

**THE CALIFORNIA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD  
MANZANITA RIFLE RANGE**

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Tamalpais Valley, folded into hills on the Richardson Bay side of the Marin County, was the location of a California Army National Guard firing range from 1911 through 1917. The encampments and marksman competitions there are long forgotten, but they left an interesting record in newspapers, along with rare photographs. Where a suburban community has since transformed former marsh and grassland, civilian soldiers gathered to train in preparation for active duty assignments. Federal regular army soldiers from nearby posts, as well as student cadets from the area, also used the firing range for training. Local news reports noted crowds of spectators. As such, it was a crossroads between the federal military post on the County's southern coastline dating to 1866 and the expanding civilian settlement of the County into the twentieth century.

### Background

Southern Marin County's dramatic landscape was formed by geological processes resulting in the twisted Franciscan formation, primarily consisting of sedimentary rock, submarine basalt, chert, and serpentinite, as well as various metamorphic rocks. For five thousand years it was occupied by people believed to be the ancestors of the Coast Miwoks.

Specific land use of the southern-most territory of Marin County entered the public record with the 19,000-acre land grant to William A. Richardson in 1838, called Rancho Sausalito by the Mexican government. Richardson sold most of his land to Samuel Throckmorton by 1856. In the 1860s, the federal government acquired 1899 acres of the Rancho for the Lime Point Military Reservation on the southern tip of the Marin County peninsula overlooking the Golden Gate. Throckmorton leased out much of the remaining property for dairy ranches. This included an area (then mapped both as Coyote Valley and Coyote Hollow) that drained eastward into Richardson Bay.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, bayside Marin County communities experienced the onset of suburban growth, spurred by urban exodus after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and the formation of the Northwestern Pacific Railroad, an electric interurban rail line that provided passenger service to stations from Sausalito to Eureka in Humboldt County. The Manzanita Point station just north of Sausalito was located at the mouth of what was known at that time as Coyote Valley. In 1908, a real estate syndicate acquired 800 acres of former ranchlands there for a town site and recorded a subdivision map renaming the area as Tamalpais Valley, although the valley was called by both names into the 1920s. The parcels were sited on lowlands west beyond the tidal marsh at the mouth of the valley. However, sales of the residential lots apparently were slow and the valley remained a rural outpost for the next decade, therein creating an opportunity for the California Army National Guard (CNG).

### Formation of the California Army National Guard

The CNG was created by legislative statute in 1866 following a legacy of citizen militias, and was shaped during the subsequent decades by additional legislative statutes. The CNG consisted of approximately sixty companies statewide in May 1885, when newly formed Company D of the Fifth Infantry of San Rafael was mustered into the CNG Fifth

Battalion at the behest of local civic leaders. These citizens were presumably inspired by a March 1876 fire at San Quentin Prison near San Rafael, when a detachment of the CNG was brought across San Francisco Bay to assist. A March 1909 letter in the *Marin Journal* newspaper provides further insight. The author noted that Company D had been organized for local protection in the advent of a breakout from San Quentin Prison. He encouraged support and enlistment in the Company.

Company D established an Armory on the ground floor of the Masonic building at Fourth Street and Lootens Place in San Rafael, and the Company developed a reputation as champion marksmen. Company D regularly practiced and competed at the Schuetzen (German for “marksmen”) Park range, located at the edge of the Richardson Bay marsh near the present location of Marin Sanitary facilities on Jacoby Street (named for the park’s founder). They also participated in CNG joint military maneuvers such as those at Atascadero reported in the *Marin Journal* on September 29, 1910.

San Rafael’s Company D was called up to serve with the Fifth Regiment in Oakland and San Jose during the Pullman railroad strike of 1894. They were then mustered into the United States Army to serve at Fort Vancouver Washington during the Philippine conflict. During the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, several brigades of the CNG, including Company D, served along with regular army forces to secure the City.<sup>1</sup> And, in 1913, Companies A, C, D, E, F, H, I, and K of the Militia Fifth Infantry, Battery B, First Battalion, Field Artillery, Company B, Signal Corps assisted Regular Army troops from Fort Baker and the Presidio of San Francisco, civilian responders, and others in battling a fire on the south slope of Mount Tamalpais that threatened the towns of Mill Valley and Larkspur from July 10th to the 13<sup>th</sup> that year.

