

Utah National Guard HISTORY HIGHLIGHT



Feb 2023

The UTNGs First Service

"The formation and establishment of the Utah National Guard was the crowning glory of the year 1894." SLC Tribune Reporter, 1894

The annulment of the Nauvoo Legion by the Edmunds-Tucker Act in 1887 paved the way for the official federal organization and recognition of the Utah National Guard. On March 8, 1894, the Utah National Guard was formed from currently organized militias. Only a few days later, on March 12, 1894, the first Adjutant General, Gen. George M. Ottinger took command.

In a conference hall in Salt Lake City on March 26, Ottinger enlisted the first members of the UTNG. Ottinger led these first Soldiers in their oath, "I do hereby enlist in the National Guard of Utah for the term of three years, subject to all the laws and rules and regulations which may govern the same." Just three weeks later, the UTNG would be called up to serve in the interest of public safety.

By the mid-1890s, the United States was suffering from one of the worst economic depressions to date. Unemployment was rampant and families were going hungry. In protest, and to lobby the government for labor reform, Jacob Coxey formed his "Industrial Armies" to march on Washington and demand change. Coxey pushed for similar movements to rise up across the nation and join him in Washington. In the west, Charles T. Kelley formed "Kelley's Industrial Army" and set out for Washington to join Coxey.

The railroads refused to transport the Industrial Armies to Washington and as a result, Kelley confiscated train cars to move his men. The men aboard the trains were believed to be capable of causing issues in the communities they passed through. As the trains approached Utah, Governor Heber M. Wells activated the Guard to contain and control Kelley's Army.

Members of the Utah National Guard watch the Industrial Army along the train tracks near Ogden, Utah on April 10, 1894.



Utah National Guard

The Utah National Guard has roots dating back to 1636, when dedicated citizens took up arms and formed militias to protect their communities.

The UTNG as we know it today evolved from the Nauvoo Legion, the Mormon Battalion and finally Utah's Territorial Militias.

"The newly organized National Guard of Utah was different in more than just name with Nauvoo Legion". The key difference is that it was no longer only dedicated to protecting the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, but the entire population of the territory.

It's new mission, "to provide mission-ready military forces to assist both state and federal authorities in times of emergency or war."

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Kelley’s Army set out from California ill prepared. They left without the provisions or money needed for the trip which was a mistake that proved fatal to some. When the 1,200 men from Kelley’s Army arrived in Ogden in early April of 1894, they were in extremely poor condition.

Fearing the arriving men were desperate and could become violent, Gov. Wells sent five companies from the Guard along with police from Ogden and Salt Lake City to control the newly arrived Industrial Army. Additionally, more than 2,000 loaves of bread were sent to feed the Industrial Army in hopes they wouldn’t venture out to find food.

For three days, 270 men from two infantry companies and one artillery company policed Kelley’s Army until a court order forced them to

leave on April 12, 1894. Following the order, Kelley’s Army left peaceably with no notable difficulties.

Utah National Guard Soldiers followed the train to ensure no one got off until it crossed the Wyoming border. A reporter for the Ogden Standard said, “the boys are certainly deserving of great credit and should be encouraged and commended in the manly nature which they showed.”

Sources:

Roberts, Richard. *Legacy, History of the Utah National Guard*. 2003.

UTNG 1894 History Report

Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Weekly, May 3, 1894, volume 74 – Number 2016



One of the first photographs taken of the newly formed Utah National Guard marching in Salt Lake City in May of 1894.



Utah National Guards first Adjutant General, Gen George M. Ottinger. Ottinger served in the Nauvoo Legion prior to his appointment as AG. Ottinger also served as the Chief of the Salt Lake City volunteer fire department and was a well know artist.