due to entry into Federal service.

Communications

On the Aqueduct a complete telephone system connecting all posts and headquarters was constructed, and on the east side of the Hudson River an electric lighting system was installed which connected up with the barracks end furnished lights for the posts on that sector. The cost of these two systems was borne by the City of New York. On the Barge Canal, the telephone and lighting system located thereon was utilized, and where no service was available rentals were made with the New York Telephone Company, so that communications with each post in the regiment was possible.

Rations

A ration allowance of seventy-five cents per man per day was given, and the meals served were of particularly good quality. In some cases in the 2nd Provisional Regiment, where posts were inaccessible and there were only three or four men on duty, arrangement to procure cooked meals at farm houses were made at the beginning of the tour, but eventually all posts cooked their own meals. "The Outpost Cook," a manual on cooking especially designed for small outposts was published as a result of this duty. Subsistence purchases were centralized and issues made by the Supply Officer of each regiment.

Housing

Barracks of a sectional type designed by a NYG Engineering Officer were constructed, built in approximately seven foot sections with double floors, paper lined side walls, roofed with boards covered with good roofing paper and made in various sizes suitable to housing from three to one hundred twenty-five men. Buildings conveniently located, if they could be obtained at a reasonable rate, were rented as barracks whenever possible. In the 2nd Provisional Regiment construction was practically complete by January 1, 1918. In the 1st Provisional Regiment work was delayed considerably by the inability to obtain



Lieut. Turner's "Bluebird" at Camp Fischer.

lumber, due to demands of the United States Government for lumber to construct cantonments. During summer months men were moved from barracks and put under canvas when canvas was obtainable. There was very little tentage in possession of the State, and due to an inability to acquire as many as required a proportional distribution was made to the Regiments. In the 2nd Provisional Regiment areas some troops were near enough armories for housing and also made use of canal facilities when possible. In the 1st Provisional Regiment areas the Department of Water Supply buildings and locker sheds, left over from the construction of the aqueduct, were upgraded and used when possible.

Uniforms

Serious difficulties were encountered in the issue of clothing; first, because of lack of appropriations to obtain necessary quantity, and secondly, the great purchase of cloth by the Federal Government shut off all others from the market. Despite this fact, men were warmly clad, and, at the time of withdrawal of the force, provisions had been made to issue each man a complete new outfit.

Transportation

Initially the 1st Provisional Regiment only had some old used police trucks, Harley-Davidson motorcycles and an old green Lozier from the City of New York. In 1917 the 1st Provisional Regiment got "new" vehicles purchased by the City consisting of three Cadillac Touring Cars, two Hupmobiles, 15 Ford Trucks and Eight Ford Touring Cars. The Regimental Commander had his personal Yellow Pathfinder. There were a number of other personal vehicles used by the NYG. There is no record that the 2nd Provisional had any vehicles supplied by the state. The Women's Motor Corps also provided vehicles and transport for the Regiments.



left—Sergt. Charles Martin, chauffeur to Colonel Rose.



Right—The Bread Fleet.



NYG Harley-Davidson

Health and Welfare

The general health of the command was excellent except during the Influenza epidemic of 1918. Most of the men gained in weight while on this duty. Only one case of typhoid fever was reported. Inoculations were given to men who came on duty and included both typhoid and paratyphoid serums. During the months of September, October and November, 1918; the epidemic of influenza made inroads upon the personnel, there being nine hundred thirteen cases and of this number thirty-six were fatal, 30 in the 1st and 6 in the 2nd.

In connection with this epidemic, the work performed by the Women's Motor Corps deserves special mention. They worked night and day transporting men from the line to the various hospitals and were ceaseless in their efforts. In the 2nd Provisional Regiment men were sent to hospitals in the immediate vicinity of their posts and treatment given by local doctors under the supervision of the two medical officers assigned to that regiment. In Albany the State Armory was used as a temporary hospital until local hospitals were able to receive the patients. On October 9th, the Commanding Officer, 1st Provisional Regiment reported that the Atlantic Division of the American Red Cross had established a hospital for the men of his command in the former Holbrook Military Academy at Ossining (Briar Cliff) owned by Mr. V. Everitt Macy who donated the use of this building free of cost, and that the Red Cross had equipped this building with various essentials and furnished some nurses. The City of

Newburgh provided the use of a building controlled by the school board, Colonel Rose was authorized by headquarters to establish this as a hospital, to hire nurses, and purchase necessary supplies as indicated by the Chief Medical Officer of his regiment. The action of the Red Cross, the officials of the City of Newburgh, Mr. Macy, and the local Red Cross Chapters was most praiseworthy. The facilities placed at the disposal of the organizations were such that there is no doubt that many lives were saved through their co-operation and generosity.



Lieut. Maud Spaulding and Ambulance Corps drivers, N.Y.H.D.



REGIMENTAL HEADQUARTERS AT OSSINING
Left—Parade-ground. Center—Administration building and barracks. Right—Hospital building. Extreme right—Guard-house and stables. Formerly the Holbrook Military Academy.

During the epidemic a temporary hospital was established in the armory at Whitehall to care for the civilian population, and at one time one hundred and ten cases were handled. A supply truck arriving with provisions for troops, and the emergency being great, the truck operators were directed to remain and assist. These men handled necessary supplies, took care of the sick, and even prepared graves for the dead. Their work was so greatly appreciated that resolutions of commendation were sent to the Governor by the Town Board.

