

History of the 8th Infantry Battalion, National Guard of California 1890-1891

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EIGHTH INFANTRY BATTALION

Eighth Infantry Battalion, Fifth Brigade
Reference: Adjutant General's Files
Location: Chico, Butte County
Organized February 15, 1890*
Reconstituted October 31, 1891**

<u>Commanding Officers</u>			
<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>		<u>Commission</u>
Park Henshaw, Lieut. Colonel	Feb. 15, 1890		Feb. 27, 1890
Burr H. Mitchell, Major	Feb. 15, 1890		Mar. 10, 1890
Ulric B. Collins, Captain Adjutant (Removed from Brigade District)	May 28, 1890		June 5, 1890
Joseph H. Gunby, Captain Adjutant	Mar. 4, 1891		Mar. 11, 1891
Richard White, Signal Officer, Surgeon	May 28, 1890		June 5, 1890

Activities:

The organization of the Eighth Infantry Battalion was authorized by General Order No. 22, issued November 26, 1889, to become effective when the three companies, which previously had their applications approved by the Board of Location and Organization, were mustered into the State service. In accordance with the Special Order the following officers were to preside and organize the companies: Major T. B. Barnard at Redding on December nineteenth; Major H. T. Batchelder, Marysville on December twenty-first. In organizing the units, the following procedure was to be recognized:

- First - Open books in which to enter the names of those applying to be enrolled in the companies to be formed, the names to be subscribed in full, with their age, occupation, place of birth, residence and place of business.
- Second - Officers directed to preside at such meetings and organize the same, have each and every one who takes part sign an enlistment oath before himself and commanding officer.
- Third - Preside at the election of company commissioned officers.
- Fourth - Forward to headquarters such enlistment oaths, certificate of election and reports as are required.

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*Adjutant General Report 1890, page 4.

**Adjutant General Report 1891-1892, General Order No. 17, page 88. (provides for organization of Eighth Infantry Regiment.)

Adjutant General Report 1891-1892, page 40. (The rank date of Colonel Park Henshaw, October 31, 1891, is to be used as the date of organization of Eighth Infantry Regiment.)

Activities: (continued)

The new battalion was officially organized and designated the Eighth Infantry Battalion, Fifth Brigade, February 15, 1890. The five companies comprising the battalion were designated and located as follows: Company A, Chico; Company B, Colusa; Company C, Marysville; Company D, Red Bluff; Company E, Redding.* An election of officers was held on February fifteenth, when Park Henshaw was elected Lieutenant-Colonel Commander of the Battalion and Burr Mitchell as Major. The table on the following page indicates the number of companies and the various changes and designations in the units of the Eighth Infantry Battalion, Fifth Brigade.

As a requirement of the National Guard Service, the Eighth Battalion participated in parades on the principle holidays throughout the year. Washington's Birthday, February twenty-second was the first public appearance the battalion made subsequent to its organization. The other days set aside for special parade activities were Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Admission Day. The passing of military and civic leaders was also observed in a manner befitting the occasion. During the existence of the Eighth Infantry Battalion, the death of General William Tecumseh Sherman, U. S. Army, retired, called forth the sympathy of the Nation as well as the Military. Homage was paid to the distinguished patriot whose death occurred February 14, 1891. The flags on the armories throughout the State were displayed at half mast until the day after the funeral and the colors of the Eighth Infantry Battalion, as well as the other regiments of the Guard, were ordered draped in mourning. The officers were to wear the usual badge of mourning for a thirty day period. General Sherman had in the early history of the State Militia, been Major General, and during the trying times of 1856 had aided the civil authorities of the State in maintaining order and protecting the lives and property of the citizens.

To distribute the new rifles received from the Federal Government in 1889 equally among the companies of the National Guard and to arm the new companies being organized, a readjustment of the arms was necessary. Under this readjustment the Eighth Battalion received seventy new rifles and 110 old. These together with the arms in their possession, brought the unit's equipment up to a good numerical standard.

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*Chico Weekly Chronicle - Record, December 7, 1889, page 3, column 5.

