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CHAPTER II.

The State unprepared for War—Decadence of the Militia—Efforts to Revive the Militia in 1856—The Brandon and Montpelier Musters of 1858 and 1860—The Militia of 1860—Military Property of the States, January, 1861—Secession Movements—Judge Smalley's Charge to a New York Grand Jury—Senator Collamer's Bill to Close Southern Ports—Attitude of Representatives of Vermont in Congress—Preparations for War—General Order No. 10—The Peace Conference—Accession of Abraham Lincoln.

If it be true, as has been said, "that when the war did actually come no people on earth were less prepared for it than those of the United States,"¹ it is also true that the people of no State of the Union were less prepared for it than those of Vermont.

The tide of emigration to the great West and the Pacific slope had kept the State stationary in population and well nigh stationary in means. The Vermonters were the heirs of a rich inheritance of military glory, for they were the lineal descendants of the men who, fourteen years before their Commonwealth was admitted to the Union, and while it was as yet an unorganized community, pledged to the Continental Congress the service of "more than five thousand hardy soldiers, capable of bearing arms in defence of American Liberty."² This amounted to an offer of the

¹ Address of General W. T. Sherman at the meeting of the Society of the Army of the Potomac, Hartford, Ct., June, 1881.

² Declaration of Jonas Fay, Thomas Chittenden; Heman Allen and Reuben Jones, to Congress, in behalf of the inhabitants of the New Hampshire Grants, Jan. 15, 1777.

service of almost the entire fighting population of the infant State; and they also offered that the quota of Vermont in the war with Great Britain, should be "clothed, quartered and paid by the State of Vermont." Their pledge was fulfilled, the world knows how, at Ticonderoga and Bennington and on many a battlefield of the Revolution. But the military spirit had become dormant among the Vermonters. The time had passed away when every Vermonter was as handy with the rifle as with the axe. The State had ceased to make appropriations for the support of the militia. The "June trainings" had become a joke, and most of the people believed that all need of military arts and munitions was soon to be ended by the approaching end of wars and fighting among civilized nations. More than fifteen years before the outbreak of the Civil War, all State laws requiring the enrolled militia to do military duty, except in cases of insurrection, war, invasion, or to suppress riots, had been repealed. The effort to provide a limited active militia force by "uniform companies," raised at large, had failed. The uniformed companies had one by one disbanded; and in 1856 there was not, and had not been for ten years, even the semblance of a military organization. This was a condition of affairs which was a source of serious disquiet to far-seeing citizens, who did not believe that the millennium had yet come, or that it was impossible that law and right should again need the support of force; and between the years 1855 and 1861, considerable effort had been made to revive the militia.

In 1856 a law was passed, designed to encourage the formation of military companies, giving three dollars a year to each member of such a company, who should be armed and uniformed and should drill not less than three days during the year. Under such slight stimulus—every dollar so earned requiring the expenditure of ten dollars on the part of the militiaman—a few companies were organized in

the years 1857 and 1858. They were small, numbering generally less than fifty men to a company. The members procured their own uniforms, and arms were supplied by the State. There was then on regimental organizations.

In the summer of 1858, Governor Ryland Fletcher, who had been a militia officer under the old regime and who felt a strong interest in the revival of the militia, invited—it was an invitation and not an order—the various companies in the State to muster at Brandon for inspection and review. To this invitation nine companies responded. They were the Woodstock Light Infantry, Captain P. T. Washburn; the Green Mountain Rangers, of Granville, Captain J. B. Richardson; the Allen Greys, of Brandon, Captain Joseph Bush; the Howard Guard, of Burlington, Lieutenant Commanding Edward Lyman; the Middlebury Light Guard, Captain E. S. Hayward; the Swanton Guards, Captain George M. Hall; the Ransom Guard, of St. Albans, Captain T. F. House; the Green Mountain Guard, of Bellows Falls, Captain S. G. Haskins; and the Cavendish Light Infantry, (just organized and not appearing on parade), Captain John F. Deane. They mustered on this occasion about 450 muskets. They had no tents and were quartered in the halls and houses in the village. There were present as guests, upon the invitation of Governor Fletcher, Adjutant General Ebenezer W. Stone, of Massachusetts, and Colonel Robert Cowdin, of the Second Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, with his staff. There being no Vermonter present capable of instructing the companies in battalion drill, at the request of Governor Fletcher, Adjutant General Stone took command, and gave the militia-men their first instruction in battalion movements. There was a large attendance of spectators, a torch-light procession and public meeting with speeches by prominent citizens on the evening of the first day, and an inspection and review on the second day, at the close of which the Governor took command, and forming the

