History of the Company A, Signal Corps, National Guard of California
1890-1912

Includes:

Signal Corps, 1st Brigade (1890-1905)
1st Company, Signal Corps (1905-1909)

This history was completed in 1940 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in conjunction with the California National Guard and the California State Library.

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Signal Corps, First Brigade

Reference: Adjutant General's Files
Location: Los Angeles, Los Angeles County
Organized May 23, 1890
Redesignated May 10, 1905*
Redesignated March 22, 1903**
Mustered out February 28, 1912***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Commission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madison T. Owens, Major</td>
<td>Oct. 7, 1889</td>
<td>Oct. 12, 1889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Appointed Major &amp; Signal Officer Oct. 7, 1889)</td>
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<tr>
<td>William A. Barracott, First Lieut.</td>
<td>July 22, 1891</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Resigned July 1893)</td>
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<tr>
<td>George E. Lawrence, First Lieut.</td>
<td>July 27, 1893</td>
<td>Sept. 23, 1893</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Re-elected August 15, 1895.)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>George E. Lawrence, Captain</td>
<td>July 8, 1897</td>
<td>Sept. 1, 1897</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horace E. Sabine, First Lieut.</td>
<td>July 8, 1897</td>
<td>Sept. 1, 1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George E. Lawrence, Captain</td>
<td>Re-elected Dec. 7, 1899</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horace E. Sabine, First Lieut.</td>
<td>Re-elected Dec. 7, 1899</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph J. Blick, Captain</td>
<td>July 18, 1901</td>
<td>Oct. 29, 1901</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horace E. Sabine, First Lieut.</td>
<td>Re-elected July 18, 1901</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*The Signal Corps, First Brigade was redesignated First Company Signal Corp, First Brigade in accordance with General Order No. 7, paragraph 20, May 10, 1905. General and Special Orders and Circulars, 1905.


****Major M. T. Owens was appointed Brigade Signal Officer, October 7, 1889, and commanded the First Brigade Signal Corps after its organization 1890 until July 22, 1891, when Lieutenant Barracott was placed in command. The election of 1893, placed Lieutenant George E. Lawrence in command, retaining that commission until July 8, 1897, when he was commissioned Captain.
SIGNAL CORPS (Continued)

Commanding Officers (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Commission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W. W. Lovett, Captain</td>
<td>Oct. 29, 1903</td>
<td>Dec. 31, 1903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec. 7, 1905</td>
<td>Feb. 6, 1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. W. Slotterbeck, First Lieut.</td>
<td>Aug. 8, 1907</td>
<td>Sept. 3, 1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. W. Lockwood, First Lieut.</td>
<td>Aug. 8, 1907</td>
<td>Sept. 3, 1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. W. Slotterbeck, Captain</td>
<td>Feb. 11, 1909</td>
<td>May 13, 1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. T. Bathey, First Lieut.</td>
<td>Mar. 24, 1910</td>
<td>Apr. 30, 1910</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activities:

The First Brigade Signal Corps was organized on May 28, 1890, in accordance with a legislative enactment of April 1889, which permitted the organization of Brigade Signal Corps. The Corps was under command of Major M. T. Owens, until the Legislature of 1891, authorized the election of a First Lieutenant to assist the Signal Officers. William A. Barraclough was the first to fill this office, being elected July 23, 1891. George E. Lawrence was elected Lieutenant in 1893, and retained that rank until 1897, when he was commissioned Captain of the Signal Corps.*

The military requirements of the Corps, consisted of signaling with wands, flags, torches and heliographs. Learning the use of the telescope was also important to these troops in conjunction with establishing and changing stations at encampments. The heliograph was a method of transmitting messages by the sun's rays. During 1891, a distance of eighteen miles was reached by heliograph signaling, while the longest range for flag signaling was but twelve miles.

The unit had been in existence but one year when they held a
rating of "Excellent" in discipline, instruction, military
appearance and care of arms and other property. Major J. A.
Driffield, who inspected and mustered the Signal Corps on April
14, 1891, made the following remarks on the efficiency of the
company:

"The Signal Corps of this Brigade is a splendid organ-
ization. Their commanding officer, Major Owens, deserves
great credit for the efficient manner in which the
Corps went through their signals and for the gener-
ally good appearance of the corps. The discipline
was the best that I have seen in any organization
in Southern California. Their uniforms were clean
and in excellent condition. The General, command-
ing this brigade should feel very much pleased and
proud of this body of men."

