

Omaha's Citizen Soldiers---Their Record and Their Need of Quarters



IN THE QUARTERMASTER'S OFFICE, MILLARD RIFLES, COMPANY I, SECOND REGIMENT, N. N. G.

AROUND THE PIANO, THE THURSTON RIFLES SING "RAMBLING" AND OTHER POPULAR DITTIES.

GAME OF WHIST AT THE GUARDS' ARMORY--SOCIAL RECREATION IN THE READING ROOM.

Oh for the gift of the ancient bard,
Who sang of valor in ye olden time,
To sound the praise of the Omaha Guards
And make them famous in every clime.

S BANG Wilma Jarratt in a local paper May 22, 1896. She drew her inspiration from the martial scene which attended the interstate drilling contests of that month and year at Memphis, Tenn. She was thrilled with the brightness and beauty of that military review, which she had witnessed, and in which she had seen the companies of her own city carrying off the first honors that she could not restrain a note of triumph.

But it is not the intention to exploit the splendors and pompous displays of military accomplishment in this article, except insofar as these triumphs give a reason for more serious considerations. Yet who is there who cannot see in the glitter of uniforms, in the burnished arms, and the flag over all, the tangible expressions of a deep, undying patriotism? Can we afford to dispense with our militia companies?

The first regiment of the Nebraska National Guard was organized by Colonel L. W. Colby in 1880. There are at present two regiments of twelve companies each. Three of these companies are located at Omaha. They are the Omaha Guards, or Company G, of the Second Regiment; the Thurston Rifles, Company L, of the First Regiment, and the Omaha Light Infantry, Company I, of the Second.

The Thurston Rifles received the governor's cup, presented by Governor Dawes for the best drilled company in the state. They were not allowed to keep it, however, because it was learned that Captain Scharff had not observed some minor point in the regulations of the competitive contest. So the cup was returned to the Omaha Guards, which company had pressed their closest in the contest.

The Thurstons have always been prize winners. During the month of May, 1895, they were the only complete company from Nebraska to compete in the interstate drilling competition at Memphis, Tenn. Here they took four first prizes and the first prize for individual drill. They came home with \$4,875 in prize money to their credit. This is a remarkable record when it is remembered that the company was a new organization. Since that time it is a question which is the leading company in the matter of discipline, the Thurstons or the Omaha Guards.

Veterans of the Service.

Of these companies the Omaha Guards is the veteran company. It was organized as an independent company October 24, 1887. That it was so organized was due to the fact that the regiments of the state militia were then completely filled. The original promoters of the company were W. A. Webster, Nat M. Brigham, Minot Tirrell and S. B. Reed. Permission to bear arms and parade was secured from Adjutant General A. V. Cole April 11, 1888, but there was no financial encouragement, nor did the state agree to furnish supplies, nor uniforms. A subscription by Omaha citizens of \$3,000 enabled the company to buy and furnish the old Casino skating rink at Seventeenth and Douglas streets. This was the first armory. On March 5, 1888, A. H. Scharff, of General Crook's staff, became the first regular captain of the company, and under him the company attained a great degree of proficiency. It won its first trophy October 30, 1888. In a competition with the Dodge Light Guards of Council Bluffs. This was the first trophy given on the occasion of the opening of the Omaha and Council Bluffs bridge. In November, 1888, a bazaar was conducted for the benefit of the Guards and \$2,000 was raised. This was expended for uniforms and equipments. On June 5, 1895, the Guards won the first prize in the drill of militia companies at Kansas City, where they had to compete with ten other companies. The prize offered was \$1,000. In October of 1890 Lieutenant H. B. Mulford solicited and secured funds to purchase a gatling gun and afterward a gatling section of the Guards was organized. The Omaha Guards won the governor's cup from the Thurston Rifles during the state encampment in August, 1894, and the gatling prize in the interstate contest at Memphis, Tenn., conducted in that city, during the month of May, 1895. This prize was \$500. No other cash prizes have been awarded. The company still holds the governor's cup for proficiency in the state contests.

