Pittsburgh In The Mexican War *

The young men of the city of Pittsburgh, who found life dull from the lack of excitement in the spring of 1846, watched anxiously all war-like moves against Great Britain over the Oregon question and against Mexico. A rumor reached the city thirteen days before war was declared against Mexico, that Mexico had declared war against us. (1) Although this was proven to be untrue, it resulted in immediate recruiting by the Captains of the existing companies. Nine days before war was declared, a parade of these various companies took place. The young men wished excitement and they made their parade an exciting affair. Contrary to military rules, the officers dressed in clown suits and the privates armed themselves with hatchets, axes and broomsticks to make themselves appear as ridiculous as possible. (2) But these queer actions were supplanted by more military tactics when the news arrived on May 13th that war was actually declared. (3)

During the next few days, about ten companies in Pittsburgh and vicinity paraded the streets and tried to secure recruits, for not one of them had over fifty members. (4) The city became warlike. Boxes of muskets, heavy carriages for cannons and ammunition were taken from the arsenal to the wharf to be shipped down the river to the seat of war. (5) The men at the arsenal worked day and night in casting balls, preparing carriages and manufacturing arms of various kinds to furnish the war supplies needed immediately. (6) The extensive foundry of Messrs. Knapp and Totten engaged in casting cannon and bomb shells. (7) On the 15th, all companies of the city held a joint meeting. A committee composed of one commissioned and one non-commissioned officer from each company, was appointed to draft resolutions to express the sense of the meeting. At first they passed a resolution in which they considered that an invasion of any part of the American soil, was an attack upon the fireside of every man in the country, and in a later resolution they ordered Colonel Troville to notify President Polk that their regi-

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ment was ready to go to war at anytime. Two companies, the Duquesne Greys and the Jackson Blues, offered their services to the Government separately. (8) Different groups of men connected with no particular companies, paraded the streets and one of them showed its zeal against Mexico by capturing her consul here in Pittsburgh. (9)

It is easy to get the impression from the activity of the troops and the supplying of equipment that Pittsburgh was strongly for war, but other facts disprove this. Soon after war was declared, citizens of other cities held war meetings. On two different occasions the editor of the Morning Chronicle called attention to this and tried to influence the citizens of Pittsburgh to have such a meeting. Not until June 5th, two weeks later than other cities, was a war meeting held in Pittsburgh. (10) On that evening several speeches were made before a large and enthusiastic audience. They passed a resolution to have the pay of the volunteers increased from seven to twenty-five dollars per month and to give each one 160 acres of land. The volunteers were supposed to equip themselves with everything except guns. Many refused to enlist on account of this. Therefore, at the war meeting, a committee of twenty was appointed to raise money for this purpose. (11) This committee appointed sub-committees in each ward, but did nothing more until a few weeks before the volunteers left for Mexico. (12) On that same evening an anti-war meeting was held but it was poorly attended. (13)

During this time an editorial fight was going on between two of the leading newspapers. (14) The editor of the Gazette, a Whig paper, continually called this an unjust war and due to the blunders of President Polk. The Post, a Democrat paper, favored the war and tried to force the editor of the Gazette to explain why his Whig friends in Congress had voted for the war. (15) However, all the newspapers whether they were for or against the war, stood for an energetic prosecution of it. (16)

One month after war was declared, there were three companies who had enrolled the required number of men and who were willing to let the Governor offer their services to the President whenever the Pennsylvania Volunteers were called for. (17)
Although war was declared in May, the Pittsburgh companies were not called out until the following December. During this time the town was kept excited by the drilling of the companies in the streets almost every evening and their occasional parading in the day time. (18)

Knapp and Totten constructed in their foundry, a dozen light boats for the use of the army of the Rio Grande. They were forty-five feet long, ten feet wide, and were constructed in three sections, so that if necessity required, they could be taken apart and transported from one river to another on wheels. (19) During September 100,000 horse shoes were ordered by the Government's agent for the use of the Army and 500 wagons were shipped to Mexico. (20) On the wharf could be seen at most any time, wagons, boats and cannon and other equipment manufactured here and in neighboring cities, to be shipped to the army. (21)

During August and September some of the companies left the city and went to encampments that lasted only a few weeks. (22) Along in October the volunteers grew weary and the question was often asked, "Will the Pennsylvania soldiers be called out?" Occasional rumors to that effect excited the boys. (23)

