

CHAPTERS OF LIVERMORE HISTORY

COMPANY I

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In the years toward the end of the 19th century, for a small community to obtain a National Guard company was a cachet of no small value. After an effort lasting slightly more than the Biblical seven years Livermore succeeded in obtaining such a company - the smallest community in California to do so.

Company I, Fifth Infantry, California Natl. Guard was sworn into service at a meeting in the Lvmr Odd Fellows Hall on 20 April 1900. The first Captain (the local commanding officer) was Carl M. Warner, then pastor of the local Methodist Church. Later commanders included J.O. McKown, E.J. Inman, Chester Young, L.J. Nissen, Bruce Painter, J.S. Concannon and Henry A. Mehrmann.

In 1906 after the San Francisco earthquake and fire, Company I served in the city from April 17th to May 19, aiding in the policing of the ravaged city. In 1916 events took them even farther away: to Nogales, Arizona on the Mexican Border for a period of some four months.

The end of Co. I as an individual unit came on Sept 24, 1917 when it became consolidated with Company A, also of the Fifth Infantry, to form Company A, 159th Infantry, 40th Division at Camp Kearny, prior to service in the First World War.

Over the seventeen years of its existence 414 men served in the company and records available to the company historian, Maitland Henry, showed that at least 6 of those men served for ten years.

Many of the members of Company I gained prominence in later years, such as Carl F. Wente (B of A Pres.), Wm. C. Brown (Chief of Police, San Jose); John A. Miller (Sheriff, Contra Costa Co.); R.W. Lefever (Supv. in Santa Barbara County). The membership included 2 who became mayors of Livermore, 4 who were city clerks, one who became the city treasurer, one the town postmaster and one who was principal of the high school.

The military monument on the east side of Carnegie Park has a bronze plaque commemorating Company I's service.

ENJOYABLE EVENING WITH THE MILITARY, from The Herald, December 1900 p.1

When the members of Company I announced their purpose to make their first anniversary ball the social event of the season it was no idle boast as anyone of the throng who were guests of the Company on Thanksgiving eve will cheerfully testify. The committee of arrangements were indefatigable in their efforts to make provision for the comfort of their patrons and they found their reward in the expressions of approval heard on all sides. The music by the Livermore Orchestra was excellent; the floor was in good condition and the floor committee, headed by Director KcKown, was tireless.

...The crowd began to gather early in the evening and by 9:30, when the leader of the orchestra sounded the "Assembly" as the signal for the beginning of the grand march, the hall was packed. After the grand march many more dancers arrived, but many of the spectators took their departure and the dancers could move about with more comfort. Mr. and Mrs. J. O. McKown headed the grand march and under their leadership some intricate and pretty evolutions were executed. There were a hundred couples in the march and it presented a brilliant spectacle with the uniforms and evening clothes of the gentlemen and the costumes of the ladies. The toilettes of most of the latter were elegant....A plain but wholesome supper was served... dancing was resumed and continued until 4 o'clock when the last lingering couples reluctantly took their departure as daylight appeared, bringing to an end one of the most enjoyable social events ever held in the Livermore Valley.

CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD, COMPANY I, "THE OLD GUARD"

On Sunday, April 28, 1919 at 10:30 am. a large crowd was gathered at the Western Pacific Depot in Livermore to greet a troop train which paused at the Depot for half an hour before continuing on to Oakland where a large celebration was planned. The stop in Livermore allowed local citizens to greet the few members of the old Company I who had remained together in a unit of the 159th Infantry Headquarters Company. Many of the other members of the original Co. I had been transferred to other units and most of the officers were still in France on occupation duty. In the days to come, the men were discharged and most returned to take up their lives in Livermore. The World War was over.

Through the years of the '20's the men reminisced about the old Company I, and, as the Herald reported on Oct 12, 1928 "A desire for a reunion of this old organization has been expressed many times recently and action was started at an informal meeting of a number of the "old guard" held Thursday evening at the offices of J.O.McKown, a former captain of the company. Mr. McKown was elected chairman of a committee to carry out the arrangements and will have assisting him M.R.Henry as secretary, M.G.Callaghan, C.G.Clarke and H.L.Kamp.

"Thanksgiving Eve was picked as the time because of the fact that it is a significant date in the annals of Co.I, its annual military ball having been held on this date.

"Old record books have been secured by the committee and an effort will be made to secure from them a complete roster showing the name of every man who belonged to the company from 1900 until it became a part of the 159th Infantry of the 40th Division during the World War."

The response was enthusiastic and the special guests of the evening were to be the Rev. C.M.Warner of San Francisco who was the first Capt. of the company, and Brigadier General D.A.Smith who mustered in the company in 1900.

The banquet and program, held at the Palace Hotel was attended by 75 former Co.I members. "After one half hour's gathering of old friends in the lobby "assembly" was sounded by Robert Livermore and 'mess call' followed as the dining room was opened and the former National Guardsmen found seats at the banquet board, a turkey dinner being served." In the program following the dinner, tribute was paid to 37 deceased members of the company. The sequence of dinner, tribute and speeches became the outline for all the reunions - which followed, the group having voted unanimously to hold the reunion annually. J.O.McKown and M.R.Henry of the committee which organized the event were elected to continue their good work. The title "Co.I, Old Guard" was adopted as the name for the permanent organization. Thus began a tradition which continued until the late '70's when old age and death had reduced the number of attendees to a handful. Maitland R. Henry served as its permanent secretary until his death in 1976. Mr. Robert Livermore took over as president and secretary in 1977. The last formal reunion appears to have been held in 1981 and was attended by Robert Livermore, John Jensen and Chester Anderson.

The war veterans memorial in Carnegie Park carries the following plaque:-