Newspaper reports on CNG activities by Marin newspapers was routine and positive, despite concerns expressed about Company D’s continual inability to recruit up to their required strength, and so threatening their readiness. Reporters playing an important role is ensuring community financial support. Along with press coverage of parades and military balls, local newspapers followed training routines and shooting matches. Marksmanship was obviously critical for preparedness for the CNG. For instance, on June 13, 1901, the *Marin Journal* reported that the Company D of the CNG was to travel by train to Camp Gage near Santa Cruz for a Division Camp. On June 23, 1904, Batteries B and C of the First Artillery CNG practiced their marksmanship at San Rafael Company D’s range, possibly the Schuetzen range mentioned above (*Marin Journal*).<sup>2</sup> In May 1910, a 160-acre ranch in Warner’s Canyon in Mill Valley was evidently leased by the B Signal Corp of the CNG for a rifle and pistol range (*Mill Valley Record* May 27, 1910). This suggests that the range used by San Rafael’s Company D was not always available or sufficient for other CNG units.

The CNG was also evidently permitted access to regular US Army facilities for inter-company competitions. In July 1908, the Fifth Regiment CNG companies met at Fort Barry in southern Marin County to compete for positions on the 1908 Eastern Rifle Team. The Lime Point federal military reservation had been renamed as Fort Baker in 1897 and in 1904, during the military’s Endicott-era of upgrades, was divided into two forts. The new post, oriented towards the Pacific on Rodeo Lagoon, was named Fort Barry. The firing range at the Presidio Of San Francisco had been abandoned around

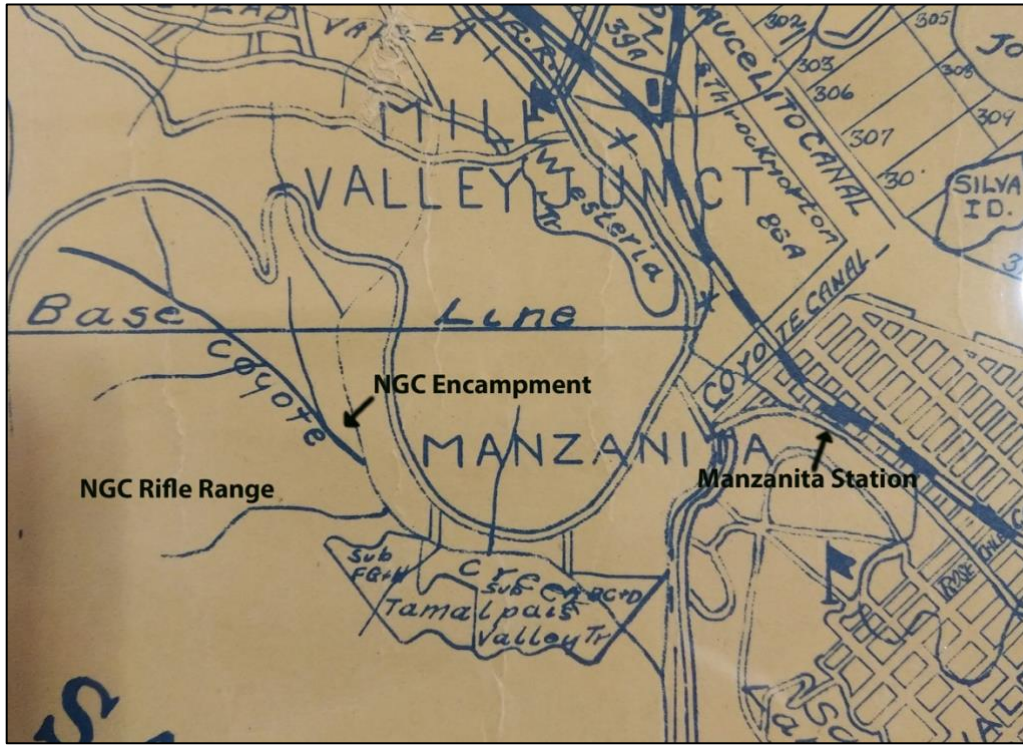
1900 and so, in 1904 the upper Rodeo Creek watershed was developed as a site for a firing range. By the end of the year the foot of the hill was modified, a target trench was completed and concrete floor was poured. A complex including a barn, storehouse, post exchange, officer's quarters was completed by 1910. Every ten days to month the camp there would briefly empty then refill with a new unit for training.