Part of the Fighting First. Then comes the late Spanish-American war, during which, as members of the famous First Nebraska Regiment of United States Volunteers they won a name and showed a valor which will make them dear to this state and city. They spent a year and six months in the Philippines, and were in every important engagement from the time they landed until they were recalled. Notably they assisted in the Spanish campaign, and the assault on the City of Manila, when that stronghold fell into the hands of the Americans. They then assisted in the policing of the city for two months. During this time they were detailed to take charge of the custom house, in which capacity they had more delicate situations to handle than any other company in the Nebraska regiment, or, in fact, in the whole Eighth army corps. At the first intimation of trouble with the Filipinos they with their regiment were sent to the outer line of defenses at Santa Mesa. Here they helped meet and repulse the first attack of the insurgents during the first weeks of February, 1898. The First Nebraska regiment then held the center of the line of march from that point to Malolos, the stronghold of Aguinaldo's forces.

When the question is asked, "What of the armories of these companies? Who foots the bills?" we are introduced to the fundamental object of this article. In all the eighteen years of the history of military organizations in Omaha they have never had an armory worthy of the name. After the companies were entered as part of the regular militia of the state they received from the state treasuries \$100 a year to meet the cost of an armory. In April of the present year the state legislature passed a bill increasing the appropriation to \$250 per company. This is the sum total of all the state has done for its militia; aside from furnishing them with arms and fatigue uniforms, and paying the individual expenses furnished by Captain W. E. Baehr of the Thurston Rifles while they were actually engaged in the annual encampments.

That this provision is entirely inadequate to meet the expenses of the companies in a city like Omaha a statement of actual expenses furnished by Captain W. E. Baehr of the Thurston Rifles will demonstrate. It is as follows: Expended for armory rent, \$600; for lights, \$130; for janitor service, \$110; for telephones, \$81; for premium on captain's bond with the surety company, \$150; for mending and repairs to equipment, \$25; for incidentals, stationery, papers, magazines, tactic manuals, etc., \$35; total \$1,065. From this deduct the \$250 given by the state and a balance is left of \$715.00. This must be met by the members of the company themselves.

The expense account of the other companies is very similar. How have these accounts been met in past years. In about four instances in the history of the companies a fair amount of money has been raised by subscription. This money, together with money actually won by the companies in various drill competitions might possibly amount to \$10,000. This would about meet the expense of three companies for three years, if it were not for the fact that money won at these competitions had in almost every case been used up before it was secured by the heavy cost of entering such a contest. It is safe to say then that these boys, who have been so patient in drill and so loyal to the needs of the state, who were the very first on hand when the war demanded the sacrifice of their individual interests, and in many cases their lives, have



GROUP IN FRONT OF THE OLD OMAHA GUARDS ARMORY ON CAPITOL AVENUE.

Captain W. E. Baehr, in the Omaha Light Infantry are Captain Sues, Captain Baughman, Captain George Seres, Captain Ed B. Cooper and Captain A. W. Kroeger.

Who Foots the Bills.

Look briefly over the history of the companies and see what kind of accommodations they have had to be content with. The Omaha Guards first met for drill in the old Casino skating rink near Seventeenth and Douglas. Here they were quartered for fifteen years. This building gradually came to be used for nothing else and slipped out of repair. It required considerable extra expense to make it presentable. And be it said, casually, a military company can not be maintained in a barn. Finally these quarters were abandoned for accommodations in Creighton hall. Of all the companies they have been the most fortunate in the matter of suitable places to drill. To maintain these places the first dues assessed amounted to ten cents per month, and the actual cost to each during the year was, to speak conservatively, \$30. Such an expense was no light matter to most of the boys. In later years the monthly dues have been reduced to \$1 per month per member, which means that there is usually a deficit which must be made up by the more loyal or the more fortunate members. Only once in the history of the Omaha Guards has any large amount of money been made by public entertainments. That was the case of the bazaar, above mentioned. Public balls have always meant a deficit. It is customary when a ball is mentioned for the boys to reach into their pockets at once and say: "Well, how much do you want this time?"

The history of the Thurston Rifles is the history of constant moving. They first drilled in Erling's hall at Sixteenth and Corby streets. From there they went to Moran's dancing academy, then located at Fifteenth and Harney, from there to the Patterson building, then to Ostoff's hall at Sixteenth and California streets. Then they went out of commission and their arms were stored at 238 South Fifteenth. When they were reorganized they had quarters in the old Brown building at Fourteenth and Douglas. After this they used the rooms in the Daily News building for some time. At present they are drilling in Eagle hall, where they have been for the last two years.

