

# **History of the Hewston Guard, California Militia 1869-1881**

This history was completed in 1940 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in conjunction with the California National Guard and the California State Library.

Digitized by the History Office, Camp San Luis Obispo, 16 January 2015

HEWSTON GUARD

Hewston Guard, Unattached, Second Brigade  
 Reference: Dead Office File, Row 6, File 4  
 Location: Petaluma, Sonoma County  
 Mustered in June 29, 1869  
 Mustered out \_\_\_\_\_

Commanding Officers

<u>Name</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Commission</u>
James Armstrong, Captain	June 29, 1869	July 1, 1869
William H. Rugg, First Lieut.	June 29, 1869	July 1, 1869
James Armstrong, Captain (Re-elected 1871)	_____	_____
J. A. Ranard, First Lieut.	June 29, 1871	July 6, 1871
James Armstrong, Captain (Re-elected June 29, 1875)	_____	_____
William H. Rugg, First Lt.	June 29, 1875	July 19, 1875
James Armstrong, Captain (Re-elected June 29, 1877)	_____	_____
Frank Warren, First Lieut.	June 29, 1877	July 11, 1877
James Armstrong, Captain (Re-elected June 27, 1879)	_____	_____
Albert G. Twist, First Lieut.	June 27, 1879	Aug. 5, 1879

Activities:

On June 18, 1869, a petition was presented to Governor H. H. Haight, signed by fifty-one citizens of Petaluma requesting a company, known as the Washington Guard, from the County to be mustered into the National Guard. A meeting was called to complete the organization of the company and the unit decided to adopt the name of Hewston Guard rather than Washington Guard. The name was to be in honor of Brigadier General John Hewston of the Second Brigade. Special Order No. 13 was issued by Adjutant General James A. Allen, requiring General Hewston to appoint a suitable officer to muster in the Hewston Guard, which was accomplished on June twenty-ninth of the same year.

The necessary Bond was filed and a requisition was made out July first for sixty stand of arms, the required accoutrements, and sixty sets of uniforms. On July seventh the Hewston Guard received sixty rifles and accoutrements, sixty uniform coats, thirty-four uniform pants and fifty uniform caps. Captain Armstrong was a veteran of the Mexican War and soon developed the Hewston Rifles into a well drilled and disciplined unit of the National Guard. In a letter, March 8, 1875, to Adjutant General L. H. Foote, the Captain advised the General that his company had been uniformed

\*\*The Weekly Argo, Petaluma, July 13, 1874.

Activities: (Continued)

with the regular United States Army uniforms, and that he had also sent to the United States Springfield Arsenal and obtained fifty stand of Springfield breech loading rifles complete, for which the Captain and Quartermaster Sergeant T. J. Harkins had signed a note as security. The total amount of the equipment was eleven hundred dollars which the Captain planned to pay with the one hundred dollars a month allowance for rent of the armory. His letter claimed the State owed his company six hundred dollars for monthly allowances past due. No information could be found in the files relating to the fact as to whether the Captain or the State paid the bill.\*

Residents of Petaluma who happened to be in San Francisco on July 4, 1874, and viewed the procession on that day, had every reason to feel proud of the splendid appearance made by the Hewston Guard. The company was not only one of the best equipped, but one of the best drilled units in the State. The corps was handicapped by the lack of music, but still marched with the precision and readiness of veterans, and along the line of march the remark was frequently heard, "There goes a company of regulars." That impression no doubt was partly due to the fact that the company was the only one equipped with the regular United States Army uniforms and arms.\*\*

On February 28, 1876, a fire broke out at San Quentin prison in the large four story paint shop and furniture factory. The sounding of the fire alarm caused a rush of the prisoners from the buildings into the yards. The gates and walls were heavily guarded by the prison guards, who gave the prisoners to understand that any attempt to escape from the prison would mean death. The fire was believed to be of incendiary origin and there was indication that it was planned as a part of a wholesale prison break. On the contrary however, the prisoners cooperated and worked in bucket brigades as the pressure of the water system was not sufficient to force much water to the top of the building. Without the co-operation rendered by the inmates it is believed the entire prison might have been destroyed. As a precautionary measure a request was dispatched to Governor Irwin for troops to guard the prison. His Excellency ordered Brigadier General John McComb to take the necessary steps to furnish the needed protection. General McComb ordered one hundred men to San Quentin, and held two hundred more in readiness if needed. The splendid behavior of the prisoners resulted in the

-000-

\*Letter on file in Adjutant General's Office, Sacramento

\*\*The Weekly Argo, Petaluma, July 10, 1874.

HEWSTON GUARD (Continued)

## Activities: (Continued)

Reference: Head Office File, Box 3, File 8

two hundred guardsmen being dismissed about 9:30 P. M., and the one hundred were dismissed the next day. The nearness of the Hewston Guard to San Quentin resulted in Captain Armstrong receiving a dispatch from General McComb about 7:40 P. M., to assemble his company and report to the commander of the troops at San Quentin. Thirty minutes later he had mustered forty men, all equipped with sixty rounds of ball cartridges, and had six wagons ready for transportation. As they were all loaded and ready to leave a telegram was delivered to the Captain countermanding the order. That was at 8:20 P. M., just forty minutes after receiving the first order. The efficiency and promptness of the Hewston Guard in responding to the call was highly commended by Brigadier General McComb in his annual report, and by the newspapers in general. The Petalumans were justly proud of their company and its splendid record. Another example of the loyalty of Captain Armstrong and his company was shown when on July 24, 1877, they received news of the threatened riots in San Francisco and Oakland. The unit assembled in their armory and held themselves ready to proceed to the scene of trouble on a moment's notice. For ten consecutive evenings they assembled and waited until the telegraph office closed before returning to their homes. Once again their services were not required.

There are no further activities on file in the Adjutant General's Office regarding the Hewston Guard, other than their participation in the regular drills and annual parades.

With the enactment of the Military Law of 1881, which reduced the annual appropriations, the National Guard Officials were compelled to make several changes resulting in several companies being mustered out or consolidated with other units. Under this new re-organization the Hewston Guard, which was an unattached company, was attached to the Fifth Infantry Battalion, to be known as Company C. For further information refer to Company C, Fifth Infantry Battalion, National Guard of California.\*

General John H. Hewston Jr., commanding the Second Brigade, Captain Robert G. Gilmore and James Cethings were assistant commanding officers, although on January 4, 1870, Captain Gilmore's commission was revoked and Jeremiah V. Spader was elected Captain.

This company was one among -000- many in the Second Brigade, which on October 20, 1870, were ordered to remain under arms in anticipation of a riot by anti-Chinese demonstrators. Meetings were

\*Adjutant General Report, 1881-1882, General Order No. 6, page 93.