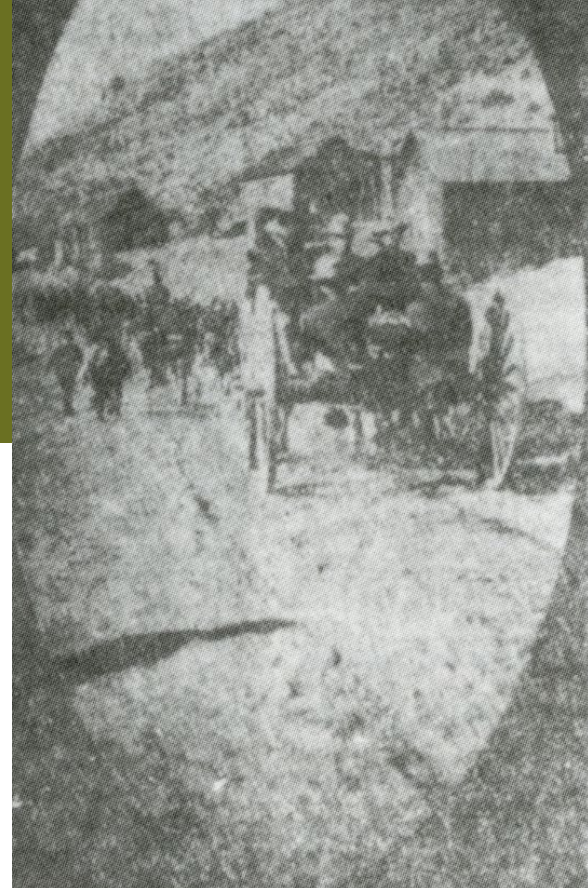


# Utah National Guard HISTORY HIGHLIGHT



June 2023



## Carbon County Coal Mine Strike, 1903

***"I do hereby call out and order into active service of the state, for execution of its laws, the preservation of peace, the maintenance of order, and the prevention of the menace of life and destruction of property, the organized and equipped militia known as the National Guard of Utah." Governor Heber M. Wells, November 23, 1903***

Following the Civil War, the U.S. began to change dramatically due to industrialization. Monopolies began to sprout, and some got rich at the expense of others. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, violent labor strikes were common to protest workplace safety, pay, fewer hours and freedom of speech. After some success in eastern states, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) set their sights to the west. Strong efforts were made to organize at coal fields in Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah. In September 1903, a coal miner strike in Colorado began. Days after, coal miners in Carbon County, Utah joined the strike after being recruited by UMWA organizers.

The employees, mainly from the Utah Fuel Company and Pleasant Valley Coal Company, presented a list of grievances regarding working conditions, pay, favoritism, and safety to management. The response and concessions made were rejected, and the following day only 33 of 850 employees reported for work. The strike had begun.

By the end of November 1903, The Utah Fuel Company fearing violence brought in guards to protect company property and prevent strikers from intimidating the active employees. Most of the miners were noted as foreign, mainly from Italy and Finland. Altercations between union and non-union employees became a serious problem. Non-union employees suffered through threats and intimidation tactics, and even some reports of assault, from union members in an attempt to have them cease working or join the union.

Due to the large area and number of strikers, Carbon County Sheriff, Hyrum Wilcox, sent a telegram to the Governor of Utah asking for assistance. In response, Gov. Wells sent the Utah National Guard Infantry Brigade Commander, John Q. Canon to assess the situation.

During his investigation, reports continued of violence and destruction of property. Canon telegraphed the Governor on his findings and on November 23, 1903, the Governor issued a proclamation authorizing the use of the National Guard. The Adjutant General, Charles S. Burton tasked Brigadier General Canon to lead the operation.

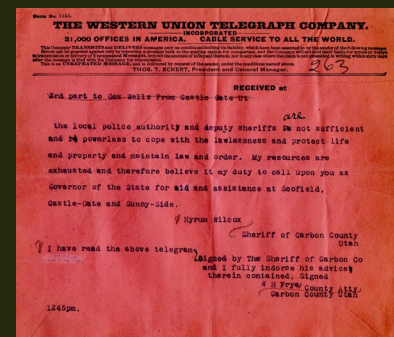
Company B at Clear Creek, Utah. Troops were housed in both tents and railroad cars. Tents were always preferred due to the stoves that could keep them warm during the winter.



## Call For Aid

As the situation in Carbon County escalated, Sheriff Hyrum Wilcox wrote to the Governor of Utah for help.

"The local police authority and deputy sheriffs are not sufficient and powerless to cope with the lawlessness and protect life and property and maintain law and order. My resources are exhausted and therefore believe it my duty to call upon you as Governor of the State for aid and assistance at Scofield, Castle-Gate and Sunny-Side."



## Carbon County Coal Mine Strikes, 1903

*"No body of militia on similar duty ever behaved themselves with greater credit." Brigadier General John Q. Canon, December 1903.*

Prior to their departure, Canon expressed to his troops that the duty could be "trying and perhaps tedious", but to remain vigilant and respect the uniform. To cover the required area, General Canon split the force into three detachments, one each covering Sunnyside, Scofield and Clear Creek.

The first few weeks were trying and tedious. To keep the Soldiers' engaged, rotations between camps were established.

In addition to standard training, the Guard was tasked with aiding in police arrests, conducting their own arrests, sentry and guard duty. In one instance, one hundred strikers gathered at Sunnyside and threatened a striker who was returning to work. The National Guard was able to deescalate the situation and arrested fifty men during the event.

While not common, there were reports of guardsmen being shot at and returning fire in addition to Soldiers thwarting attempts at sabotage and destruction of property.

As tensions dwindled, a phased approach for troops to return home was executed. The first guardsman returned home on December 22, and by January 24, 1904, the last troops headed for home.

Praise for the way the Utah National Guard performed their duty came from both sides of the strike. Citizens of the community commented that "there would have been a great deal of trouble" if not for the Guard. The strikers and their leaders appreciated the Guard protecting against intimidation by law enforcement and stopping the violence on both sides.

The Utah National Guard learned valuable lessons from activation and deployment of its troops. Shortfalls in camp conduct, home job security, and pay were highlighted, but the successes of the guard were just as clear.

### Sources:

"Legacy, History of the UTNG", Richard C. Roberts  
UTNG Reports and Telegrams, 1903  
Salt Lake Herald, 1903

Utah National Guard strike duty troops at their camp in Clear Creek, Utah.



National Guard at Scofield mine strike. Known soldiers left to right: Colonel John D. Ford, Brigadier General Jon Q. Canon.