

COMPANY G AND THE MEXICAN BORDER WAR

By Ellen Knight¹

In 1916, American men were sent to the Mexican border. Later this service was essentially forgotten to history. Unlike other wars, it was not even mentioned in the Town's annual reports of the time.

In fact, the number of Winchester men was small (27 have been identified). Their involvement was generally brief and resulted in no casualties, and in most cases no combat, unlike the next war, a year later, into which all but five were drawn, when they would experience a different kind of war altogether.

After the Mexican Revolution began in 1910, the U.S. Army was stationed along the border and occasionally engaged in fighting with Mexicans. In 1916, when the revolutionary Pancho Villa attacked the American border town of Columbus, New Mexico, General John J. Pershing led a punitive expedition into northern Mexico to capture Villa.

Winchester native Frank E. Foley, in the army since 1911, spent 11 months on this expedition with the Engineer Corps. But it was not he but rather men from the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia who made the local news.

In June, Congress approved the use of state militias (a.k.a. National Guard) to reinforce the Army garrisons at the border. Between 100,000 and 150,000 men were called up and stationed along the border in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. On the night of June 24, the mustering of 7,000 men of the 5th Massachusetts Regiment began, including the Woburn/Winchester contingent, Company G (headquartered in Woburn).

Co. G went to Texas, as did a few Winchester men in other branches of service. Dwight Cooke, Norman Hunnewell, Guy Kinsley, and Whitelaw Wright were with the cavalry. Rev. Murray Dewart, rector of the Parish of the Epiphany, volunteered to be a chaplain for the 1st Regiment Field Artillery. Dr. Irving Cutter joined the hospital corps of the 8th Regiment. Mary Jane (Wallace) Mobbs, a qualified nurse, volunteered to serve with the Red Cross and be with her husband of three years, Lt. William Horatio Mobbs, who had been with Co. G since age 19.

Dr. Cutter was senior medical officer for the Eight Regiment, associated with the militia for 16 years. His medical department had the care of 1,400 on the border at Camp Cotton, El Paso. Most of the other men from Winchester were given guard and patrol duties.

Mrs. Mobbs reported from El Paso, "Our boys are doing duty at the Smelter, which is situated on a very high hill, overlooking a Mexican village, where pigs, cattle, sheep, horses and donkeys are quartered in the same houses with the humans. Lieut. Mobbs is officer of the guard and patrols the Mexican district with men on different guard position."

It was quiet, she wrote. “No bullets like a great many newspapers speak about but rather quiet, peaceful people just now.”²

The Winchester Star carried as much romantic news as war news connected to this group. Before leaving, Kinsley had what the newspaper reported to be the first Winchester war-time wedding. He applied for a court dispensation to waive the waiting period for a license. Once granted, the ceremony was performed, after which the groom immediately left to join his troop which was entraining for the border.

A second wedding story emerged later when Major Cutter met an El Paso girl, daughter of a cattle dealer, at an entertainment given for the troops. Cutter had been thought to be a confirmed bachelor, but when he returned home he brought his Texas bride with him.

The Woburn contingent was sent home in October. Their return was announced by the blowing of the fire whistle when their train left Boston. Friends turned out to greet them as the train passed through to Woburn, where they were met by a reception committee, band, veterans of the Civil and Spanish-American Wars, and others. After a parade ending at the Woburn Common, they heard an address by the mayor and were treated to a complimentary dinner and ball.

Just the next year, when the country entered World War I, most members of Co. G, as well as Rev. Dewart and Dr. Cutter, answered the call again. El Paso may have been a relatively quiet assignment, but not so this time, for the majority of the Co. G men who went to this war saw service in France.

During World War II, at age 44 John “Black Jack” Kelley, veteran of the Mexican Border War and WWI, marched with fellow selectees from Winchester to the train for the induction station in Boston. This was one war, however, he had to sit out. But he was cheered all along the route as he marched, as people responded to his spirit and willingness to serve his country in all its times of need.

¹ This article © 2018 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Dec. 30, 2016. This revision supersedes all previous articles.

² *The Winchester Star*, June 30, 1916.