

"SORE AS A BOIL BUT SOLID AS A ROCK": The Arizona National Guard on the Mexican Border, 1916-1917

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“SORE AS A BOIL BUT
SOLID AS A ROCK”

The Arizona National Guard on the
Mexican Border,
1916–1917

by

William D. Tackenberg

THE VILLISTA ATTACK on Columbus, New Mexico, in the early morning hours of March 9, 1916, set in motion a series of events that affected the U.S. regular army and the National Guard. The army launched a major offensive into Mexico, under Brig. Gen. John J. Pershing, with the popularly understood mission to “get Villa!” Meanwhile, continuing raids along the U.S.-Mexico border, including Glen Springs and Boquillas, Texas, in late May, convinced Southern Department commander Maj. Gen. Frederick Funston and Commanding General of the Army Maj. Gen. Hugh Scott that additional troops were needed to protect border communities and to release regular army units to support Pershing in Mexico. Consequently, Funston and Scott recommended that President Woodrow Wilson mobilize National Guard troops to patrol the border. Wilson called up 150,000 Guardsmen from every state except Nevada, which had no National Guard organization. By July 31, almost 111,000 Guardsmen were on the border, with another 40,000 awaiting orders in mobilization camps around the county. Among the first National

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Guard units called into federal service was the First Arizona Infantry Regiment.

In point of fact, the War Department initiated two separate mobilizations of the National Guard. The major call went out on June 18, 1916, exactly fifteen days after Congress passed the National Defense Act, providing the president with additional authority to call reserve forces to active duty during times of national emergency. Already, a month earlier, the president had invoked the 1903 Dick Act to call out the Guard organizations in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. To speed up their deployment, these units were dispatched directly to military posts along the border. The First Arizona Infantry, alerted on May 9, arrived by train at Camp Harry J. Jones, near Douglas, on May 12 and 13, 1916. More than 1,000 well-wishers cheered the special train carrying most of the Guardsmen as it passed through Tucson at 6:00 A.M. on May 12.¹

Upon their arrival at Camp Jones, the Arizona infantrymen tackled the difficult jobs of unit organization, dealing with equipment and personnel shortages, and determining their assignments. But first, each Guardsman was required to take an oath transferring his allegiance from the state to the federal government. War Department directives stipulated that each infantry company have sixty-five qualified officers and enlisted men present for duty before it could be mustered into federal service. Preparations for mustering the Arizona Guard commenced almost immediately, with the first unit—Company L from Yuma—mustered in on May 22.

Like most National Guard units called to the border, the Arizona contingent was undermanned. Arriving in Douglas with forty-nine officers and 837 enlisted men, it fell twenty-nine men short of its required peacetime strength and 1,029 short of the wartime strength to which it must expand before being ordered to mobilize. Feverish activity in various Arizona communities produced some additional recruits. These new enlistees, however, had to be trained in the most basic skills of soldiering. Although all the Arizona Guard units were mustered into federal service by June 20, and recruiting continued thereafter, the regiment's overall strength declined during almost all the months it was stationed on the border.²



Edward M. Robison.

Mobilization revealed the special character of several of the Guard companies. Company F, for example, consisted of Papago, Pima, Apache, Hopi, and Mission Indian students from the Phoenix Indian School. Newspapers around the state proudly boasted that it was the only truly all-Indian military unit in the country. Yuma's Company L, meanwhile, included fifteen Yuma Indians among its members. Company E was composed exclusively of Mexican-American Guardsmen, most of them native Tucsonans. They spoke Spanish almost exclusively while in camp.³