The Omaha Light Infantry have always been on the move. They have occupied successively the Masonic Temple halls, Germania hall, quarters on Fourteenth and



GROUP IN FRONT OF THE OLD OMAHA GUARDS ARMORY ON CAPITOL AVENUE.

not only been faithful to the interests of the commonwealth, but have paid the expense of maintaining their organization as well.

Quarters for the Guard.

It is very hard for a drill company to get suitable quarters. They have often been obliged to move because the marching was found to be injuring the buildings. In other instances the rent has been successively raised beyond enduring. This last is the stern fact that is facing all the companies at the present moment.

Interest in the Movement.

Of late the Omaha Commercial club has taken an increasing interest in the militia companies here and a move has been contemplated toward securing quarters for them. Among the most enthusiastic members in this project is O. D. Kiplinger. He says the matter was broached to the Auditorium management, but was promptly refused. The old market house on Thirteenth and Capitol was also considered. He says: "What the boys need is a good, new armory, one that will accommodate four companies at least. It don't have to be an elaborate building at all, but a place where they can meet to drill and have a few rooms for reading and amusement. Council Bluffs has furnished its one company with excellent quarters, while Omaha and the state of Nebraska have done next to nothing."

J. A. C. Kennedy, a member of the Omaha Guards during the late war, in which he held the rank of first lieutenant and was detailed to the commissary department, says: "The money question of the militia companies in Omaha has always been a financial nightmare. They have always been crowded for cash, and the work of the officers has been full of worry and care. I am in favor of a policy in the states to reduce the necessity for a large standing army by making it possible to have better militia companies. It can not be done as long as the members must furnish all the means of their maintenance. The state could well afford to build armories in its three largest cities. The safety of the state and the country at large depends on an effective militia and it has done next to nothing to make it effective."

is no real pleasure in being a member of the militia nowadays. It is a constant tax on a man's pocket and his patience. Quarters are scarce and rents always going up. My work has taken my interest away from the guards of late, but I would like to see the companies here provided with suitable quarters. There is no reason why the state or the city might not furnish an armory."

What is Needed.

Major O. G. Osborne says: "The boys cannot drill in a barn. They must have an inviting place to meet. They must have rooms where they can enjoy themselves. There are too many attractions to expect that young men will put up with privations for the sake of being patriotic. At present the boys dig up for all the accommodations they have. An armory should be provided, with a drill room, a place to store arms and equipment, club rooms and reading rooms. These need not be elaborate, but at least comfortable. An appropriation for an armory, I think, would be better than rent."

Captain A. W. Kroeger of the Omaha Light Infantry says: "If we only had money we could build up a good third company and a fourth no doubt. The \$250 allowance from the state may be enough in the country, where the rents are low and where the quarters are often free, as is the case in Kearney, but it is entirely too small here, where the cost of accommodations of the most galling narrowness must be paid for at an increasing rate."

W. B. Trautzy says: "You can get me down as one in favor of better provisions for the accommodation of the military companies here. They have never had the support morally or materially from the people of Omaha that was their due. I remember when the Omaha Guards came back from Kansas City, after having won the first prize for militia companies, that we marched from the station to our quarters in the old Casino and no one cheered nor looked our way except Mr. Hayden during the entire distance. For the most part that has been the treatment since. It is not because there is any sentiment against the Guards, but it is lack of sentiment either way. I hope to see better things. If not, it will not surprise me to see all the companies here disband."

Money Well Spent.

Constantine J. Smyth says: "Money spent in the direction of an armory is well spent. What they need is a fair-sized hall on the ground floor. New York has provided magnificent armories. Philadelphia gives \$500 per year and the state gives an additional \$500 toward rent for each company in the state. There is no reason why Omaha could not provide as well. We have had some famous companies here. Prize winners in many contests, and it is up to us to help in their last extremity. We haven't done it before. It is time we should do it now."

Captain W. E. Baehr says: "No one will ever know the endless struggle we have had in all the history of the Thurston Rifles to find and keep quarters. In one place we went to the expense of \$250 to have a hall refitted and before we had had any good of the improvement the owner or manager at least broke his contract with us and we were out. It has been so ever since. I have often been on the point of giving the whole thing up. I have paid out of my own pocket \$23 during the first six months of last year. I threw my account book away and went on paying."

