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The First National Pastime in the Middle West¹

BY THEODORE G. GRONERT

The newspaper of the fifties was not an imposing sheet. There was no photographic section; no comic strip; no large headlines. The section that many of us turn to first was conspicuous by its absence—the sporting section did not exist. The reader in search of entertainment might amuse himself by counting up the many ailments he was likely to have that were especially responsive to a dose of Doe's Elixer or Roe's Little Liver Pills. If he wished to rouse his competitive spirit he might try his hand at adding to the expletives already used by the editor in his diatribes on "Woman's Rights." He might even while away a leaden-footed hour by writing a long letter dealing with the general depravity of the younger generation, for the writing of such letters was the great indoor sport of the period, and to be assured publication one need only sign his epistle *Scipio*, *Cato* or *Publius*. Such classical anonymity was prima facie evidence of erudition. Or he might even write a verse, touched with tragic melancholy, with here and there a suggestion of the essential frailty of man, and have more than an even chance to see it in print in an early issue.

Occasionally ambitious amateurs, lacking the sporting instinct took unfair advantage of rivals and editors by writing in the manner of Poe, thus taking no chance on being turned down. Imitations of *The Raven* won more free space than has ever been surrendered by a flattered columnist of the twentieth century. Gradually however from out the welter of odes, patent medicine advertisements, foreign dispatches and domestic intelligence, appeared a new set of items. Let the New

¹ This paper was read at one of the sessions of the annual Indiana History Conference, which was held at the Claypool Hotel in Indianapolis, December 9-10, 1932.

York *Herald* of 1857 speak for itself. Type much larger than the usual modest headline marshalled forth the following announcement:

PARADE OF CITIZEN VOLUNTEERS
 GRAND TOURNOUT OF THE TARGET COMPANIES
 6000 VOLUNTEERS IN THE PROCESSION—A GALA
 DAY AMONG THE TARGET-SHOOTERS. REVIEW OF
 THE CITIZEN VOLUNTEERS BY THE MAYOR AND
 COMMON COUNCIL. . . .²

In the case of the New York papers some of the interest displayed was due to the fact that the volunteer companies in some instances represented rival political groups and the papers were naturally engaged in playing up their pet companies. The basic reason for the development of the volunteer company was not political however. Rather it developed in answer to a demand among the youth of the land for a recreation that would meet a social and a physical need. Some had recourse to the volunteer fire department while still others, depending on racial affinity joined a German Turnverein or an Irish Marching Club. In the long run however it was the independent companies that met the need. Every daily paper of the period gives evidence of their existence. The columns of the Chicago *Tribune* indicate that in the year 1857 there were at least two score companies in Chicago in various stages of organization. The Milwaukee *Sentinel* listed at least eight companies in the metropolis of Wisconsin and a dozen other communities in the Badger state boasted of one or more companies.

These companies were not the old militia companies, but voluntary organizations usually established independently of state control. If they did accept state control, it was usually for the purpose of securing the use of state equipment. The members elected their own officers, determined the cut and color of the uniform, marched and countermarched as they pleased and generally behaved in a highly picturesque and individualistic manner. And in their marchings and countermarchings they were quite disregardful of state boundaries. In fact the most enthusiastic activity of any volunteer military company took form in participation in an encampment or

² New York *Herald*, April 24, 1857. On this same day, the New York *Tribune* gave a half-column to the same subject under the heading, "Parade of the Target Co's."

celebration in a neighboring state.

An Indiana company, the Indianapolis Guards, took part in such an inter-state gathering in 1857 on the occasion of the dedication of Henry Clay's monument at Lexington, Kentucky, on July 4, 1857.³ Five out-of-state companies attended this celebration, including two from Cincinnati and one each from St. Louis, Baltimore and Indianapolis. The Indianapolis company contributed a fair share to the celebration. When the invitation to the dedication was received, there was an immediate growth of interest in drill and dress parade. This company secured new recruits, especially when it was announced that the Indianapolis and Cincinnati Railroad would give free transportation, and the Covington and Lexington would charge a two-thirds fare.⁴ The *Indianapolis Journal* notes with approval that the Guards had been recruited to a force of thirty-eight strong and that Captain Morris had issued a stern General Order for the expedition into Kentucky. The members of the company were to behave as citizens and soldiers, refrain from entering any saloon or refreshment stand where spirituous liquors were sold, especially "while wearing the uniform of the Company." In view of the convivial habits of the period this General Order was not without its justification, but in spite of precautions there were some casualties. When the company was entertained by the Guthrie Grays of Cincinnati an accompanying journalist declares in covert phrase that "several of them suffered severely. Two of them at least fainted."