battalion in column by company, stormed a rocky hill on one side of the parade ground, amid the applause of thousands. This muster had its intended effect in a very general increase of public interest in the militia. New companies were formed, in different parts of the State, and during the next year the companies were organized into four regiments, constituting a brigade, which was placed under the command of Brigadier General Alonzo Jackman, Professor in the Norwich Military Academy.

On the 30th of August, 1860, by order of Governor Hiland Hall, a brigade muster took place at Montpelier. In this, fourteen out of seventeen organized companies which drew pay that year from the State, took part, mustering, with field and staff officers and music, not far from 900 men. The First Regiment, Colonel J. Bush, consisted on this occasion of four companies; the Second Regiment, Colonel W. W. Cochran, of five companies, to which was added the only company of the Third Regiment present, and the Fourth Regiment, Colonel George J. Stannard, of four companies—all under command of Brigadier General Jackman. The brigade went regularly into camp in tents provided by the State, and during the muster the men had their first instruction and experience in camp life, with which many of them were soon to become so familiar.

At the close of the year 1860, the books of the Adjutant General's office bore the names of twenty-two organized companies; but of these five had little more than a nominal existence. The other seventeen were uniformed according to the varying taste and means of the several companies, but without overcoats, and most of them were armed with smooth-bore percussion muskets, one or two companies, however, having only old flint-locks. These were nominally organized into a brigade of four regiments, under command of Brigadier General Alonzo Jackman. The regimental commanders in February, 1861, were: First Regiment, Colonel C. H.

Joyce, of Northfield; Second, Regiment, Colonel W. W. Cochran, of Bellows Falls; Third Regiment, Colonel D. W. Blanchard, of Coventry; Fourth Regiment, Colonel George J. Stannard, of St. Albans. The regimental organization, was, however, in each case, little more than a list on paper.

The military property of the State, in January, 1861, consisted of 957 muskets; seven six pounder field pieces, three of brass and four of iron; 503 Colt's pistols, described by the Quartermaster General as "of no practical use whatever;" and 104 tents. In other words the State had arms to arm a single army regiment, no more.

During the winter and spring of 1861, acts of rebellion in the Southern States followed rapidly. The transport Star of the West, laden with troops for the reinforcement of Fort Sumter, was fired upon and driven from Charleston Harbor by the South Carolina batteries. State after State passed ordinances of Secession. Fort after fort in the South was occupied by Southern State Militia. A rapid recruiting of military companies was going on at the South, and the seceding States were providing themselves with arms and munitions of war, a considerable portion of which were supplied from New York city. The attitude of the State of Vermont, as represented by her public men at this time, was not equivocal. On the 14th of January, Hon. D. A. Smalley, United States District Judge for the District of Vermont, sitting for the time being in the United States Circuit Court for the Southern District of New York, delivered to the Grand Jury a memorable charge, in which he defined the seizures of Federal forts and property by the Southern Militia to be acts of treason, and declared that "any individual owing allegiance to the United States who shall furnish these Southern traitors with arms or munitions of war, vessels, or means of transportation, or materials which will aid the traitors in carrying out their traitorous purpose, is clearly liable to be indicted, tried, convicted and executed as a

traitor—for death is the penalty of treason!" On the 23d of January, Senator Collamer introduced in the United States Senate the only practical measure of resistance proposed in that Congress—a bill authorizing the President to close the ports of the seceded States, and suspending the United States mail service in those States. A few days later, Hon. E. P. Walton, of Vermont, declared in a speech upon the floor of the House of Representatives, that "to compromise with Secession was to license rebellion for all future time, and that it would be more dangerous to surrender to rebellion than to resist it." Hon. Justin S. Morrill, of Vermont, at the same time avowed his opinion that no compromise was possible, and declared that for one he would do nothing to admit the right of secession, or to commit the Republic "to the crumbling processes of mutiny and decay."