This statement encouraged the corps in retaining their rating of
efficiency. Although they had a membership of but twenty men,
it had no bearing upon their ability to make a showing.

This Signal Corps attained its greatest degree of efficiency
during encampments, when stations were established at different
points and messages relayed. At the Camps of Instruction, the
Signal Corps was acclaimed as one of the most essential units
of the National Guard. The men were also trained in being pre-
pared for taking the field and to be in readiness for rendering
competent service when called upon. The Signal Corps was of
vital importance too, in time of a riot or war, as with their
system of signaling, messages could be relayed or communicated
for great distances.

The first encampment the corps participated in was held at
Avalon, Catalina Island, from August 6 to 16, 1892, and was
under command of Major M. T. Owens. Most of the time was spent
in signaling with the flag, torch and heliograph and the Signal
Corps made very good progress. A large majority of the members
attained a commendable degree of proficiency and were competent

*Annual Muster Roll, First Brigade Signal Corps, April 14, 1891.
Adjutant General's Office.
Activities: (continued)

to take the field at any time and render efficient service.
The unit endeavored to open communication between Avalon and
San Pedro with the heliograph, but failed due to heavy clouds
hanging over San Pedro.

However, several days later, the corps was divided into five
detachments and did some very commendable work, establishing
stations and signaling from one outpost to another. One sta-
tion located on Black Jack Mountain, established communication
with one on Mt. Johnson, fourteen miles away. Messages were
then transmitted to the other stations with little difficulty.
This accomplishment was at that time considered quite a feat,
as heliograph as a military science was practically a new field
in the National Guard of California.

In his report of this encampment, Major Owens recommended Black
Jack Mountain as a valuable signal station. According to the
Major, from there a view could be had of San Clement Island,
San Nicolas Island, the islands off Santa Barbara and all of
the coast from Santa Barbara to San Diego.

The Signal Corps, consisting of twenty men and one officer,
showed a good record of attendance. The expenses for this en-
campment were $246.01 for a period of ten days or an average
of slightly more than one dollar per man.*

An unusual and consequently a severe efficiency test was given
the entire First Brigade on November 14, 1893, in response to
an "Emergency Call." These calls were few and far between and
the one in 1893, was the only one that the Signal Corps parti-
cipated in prior to being mustered out of the service in 1912.
The militia supposedly, was expected to be ready for a fight
or a frolic at a moment's notice. Some of the doubting citizens
had expressed a doubt as to the troops ability to assemble on
short notice for the purpose of repelling an enemy. The
"Emergency Call" was intended to refute this insinuation.
Orders were issued at eleven o'clock A.M., by Brigadier-General C. F. A. Last, and sent to each commanding officer of the First Brigade, to have their troops assembled at the armory by three o'clock P.M. These orders were not received until twelve o'clock, which caused a great deal of commotion among the Guardsmen. Messengers were sent out by bicycle and horse to notify the members of each company, and that they did well is shown by the roll call, when all members of the Signal Corps responded, except those doing signal duty on Mt. San Bernardino.

The usual signs and formation about the armory, the bugle call of assembly and the rolling of drums had attracted at Broadway, a large crowd of people before three o'clock. Four wagons were loaded with tents, blankets and commissary stores and were ready long before the order was given to "march." The Signal Corps was the first to be ready and under command of Major H. T. Owens, were in their saddles before the infantry came down the stairs from the armory. The column was formed and at 4:18 P.M., began the march through the business section of Los Angeles, causing a great deal of comment, as no one understood the meaning of the military demonstration.

The place of rendezvous was reached in time for the preparation of the evening meal and setting up the tents that were brought along. It was left optional with the troops as to what equipage should be taken and consequently a full number of tents were not taken. This made it necessary for many of the men to rough it in the open air, without even the usual camp protection. The following day was spent in going through war maneuvers under rigorous rules. The troops were given various drills as though they were actually in the field of war with an enemy in sight. After a strenuous day of maneuvering, the troops marched to their respective armories. A general idea of what is expected of a soldier in the field was gained by the Signal Corps and improved the member's knowledge of military tactics.* The knowledge obtained from encampments and the "Emergency Call", helped to fit the troops in the Signal Corps for active service in 1893.

