

National guard of California

OUTLINE HISTORY

CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD  
MILITIA AND VOLUNTEER FORCES  
1846 - 1941

THE OFFICE OF THE STATE HISTORICAL ARCHIVES  
1400 CALIFORNIA STREET  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA  
94102  
The following is a list of the

ACTIVITIES OF THE COMPANIES

OF THE

CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD

DURING THE

LONG BEACH EARTHQUAKE, MARCH 10, 1933

STATE HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

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THE CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD

**OUTLINE HISTORY**  
 OF THE  
**CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD**  
**MILITIA AND VOLUNTEER FORCES**  
 1849 - 1941

Prepared in  
 THE OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL  
 SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA  
 C. D. O'SULLIVAN  
 Brigadier General  
 The Adjutant General

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**STATIONS AND LOCATIONS OF THE COMPANIES**  
**OF THE**  
**CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD**  
**DURING THE**  
**LONG BEACH EARTHQUAKE, MARCH 10, 1933**

Consequently, when fairly severe shaking came again, the usual toll of a great disaster, only by good fortune. It was known following the shock of March 10, 1933, that a great earthquake, location, intensity, size of area of responsibility, and the distance to which it was well recorded by seismographs. It was however, a substantially large, fairly strong local shock.

\*Earthquakes in Southern California by Harry G. Wood, Page 21 and Los Angeles Herald, March 11, 1933.  
 \*\*Earthquakes in Southern California by Harry G. Wood, Page 21

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THE CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD  
AND THE  
LONG BEACH EARTHQUAKE, MARCH 10, 1933

On the tenth of March, 1933 at 5:54:20 P.M., there occurred in the southern part of California, an earthquake, which caused by far the greatest loss of life, the greatest number of injuries to persons and the largest financial loss and destruction of property ever occasioned by an earthquake in Southern California.\*

The earthquake was not the greatest in point of magnitude, nor the strongest in point of intensity which has visited the same district since white men came to occupy it. In magnitude and intensity the shock was comparable with that which laid Santa Barbara low in 1925.

The rapid influx of population during the two decades proceeding the catastrophe resulted in the organization of numerous towns, villages and cities of considerable size throughout the area affected by the disaster. The assemblage of houses, shops, plants and other works of construction were ill designed and not so built as to withstand any severe or unusual stress. This was true especially of business buildings and unfortunately, of schools and churches and other public and semi public places of assembly.

Consequently, when fairly severe shaking came again, the result fell short of a great disaster, only by good fortune. By every known criterion, the shock of March 10, 1933 fell short of being a great earthquake: duration, intensity, size of area of perceptibility, and the distance to which it was well recorded by seismographs. It was however, a moderately large, fairly strong local shock\*\*

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\*Earthquakes in Southern California by Harry O. Wood, Page 21 and Los Angeles Herald, March 11, 1933.  
\*\*Earthquakes in Southern California by Harry O. Wood, Page 21

The damage, injury and loss of life caused by the earthquake of 1933 were due in overwhelming measure to bad or wretched construction, or to bad or wretched material or artificial foundation ground or to both in combination. There is little doubt that the earthquake shocks which occurred in the autumn of 1812 were greater and stronger than that of 1933 and the probability is that the shock of 1769 was also stronger in the Los Angeles plain than was that of 1933.

A shifting of the earth's crust at the source of the shock, some three and one-half miles off shore from Newport Beach in The San Pedro Channel, and in the course of the Inglewood fault-Zone projected southward, was in the opinion of eminent scientists the cause of the disaster.\*

More than a hundred lives were snuffed out by the catastrophe and more than a thousand other persons were injured. The estimated damage to property in the area affected by the earthquake varied from forty millions to sixty-five millions of dollars.\*\*

The first and most violent shock was felt over an area extending from Santa Barbara on the north to San Diego on the south and as far east as San Bernardino.\*\*\*

The area most seriously affected extended from Los Angeles to Newport Beach and east to Anaheim. The greatest loss of life occurred at Long Beach where about seventy-five persons were killed. Then in turn came Compton, Huntington Park and San Pedro.

Nearly one hundred cities and towns in the affected area suffered severe damage to property, the most serious losses occurring in Long Beach, Compton, San Pedro, Santa Ana, Huntington Park and Anaheim.

Aftershocks were very numerous, instrumental registrations, with the more sensitive apparatus at Pasadena, some fifty miles away, having been continuous for many hours. The places of origin of many of the aftershocks, especially those which occurred soon after the main shocks were very close to that of the main shock. Others, however, especially the later ones, were located at various distances from the original source, up to 15 or 20 miles both to the northwest and to the southeast.

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\*Earthquakes of Southern California, by Harry O. Wood, page 22

\*\* Los Angeles Herald, March 11, 1933, page 1, column 2

\*\*\* Los Angeles Herald, March 11, 1933, page 1, column 7

While the aftershocks caused no further extensive damage to property, they constituted a serious menace to the lives of the men who were engaged in the work of rescuing the injured.