As a Business Proposition.

Captain A. D. Falconer says: "The maintaining of a militia company requires an endless amount of work. On account of members leaving the city or engaging in business that will not permit of membership, we are constantly after recruits. It is the hardest kind of work to get men to join and ask them to pay \$1 per month dues for the privilege of drilling. It would not be so hard if other inducements could be offered besides drill. As it is now, the average expenses of this company are about \$90 a month; \$50 rent, \$10 lights, \$1 telephone, \$5 janitor service, and about \$15 a month for miscellaneous, such as library supplies, insurance, postage and repairs to furniture. The state of Nebraska allows

\$150 a year. As our expenses are over \$1,000 the difference must be made up by the members out of their own pockets or by calling on their friends. I don't think this should be necessary. If a body of young men are willing to devote their time and energy to perfect themselves as soldiers, those who benefit should provide them with a home. The Commercial club would, without any trouble, be able to raise funds to build a suitable armory. It could be done by inducing the large corporations, such as the railroads, packing-houses and other large employers of labor to join with the business houses and help. Business interests should consider a national guard as an much insurance. They pay the police and deputy sheriff for protection. But if the police and sheriff fall they call on the National Guard. It would not be necessary to build a costly building or provide any luxuries. All that would be necessary would be a substantial building large enough for a drill hall for all and a locker and lounging room for each company. There should also be a shooting gallery, for a man must learn how to shoot to be of any value. All the cities of the east provide armories for their militia. Even Council Bluffs, as small as it is, has provided the finest kind of a home for its company. It will be necessary to do something toward building very soon or the Omaha companies must go out of existence. Rents have been raised so that it is now impossible to get a place to quarter a company."

These Were Intelligent Elk

We had stopped at the cabin for the night, for the fact that we had been driving in the rain for half a day wasn't conducive to our wanting to camp out. It was a grazed old fellow, but straight-backed and trim built, with a little twinkle in his eye and a big perpetual quid of tobacco in his mouth. Although he was not at all extravagant with his words, we felt that he must have a good story to tell of his experiences, if we could only get him to open up.

So, after supper, when we had turned the kitchen into a library by spreading a week-old paper, which our friend watched with greedy eyes, on the table and leaned our cracker-box chairs against the side of the cabin we began pestering him with fool questions. But we didn't learn any more than that he was a retired prospector, who had made his pile and was now taking life easy--also taking in any tourists that might stray his way. And when he told us that his pile was nothing more nor less than a pile of elk teeth, we certainly were curious to know how he could have secured them, and how he got them to have secured himself a competency.

"Well, I'll tell you, that's if you'll say you won't tell anybody else, for it's a pretty rich vein that you all could get a piece of if you wanted, and I would not want it spoiled," he said.

"Of course," we all promised eternal secrecy, but to ourselves we began to figure how we would spend the money if he should let us in on how he got them.

"You see, me and my partner, him that's dead now," he went on, "was diggin' around up in the north country, and after a pretty long stretch of dull luck we decided we'd have to quit after something there was more ready money in. So we went to huntin' and trappin'. We did pretty fine the first winter and was surprised to have our elk teeth that we had got put out as much as the rest of the skin's so, as sure and hard meant a lot of work, we sorter decided to go for just the teeth alone."

"So we got some long-range guns and went after 'em, and we got 'em, too. It was a pity, but then somebody else would have to get them some time, so what's the use. And we got 'em, like so scared of us that--well, I don't like to tell yeh, 'cause you may not believe it, but them there elk knew we just wanted their teeth, so whenever we got a bunch of 'em cornered they would run up a tree, jab their teeth into it, and break them off, yes, sir, and all we had to do was to go along with a basket and pick out what we wanted."

"And that's how he got this pile of elk teeth, as far as we know, for, with the 'twinkle still in his eye, he never did divulge the secret to any of us--Denver Post.

Prattle of the Youngsters

Small Ethel had accompanied her parents to a family reunion and upon returning home she astonished her mother by asking: "Mamma, was papa related to us before he married into our family?"

