

Battle of Elkhorn Bridge and Nebraska National Guard



Saved from 1863 and still noisy.

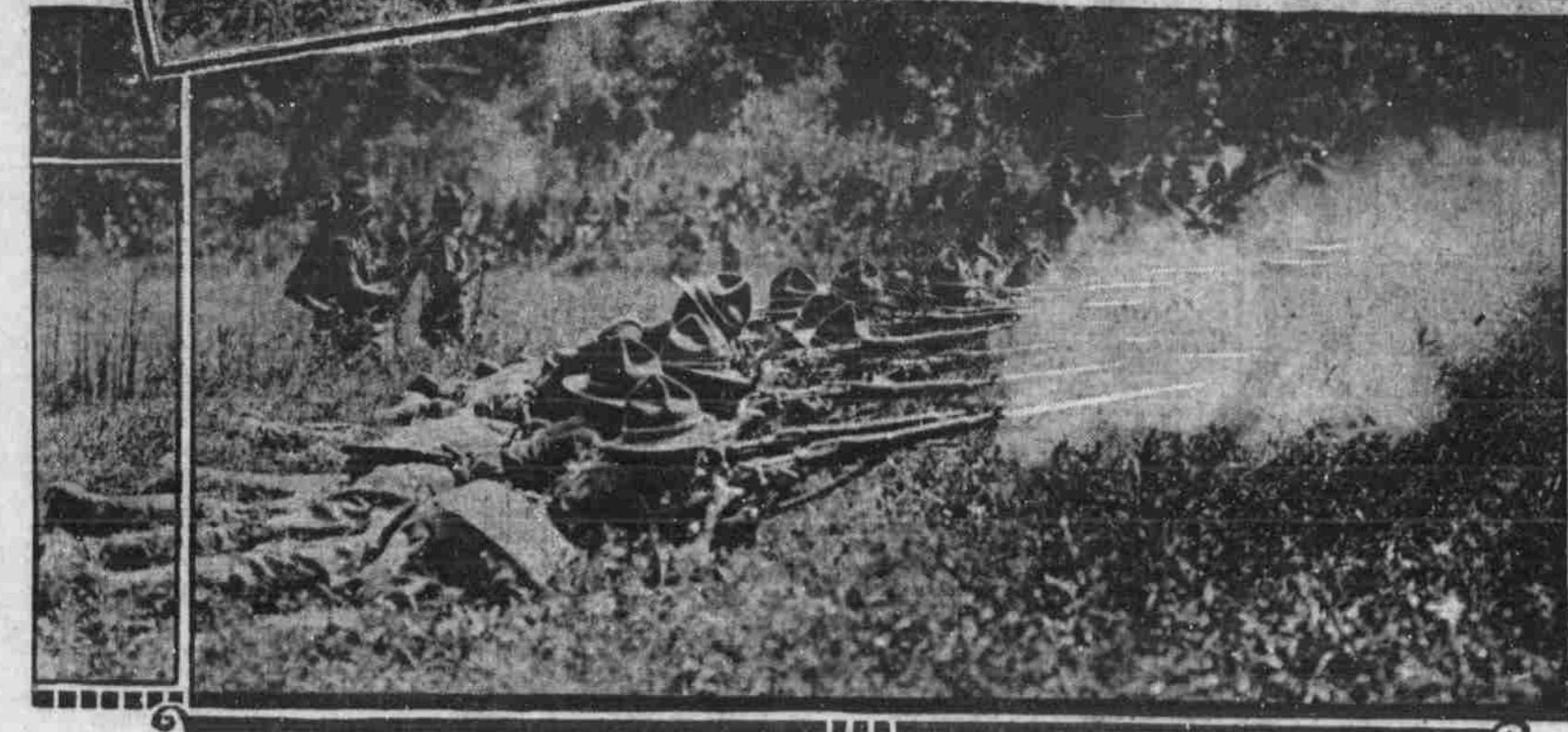
Going into Action



This Squad of "Blues" was killed en masse



Another Glimpse of "The Front"



Section of Firing Line



Blues in a Hot Corner

SEE those fellows fight! The militiamen of Nebraska are real soldiers," cried Adjutant General Phil L. Hall as he watched 1,200 National Guardsmen of Nebraska charge into the sulphur smoke of a practice battle at Waterloo. "Ninety miles they've marched through dust and heat and now, with the sweat pouring down their dirty faces, they're fighting as coolly and as methodically and as bravely as veterans of real war." And General Hall voiced the reason back of the maneuvering which sent 1,200 of the citizen soldiery of Nebraska through dust and heat to a mimic battle and hard drill in a well policed camp.

It was a little Corsican, in his time the glory and the terror of all Europe, who sagely said that his battles all were won before his armies answered the bugle's call and fell in line for the fight. In war the theory still holds that victory on the battlefield is won around the spluttering campfire, over the battle maps spread on officers' tables, and in the days of hard training and long marching and mimic battles. Believing in this theory the militiamen of the state, fresh from farm and office and factory, kept enthusiastically and unwaveringly to the march to Waterloo and pitched their drab tents in the low, green valley by the Elkhorn with a fervor to make their officers proud.