Thousands of people, fearing complete annihilation in the cities, fled to the beaches, to the parks and to the surrounding country. On the day following the earthquake hordes of gaunt-eyed, pathetic human beings were to be seen streaming back to the cities from the localities where they had spent a long sleepless night. Many of those returning, burst out weeping as they reached the places they had called their homes.

Fires which tried the capabilities of the fire departments of various communities broke out, but fortunately, except in a few places, the water supply did not fail and the damage from fires in the stricken area was comparatively small. The new and expensive Huntington Park high school was burned. The water supply at that point was cut off, but the use of explosives prevented the flames from spreading. Fire broke out in the Signal Hill oil fields near Long Beach and for a time there was fear of a serious conflagration, but the danger was overcome by volunteer fire fighters and municipal apparatus. In Long Beach a number of persons were reported to have been killed and many others seriously injured by leaping from windows. The Stockwell building in Compton was one of the centers of the disaster. Several persons perished in that structure when clerks and customers were trapped in a large public market on the ground floor when the walls of the building crashed inward. The Seaside Hospital in Long Beach was the scene of great confusion as the building trembled and reeled under the series of shocks, sending the patients into a panic. Debris continued to fall inside the building as ambulances brought in scores of injured persons.

Throughout the night of March 10-11 hundreds of persons lay huddled in blankets before blazing bonfires peering through the fog at nearby buildings which were being repeatedly shaken by a succession of minor trembles. The tragic atmosphere was heightened and many persons left the city in haste, when a rumor was spread that a tidal wave threatened Long Beach. The Navy department, with its accurate scientific facilities made a complete survey of the situation and advised that there was no basis for such fear.

Considerable damage to shipping resulted from the first heavy shock. Officers aboard ships at dock in the harbor reported having felt the quake severely and the master of on large liner said he thought for a time that his ship had been rammed by another vessel. The piers at Wilmington were badly damaged

by the shocks, the paved decking having been cracked and broken and cargoes stowed in the pier sheds were damaged to quite an extent.\*

The United States Frigate Constitution, "Old Ironsides," which was being towed from her berth at San Pedro to the pier at Long Beach, was damaged as she was about to be made fast to the Long Beach docks. The shock caused the shore crews to lose control of the lines, and the famous old frigate crashed into the pier. Her railing on one side was stove in and her cannons were battered and displaced. The damage, however, was not serious.\*\*

While panic gripped the people in the stricken area for a time, cool heads soon assumed charge of rescue and emergency work. Men plunged fearlessly into toppling buildings and brought out the injured. Equally resourceful men and women set up emergency relief measures to care for the injured. Firemen, patrolmen, Sheriffs and deputy sheriffs were soon engrossed in rescue work. Scores of boy scouts organized messenger and errand service. The Salvation Army, The American Legion and other agencies were soon busy rushing food to the workers and to all others who desired food.

General Fred Bradman, Commander of the United States Marine base at San Pedro immediately sent 1000 marines to aid the civil authorities in the stricken area. Naval physicians hastened to the scene. Thousands of sailors were busy performing tasks to which they were unaccustomed.

Troops of the California National Guard were among the first to render assistance in the communities most seriously affected by the disaster. The organizations performing emergency duty were: Battery E, 251st Coast Artillery, stationed at San Pedro, March 10 and 11 and at Long Beach, March 12 to 23 inclusive. Battery F, of the same organization, stationed at Long Beach throughout the emergency. The Third Battalion, comprising Headquarters Company, and companies I, K, L and M, 185th Infantry, of which Headquarters Company and Companies I and L were stationed at Santa Ana during the emergency. Company K was at Anaheim, March 10 and 11 and at Santa Ana, March 12 and 13. Company M was on duty at Santa Ana, March 11, 12, and 13. A Detachment of 10 officers and 175 enlisted men of the 160th Infantry was stationed at Long Beach from March 11 until the emergency was past.

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\*Los Angeles Herald, March 11, 1933, page 4, column 7

\*\*Los Angeles Herald, March 11, 1933, page 1, column 7

The two Batteries of Coast Artillery and the Third Battalion, 185th Infantry took over their duties immediately after the first earthquake shock. No authorization had as yet been issued to these troops and the duties performed by them were for the time being, on a voluntary basis. About midnight, March 10, the 160th Infantry, stationed at Los Angeles received authorization to proceed to Long Beach. The Second Battalion, 251st Coast Artillery received authority to mobilize at about 4:30 P.M. March 11 and the Third Battalion, 185th Infantry was on a voluntary basis until afternoon, March 12.

