

McCLELLAN GUARD

McClellan Guard, unattached, Second Brigade

Reference: Dead Office File, Row 4, File 6

Location: Vallejo, Solano County

Mustered in June 1, 1863

Mustered out October 4, 1864

Commanding Officers

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Rank</u> | <u>Commission</u> |
|---|---------------|-------------------|
| John Byrne, Captain* (Resigned Aug. 24, 1863) | Jan. 1, 1863 | Jan. 15, 1863 |
| John Dawson, First Lieut. | Jan. 1, 1863 | Jan. 15, 1863 |
| John Dawson, Captain (Resigned Sept. 19, 1863) | Sept. 4, 1863 | |
| William Dobbs, First Lieut. | Sept. 4, 1863 | Sept. 29, 1863 |
| Charles O'Neill, Captain (Resigned Mar. 1, 1864) | Jan. 29, 1864 | Mar. 1, 1864 |
| Thomas Fay, First Lieut. | Jan. 29, 1864 | Mar. 1, 1864 |

Activities:

In accordance with notices posted for the required number of days, a meeting was held at Vallejo, Solano County, for the purpose of organizing an artillery company. The McClellan Guard was chosen as the name for the newly organized unit. The elected officers were John Byrne, Captain and John Dawson, First Lieutenant.

The McClellan Guard's existence was one of strife and friction. As early as 1863, the Secretary of the Union League, Vallejo, reported to the Brigadier-General regarding the disloyalty of a number of officers and men of the company, and proposed to send in affidavits and other evidence to substantiate his claims. The League requested that the commissions and arms be withheld, for they felt the arming of the company would be a serious mistake and detrimental to the Union Cause. On September 22, 1863, Second Lieutenant John W. Lee communicated with the Adjutant General pertaining to the League's accusations and assured the General that most of the men were employed on Mare Island where disloyalty would be out of the question. The Lieutenant further claimed that the charges were malicious and started with an incentive to destroy the newly organized company, and concluded with the statement that the McClellan Guard would welcome an opportunity to prove their faithfulness to the Cause.

*John Byrne resigned before he received his commission.

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McCLELLAN GUARD (Continued)

Activities: (Continued)

Apparently after weighing both sides of the question, the Adjutant General decided in favor of the company, for he commissioned the officers in September and the corps received their arms in November.

At a meeting January 29, 1864, an election of officers was held to replace the Captain and First Lieutenant, who had previously resigned. Captain O'Neill was elected Captain and had to submit to questioning as to his loyalty before he was qualified. At this same meeting a resolution was drawn up and sent to Brigadier-General John Ellis commanding the Second Brigade, re-affirming the unit's oath to uphold the principles of the American Union and to be loyal citizen soldiery. However, despite the fact that the company early in 1864 declared their loyalty to the satisfaction of the Military Authorities, the unit did not live up to their promises, and on October sixth the citizens of Vallejo sent a letter setting forth the following reasons why the company should be disbanded:*

1. They are not considered loyal to the Government by the citizens of Vallejo.
2. They have not had a parade since their organization which is over a year, though the laws of the State Militia call for three or more.
3. They have not a commissioned officer in the County, the Captain and First Lieutenant not having resided here for five months or more; the Second Lieutenant, late in command, having resigned on account of their disloyalty.
4. The Bondsman for the arms are persons whose loyalty has always been doubted.
5. The uniform furnished by the State is constantly worn by some of them as an every day attire.
6. And being personally acquainted with all of them do not know one of them that is not hostile to the administration.

The officers of the McClellan Guard were found guilty of non-compliance with Military Laws, and were mustered out of service October 4, 1864. Great difficulty was experienced by the State in repossessing the arms, for they were scattered in different sections of the County. It was fortunate that the recovered arms were stored over night in the Express Office as a plot was under way by the citizens to seize them after dark.

-oOo- page 4, column 4.

2 *Letter signed by John H. Lee, Second Lieutenant, and Fred Harrington to the Honorable General Evans, October 26, 1864, on file Adjutant General's Office.

McCLELLAN GUARD (Continued)

CONNER GUARD

Activities: (Continued)

The accusations as to the company's disloyalty were not entirely unfounded, for from the report the committee sent to disband the unit, it was brought out that the sentiments of certain members of the company and other parties opposed to the Government were bitter; and the mustering out of the unit was regarded as a political and party measure rather than a non-compliance with the Militia Laws.

Commanding Officers

An interesting item appeared in the Sacramento Union referring to the McClellan Guard as a Copperhead Company.* This article highly approved the Government's action in depriving the corps of their arms and accoutrements, for a company designated as a Copperhead unit was not loyal to the Union Cause as "Copperhead" was a term applied to residents of the North during the Civil War; those who, deeming it impossible to conquer the Confederacy, were earnestly in favor of peace and consequently opposed to the War policy of the President and Congress. The term originated in the Autumn of 1862 and its use spread throughout the North quietly and persistently because of the fancied resemblance of the peace party to the venomous copperhead snake which strikes without warning. Some of the more zealous advocates of the peace policy went so far as to wear badges of heads cut from a one cent piece, fancying that such a display emphasized their attitude more fully.**

...the bounding territory fell the need of military protection as the region was situated on an unprotected coast and it was considered a vulnerable position for an attack by foreign invaders. Therefore on Feb. 2, 1864, at a meeting held in the historic old Monterey Court House, the Conner Guard was organized and the necessary papers filed with the Adjutant General's Office for approval. This company desired to be recognized as a cavalry unit equipped with the necessary arms. However, they also asked that Headquarters supply them with a piece of Artillery. The records showed that the unit succeeded in getting their equipment for cavalry but no artillery was ever furnished the company. The soundness of the plans of the Conner Guard to augment the cavalry with an artillery unit was exemplified when, in February 1865, the Federal troops under the leadership of Captain O'Brien earnestly requested the government to furnish an artillery unit to strengthen his command. Many citizens of Monterey were Secessionists and the Federal troops had the effect of restraining them in both speech and acts.

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Due undoubtedly to the great distance between the Capital and the First Brigade Headquarters, to which the Conner Guard was attached, there are few records or papers on file regarding their activities. In 1865 they received new cavalry uniforms and were well equipped

*Sacramento Union, October 31, 1864, page 4, column 4.

**Encyclopaedia Britannica, Volume 6, page 409.