But the general impression of editors and reporters was favorable. The *Indianapolis Journal* devoted four columns of a two-page paper to the celebration to give its meed of praise to a gathering of the "military gentlemen" where "the drums rolled in stern consonance with the daring character of the heroes they heralded."⁵ The Lexington editor not to be outdone, devoted half his space to a description whose climax proclaimed: "The glittering armor, waving plumes and the wonderful precision of the movements of the troops presented a scene of true grandeur and one well-calculated to inspire enthusiasm and make the pulses fly."⁶

³ G. W. Ranek, *History of Lexington, Kentucky*, 377.

⁴ *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, June 18, 1857.

⁵ *Ibid.*, July 8, 1857.

⁶ *Lexington Observer and Reporter*, July 8, 1857.

The usual military item however was not concerned with grand tours and fraternal visits, but dealt with humbler matters of local import. There were notices of meetings for drill, elections of officers and of occasional dress parades. In the fall and winter there were advertisements of "Grand Military Soirees" where the reader was assured that, "All the grace and beauty of our fair city was in attendance." In Indiana the Lafayette and Indianapolis companies were addicted to the "Soiree" while Captain Lew Wallace's Montgomery Guards of Crawfordsville were given to "stag suppers" where they served "oysters and drink, cold water principally."⁷

There is no little temptation to interpret the reporters statement, but it may suffice to say here that only the Temperance Cadets uniformly toasted their guests in water. Though the Temperance Cadets of Indianapolis often took part in the maneuvers of the military they sustained themselves solely with such "refreshments as their pure appetites demanded and their rules permitted." Cynical reporters—they were that way as early as 1857—waxed enthusiastic enough to declare the parade of the Maine law devotees "one of the prettiest sights we have seen in many a day," but at this point, the cynic obtruded again to declare that unfortunately the enrollment of the Cadets was small.⁸

Despite his cynicism the reporter or editor was always welcomed by the officers and privates of the volunteer companies, for they were not disregarding of the value of publicity. If there was no newspaper representative enrolled in the company, the editor was extended an invitation to attend excursions and other celebrations as a guest of the company. The Indianapolis Guards had the services of a reporter or editor on all important occasions, and other Indianapolis organizations were also well served. The Guards were not above the use of flattery in their appeal for publicity for the editor of the *Journal* acknowledges a serenade by the Guards' band when "the soft notes of Annie Laurie fell upon the ear in the midnight hour with an exceeding sweetness."⁹

The veteran company was the more attentive because rival claimants were appearing on the scene to claim attention.

⁷ Crawfordsville *Journal*, Nov. 18, 1858.

⁸ Indianapolis *Daily Journal*, Oct. 23, 1857.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Aug. 22, 1857.

On August 5, 1857, a new artillery company was organized¹⁰ as a friendly rival to the Marion Artillery Company, and on August 7 the City Grays, an infantry company, held their first parade.¹¹ This parade had as an objective the home of General W. J. Elliott who had been elected captain of the company. The honor conferred on General Elliott carried with it certain obligations, including the timely serving of refreshments and the granting of pecuniary aid in the purchase of equipment. No volunteer company was complete without some sponsor whose generosity would express itself in entertainment or more substantial aid.

Monetary aid was especially desirable in the purchase of uniforms. The average volunteer might be able to buy an inexpensive campaign outfit but he could not afford the elaborate dress uniform deemed so necessary for public appearances. Private contributions or public benefits were utilized to secure the necessary funds to provide distinctive uniforms. Adornment was an object in itself. The City Grays of Indianapolis appointed a special committee on trimmings and when their dress uniform was assembled it consisted of gray coat and pantaloons with black cloth trimmings, corded with gold, and a bear-skin shako.¹² The company in full dress resembled a convention of drum majors and at their appearance on parade "a general feeling of admiration fell from the lips of men, women and children."¹³

The Lafayette Guards and Indianapolis Guards wore the regulation coat with white trousers as a dress uniform. Their most striking adornment was a plumed hat, and the commander of the Lafayette company was especially fond of calling for a parade with "white pants and plumes."¹⁴ Probably the Lafayette Guards were pricked by the spur of rivalry for in addition to a gun squad, a Teutonic company and the Turners, that ambitious young city boasted of two volunteer fire companies. One had a name symbolic of incendiarism and rebellion, in *Kossuth*, but the other in becoming contrast modestly called itself, "The Good Intent Fire company." Crawfordsville's fire company and its Wabash Cadets furnished no real

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Aug. 5, 1857.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Aug. 11, 1857.