Just before midnight, March 10, 1933, Governor James Rolph Jr. issued a proclamation calling into the service of the State, units of the California National Guard in such numbers and for such time as in the judgment of the local authorities and of the Adjutant General, should be necessary to aid the earthquake sufferers and protect the lives and property of citizens residing in the afflicted area, and render such necessary services for the help of the communities as the local rehabilitation authorities should request.\*

The period following the earthquake exemplified the apparent desire of individuals and civic organizations to co-operate and render all possible assistance; and the almost entire lack of co-ordination. The desire to help led different organizations to attempt the assumption of leadership with the inevitable chaos which was bound to result. The afflicted area extended to several municipalities and at least two counties. Local authorities appeared unable to properly estimate the situation as to realize that definite machinery was existent for the handling of such conditions. A very definite reticence to the use of the National Guard troops was apparent in Long Beach. In that city, it was the idea of the authorities to place entire dependance upon the United States Navy, and taking into consideration the existing chaotic condition, the Navy stepped in and rendered wonderful service.

The duties of the troops of the 251st Coast Artillery in the emergency were considerably varied. Battery E patrolled the affected area in San Pedro while on duty in that city. Battery F immediately undertook first-aid relief work in Long Beach, disregarding the almost hostile attitude of the Municipal authorities there. The Armory was fitted up for use as a receiving hospital. Communication by radio and telephone were established from the Armory prior to any other place in Long Beach. Subsequently, the Armory was used as a food collecting and distributing

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\*Governor's proclamation on file in Adjutant General's Office.

point, both for Long Beach and the surrounding territory. The personnel of the 2nd Battalion was used in that work, although details were used on guard duty and work in emergency kitchens.

The equipment which the National Guard was able to put into the field with trained and disciplined personnel, made it possible to avert much suffering that would otherwise have occurred. The lack of co-ordination already mentioned and the apparent interference of politicians hindered very materially an early solution of the situation which would have made possible the prompt withdrawal of the National Guard troops. What the municipal authorities of Long Beach apparently wanted and expected, was that the Armory and the equipment of the National Guard would be turned over to them to be manned and used by men of their own choosing. Finally realizing that such a course was impracticable, the City Manager, at about 10:30 P.M. March 10, made a formal request upon Governor Rolph, for troops and equipment of the National Guard. This request resulted in the sending of a Detachment from the 180th Infantry together with all rolling kitchens, field ranges etc. to Long Beach. Major Harris with the Second Battalion, 251st Coast Artillery were still standing by, awaiting orders which were not received until the following day.

At 8:25 A.M. March 11, the decision was reached to recommend to the Adjutant General, that the 2nd Battalion, 251st Coast Artillery be ordered out and that the garages and drill court at the Long Beach Armory be used as a food distribution center and that the motor equipment be used for the collection and distribution of food. Captain George W. Oertly, Battery F, was placed in charge of the warehouse and transportation, in a civilian capacity, pending receipt of further orders.

At 4:45 that afternoon, Captain Oertly with Battery F was officially assigned to handle the food warehouse with transportation and deliveries involved. At 10:00 P.M. March 11, Battery E having been relieved at San Pedro, arrived at Long Beach and was assigned to furnish relief and reinforcement to Battery F in the rapidly increasing work of receiving and disbursing food. The two Batteries continued to perform these duties until relieved. Battery E left Long Beach for their home station at 5:10 P.M. March 23 and Battery F terminated their services as of midnight, March 25, 1933. Headquarters, 2nd Battalion, 251st Coast Artillery was also relieved from official duty as of midnight, March 25.

The communities of Santa Ana and Anaheim were both out of control of the civil authorities. The danger of loss of life was so great and the chance for pilfering was so great, that soon after the first shock, requests were made for the Third Battalion, 185th Infantry, to take over the guard duty in both these communities. Members of Headquarters Company, Third Battalion and Company I



and Company L were immediately placed on duty in Santa Ana. The request for troops to take over the entire duty of guarding and patrolling the city of Santa Ana was from both the Mayor and the Chief of Police, who requested immediate action as the situation was critical. Immediately upon placing the troops on duty in Santa Ana, Major Donald L. Winans of the 185th Infantry notified his regimental headquarters of his action, and a wire requesting authority for the action was sent to the Adjutant General at Sacramento. Additional troops were badly needed at Santa Ana and at 10:00 P.M. March 10, Major Winans left that city for Anaheim for the purpose of ordering Company K of the 185th Infantry to Santa Ana. Upon arriving at Anaheim, Major Winans was requested by the Chief of Police of that City to leave Company K at Anaheim as he was unable to handle the situation himself. The request was granted and Company K took over complete control of guarding and patrolling the city of Anaheim. At 10:30 P.M. March 10, telegrams were sent to regimental headquarters and to the Adjutant General, notifying both officers of the action in Anaheim and requesting authority for those actions.