COMPANIES COMPOSING THE EIGHTH INFANTRY BATTALION, FIFTH BRIGADE

1890-1891

A	B	C	D	E	F
Company A (formerly Chico Guard, unattached) <u>1890</u>	Company B (formerly Colusa Guard, unattached) <u>1890</u>	Company C, <u>1890</u>	Company D, <u>1890</u>	Company E, <u>1890</u>	Company F, <u>1891</u>

Note: The year dates in the table indicate the year the companies were attached to the Eighth Infantry Battalion, Fifth Brigade.

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Activities: (continued)

Target practice was to be held in June and September with every officer and enlisted man of the National Guard, including retired officers, musicians and markers, participating and firing ten shots. No sighting shots were to be allowed. The competitors were to practice in full dress or fatigue uniforms. Scores would not be approved if the participant did not observe this ruling. It was the duty of the target practice inspector to see that targets, dices and weights were in readiness and of correct patterns for the practice shoot, in order to avoid unnecessary delay on the arrival of troops at the range. In connection with these practices, the Eighth Infantry Battalion received 6,300 ball cartridges. The following awards were made for the different scores:

- 90 percent or over, a silver medal with a gold sharpshooter clasp,
- 80 percent, a silver medal with a silver rifleman clasp,
- 60 percent, a silver medal with a bronze marksman clasp.

It was necessary that a Guardsman attend sixty percent of the company drills throughout the year to be entitled to any of the awards or decorations. While the Battalion took an active interest in target practice, their average score was not a large one due to three of the units having been newly organized. Returns from the 1890 target practice reports show that none of the company or battalion staff members rated first class honors. However, Commissary First Lieutenant W. H. Parks and Commissary Sergeant J. H. Rooney together with Sergeant T. G. Johnson, Inspector of rifle practice, Captain C. B. Swain of Company A, were awarded second class decorations and a large number of members from the different companies rated third class honors. An improvement was evident from the 1891 shooting finals with the Eighth Battalion having thirty-six members receiving second-class decorations.

The annual inspection and muster was held in July of 1890, with the numerical strength of the Battalion given as 352. Sixty were absent which lowered the average rating to 82.95 percent. The following year the annual inspection was held in March and the reports indicated that the numerical strength had decreased to 299, however, the percentage of attendance had increased to 98 percent.

Company D of Red Bluff was the only company of the battalion having an average merit of six points. The average merit was based

Activities: (continued)

upon the following points: excellent, 6; very good, 5; good, 4; fair, 3; poor, 2; bad, 1. The degree of merit was compiled from the inspectors report on each company on the following requirements:

- 1st, - Neatness as to person, uniform and equipment;
- 2nd, - General bearing and soldierly appearance;
- 3rd, - Knowledge of duties.

The rapid progress the battalion made in military routine during the nine months between inspections, was undoubtedly instrumental in the recommendation that another company be organized to raise the Battalion to a Regiment.

Following the 1890 annual inspection and muster, the Eighth Infantry Battalion held a battalion encampment at Chico, October 1890. The Camp was designated Camp Bidwell, honoring the distinguished citizen General John Bidwell. The Camp was situated in a grove of oak trees which provided ample shade for the tent city. Adjoining the site was a large open space affording sufficient space for the evolution of the Battalion. Company E of Redding was the first company to arrive in camp. They were met at the train by Adjutant N. B. Collins and members of Company A, the resident unit. When the companies comprising the Eighth Infantry were in camp, there were 300 men present, Company C of Marysville having the largest membership.

The first day's activities were hampered by the strong northern wind which made the field maneuvers almost impossible as the commands could not be heard very far distant. Visitors were invited and everything possible was done for their comfort. The mornings were devoted to battalion drill and most of the afternoon was given up to skirmish drill. The skirmish drill was entirely new to the boys. However, they quickly learned what was expected of them, adding greatly to their military knowledge. Due to a long and active skirmish drill, dress parade was postponed and the call for guard duty was sounded by the bugler. Friday and Saturday the ranks of the companies were increased to the limit as many of the men could not leave their work during the week. The Governor and his Staff, Adjutant General Orton and Staff and several officers from other military companies in the State, visited the camp on Friday. A review was held from one to six o'clock during which time the Governor reviewed the battalion. A grand reception and ball for the visitors was given in the evening at the armory of Company A. The closing activity of the encampment was the sham battle on Saturday which was witnessed by a large crowd of spectators. A special detail of guards was necessary to keep the crowd off the field of action. Companies A and B defended the tents and companies C, D and E made the attack. The latter companies were victorious over the other