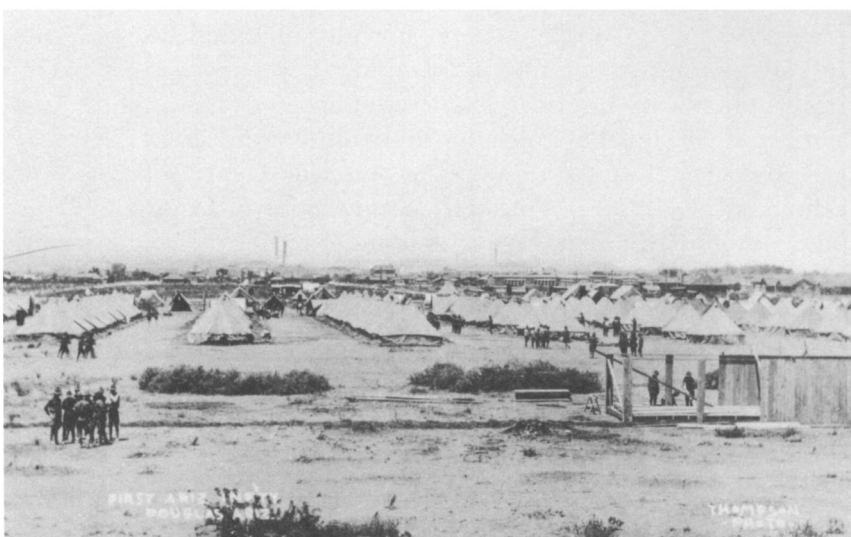
Of special note among the Arizona Guard officers was Edward M. Robison of Flagstaff. Commander of Flagstaff's Company I since 1913, he was no newcomer to either the regular army or the National Guard. Born in Pennsylvania in 1879, Robison arrived in Arizona in 1912, after having served two tours with the U.S. cavalry and the signal corps. He saw action with the Second U.S. Cavalry in Cuba, participating in the battle of Santiago de Cuba, before falling victim to yellow fever and malaria. Discharged in 1898, he enlisted in the signal corps, from 1900 to 1903, and served two years in the Philippines, where he contracted tropical dysentery. After his second discharge from the

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regular army, he joined the Pennsylvania National Guard from 1906 to 1908, while pursuing his civilian career as a dentist. In 1910, Robison moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he worked as a railroad telegrapher and telephone engineer. Two years later, he took a job with the Western Union Telegraph Company in Flagstaff. He joined Company I of the Arizona National Guard, winning successive elections to second lieutenant, first lieutenant, and captain. Sometime after the May 9, 1916, mobilization, Robison started a diary that provides interesting glimpses into the activities of the Arizona National Guard on the border.⁴

Robison's Company I was mustered into federal service on June 2, with each member recording his name in the regimental muster book. The unit's composition was similar to other companies in the regiment, with a few significant differences. Eighteen of the sixty-eight officers and enlisted men gave their occupation as "laborer." The average age of Company I men was 29.02 years, the oldest among the Arizona Guard companies. Only twelve individuals in the entire regiment, including Captain Robison, listed any prior military service—regular army or National Guard. Fifteen of

First Arizona Infantry encamped at Camp Jones, Douglas. (Salm-1)



the company members were married, and only five listed Arizona as their birthplace. Like their fellow Arizona Guardsmen, the men of Company I were untested and attempting to find their way in the new adventure along the border. "The regiment is in camp at Harry J. Jones, Douglas, Arizona," the regimental muster report matter-of-factly recorded. "The entire command is occupied with making the camp habitable." Habitable or not, Douglas would not be home for long to some of the Arizona Guardsmen.⁵

Units of the Arizona Guard were quickly dispersed from Camp Harry J. Jones to locations along the border previously manned by detachments of the First U.S. Cavalry. On June 21, the Third Battalion, consisting of companies K, L, M, and I under Maj. George E. Haedicke, left for Camp Stephen A. Little outside Nogales, where they arrived about 8:15 A.M. the following morning. Company A, meanwhile, took post at Slaughter's Ranch east of Douglas, while June 22 found Company D at Forrest on the El Paso & Southwestern Railroad twelve miles east of Naco.⁶

July brought further deployments of the Arizona regiment. Companies K and L left Nogales for Ajo and, on July 14, Maj. H. G. Goykendall and the Second Battalion departed Camp Jones for Fort Huachuca, where they replaced regular units ordered to join Pershing south of the border. Company M moved to Roosevelt on the Salt River as security for the Roosevelt Dam. Regimental headquarters and the remaining Guardsmen left Douglas on July 15 and established camp at Naco, where they would remain for the next eight months.

At 10:30 P.M. on July 3, Captain Robison and Company I entrained at Nogales for Casa Grande, arriving at the small farming community midway between Tucson and Phoenix at 9:55 o'clock the next morning. Local residents treated the Guardsmen royally, inviting them to dinners and celebrations of the national holiday. The *Casa Grande Valley Dispatch* noted that Captain Robison's wife paid the unit a visit during the week of July 21–28.⁷

Robison made the first entry in his journal on July 25. Not surprisingly, many of his comments involved the weather. A severe electrical storm on the night of July 24 damaged some tents and two soldiers were struck by lightning as they performed guard duty. Storms became a recurring theme in Robison's diary while he was stationed at Casa Grande, where he listed nine days