More men were needed at Santa Ana and Major Winans called upon Company M of San Bernardino to send one officer and twelve enlisted men to assist Companies I and L. The troops of Company K having been relieved at Anaheim at noon March 11, reported at Santa Ana at 2:00 P.M. the same day. This company was then assigned to perform guard and patrol duty at Santa Ana where they remained on duty until 9:00 P.M. March 13.

The detachment from Company M reported at Santa Ana at 2:00 P.M. March 11, and performed guard and patrol duty in that city until 2:00 P.M. March 13. By Monday night, March 13, it was possible to reduce the number of posts at Santa Ana and all but about seventy men detailed from Headquarters Company, Company I and Company L were relieved from duty. The details were relieved from duty, March 14, at 8:00 A.M.

In Santa Ana and Anaheim, the troops operated in conjunction with the civil authorities and under instructions from the Chiefs of Police. All instructions were given directly from the Chief of Police to the officer detailed as officer of the guard. All National Guardsmen on duty in these two cities, operated under their own officers. No other agencies attempted to give orders to the troops and there was no semblance of the chaotic condition existing in Long Beach.

The glass in practically every store front in Santa Ana was shattered and with each succeeding shake more glass was broken and more destruction was wrought. That condition

made it necessary to block off the entire business district from all persons and to maintain guards and patrols throughout the business district.

Major Winans received no reply to his telegrams of March 10, to Regimental Headquarters and to the Adjutant General until 10:00 P.M. March 11. At that time he received a telegram from Regimental Headquarters stating that the troops of the 185th Infantry were working on a voluntary basis.

Upon being notified of the fact that the troops were on a voluntary basis, Major Winans and the Mayor of Santa Ana called the Adjutant General's Office and were notified that the Adjutant General would be in Santa Ana Sunday afternoon, March 12. No further attempt was made to obtain permission for the employment of the troops at Santa Ana and Anaheim.

Due to the fact that Friday night was the regular school night for officers and noncommissioned officers of the 160th Infantry, some two hundred of these had reported at the National Guard Armory in Los Angeles within twenty minutes after the first severe earthquake shock. Later in the evening, practically the entire regiment had reported. After receiving reports from the patrols sent to Long Beach, Compton, San Pedro and Huntington Park, the Commanding General, 80th Brigade, requested the State Adjutant General's Office to issue orders to mobilize such troops as might be desired in the earthquake area. At 11:30 P.M. March 10, the Commanding General, 80th Brigade, and the Commanding Officer, 160th Infantry, left Los Angeles and arrived at Long Beach at 12:15 A.M. March 11. At 11:59 March 10, a message was received from the Adjutant General, authorizing a Battalion of the 160th Infantry to proceed to Long Beach and report to the City Manager there. Upon receipt of the message from the Adjutant General's Office, authorizing a Battalion of the 160th Infantry to proceed to Long Beach, steps were immediately taken to mobilize the detachment. At 6:30 A.M. March 11, seven officers and seventy-five enlisted men with six rolling kitchens and seventeen field ranges were dispatched to Long Beach. On the afternoon of the same day, 238 tents, 100 blankets and 600 cots were sent to Long Beach to accommodate the families rendered homeless. On March 13, the 160th Infantry detachment on duty in Long Beach was increased to ten officers and one hundred seventy-five enlisted men. The detachment was on duty in the devastated area until March 23, inclusive.

The duties performed by the 160th Infantry consisted solely of the preparation and serving of food to refugees. Four kitchens were established and stationed as follows:

Kitchen No. 1, In rear of National Guard Armory,  
Long Beach

Kitchen No. 2, In Bixby Park, Long Beach

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Kitchen No. 3, In Belmont Shores, a suburb of  
Long Beach.

Kitchen No. 4, In north Long Beach.

The approximate number of meals served by the detachment was 242,000, an average of about 22,000 meals per day for eleven days.

Kitchens No. 3, (Belmont Shores) and No. 4, (North Long Beach) were discontinued March 21 and the personnel returned to Los Angeles. Kitchens No. 1, (Armory) and No. 2, (Bixby Park) were discontinued March 23, and the remainder of the detachment returned to Los Angeles on that date.

The efficient services and exemplary conduct of the units of the 251st Coast Artillery, the 180th Infantry and the 185th Infantry who served during the critical period following the earthquakes of March 10, 1933, proved the ability of the National Guard to cope with such situations. Immediate mobilization of these units took place in Long Beach, San Pedro, Santa Ana and Anaheim and the officers and men proceeded to render all possible assistance to the injured, and to protect lives and property before proper authorization was received, secure in the knowledge that they were rendering a necessary service to humanity.

The National Guard is the one organization in the United States, outside of the Army and Navy, able to render aid to civil authorities in times of catastrophe or emergency. The units of the California National Guard which served so well in the emergency in Southern California, were worthy of the congratulations and praise they received from all who knew the story of their experiences and sacrifices.