

CHAPTER IV ON THE BORDER

Trouble loomed again on the horizon for America when the spark of revolution swept through Mexico in 1911. Concerned over the tumult raging in her southern neighbor, America watched and waited, until March 9, 1916, when the Mexican bandit Pancho Villa with 1,500 men rode into Columbus, New Mexico, burned the town and murdered 19 innocent Americans. In reaction to this and previous incidents, President Wilson authorized a punitive expedition under the command of Brigadier General 'Blackjack' Pershing to pursue the elusive bandit, into Mexico. Because there was a very real possibility such an action could provoke war with Mexico, National Guard troops were called up to protect the border.

In response to the callups, Company A mustered into Federal service on June of 1916. ¹ The Company, with a strength of 164 men, was regimented with one Company from South Carolina, one from Alabama and four from Ohio, to form the Engineer Regiment of the 11th Provisional Division. ² The Regiment was under the command of Major U.S. Grant III, the grandson of the Civil War hero.

A quick glance at the makeup of an engineer Company of that day is certainly in order as it differed substantially from the ones of today. One platoon of the Company was mounted on horses for added mobility, the rest were foot powered, but heavy emphasis was placed on mules and horses for equipment transport. There was even such a creature as an engineer 'combat wagon.' It is an interesting sidelight that the officer in charge of the mounted platoon was Ralph A. Loveland, who later would command both the 107th Engineer Regiment and as a Major General the Michigan 46th Infantry Division.

The border duty was hot, dusty and uninteresting, but the experience was invaluable, not only for the Upper Peninsula engineers, but also for the entire Army. Within short months, America would be at war and her ability to raise, train, equip and control the Army would be vital for her success. The border action was the Army's dress rehearsal.

Mustered out of service on March 23, 1917, the engineers had short rest, for on March 26 two officers and 40 men were ordered to guard the locks at Sault It Ste. Marie against possible sabotage. Relieved ten days later by Regular Army troops, the men returned home to rest, but not for long.

When Company A was mustered out, Major Grant was impressed enough with its performance to suggest to the state Adjutant General of Michigan that Michigan form an entire Battalion around the Company. Apparently the Adjutant General was of the same opinion because the 1st Engineer Battalion, Michigan National Guard, consisting of Headquarters, Headquarters Company and three letter Companies, was formed shortly thereafter.



After being converted to engineers, the men of the Upper Peninsula received the latest in military technology, an 'engineer combat wagon.' Credit: Battalion Archives



Horsemanship was an important part of duty on the Mexican border. Credit: Battalion Archives



Members of Company A pose with their pennant, a souvenir of the months spent on duty on the Mexican border. Credit: Battalion Archives