Officers of the First Arizona Infantry at Naco. Colonel Tuthill is seated fifth from left; Captain Robison is fourth from left at Tuthill's right side. (AHS/SAD #44444)

during which his company endured wind and/or rain storms. The unit bathhouse was demolished three times, and on other occasions tents were either blown down or flooded. When it wasn't raining, Robison complained about the "sultry" 100-degree temperatures.⁸

Company I stayed busy despite the heat and storms. A two-mile hike on August 3, a three-and-half-mile hike two days later followed by a four-mile hike on August 7, a five-mile march on August 11, and two days in the field at the end of the month attested to the company's ongoing physical training. On August 21 and 24, Company I received shipments of cots to replace their old bedding, more than one-third of which was broken and unserviceable. New tents arrived a week later. Meanwhile, the troops constructed a dining hall, complete with screened doors and windows, along with an incinerator for burning the camp garbage. Discharges and demotions mirrored the rising boredom among the Arizona Guardsmen.⁹

There were also lighter moments. On July 27, an enlisted man took eight Boy Scouts on a two-day camping trip to Smith's ranch. Captain Robison periodically inspected the camp and, on

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July 31, the company underwent a venereal disease inspection. On August 17 Maj. M. A. W. Shockley from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, passed through on an inspection tour of military units along the border. Robison noted, perhaps with tongue in cheek, that a "reconnaissance" party left on August 24 for a two-day march to Quojote, Mexico. Between 10:00 and 11:00 P.M. on the twenty-sixth the soldiers conducted a howling "dog party" from their tents, which left the camp "greatly disturbed." Company I's relative isolation ended on September 6, when the Guardsmen boarded a train for the trip to Naco. Once again, well-wishers cheered the soldiers as they passed through Tucson.¹⁰

Orders consolidating the First Arizona Infantry at Naco set off a round of rumors that the regiment would either join Pershing in Mexico or be mustered out of federal service. Neither proved to be the case. Instead, the Arizona Guardsmen at Naco faced seven months of monotony and tedium.¹¹

Col. Alexander Tuthill, the regimental commander, tried to dispel boredom by keeping his troops occupied. On September 11, he reviewed the entire regiment assembled at Naco. From the

First Arizona Infantry band practicing at Douglas. Guard bands provided regular concerts for troops and local communities. (HM-70 4880)



twentieth through the twenty-seventh, he led the First Arizona Infantry on a 120-mile march from Naco to Hereford, Lewis Springs, Tombstone, Gleason, McNeal, Forrest Ranch, and back. "Considering heavy equipment carried, the desert country passed through & the lack of facilities for supplying troops with water," Captain Robison proudly recorded, "It was darn [?] outstanding that the physical condition of the Regiment is excellent. Also where it comes to marching they could take their place with seasoned troops."¹²

The Arizona Guard had its share of visitors while the regiment was encamped at Naco. Each inspection required the troops to police the camp, polish equipment, and generally present a shining example of soldierly appearance. Apparently, they did not disappoint. On September 29 Captain Robison had dinner with Governor George W. P. Hunt, who was visiting the regiment. General Funston inspected the Arizona Guard on January 11, 1917, and General Pershing passed through Naco on March 28. Along with weekly inspections by their own officers and senior noncommissioned staff, the Arizona Guardsmen were "well observed" during their stay on the border.¹³

At the same time, the Arizona Guardsmen always looked forward to visits by family and friends. Mothers, fathers, and sweethearts took advantage of the relative proximity of their boys on the border to see what this soldiering business was all about. They peered into tents, sampled the food, experienced the heat, and in some cases shouldered weapons for the camera.

Mostly, however, the Arizona Guardsmen engaged in training exercises devised by the regimental staff to keep them fit and occupied. In addition to long hikes and weekly close-order drill at platoon, company, and regimental levels, the troops took part in various field maneuvers. For example, in early October Captain Robison's Company I participated in tactical exercises with Companies K, L, and M. First, Company I defended a bridge while the three other companies attacked. Later in the day, Company I attacked a railroad bridge defended by two other companies of the regiment. On October 3, Robison took his company to observe American and Mexican entrenchments along the border.