¹² *Ibid.*, Nov. 12, 1857.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Nov. 13, 1857.

¹⁴ *Lafayette Daily Courier*, July 12, 1859.

rivalry for the Montgomery Guards, for by 1859 this latter company had adopted a Zouave uniform with red cap, blue jacket and "red breeches like meal bags gathered at the knees."¹⁵

Indiana youths were not the only ones addicted to bright colors. Many companies, perhaps to demonstrate their impartiality, incorporated most if not all the major colors into one uniform. The dress uniform of the New York City Guard included a bear-skin cap, white dress coat, faced with red and trimmed with gold, and blue trousers with red stripes. The Garde La Fayette boasted a blue frock coat with red cuffs, collars and shoulder knots, red cloth caps and pantaloons. To complete the picture each man nursed a moustache and goatee and carried a short sword "imported from France." The Juneau Guards of Milwaukee wore bear-skin caps, red jackets decorated with lace, blue pants with white cord, and white cross belts with silver ornaments.¹⁶

This attempt to out-dress Solomon in all his glory might have been made in behalf of military efficiency and personal morale but the weight of evidence inclines to a different conclusion. Dress parades were made over well travelled streets in the hope that the brave might be viewed by the fair. When the men of the fifties dubbed General Scott "Old Fuss and Feathers," they were characterizing an epoch as well as an individual. Men may cherish a suppressed desire to imitate the lillies of the field but only occasionally find sufficient excuse to gratify that desire. The voluntary military companies of the fifties afforded opportunities and the newspaper descriptions indicate that the members made the most of them.

The movement had its social as well as its athletic features. After drill there was often a dance in honor "of the God of war and the Goddess of friskers."¹⁷ When a company from Lafayette visited the Crawfordsville Montgomery Guards, the members were entertained by a dinner and dance. They "had plenty to eat and drink, and all arrived home in good time this morning and of course duly sober."¹⁸ Military encampments were never completely successful unless terminated by a great

¹⁵ *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, Feb. 23, 1860.

¹⁶ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 21, 1852.

¹⁷ *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, Aug. 14, 1860.

¹⁸ *Lafayette Daily Courier*, Sept. 11, 1857.

military ball which visiting companies patronized by sending "a large representation of their beauty and elite."¹⁹

The ladies were as usual doing their share in fostering the military spirit. The thousand ships launched through the beguilements of Helen of Troy had their counterpart in the thousand flags fabricated by "fairy fingers" for the volunteer companies. Two months after their organization the City Grays of Indianapolis were presented with company colors. Mrs. Sarah E. Bolton made an appropriate presentation speech on behalf of the women of Indianapolis and Captain Elliott made an appropriate response.²⁰ Just what was said the Indianapolis *Journal* did not record. The general trend of his remarks might be judged by the report of a similar affair in Charleston, South Carolina, where an "oration replete with thought and feeling was delivered to a large audience of fair women and brave men. . . ." ²¹

Of course flag-raising like flag-waving was a very serious matter in the fifties, and generally speaking everything was managed with a proper regard for the standards of conduct set forth in McGuffey's *Eclectic Readers*. Note this remonstrance from a Cincinnati paper of 1856: "Military gentlemen should not take nice young ladies in pink silk to the ball and leave their wives to mope in calico at home."²²

This was serious enough, but one hopes the gentlemen did not add to their derelictions by dancing the Garotte Cotillion, which according to the Lafayette *Courier*, was becoming very fashionable in 1857. Here is the editorial description: "The ladies swing corners. Having done this, the gentlemen place their arms around their (the ladies') necks and kiss them on the left cheek. Young ladies screech and fall into young gentleman's arms. Gentlemen seize young ladies in their arms and waltz to their seats."²³ Comments by editors indicate a tendency towards over emphasis of the social activities of the military. Collations in which speech making and the drinking of toasts left little time for drill were of frequent occurrence, and there were constant warnings against too much conviviality. One commentator on the Lafayette encampment of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, July 1, 1859.