### Establishing an official CNG Rifle Range

Without permanently secured property in the region, local CNG companies had routinely searched for new locations for practice ranges and were dependent on civic leaders for support. However a December 1904 account in the *Marin Journal* noted that state CNG representatives examined a rifle range between Petaluma and Santa Rosa for use by CNG Company C of Petaluma and Company E of Santa Rosa. The rifle range was accessible by the electric rail line and was suitable for two-, three- and five-hundred-yard rifle targets.<sup>3</sup> This search followed the federal Militia Act of 1903 which reorganized and professionalized the National Guard. It provided federal funds for the establishment of summer training camps.

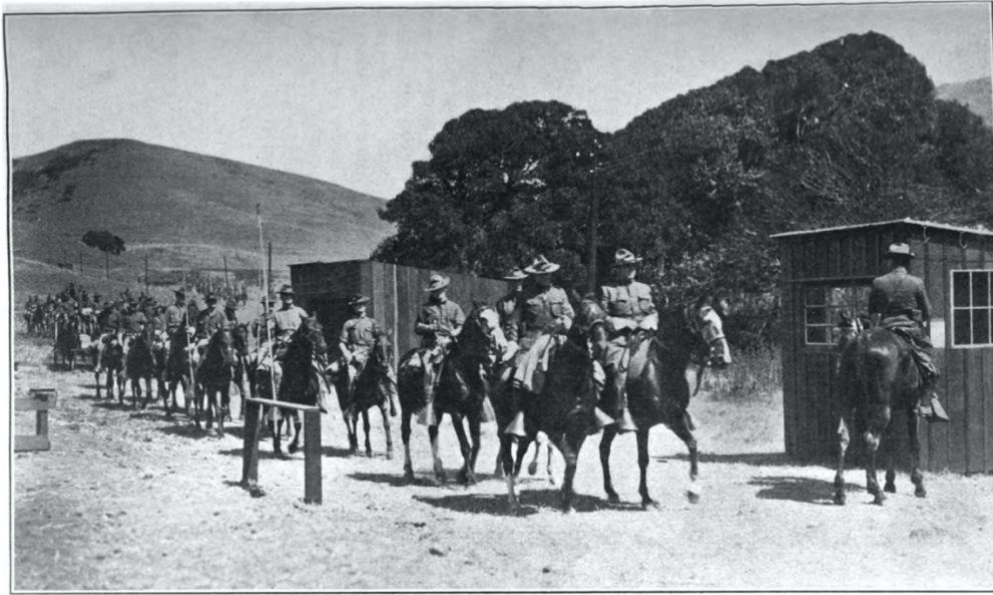
The Tamalpais Valley location was determined suitable presumably because it was accessible by several Northwestern Pacific Railroad stops on the northward alignment, and was crossed by the Sausalito to Bolinas Road. The valley's topography and proximity to the federal military posts also were likely considerations. On April 28, 1911, the *Mill Valley Record* noted that property near Alto station had been examined as a possible CNG firing range. By May 27, 1911, Adjutant General Forbes of the State Militia had completed arrangements for a three-year lease of 600 acres of the former ranch in Coyote Valley (as the geographic area continued to be alternately called for some time). Located west of the new subdivision, the property was to have twenty-five targets (*Sausalito News*). The hillsides were open grasslands at that time, but the drainages were wooded with shrubs, willows, and bay laurel. One of the few valley residents at the time remembered that fifteen men were hired to clear the vegetation around the creeks on the valley floor and level that land for the rifle range.<sup>4</sup>

By mid-August 1911, Company K of the Fifth Infantry had tried the "Manzanita" rifle range set against the hillsides at the far west end of the Valley. By late summer, the range was evidently in full operation, as it was reported that Coast Artillery Corp and Fifth Infantry were to make camp on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> of September for field exercises/war maneuvers/"sham battle." They were to have the assistance of the Signal Corps' aviation detachment and wireless telephone detachment (*Sausalito News* August 19, 1911). Civilian groups were evidently also allowed to use the range, such as the San Francisco Rifle and Revolver Club, that held a competition at the new range in November. As a side note, it was reported that it was the only such group in that part of State using the new model Springfield military rifle (*SF Call* November 6, 1911).