Target practice with rifles and pistols honed the Guardsmen's marksmanship. Captain Robison recorded that his company went



First Arizona Infantry troops guarding the Wells Fargo office at Naco, 1916. (Sgt. Paul Ballinger album, Fort Huachuca Historical Museum #1916.00.00.01)

to the range on October 19 through 25, and again on October 27 through November 3. The Arizona Guard underwent subsequent rounds of marksmanship training in late February and early March 1917.¹⁴

Even with imaginative training activities, camp life quickly devolved into repetitive chores, with few opportunities for recreation. Soldiers who scored satisfactory marks on weekly Saturday inspections received Sunday “liberty.” Unfortunately, Naco offered little in the way of wholesome entertainment for soldiers on their days off. Mounting boredom among the Arizona Guardsmen was again reflected in declining morale, increasing discipline problems, and desertion. Recruiting efforts around the state failed, and regimental strength steadily declined. By March of 1917, the muster rolls contained 180 fewer names than when the regiment was sworn into federal service ten months earlier, well below its required wartime strength of 1,915. Company I’s strength had declined almost by half to three officers and thirty enlisted men.¹⁵

In an effort to raise sagging spirits, the regimental staff instituted almost monthly dances for officers and their wives, many of

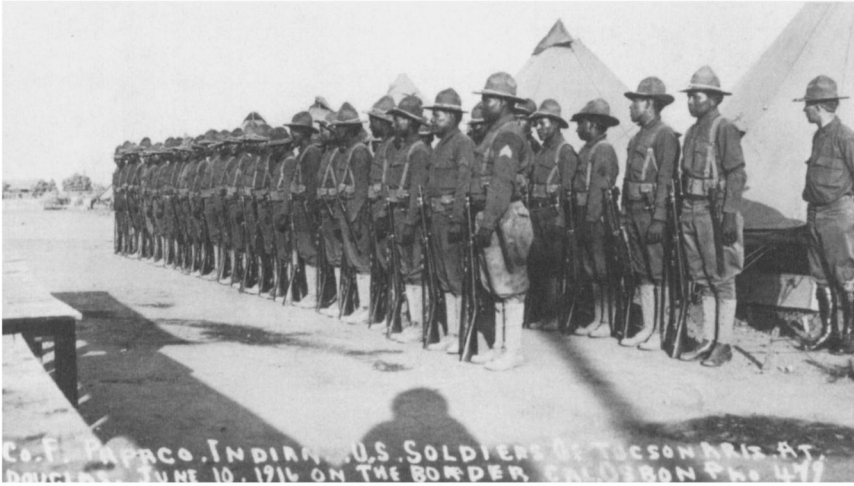
whom regularly visited the Naco encampment. Other social activities included a Lincoln's Birthday party, an enlisted men's Halloween party, a Washington's Day parade, and a masquerade ball. National and state elections on November 7 provided a diversion for officers and soldiers who stayed up late waiting for returns. "Little doing," Captain Robison remarked the next day. "Getting over the late hours of election night."¹⁶

Holidays were a difficult time for Arizona Guardsmen separated from their homes and families. To alleviate some of the Thanksgiving gloom, the regimental mess served a lunch of roast turkey, oyster soup, cranberry sauce, French fried potatoes, parsnips, dressing, celery, turnovers, pie, cheese, and nuts, topped off with cigars, cigarettes, and coffee. The entire regiment was granted liberty to work off the sumptuous meal. Christmas was especially hard on the lonely citizen-soldiers. "Christmas Day," Captain Robison recorded in his diary. "Turkey dinner and liberty."¹⁷

No doubt the Arizonans' spirits lifted as they watched some of the other National Guard units along the border return to their home states in August and September 1916. Their hopes drooped, however, with the arrival in late November and early December of fresh lumber for framing and flooring their tents. Although their habitations would be more comfortable, the upgrade indicated that their stay on the border would be indefinite. On January 4, 1917, electricity was installed in the squad tents.

Morale and troop strength dipped to new lows during January and February 1917. On January 16, the entire Third Battalion had to be consolidated in order to muster enough men to perform basic company drill. Feelings ran over on January 23, when a "go home" parade quickly got out of hand, culminating in "a near mutiny of 100 men." Discipline became increasingly difficult during the cold winter months. On February 1, eight men refused to work on a wood-cutting detail. That same day, Captain Robison's tent mysteriously burned to the ground when most of the regiment was at drill. On February 28, seven rifles were reported missing from the Company D arms rack; the weapons were later found hidden away in Naco.¹⁸

The announcement in late February of 1917 that the Arizona Guard would be released from border duty on March 27