On the 26th of January, the first open note of preparation for the impending conflict on the part of the State of Vermont, appeared in the publication of an executive order, dated January 21st, directing the Adjutant and Inspector General to issue notices to the town clerks and listers who had failed—as most of them had done—to make returns of the number of persons liable to do service in the militia in their respective towns, requiring their immediate compliance with the statute on that subject. This was followed by an order—General Order No. 10—to the officers of the various companies of uniformed militia, directing them to ascertain at once whether any men in their commands were unable or indisposed to respond to the orders of the Commander in Chief, made upon any requisition of the President of the United States to aid in the maintenance of the laws and the peace of the Union, in order that they might be discharged and their places filled by men ready for any public exigency that might arise. The captains were directed in the same order to make proper exertions to have all

vacancies in the ranks of their companies filled, and the men properly drilled and uniformed.

Compliance with the first of these orders was very slow on the part of the listers, and the enrolment of the Militia was still so imperfect when the call for troops came, that the number of men liable to do military duty in the State could not be determined with even an approximation to correctness.³

To General Order No. 10, the captains of ten companies made written response, reporting an aggregate of 376 men armed, partly equipped, and willing to respond to a call to active service.⁴ The largest company numbered but seventy-five officers and men, and the average of the rest was less than fifty. The companies generally began to brush up in drill; but very little progress was made towards filling their ranks.

Meantime the possibility of a peaceful solution of the national problem was kept alive by fresh schemes of compromise proposed in Congress, and by negotiations between the Southern leaders and the administration at Washington. The famous Peace Conference had also been called by the Legislature of Virginia, and Governor Fairbanks had appointed five prominent citizens—Ex-Governor Hiland Hall, Lieutenant Governor Underwood, Hon. L. E. Chittenden,

³ Adjutant General's Report, 1862, p. 6.

⁴ The commanders of other companies probably made verbal response to the order. Replies from only ten captains are on file in the Adjutant General's office. One captain replied that as his company had nothing but old flint-lock muskets, and the State had refused or delayed to supply them proper guns and equipments, they were not disposed to respond. Another captain asked to be excused from acting under General Order No. 10, on the ground that the order was not in accordance with any law of the State of Vermont or other authority. He added, however, that his men were "ready to do their duty at all times under the laws of the State or of the United States." And the event proved that he knew his men; for when the call came the company was one of the first to respond. It marched with full ranks, and no company rendered better service.

Adjutant General H. H. Baxter, and Hon. B. D. Harris—as commissioners to represent Vermont in the Conference.

During the session of the Conference, protracted with closed doors for twenty-four days, the Confederate Government had organized at Montgomery, Alabama, with Jefferson Davis as its president. Yet the hope that Virginia and the other border slave States might be held back from Secession,⁵ and that in that or some other way the impending collision might be averted, though faint at strongest, was sufficient to hold in abeyance all active preparations for war in the Green Mountain State.

The 4th of March came and went without an outbreak. The schemes of the hot-heads for the capture of Washington had been held in check by the more cautious Southern leaders; and a President committed to the pusillanimous doctrine of "non-coercion," had given place to Abraham Lincoln, who in his inaugural pronounced the Union to be still unbroken and announced his purpose to "hold, occupy and possess the property and places belonging to the Govern-

⁵ The attitude of Virginia, as the representative and most powerful of the border States, was aptly set forth in the following lines, contributed to the New York **Commercial Advertiser**

VIRGINIA TO THE NORTH.
Thus speaks the Sovereign Old dominion
To Northern States her frank opinion.
FIRST.
Move not a finger; 't is coercion,
The signal for our prompt dispersion.
SECOND.
Wait till I make my full decision,
Be it for union or division.
THIRD.
If I declare my ultimatum
Accept my terms as I shall state 'em.
FOURTH.
Then I'll remain while I'm inclined to,
Seceding when I have a mind to.

ment." Yet Mr. Lincoln still held out the olive branch to the secessionists; and the people of Vermont, who had followed his leadership with a greater approach to unanimity than any other community of equal numbers, were willing to share his hope that the madness of rebellion would yet give way to reason and patriotism.