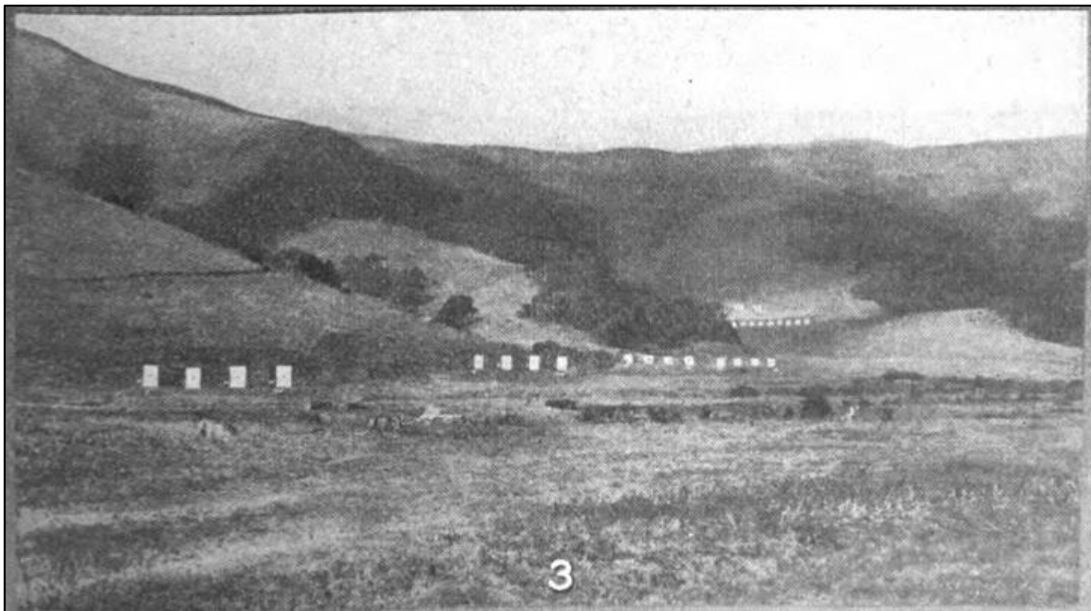


1911 Marin County map (portion)

By January 1912, officials reported plans to enlarge the Manzanita range to accommodate larger numbers of troops in maneuvers (*Mill Valley Record* January 12, 1912). It was in this period that a Report of the Adjutant of the State of California for the Period July 1, 1910 to November 16, 1914, recorded that, in the larger effort to modernize the Guard, they successfully equipped the State's Signal Corps for field work. A photograph included in the report is identified as that of Company B, Signal Corps at the Manzanita Rifle Range. This image, when cross-referenced with other recently discovered photographs, enables a fairly specific mapping of the leased CNG range. It appears that the seasonal encampments were located adjacent to the northbound leg of the Sausalito to Bolinas Road (now State Highway 1/Shoreline Highway). The targets were installed at the sheltered southwest corner of Tamalpais Valley where there were surrounding steeply rising slopes .<sup>5</sup>



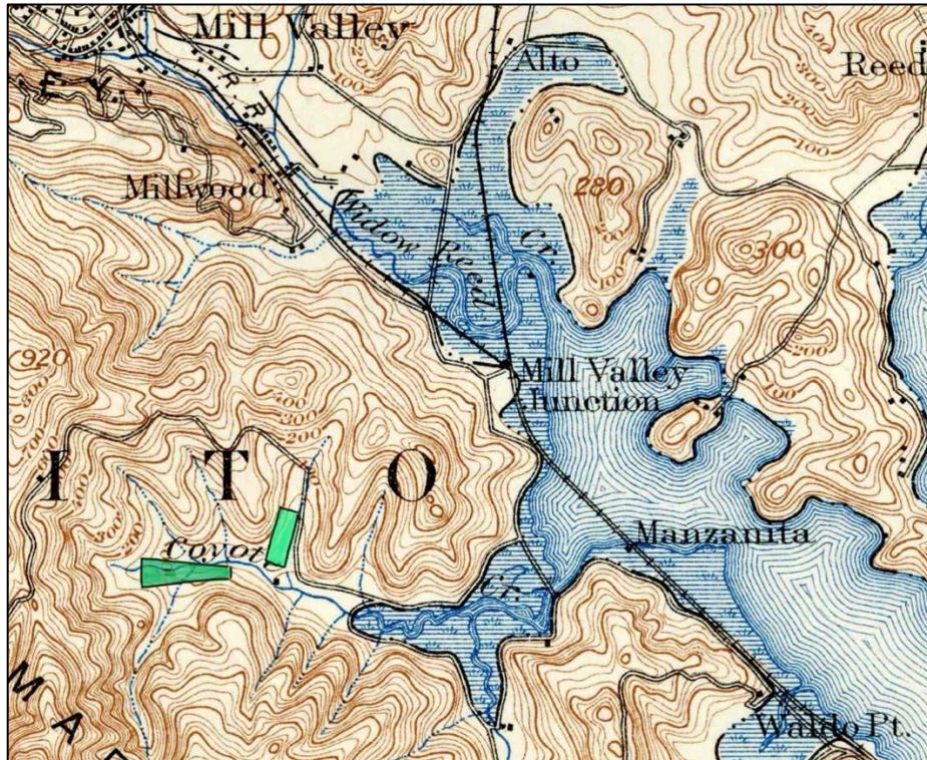
Company "B," Signal Corps, at Manzanita Rifle Range.



