

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)

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Signal Corps, First Brigade

Reference: Adjutant General's Files (continued)

Location: Los Angeles, Los Angeles County

Organized May 28, 1890 Oct. 29, 1893

Redesignated May 10, 1905*

Redesignated March 22, 1909** APRIL 14, 1909**

Mustered out February 29, 1912***

Commission
Dec. 21, 1898

Feb. 8, 1905
Feb. 6, 1908

Commanding Officers****

<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Commission</u>
Madison T Owens, Major (Appointed Major & Signal officer Oct. 7, 1889)	Oct. 7, 1889	Oct. 12, 1889
William A. Darracott, First Lieut. (Resigned July 1893)	July 23, 1891	_____
George E. Lawrence, First Lieut. (Re-elected August 15, 1895.)	July 27, 1893	Sept. 23, 1893
George E. Lawrence, Captain	July 8, 1897	Sept. 1, 1897
Horace E. Sabine, First Lieut.	July 8, 1897	Sept. 1, 1897
George E. Lawrence, Captain (Re-elected Dec. 7, 1899)	_____	_____
Horace E. Sabine, First Lieut. (Re-elected Dec. 7, 1899)	_____	_____
Joseph J. Blick, Captain	July 18, 1901	Oct. 29, 1901
Horace E. Sabine, First Lieut. (Re-elected July 18, 1901)	_____	_____

*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.

**First Company Signal Corps redesignated Company A, Signal Corps, April 14, 1909, General Order No. 7, paragraph 10. General and Special Orders and Circulars, 1909.

***Adjutant General Report 1910-1914, page 9.

****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 23, 1891, when Lieutenant Darracott 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.

888

SIGNAL CORPS (Continued)

<u>Commanding Officers (continued)</u>			
<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>		<u>Commission</u>
W. W. Lovett, Captain	Oct. 29, 1903		Dec. 31, 1903
Horace E. Sabine, First Lieut. (Re-elected Dec. 3, 1903)			
Horace E. Sabine, Captain	Dec. 7, 1905		Feb. 6, 1906
H. W. Slotterbeck, First Lieut.	Dec. 7, 1905		Feb. 6, 1906
H. W. Slotterbeck, Captain	Aug. 8, 1907		Sept. 3, 1907
V. W. Lockwood, First Lieut. (Resigned Dec. 23, 1908)	Aug. 8, 1907		Sept. 3, 1907
H. W. Slotterbeck, Captain (Re-elected May 13, 1909)			
H. T. Bathey, First Lieut.	Feb. 11, 1909		May 13, 1909
H. T. Bathey, Captain	Mar. 24, 1910		Apr. 30, 1910
A. K. Boeckman, First Lieut.	Mar. 24, 1910		Apr. 30, 1910

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. Darracott 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.

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*Adjutant General Report 1896-1898, page 104. General Order No. 7.

SIGNAL CORPS (Continued)

Activities: (continued)

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. Driffill, 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 organization. Their commanding officer, Major Owens, deserves great credit for the efficient manner in which the Corps went through their signals and for the generally 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, commanding 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 prepared 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

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*Annual Muster Roll, First Brigade Signal Corps, April 14, 1891.
Adjutant General's Office.

SIGNAL CORPS (Continued)

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 station 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 encampment 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, 1896, in response to an "Emergency Call." These calls were few and far between and the one in 1896, was the only one that the Signal Corps participated 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.

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*Adjutant General Report 1895-1894, pages 204, 205.

SIGNAL CORPS (Continued)

Activities (continued)

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 M. 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 1898.

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

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*The Los Angeles Herald, November 15, 1896, page 4, column 1.

SIGNAL CORPS (Continued)

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

*Adjutant General Report 1899-1900, page 7.

832 ✓

SIGNAL CORPS (Continued)

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 23, 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,

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*Adjutant General Report 1903-1905, pages 72 - 76/.

SIGNAL CORPS (Continued)

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 reason for selecting the First Brigade Signal Corps was probably due to the fact that it was not the oldest company and furthermore, was equipped with less modern devices. Therefore, Company B, Signal Corps of the Second Brigade, remained in the National Guard and Company A was mustered out of service on February 29, 1912.*

Records for 1921
for 1922
Redesignated March 22, 1922

*Adjutant General Report 1910-1914, page 9.

as Divisional Signal Company, March 4, 1921. General
-8- Special Orders 1921, page 15.
Signal Corps redesignated as 40th Signal Corps March
and Special Orders 1922. Special Order No. 22.