

Utah National Guard HISTORY HIGHLIGHT



May 2023

UTNG at the Mexican Border, 1916

"I am filled with admiration for the spirit with which they have met this call, and with which they are performing an important and necessary service to their country." Secretary of War Newton C. Baker, 1916

The National Defense Act was signed on June 3, 1916, and became one of the hallmark moments in National Guard history. The act empowered the president to mobilize the entire guard during emergencies, along with vastly increasing federal oversight and granting federal pay when activated. Less than three weeks later, the act would be put into practice as tensions along the Mexican border reached a boiling point.

In the early 1900s, Mexico's political landscape was in upheaval. In only a few short years, the presidency would change hands numerous times through threats, assassination, and forced resignations. Venustiano Carranza gained control, much to the consternation of one of his political rivals, Pancho Villa.

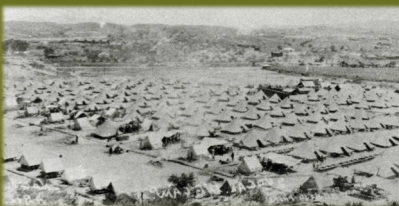
Villa, to cause disruption and gain more prominence, began to assault the border along the United States. On March 9, 1916, Villa attacked Columbus, New Mexico and killed 16 Americans. The attack prompted President Woodrow Wilson to give the order to push into Mexico and capture Villa.

Villa was elusive and seemed to elude capture easily. During the manhunt, the raids across the border into the United States continued. To secure the border, the president called on the National Guard to mobilize so the active-duty units could continue the pursuit of Villa unincumbered by dual roles.

On June 18, 1916, the Utah National Guard mustered two squadrons of cavalry, one field artillery battery and a field hospital. In total, the Utah Guard would assign more than 800 Soldiers to duty along the Mexican border.

The UTNG units began to arrive at the border on June 29, 1916 and established its camp in Nogales, Arizona along the Santa Cruz River.

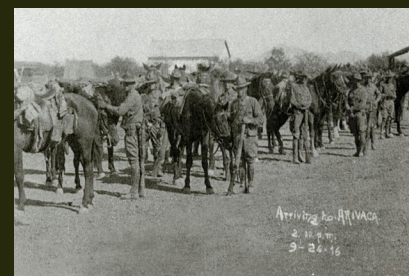
First Squadron Cavalry camp near the town of Nogales, New Mexico. The camp was built along the Santa Cruz River to aid in watering the hundreds of horses the cavalry used for patrols and moving equipment.



Field Hospital

The field hospital was given the task of caring for the accident and combat casualties along with the sick from the National Guard and regular units assigned to the Nogales area.

Due to the sporadic and light combat, their duty was manageable, allowing them to focus on camp sanitation. Their efforts were exceedingly effective, resulting in a notable absence of epidemics and overall sickness in camp.



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The role the Utah National Guard units played during the conflict were critical. The artillery was used mainly as a deterrent, tasked in maintaining readiness and proficiency if Mexico launched a full-scale invasion. The two squadrons of cavalry were given the assignment to patrol the border, searching for incursions from bandits and smugglers.

It was during one of those patrols on January 26, 1917 where five men from Troop E discovered a large group of Mexicans smuggling cattle across the border. The Mexicans quickly took cover and began firing on Troop E. The patrol returned fire and sent for reinforcements.

The rest of Troop E returned and engaged the Mexicans. The Battle of Casa Piedra as it came to be known, lasted for 48 hours and was the largest of the conflicts fought by Utah Guardsmen. After additional reinforcements arrived from Nogales, it was discovered that the Mexicans had disappeared. Major Wallace, the 2nd Cavalry Squadron commander estimated that more than 4,000 rounds had

been fired at them and the enemy suffered three dead and seven wounded to no casualties from the Utah Soldiers. Major Wallace said, "it was a real test and I'm proud to say that every man and horse came through in excellent shape."

Utah National Guard units began arriving home in October, 1916 with the last being the Calvary's Second Squadron returning in March, 1917. While not all criticism of the numerous other states guard units assigned to secure the border was encouraging, the Utah National Guard received more positive praise than most due to their "tradition of service and reputation behind them from the Spanish-American War."

Sources:

"Legacy, History of the Utah National Guard", Richard C. Roberts
Deseret News, 1916
Salt Lake Tribune, 1916

First Squadron, First Cavalry patrols along the Mexican border, September 8, 1916.



First Squadron, 2nd Cavalry assumes patrol formation along a tree line just short of the Mexican Border on November 15, 1916.