The Red Cross established and operated a canteen on the Aqueduct, and had worked out a System of traveling canteens for the Barge canal, when advice that troops were to be withdrawn caused the discontinuance of this activity. The Aqueduct Hostess House at Scarsdale was opened 22 February 1918, and the War Camp Community Club at Niagara Falls furnished facilities which were greatly enjoyed by men at that point.

Major incidents and activities

The activities of the organization composing the Provisional Brigade were many and varied; no publicity was given to the many attempts made to destroy or injure the valuable properties protected. Threats to blow up the Aqueduct were investigated and plans frustrated. A plot to destroy the International Bridge at Niagara Falls overheard in Erie, PA., and reported by the Chief of Police resulted in recalling all leaves and extra precautions being taken. An unknown man was killed while endeavoring to escape from the sentry at Gate 5, Post 40 near Mohawk. On April 11, 1918, the Empire State Express was wrecked in close proximity to Post 55 - 56 Guy Park, Amsterdam, with some loss of life and many injured. Men off duty at this Post rendered first aid, and assisted in the rescue, and policed the wreck. Major Becker, Surgeon, 2nd Provisional Regiment, a passenger and slightly injured himself rendered valuable aid to the unfortunate. Private Leitt, Company D, 2nd Provisional Regiment, on guard at the Lock at Palmyra on October 29th jumped in the Lock and rescued a small child from drowning. Men on the Aqueduct and at Poughkeepsie constantly observed signal lights which conveyed messages of considerable import to the enemy. Investigations which led to arrests of alien enemies were made by the Commanding Officer, 1st Provisional Regiment, in conjunction with Federal authorities. Due to lack of prior instruction there were twenty cases of accidental shooting. Only one fatality occurred. Sentries were fired upon one hundred and six times two men being injured. Five hundred Fifty-one cases of suspicious actions were reported either before or after investigation. Eighty-two arrests were made, the charges being seditious utterance, loitering, robbery, enemy alien, and draft evasion, desertion, photographing or sketching property protected, attempted damage to property protected. These cases were prosecuted by the

Federal authorities. Three men on duty committed suicide. Aeroplanes were reported twelve times as passing over or lingering in the vicinity of protected points. Four fires were extinguished on the Poughkeepsie Bridge. Two fires were extinguished on the Michigan Central Bridge at Niagara Falls, two on the Livingston Avenue Bridge at Albany, one at building B of the New York Air Brake Company at Watertown, and one in a house near the Post at the Executive Mansion, Albany. Assistance was rendered at two fires adjacent to the Aqueduct, and two men were severely burned in a fire in a supply tent at Millwood. What would have been a serious accident was averted by the quick wit of a sentry at the Gorge in Niagara Falls, who being stationed at almost the identical spot where a great fatality occurred a year previous, having observed two large rocks fall in the Gorge, in the path of an approaching car, stopped the car which was traveling at high speed and was loaded with passengers.

The general public of this State having been informed by newspaper propaganda never realized the size of the task which confronted the officers and men of this Brigade. The opinion prevailed with too many people that this service was a haven for those who wished to avoid the war's responsibility. Nothing could be further from the truth. When one considers that the 1st Provisional was charged with the real responsibility of the protection of a water supply which provided, first, means of combating a campaign of the torch which was carried on in the winter of 1917; second, the supply of potable water for ships engaged in carrying troops and supplies to France; and third, the continuous supply of water necessary to flush toilets, etc., in crowded districts, which, if interrupted meant a terrible pestilence, and that the 2nd Provisional Regiment was responsible for the uninterrupted movement of submarine chasers, ships, raw materials and commerce of any kind through the Barge canal, keeping clear one of the gateways to New England not alone for the transportation of raw material going into munitions manufactured there and their shipment back in finished product, but also the movement of coal and other essentials upon which depended the operation of factories and the means of livelihood of the people; the maintenance of uninterrupted communication with our Canadian ally for the same reason; and the protection of plants engaged in war industries, it can be seen that this work was not only State but National in scope.

The work was exacting and irksome requiring continual guard duty. Any man who has performed two hours on and four off one day in seven can realize the monotony of a daily grind of four hours on and eight hours off, or six on and twelve off, which was the fate of these men. Shortage of man power made leaves of absence a rarity. Training camps at various cantonments in this country had Saturday and Wednesday half holidays with work only during daylight, and were on duty without responsibility for the protection of life and property. The men of the Provisional Brigade were on duty as sentries or as relief twenty-four hours every day, with no holidays or Sundays off. This tour of duty was carried out in the severest winter known in fifty years, with temperature ranging from zero to thirty below. Instances are recorded of men performing continuous duty for twenty-four and thirty-six hours, where sickness left only one man on duty at a Post or snow and weather conditions prevented relief within that period.



POSTING THE RELIEF

A typical stretch of The Line Impregnable on the Company A sector.

Deactivation

The Provisional Brigade was disbanded by Special Orders of The Adjutant General's Office on 18 November 1918. The 2nd Provisional Regiment was deactivated 1 December 1918. The 1st Provisional Regiment began downsizing in December and on 1 February 1919 the line ran silent and dark.