On November 23rd, the long hoped for news came. Ten volunteer companies from Pennsylvania were ordered to go to war. Within a few days, the Duquesne Greys and the Jackson Blues had offered their services and were later accepted. (24) There was much excitement. Some of the members dropped out when they saw that they would really have to go. On account of this these two companies paraded the streets, drumming up recruits to take their places. (25) Members of some of the smaller companies, seeing no hope, joined the Greys and the Blues. (26)

On Saturday evening, December 5th, a large assemblage of citizens made some arrangements to help these volunteer companies. A committee of seven was appointed to keep in touch with the families of the volunteers during the war, report any want or distress and if so, take measures to help. (27) Dr. M. Dowell gave his medical
services free to the families of the Jackson Blues. (28) A
theatre gave its returns one night and the proceeds of a
ball went to the volunteers. Even the City Council pro-
posed to give $2000 for the use of the volunteers and their
families but it was laid over until the next meeting and
never passed. (29) The most successful of all was the com-
mittee of twenty appointed in May, which took in $960.95
in contributions. However, this was given by only a few
citizens and was small compared with the money raised in
the city during the winter months for the suffering in
Ireland. (30)
Pittsburgh was the place of rendezvous. On Decem-
ber 15th, and 16th, the Philadelphia troops arrived. (31)
Two days later, an election was held to select officers to
command this regiment. Everything went along well with
the exception of a few fist fights. On that same evening
as on a previous evening, a fight occurred in the streets be-
tween the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh soldiers. (32) The
companies attended church on Sunday because they were
invited by the ministers. The editor of the Journal
judging from past actions said that some of the boys need-
ed praying for. (33)
Before the departure of all Pittsburgh troops, certain
groups of citizens presented the officers with swords and
wished them success. On December 22, 1846, the First
Regiment departed for the seat of war. There was a big
crowd at the wharf which cheered as the boys left. (34)
A few days after the departure of the First Regiment,
the call came for the Second Regiment of Volunteers from
Pennsylvania. One company from Pittsburgh was ac-
cepted, the Hibernia or Irish Greens, who had been actively
recruiting and drilling for the last month. (35) A com-
mittee of citizens was appointed to raise money for this
company but it met with no success. (36) From January
1st to 5th, 1847, companies from different parts of the
state arrived in the city. The military election was held
and it passed off with not half the noise, fighting and drink-
ing which characterized the former election. In fact these
volunteers conducted themselves with a great deal of pro-
Pittsburgh in the Mexican War

priety and order. (37) On the 9th and 10th, the departure took place. When the Hibernia Greens got on board the boat, eight of their members were missing and after two or three hours of searching, they were found in an intoxicated condition. When the boat was ready to leave, jostling took place among the fellows and several fell overboard into the ice-cold water and had to be fished out. (38) There was not much interest manifested by the citizens over the departure of this regiment because of the very cold weather. (39)

This did not quiet the warlike activities in Pittsburgh. Two more companies tried to recruit men in hopes that a third regiment would be called. (40) However, the men anxious for the excitement of war had left and recruiting met with little encouragement. (41) During March, thirteen companies from Eastern Pennsylvania and Maryland passed through the city for Mexico. The recruiting officer in the city, for the regular army, occasionally sent a few men down the river. (42)

On Saturday evening, April 17th, a war meeting was held to rejoice over recent victories in Mexico. (43) It arranged for an illumination which took place on the following Saturday evening. All buildings were lighted up with candles, the boys dragged skiffs of burning tar barrels through the streets, rockets were fired and the neighboring hill-sides were lighted with bonfires. (44)

Captain P. N. Guthrie raised a company in Pittsburgh and left for war during the first part of May. (45) Deserters dodged in and out of the city and thirty dollars was offered by the Government for anyone caught. Occasionally one would be brought in. The bounty for enlistment was twelve dollars and some would enlist, receive the money and then try to escape. (46) From time to time, soldiers, disabled by sickness arrived home. Also, the remains of others who had died in service were sent back to this city.