Company F, Papago Indians, enlisted in the First Arizona Infantry on June 10, 1916. (HM-65 4875)

came none too soon for the unhappy soldiers. Preparations for returning to civilian life began almost immediately. Physical examinations were administered on March 12 as snow fell on men standing in lines to await their turn. A regimental order the following day suspended all drills. On March 16, officers, first sergeants, and company clerks received instructions on procedures and forms to be used in mustering the regiment out of federal service. Regular army officers inspected and approved regimental paperwork, and regimental clerks prepared payrolls that granted each Guardsman a fifteen-day paid furlough after the muster-out date. By the twenty-fourth, all bed sacks and company equipment had been turned in. The next day, stoves were turned off and returned to company supply rooms. Finally, on March 26, the Guardsmen pulled down their tents. They spent their last night sleeping under the stars. "Cheerfulness and expectation animates the entire regiment as they look for release," Captain Robison noted in his diary.¹⁹

For many Arizona soldiers who had spent ten long months on the border, their imminent return to families and loved ones must have seemed almost too good to be true. Unfortunately, it was.



Naco belles. (Salm 12)

When the regiment formed up on the morning of March 27 for formal mustering out, the Arizona Guardsmen were greeted by a telegram from the War Department notifying them that, because of the increasing possibility of war with Germany, all National Guard units still in federal service were being frozen in place.

The news hit the Arizona troops, who had remained on the border longer than almost any other Guard organization, especially hard. Captain Robison noted a larger-than-usual number of men absent without leave at first formation on the morning of March 28. It was no doubt a tribute to Robison's leadership that all the Flagstaff men were present and accounted for. Many of his soldiers were "sore as a boil," but Company I was "solid as a rock."²⁰

While the Arizona Guard awaited orders, regimental staff reissued equipment and resumed training. It is a tribute to officers and enlisted men that by March 29, companies were reopening their camps and trudging back to the firing range. Even so, many individual Guardsmen had enough of Uncle Sam and the army in general, and were looking eagerly for the first opportunity to be released from federal service. Uncle Sam came to the assistance of some reluctant Guardsmen by ordering the immedi-

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ate release of all personnel who had needy dependents at home. Others simply refused to take the new federal oath required of Guardsmen mobilized under the National Defense Act.

Despite appeals from regimental staff and from newly elected Governor Thomas Campbell, 326 men turned in their weapons in April 1917. The muster-in of 114 recruits somewhat offset the loss, but still the regiment carried only 442 enlisted men on its rolls at the end of the month. The numbers failed to account for the loss in experience and expertise. Recruiting efforts over the next several months barely maintained the status quo as more Guardsmen were discharged at Naco. The Arizona Guard was forced to reevaluate its training program as inexperienced enlistees swamped the regiment. On a positive note, desertions declined with only seven deserters reported between May and September of 1917.²¹

The First Arizona Infantry underwent still more changes as it prepared for deployment in Europe during World War I. On October 18, 1917, the regiment arrived at Camp Kearny near San Diego, California, where the Guardsmen received additional

A family member visits Arizona troops. (80-17)



training, absorbed recruits from other states, and acquired a new designation—the 158th Infantry. Col. Alexander M. Tuthill, commander of the Arizona Guard, was promoted to brigadier general and placed in command of the 79th Infantry Brigade (part of the 40th Division), composed of the 158th Infantry, the 157th Infantry (formerly the First Colorado Infantry), and the 144th Machine Gun Battalion (formerly the First New Mexico Infantry). Upon the brigade's arrival at Charbourg, France, on August 24, 1918, many officers and enlisted men were pulled from the 40th Division as replacements for other units. Neither the division nor the Arizona Guard saw action as units.²²

Captain Robison retained command of Company I until the 158th Infantry reached France, when he and many other officers of the 158th were reassigned to the 372nd Infantry Regiment of the 93rd Division. He commanded the 2nd Battalion of the 372nd in action near Champagne during the Muese-Argonne offensive, and was wounded on October 2, 1918, near Monthois. He received the Purple Heart, the Distinguished Service Medal, and the Italian Croix de Guerra. After his discharge from the army, Robison resumed his civilian occupation in Flagstaff. On May 18, 1920, he was recommissioned to command Flagstaff's field artillery battery of the Arizona National Guard. The unit existed for only a short period. By the early 1920s, Robison and his wife had moved to Berkeley, California, where the former Arizona guardsman graduated from the University of California Law School in 1926. He died at Shell Beach, San Luis Obispo, in June of 1967.²³

The First Arizona Infantry compiled a mixed record of service along the border. To its credit, it mobilized quickly and enthusiastically when called into federal service in May and June of 1916. By performing guard duty at border crossings, inspecting vehicles for arms and ammunition, and patrolling the border to prevent armed incursions, Arizona's citizen-soldiers freed up Regular troops for reassignment to Mexico and elsewhere. But discipline among the Arizona Guardsmen deteriorated dramatically as weeks and months passed with no prospect of their seeing action in Mexico or returning to their homes. Desertions and discharges soon outstripped recruiting efforts, until the regiment mustered barely half its original strength. Like many other National Guard

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units, the Arizona contingent never came close to achieving the wartime strength stipulated by the War Department.