*The Los Angeles Herald, November 15, 1893, page 4, column 1.
Activities: (continued)

When war was declared between Spain and the United States during April of 1898, the First Brigade Signal Corps was not called to enter the Federal Service as a unit. However, this company furnished one commissioned, three non-commissioned officers and one private, who were assigned to the Volunteer Signal Corps.*

At the encampment held at Camp Atascadero, from August 15 to 26, 1904, the First Brigade Signal Corps played an important role. They joined with other signal companies and formed a Division Signal Corps which was commanded by Captain Carl F. Hartman, of the United States Army. The first two days were confined to camp duty, signal drill with field buzzer, flags, heliograph and lamps at night.

At 6:25, on the morning of the third day, Captain William Lovett with a detachment of ten men, reported to Colonel R. K. Whitmore of the Sixth Infantry Regiment and his command, for a day of rigid field maneuvers. The detachment was equipped with two field buzzers, four signal flags and one motorcycle, operated by Sergeant H. O. Waterman, First Brigade Signal Corps. The detachment accompanied the command to a specified point which was 350 yards southeast of the commanding officer and his main body of men.

A rear guard was formed which opened communication between the detachment and the commanding officer of the main body of men. This was accomplished through the use of a barbed wire fence which was grounded by driving nails into roots of trees, making a very serviceable return circuit. As the column retreated the signal men opened stations wherever necessary, using the buzzing wire after there ceased to be any more fence. As the retreat was quite rapid and the men exposed to a heavy fire, communication was broken at times. Messages were then transmitted by means of flags and a motorcycle, the latter being of great value. The command was forced to retreat and when the signal corps was acclaimed victorious, it was just 12:05 P.M.

The above mentioned signal practice was an example of each day that followed during the encampment. This practice gave the

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Activities: (continued)

Signal Corps much deserved credit for splendid military performance.*

The unit strictly adhered to the rules and regulations of the National Guard at their weekly meetings and also adopted By-Laws of their own. At a meeting held on September 7, 1907, the following By-Law was adopted: "No persons other than officers and regularly enlisted men of this First Company of Signal Corps shall be allowed in the meeting room during business meetings." This by-law held a great deal of significance as the unit, in holding their regular meetings, held strictly to military matters which enabled them to attain a high standard of efficiency.

At the same meeting, an amendment was made to Section 20, of the company's By-Laws which read as follows: "All members shall pay dues of twenty-five cents per month in advance. Any member who shall become one dollar in arrears for dues shall be eligible for discharge by vote of Corps." The delinquent clause was left out and members were requested to "pay dues of fifty cents per month in advance." By increasing the monthly dues, the corps was able to keep their uniforms and equipment in perfect condition and also enabled them to go on many week-end trips. These outings were held in order to improve the company's knowledge of military maneuvers, and enable the members to become expert signalmen.

As an example of the services performed by the unit over a period of a year, a brief history is taken from the company muster roll of 1907 and reads as follows:

"The company drilled on all drill nights during the year including the month of December, part of each evening being devoted to schools in telegraphy and electricity. Responded to "emergency call" to Oakland and Sacramento. Had signal practice as follows: January 27, 28; June 25, 24; July 8, 15, 22, also July 28, 29. Men also turned out on Sunday afternoons on their own accord. Had mounted ride to Whittier, California on November 11, 12. Regular target practice each month. Paraded July Fourth. Sent firing squads to two different cemeteries."

The general average of efficiency for 1907, was 91.89 per cent.

Activities: (continued)

which signifies, the rigid training of the unit, fitted them for
a top place among signal corps.

A few years later, however, it was decided that the National
Guard of California, was unbalanced by maintaining two signal
corps. Therefore, one unit was taken from the Guard. The rea-
son for selecting the First Brigade Signal Corps was probably
due to the fact that it was not the oldest company and further-
more, was equipped with less modern devices. Therefore, Com-
pny B, Signal Corps of the Second Brigade, remained in the
National Guard and Company A was mustered out of service on
February 29, 1912.*