Long Hours in Drilling.
Through the days of grueling drill on the Waterloo camp around the soft young soldiers hardened into veterans. "Give us more drill," they pleaded with their officers, and company captains gathered at brigade headquarters to gladly present the privates' requests. Some of the grizzled veterans of late wars, now officers in the National Guard,

grinned broadly and with pleasure and put the young men through the paces from 5:15 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock at night. But when reveille sounded the sergeants detailed to yank the sleepy out of their blankets had nothing to do but witness the quickness with which the guardsmen rolled out, took their morning plunge in the river and with voracious appetite devour the rough breakfast fare.

"American soldiers cannot stand the rigors of war like the Japanese, for example, because they refuse to deny themselves," said Major C. W. Walden, head of the medical corps at Waterloo. "That is the old contention, but when I see these young bucks come in from a ten-mile hike and fight all day without a bite to eat, at once I realize there's nothing of the old contention. They always want to eat, but that's because they are more energetic, use more steam and need more fuel."

Over at the field hospital, prepared to care for fifty guardsmen if need be, Major J. M. Spealman and his staff lounged in the shade, smoked good cigars, bandaged a blistered heel or smeared some cooling stuff on a sunburned face and thanked the state for their vacation.

Healthy and Hungry.
"Healthiest gang I ever saw," said Major Spealman. "Nothing the matter with them. They can rest anything on earth, do any amount of work and feel like fighting when the day is over."

Colonel A. D. Fetterman, state inspector general, who was the little father to the two regiments and provided them with food and saw that the camp was properly sanitized, declared the resources of the region around Waterloo were practically consumed by the hungry twelve hundred. Colonel H. J. Paul of the Fifth regiment, known as the Reds in these

maneuvers, who attacked Omaha and was met by Colonel G. A. Eberly's Fourth regiment of Blues at the Elkhorn river bridge where a draw battle was fought, agreed with Colonel Fetterman that the appetites of the young men were something to marvel at, but pointed out that the officers ate even more proportionately.

Feeding twelve hundred men hurriedly gathered at a little town is a man's size job, according to Colonel Fetterman, and the practice in securing and dispensing rations alone justified the maneuvers. While on the march the captains of companies sent out their foraging parties and procured "grub" well within the apportionment by the state for the purpose.

Food the Least Problem.
Food was, however, but one of a score of problems faced by the guardsmen on the march and in practice camp. The privates rapidly learned to roll their tents into the neatest roll for carrying, how to pitch their tents and where, how to stack arms, to dress hurriedly, drink sparingly of water after a long, hot march, conserve their strength in marching and how to sleep at night. Although many of the companies were marched ten miles without a halt in a glaring sun, there was no complaint.

When the two armies met early in the afternoon of a hot day for the battle at the bridge the men had been marched eleven miles, and yet they approached the bridge, where the advance guards were fighting, at a dog trot, and all afternoon charged and retreated and carried out their battle maneuvers as vigorously as though they were just beginning the work.

Four regular army officers—Colonel Westcott, Lieutenant Colonel Waldo E. Ayer, Captain Walter C. Babcock and Lieutenant Forrest E. Overholser,

with General Hall as chief—acted as umpires of the battle. All of them had seen active service and all ungrudgingly gave the young soldiers credit for efficient work. Bishop George A. Beecher, chaplain of the Fifth regiment, and Captain Fletcher N. Sisson, chaplain of the Fourth, who were on the field of battle all day, were profuse in their praise of the spirit with which the men entered into the mimic war.

Spectacular Signal Corps.
To the thousands who watched the battle and later witnessed the brigade, battalion and company drills the work of the signal corps under Captain H. A. Jess was a source of unfeeling interest. For Captain Jess, a baker by trade, has become himself an expert signal man and boasts that many of his company could qualify for service with regulars. The signal corps worked at night with lanterns and in the day with wig-wagging flags and the heliograph.

Major J. M. Birkner, oldest man in point of service in the Nebraska National Guard, said he had not attended a camp which was so thoroughly military as Camp Waterloo. "The maneuvers on the Elkhorn were not only the most comprehensive ever attempted by the state, but were more war-like, said Major Birkner, than any attempted during the twenty-seven years which he has spent in the service of the state militia.

While Camp Waterloo was a war-like place, like

the true Anglo-Saxon whose blood is warmed by play as well as by wars and the rumors of wars, the militia were given wide and diversified means of amusement. Swimming contests were held in the Elkhorn river. Base ball games were played and several wrestling matches with state champions as contestants were staged in a big tent erected especially for amusements.

Governor John H. Morehead, his staff and family and Mayor James C. Dahlman of Omaha were among the spectators at the big battle over the Elkhorn bridge. They were surprised at the magnitude and the completeness of the maneuvers. "I thought there would be a little skirmish and company firing," said Mayor Dahlman, "but the battle was made strikingly real by both regiments coming together at close range and by the heavy artillery firing." Governor Morehead was much pleased with what he saw of the battle and camp life.

Roster of Staff and Officers.
The general staff of Governor Morehead, as com-

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