Pittsburgh continued to send large quantities of equipment to the army. By February, 1847, 250,000 mule shoes had been sent. (47) Besides wagons and cannon, a large
number of eighteen gallon kegs were manufactured. They had strong handles over the bung holes. Two of these kegs were to be strapped together at the handles, put over a mule's back and used to carry water across the deserts for the army in Mexico. (48)

Lieutenant Rowley of the Jackson Blues, who had returned home disabled, was ordered in the fall of 1847, to raise a company. (49) He secured 85 men but they did not all come from Pittsburgh, for Lieutenant Rowley made recruiting marches into outlying districts. (50) Recruiting in the city continued until the end of the war by officers representing the First and Second Regiments who wanted recruits to refill their ranks. (51)

The opponents and supporters of the war gave expressions to their views. On Thanksgiving Day, November 22nd, 1847, a large number of the ministers took the opportunity to condemn the war, (52) while the supporters of the war held a meeting about two weeks later. It was led mostly by the Democrats and the resolutions it passed savored so much of politics that they did not secure the support of the Whigs. (53) One man submitted a minority report in which he censured the government for allowing Santa Anna to go in to Mexico. As a result he was chased from the hall. (54) At this meeting a committee of five was appointed to look after the families of the volunteers. During the next two months it secured over $400 for this purpose. (55)

Let us turn back and follow the activities of the Pittsburgh volunteers from the time they left this city until they were relieved of their duties in Mexico. The First and Second Regiments came together at New Orleans and camped for several weeks below that city. Then they moved to Lobos Island and from there they went to Vera Cruz and took part in the capture of that city. The change of climate and bad water caused many of our men to break down because they were not accustomed to such a life. After the surrender of the city on March 27th, 1847, a number of sick and disabled soldiers either were discharged or resigned. (56)
The Pittsburgh boys took part in the capture of Cerro Gordo and Jalapa, and about the middle of June they were in the city of Pueblo. It was necessary for General Scott to keep his line of communication with Vera Cruz open and additional troops were needed. Captain Guthrie's company was accepted and joined the main army at Pueblo in July. (57) Warner, in his History of Allegheny County, says that Lieut. Rowley's company also joined the main army at Pueblo in July, 1847, but according to the newspaper accounts, Lieut. Rowley's company left Pittsburgh for Mexico in the following November and could not have gotten there in time to have participated actively in any campaign. (58)

On August 8th, the main army marched for the City of Mexico. The Pittsburgh companies were separated for the first time, for the First Regiment was left at Pueblo. The City of Mexico was captured in September and the army remained there for nine months until the treaty of peace was signed. (59)

On May 29, 1848, they received their orders to start home. The ranks of the Pittsburgh companies were sadly depleted for many of the men had died at Vera Cruz, Jalapa, Perrote and Pueblo. The regiments rested through the day and marched at night on account of the hot weather. On the 20th of June they embarked on a steamer for New Orleans (60) from which place they would sail up the Mississippi River to Pittsburgh.

When the news arrived in Pittsburgh that the soldiers were coming home, a meeting of the citizens was held to make arrangements for their reception. A committee was appointed to take charge of the affair. (61) It found out the definite dates for the arrivals. The Second Regiment was to arrive on the 10th of July and the First on the 15th. Two days before each arrival, boat loads of citizens and friends went down the river to meet these volunteers. Both regiments were received at the wharf by immense crowds of citizens, with the ringing of bells, firing of cannon and every demonstration of enthusiastic patriotism and joy. Then processions followed through the streets.
These volunteers looked remarkably well to the citizens although they were sun-burnt and weather beaten. (62)

A few days later, a boat arrived with the remains of thirteen dead soldiers who belonged to the Duquesne Greys and two or three who belonged to the Jackson Blues. (63) The ambition of the Irish Greens was to bring home the remains of their dead but they were unsuccessful. Although the citizens of Pittsburgh had sent 150 dollars to finance the undertaking, the two men who were sent ahead to prepare the bodies and to meet the rest of their company at Pueblo, were never heard of again. (64)

The Duquesne Greys left with 88 members but only 28 returned in good health, 25 either were killed or died of disease, while 22 were discharged or had deserted. (65) The Hibernia Greens left with 84 members, Captain Guthrie's company left with the full quota required but the number was not given. (66) Lieut. Rowley left with 85 men. The casualties of these three companies were not found.

Many meetings were held by local organizations throughout the city in which the officers told of their experiences in Mexico. (67) Public funerals were held by each company for their dead members. (68) Within two weeks after their arrival, all the men had been given three months extra pay and had been discharged. (69) The old members of the Duquesne Greys raised money for a monument in honor of their dead. (70)

Thus ended the war activities of Pittsburgh. It is apparent from the records of that time that our city was not wholly united on the question of fighting the Mexican War, but it is nevertheless true that once our men had entered the service they made a record concerning which we have no cause for regret.

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