EIGHTH INFANTRY BATTALION

Activities: (Continued)

companies driving them into camp when the white flag of truce was raised. The battalion broke camp late Saturday afternoon and the out-of-town companies left for their homes on the late trains. This encampment was considered a success as it was the first time the companies had the experience of drilling together.*

The last activity participated in before the battalion was organized into a regiment was their attendance at the Camp of Instruction during August 1891. Prior to the encampment, Adjutant General C. C. Allen issued a circular with the suggestions relative to the improvement of the troops. While the enjoyment and recreation of the participants were not to be over-looked, General Allen felt that the military part of the meetings should not be neglected. Among the suggestions listed were the following:**

"Discontinuance of indiscriminate entertainment and the accompanying use of spirituous liquors contending the practice was detrimental to the good of the service.

The tax payers of California are responsible for the liberal appropriations made for camp purposes which make it more necessary that nothing should be allowed in camp, nor a line of conduct followed that could call for adverse criticism.

The practice of ladies remaining in camp nights was classed as an objectionable feature and recommended to be disbanded.

Receptions and reviews were to be reduced to a minimum as they were fatiguing to the men and no practical value. The official visit of the Commander-in-Chief was the only exception to the review ruling.

On these occasions the arms were to be clean and in good order. Shoes were to be of the wide-toed and wide-soled, substantial variety; clothes clean and in good repair. Knapsacks in good order; straps serviceable. Overcoats carefully rolled and strapped on. Blouses, caps and leggings (clean) in knapsack. All brasses bright. Helmet worn square on the head, tipped neither to one side nor the other. Gloves clean. No tobacco to be used in ranks. When standing at attention, men were to stand with head and eyes to the front, no gazing about or talking."

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*Chico Weekly Chronicle-Record, October 11, 1890, page 1, column 3.

**General Orders, Series 1887-1895, Circular No. 1, page 123.

EIGHTH INFANTRY BATTALION

Activities: (continued)

The Camp of Instruction was held at Santa Cruz, July 18 to 26, 1891, designated Camp Allen, honoring the Adjutant General of the State. The cost of transportation for the Eighth Infantry Battalion to and from the camp was \$1,362.20. In accordance with the recommendations issued previous to the encampment, the camp bore an especially military character, and was conspicuous for its compact, practical appearance and absence of all save military decorations. From the Inspection Report compiled during the Camp of Instruction, it is apparent there were 194 out of the 274 present, making an average of 70.80 percent attendance and the average merit rating of the Battalion was 5.98 percent. This was a fair rating considering the fact that the Battalion had been newly organized and had little experience drilling in unison with one another. Lieutenant-Colonel A. D. Cutler, the Division Inspector, reported that the five days experience in camp had shown a decided improvement in the company's military standing from an efficiency standpoint. The general condition of the camp was highly commendable, being clean, neat and in good order. Quarters of the non-commissioned staff, bands and servants were also in good order. The regimental and company streets were well policed. The inspection of quarters showed a fine body of men of good appearance, with uniforms, equipment and quarters in excellent condition, reflecting creditably on the officers who displayed interest in their men. While some of the duties were only fairly well performed, these were offset by other activities which were above the standard. The duties referred to included the general appearance and manual of arms at the Brigade Review and dress parade were excellent. Manual of arms in line was also excellent. The activities to be corrected were:

Guard duty had been only fairly performed, and salutes of both officers and men were not generally or promptly given.

The formation for field inspection was tardy and lengthy and the manual of arms at inspection was poor.

The general condition of pieces was also poor, and indicated serious lack of attention of both officers and men.

Brigade formation and movement were excessive and unnecessary and it was recommended that the officers pay particular attention to the correction of these activities.

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EIGHTH INFANTRY BATTALION

Activities: (Continued)

One month after the encampment the Board of Location and Organization recommended the organization of a company at Oroville to be designated Company F. Company F together with the five companies already comprising the battalion, made up the minimum number of units required for a regimental organization. In accordance with the recommendation made by the Board, the Eighth Infantry Regiment was organized from the Eighth Infantry Battalion and Company F was designated Company F, Eighth Infantry Regiment, Fifth Brigade, October 31, 1891.*

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*General Orders, Series 1887-1895, General Order No. 17, page 128.