Ragged Boy--Please, sir, give a poor orphan a few pennies.
Pedestrian--Have you no parents?
Ragged Boy--No, sir. They were divorced last week.

"Come, now," said mamma, who had taken the children for a walk through the Zoo, "let's go home and see papa."
"Oh, no," protested Ethel, "let's see these other monkeys first."

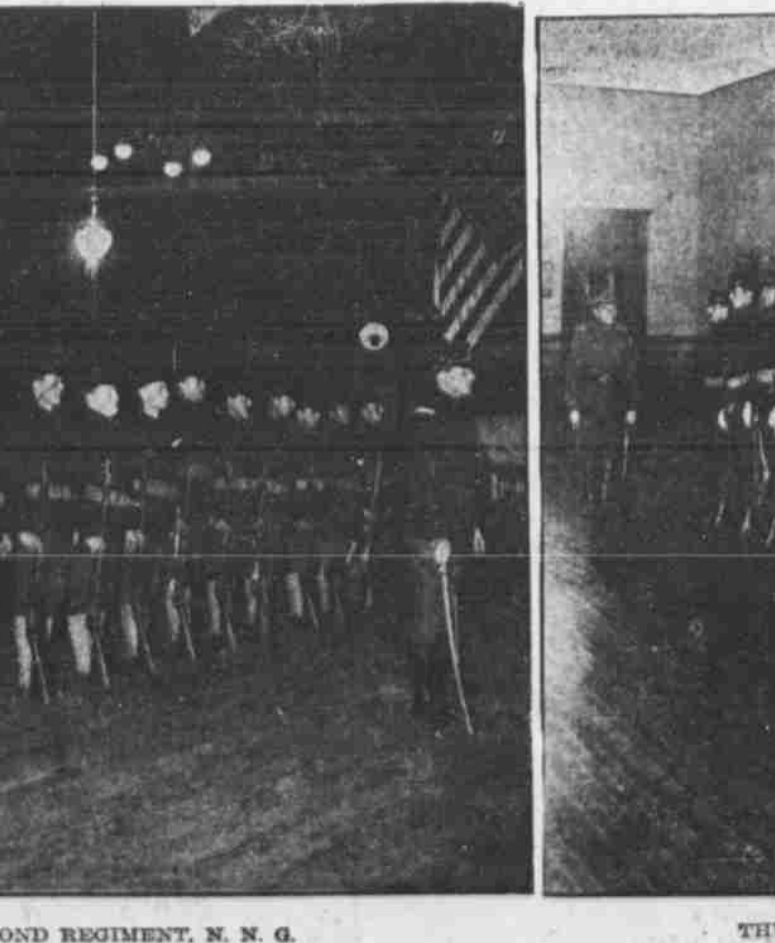
Fa Twaddles--I can't see why that young idiot who is calling on Molly hasn't sense enough to get it in his mind.
Tommy Twaddles--Tain't his fault. He can't go--sister's settin' on him.

"Johnny," said the mother of a strenuous urchin, "how is it Willie Jones wins a prize each week at school, and you never get one?"
"Hugh!" rejoined Johnny. "He don't win nothin' but 'good-conduct' prizes. The rest of us fellers don't want 'em."

Tommy's Grandmother On the capacity of hostesses--You're welcome to eat all you want, dear, but how on earth can a slim little boy like you hold so much?
Tommy (with his mouth full)--Hugh! You don't know how I stretch when I eat, grandma!

Record of Thurston Rifles.

The Thurston Rifles were the next company to organize. They were first organized as a marching company to assist in the republican campaign during the autumn of 1884. After the campaign was over the comradeship among the members had become so congenial that it was determined to make the organization a permanent one. Captain A. H. Scharff, who had been connected with the Omaha Guards for six years, but who had severed his connection with them in 1882, was chosen as their first captain. They at once took rank with the Omaha Guards, and since then have been the most formidable rival company. With the first reconstruction of the state organization, the Thurston Rifles were admitted as Company L of the First Regiment of the Nebraska National Guard. In the first state encampment after their



OMAHA GUARDS, COMPANY G, SECOND REGIMENT, N. N. G.

THURSTON RIFLES, COMPANY L, FIRST REGIMENT, N. N. G.

OMAHA GUARDS, COMPANY G, SECOND REGIMENT, N. N. G.