Nevertheless, the First Arizona Infantry and other National Guard units successfully mobilized for the first time under the Dick Act of 1903 and the National Defense Act of 1916. And, although much of the valuable training they received on the border was undermined by the loss of most of the regiment's trained personnel between April and June of 1917, enough officers and senior enlisted men remained to compile a credible record in France in 1918. Their training and experience proved invaluable in the reestablishment of the Arizona National Guard after the war.

NOTES

1. *Arizona Daily Star* (Tucson), May 13, 1916; *Report on Mobilization of the Organized Militia and National Guard of the United States, 1916* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), p. 10. Mobilization sites were changed as follows: Texas, from Camp Mabry, near Austin, to San Antonio; New Mexico, from Las Vegas to Columbus; and Arizona, from Whipple Barracks, near Prescott, to Camp Jones, near Douglas. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
2. Troop strength for the First Arizona Infantry at mustering in varies considerably depending upon who is counting, purpose, and the date the report was finished. For example, the War Department's *Report on Mobilization*, p. 153, places the Arizona Guard's overall strength upon mobilization at 915, the unit mobilization muster rolls contain the signatures of 927 men, while the initial monthly muster report submitted by the regiment to the federal government lists 886 men. I relied on the numbers from the monthly reports submitted to the federal government and now located at the National Archives (NA) in Washington, D.C. I realize that later enrollees may account for some of the discrepancies. Muster Report, First Arizona Infantry, 1916, Arizona Military Museum (AMM), Phoenix, contains the names of 355 individuals who did not report for service, with no adverse action taken. By contrast, the *Arizona Daily Star*, May 26, 1916, reported that 116 Texas National Guardsmen would be court-martialed for refusing to report for duty.
3. Untitled clipping, in National Guard—First Arizona Infantry—News Clippings, James McClintock Collection, Phoenix Public Library.
4. Edward M. Robison service record, Headquarters, State Area Command, Arizona National Guard Records Section, Phoenix; *Coconino Sun* (Flagstaff), May 12, 1916.
5. Regimental Muster Log, AMM; President Wilson ordered the mobilization of more than 150,000 National Guardsmen nationwide. By July 31, 1916, 110,957 Guardsmen were stationed along the border, with another 40,139 waiting at mobilization camps in the various states. *War Department Annual Report, 1916* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), vol. 1, p. 190.
6. Monthly Report, First Infantry Arizona National Guard, WW I Strength Returns, Box 899, Records of the Adjutant General's Office (RAGO), Record Group 407, NA.
7. *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), July 9, 1916; *Casa Grande Valley Dispatch*, July 14, 28, 1916.
8. Edward Robison Diary, July 25, 1916, MS 267, Cline Library Special Collections, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff.
9. *Ibid.*, August 3–11, August 14–19, and August 30–31, 1916.
10. *Ibid.*, July 27–August 26, 1916; *Tucson Citizen*, September 7, 1916.

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11. *Arizona Republic*, September 8, 9, 1916.
12. Robison Diary, September 26, 1916.
13. *Ibid.*, September 29, 1916.
14. *Ibid.*, October 3, 1916.
15. Monthly Report, 1st Infantry Arizona National Guard.
16. Robison Diary, November 7, 8, 1916; February 12, 22, 1917.
17. *Ibid.*, November 30, December 25, 1916.
18. *Ibid.*, January 23, 29, March 4, 1917.
19. *Ibid.*, March 12–26, 1917.
20. *Ibid.*, March 27, 1917.
21. Troop strengths are derived from Strength Returns, First Arizona Infantry, RAGO. Desertion had become so great a problem that Arizona Adjutant General Charles W. Harris published in the *Arizona Daily Star*, July 13, 1917, the names of ninety-nine deserters and requested the public's help in locating the men.
22. Arizona troops comprised approximately one-third of the 158th Infantry.
23. Robison Personnel File, Headquarters, State Area Command, Arizona National Guard Holding Office, Phoenix; University of California Alumni Association, Bolt Hall, Berkeley.

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