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[Report of the Adjutant-General of the State of California for the Period July 1, 1910 to November 16, 1914





Location of the 1911-1917 Manzanita Rifle Range (dark green shading) and encampments (light green shading)

The establishment of the Manzanita rifle range reflected the pattern of military improvements demonstrated a few miles southwest at Fort Barry at the entrance to San Francisco Bay. Features survive from the Fort Barry range and have been recorded in the National Park Service cultural landscape reports, but the CNG Manzanita range from the same era has been subsumed by residential development. Although one can consider the Fort Barry range as context, the Manzanita range was evidently not developed as extensively as the Fort Barry range, nor utilized as intensely. CNG troops were not posted at the CNG range continuously and it appears that most activities there were held during dry weather. Given these facts, it is not surprising that no construction or obvious landform alterations appear to have survived from the Manzanita range.

That leaves the written and photographic record to outline the story. Various events at the Manzanita range were reported in local newspapers. As reported in the *Sausalito News*, in 1913, a captain from Company D of the Fifth Regiment from San Rafael State carried off the honors at the state shooting competition at Manzanita. The most difficult test involved 200-yard, 600-yard and skirmish ranges (*Sausalito News*, August 2, 1913). At least one soldier, Joseph Lacey, kept photographs of his time there that year. The photograph below evidently shows members of his Company in front of the range keeper's house (which was located on the west side of the Sausalito-Bolinas Road, now Highway 1).



Ca 1913 looking north east (Joseph Lacey Collection)



Ca 1913 looking northeast (Joseph Lacey Collection)

### Influence of National Events

By 1915, the arc of the Manzanita range story was influenced by larger military events. In February 1915, Lieutenant Martin Walton of the Second Company of the Coast Artillery CNG wrote a lengthy commentary in the *Mill Valley Record* about how as much it was hoped that the country could avoid the war in Europe, it was critical to recruit and train Guard soldiers who could provide an important function protecting the country in the event that conflict was unavoidable. The link between the Manzanita range and these larger issues is illustrated by the activities of Company G of the Fifth Regiment from Alameda. Company G, led by Captain Charles Magagnos, was posted for rifle practice at the range in May 1915. A photograph taken that summer indicated that the troops had “started from Fort Barry,” about three miles south. Company G became friendly with the Neuhaus family (referenced above), whose daughter created a photo album of that summer. The album’s images show the target range, encampment and sociability of a brief happy time.



Official public records on the range are few. Several “Reports of Pistol Practice” survive at the California State Archives regarding Championship, Regimental, and Individual Qualification Matches held at the Manzanita Range in 1915. Thus, newspapers provide the most source material. In April 1916, student militias camped at the range for rifle practice (*Mill Valley Record* April 15, 1916). On September 30, 1916, the *Mill Valley Record* reported that the 25<sup>th</sup> Company of high school cadets and the officers and non-commissioned officers of the 29<sup>th</sup> Company held target practice at the Manzanita Range. This may have been the event recorded in a panoramic photograph at the range, which captured the encampment, the structures used to store range equipment, the building occupied by the range keeper Harry Warr, the remaining residence of Big Coyote Dairy Ranch (then the residence of the Neuhaus family), and, in the foreground, several troops of CNG soldiers and cadets.



Cadets and CNG troops ca 1916 (private collection).  
Looking north west, north and north east

In the circa 1916 panorama (a composite of three images taken at slightly adjusted angles), the camp tents are located on the slopes in the upper left of the photograph. The targets are located to the left of the photograph. The Big Coyote ranch house is to the upper right and the Warr house is situated towards the top to the right of center of the photograph on what today is Browning Street in Tamalpais Valley. Harry Warr, who had been a state game warden in El Dorado County in 1910, became the range keeper at some point during this period. He and his wife settled in Tamalpais Valley and, thereafter, he was referred to locally as Captain Warr. When the range was later moved to Alameda County, Harry Warr served as the range keeper there. Although he lodged part time in the East Bay, he retained his home in Tamalpais Valley and lived there into the 1930s.



CNG encampment ca 1916, photographer looking southwest (private collection)



Targets at the west end of the valley ca 1916 (private collection)



CNG in formation ca 1916, photographer looking north.  
Captioned "finished blowing colors" (private collection)



Company G and local resident ca 1916 (private collection)



Photo ca 1916 (private collection)

Meanwhile, property owners along the US southern border had been lobbying since 1914 for CNG protection against raids by bands crossing from Mexico. In March 1916, Mexican revolutionary forces led by General Francisco Villa attacked a US cavalry regiment in Columbus, New Mexico, resulting in the deaths of eighteen Americans. Company G, San Rafael's Company D, and the other companies of the Fifth Infantry were mustered in on June 28, 1916 for Mexican border US army service ("California National Guard and the Mexican Border Service" manuscript at the CSL). They were posted on the US/Mexico border near Nogales, Arizona, for a long, hot, and dusty encampment, dissuading further crossings until October 7<sup>th</sup>, although, like most of the National Guard, they did not participate in any direct engagements.

The Manzanita range was still considered valuable by local officials at that time. On January 20, 1917, Senator Scott of San Francisco was reported as planning to ask for an appropriation to purchase the Manzanita Rifle Range (*Sausalito News*). On April 7, 1917, a *Mill Valley Record* editorial supported keeping a rifle range in Marin County and not moving it to Alameda, which evidently was being planned. The *Record's* editor argued that it was the second most important range west of the Rocky Mountains.

However, the United States had officially entered World War I in Europe and the National Guard troops were being incorporated into the regular army. CNG leaders were pressured to improve recruitment, which had long been a challenge. Presumably, most, if not all of the men in Company G were absorbed into the federal forces. Sadly, Captain Magagnos, of Company G had died of a heart attack on March 26<sup>th</sup>, having



worked since 4:00 a.m. superintending the enlistment of the company “up to full war strength” (*LA Herald and Riverside Daily Press*).

### Influences After the First World War

On April 11, 1917, the State of California was reported as having purchased land in Leona Heights in Oakland, Alameda County, for a new range, which opened in 1920 after the end of World War I (*Oakland Tribune*). In 1919, developers subdivided the former rifle range in Tamalpais Valley into residential lots as the Little City Farms development. The valley eventually filled with residential neighborhoods reaching toward the crests of the hills, only halting at the boundary of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area established in the 1970s. Nothing remains of the rifle range except a few spent bullets and shell casings occasionally found at the west end of the valley (see below).



Author's collection

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Panorama of the Manzanita Rifle Range ca 1916. Private Collection.

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*United States Federal Census*

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<sup>1</sup> Although several dozen members of the CNG were arrested for looting while on duty, the commander of the Pacific Division of the Army praised the CNG's performance in his special report on the catastrophe.

<sup>2</sup> A new range was reported as having been arranged on property by the marsh "midway between the landing and the toll road" in San Rafael (*Marin County Tocsin*, November 13, 1897). This was presumably the "new range" was located "by the broad gauge" according to the *Marin County Tocsin* June 18, 1904.

<sup>3</sup> It is unknown at the time of this article if this practice range was secured, but Company C was disbanded in 1907 for lack of community support, It was subsequently reorganized as Company K.

<sup>4</sup> Neuhaus and Roll Interview, 1987. Neuhaus, a teenager at the time, was the daughter of the family that bought the former Coyote ranch house in 1908 and were the valley residents in closest proximity to the range.

<sup>5</sup> Decades later local children made a game of finding spent bullets and casings in and among the trees in the area.