²⁰ Indianapolis *Daily Journal*, Oct. 14, 1857.

²¹ Charleston *Courant*, July 3, 1857.

²² *Star of the West*, March 29, 1856.

²³ Lafayette *Daily Courier*, March 24, 1857.

1859 declared that "Captain Bourbon" should be given a summary court-martial and be drummed out of camp.²⁴

This interest in the welfare of the companies indicates the regard in which the military pastime was held. Honorary members of the Milwaukee Light Guard Company contributed \$1400 a year for its support.²⁵ The Indianapolis City Grays were awarded \$100 when their enrollment exceeded seventy, and they were aided by benefit performances.²⁶ The Guards, close rivals of the Grays, had the support of honorary members, the aid of certain prize moneys and the usual benefits. Military companies on excursion were never charged full fare by the railroad companies and often traveled on passes. Volunteers, in fact, considered such concessions as vested rights, and when the Covington and Lexington railroad charged the Indianapolis Guards two-thirds fare for indifferent accommodations, there was vehement protest. When the offending railroad reported a deficit, an Indianapolis editor suggested that this was the natural result of such an illiberal policy as that followed in the treatment of the Guards.²⁷

National holidays, state and county fairs, and dedications were not considered complete without the appearance of one or more of the voluntary companies. If public occasions were not numerous enough the companies would make their own by staging a competitive drill or an encampment. Interchange of visits by neighboring companies was common and such visits were occasions for great enthusiasm and excitement. Note the comment of an Indianapolis editor on the occasion of the visit of the Indianapolis Grays to Shelbyville: "Talk as we will of peace, there is a charm in war-like preparations of which the gay parade is but the type or shadow, that enlists all hearts both old and young, and the pride that all countries take in their military, and here in our free America the spirit that impels our youth to sacrifice time and means to support military organizations, is but a tribute paid to this passion or principle in the universal human heart."²⁸

Unfortunately editors did not confine themselves to generalization. All too frequently they were as biased as alumni

²⁴ *Ibid.*, July 1, 1859.

²⁵ *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, July 22, 1858.

²⁶ *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, Oct. 30, 1857.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Sept. 8, 1857.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Aug. 15, 1859.

followers of a college football team. The modest enthusiasm of a Milwaukee writer when comparing a regiment of United States' regulars with the local Light Guard Company is an example. The regulars he conceded presented a "tolerably soldierly appearance," but were quite out of the picture when compared with Milwaukee's pride. He concluded that "Uncle Sam is nowhere when compared with Milwaukee in the military line."²⁹

The metropolis of Wisconsin was not alone in this boasting for a Crawfordsville editor stood ready to bet his *pile* that Lew Wallace's Zouaves were the best drilled company in the state of Indiana.³⁰ In this he had support from an Indianapolis observer at the 1860 encampment who praised the "Arab performance" of the Zouaves and proclaimed them "a little ahead of anything similar seen in *these parts*."³¹ A Lafayette editor was more impartial when he included all the companies participating in the Tippecanoe encampment of 1859 declaring that, "The military science displayed in the drills, parades and evolutions, is worthy of all praise."³²

The encampment at which these evolutions occurred was one of the outstanding events of the history of volunteer companies. In 1859 Lafayette, combining the appeal of the Tippecanoe Battle ground with the interest in an Independence celebration, announced an inter-state military encampment. The youth of the city began preparations in the spring of 1859. A gun squad, armament one cannon,³³ and a company of husars were formed.³⁴ These organizations were welcomed as supports to existing companies, the Teutonic Rifles and the Lexington Guards. Volunteers drilled six days a week while the gun squad made as much noise as possible with the lone cannon, and the Teutonic Rifles secured a little taste of active service through a raid on a camp of thieving gypsies.³⁵ Citizens raised money to aid the local companies and the newspapers promised that the fete would be "the most brilliant and pleasing ever held in the middle west."³⁶

²⁹ Milwaukee *Daily Sentinel*, Aug. 4, 1857.

³⁰ Crawfordsville *Review*, Aug. 7, 1858.

³¹ Indianapolis *Daily Journal*, Sept. 22, 1860.

³² Lafayette *Daily Courier*, July 5, 1859.

³³ *Ibid.*, June 20, 1859.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, June 22, 1859.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, June 20, 1859.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, July 1, 1859.

Twelve military companies from Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Kentucky attended the encampment.⁸⁷ The railroads in addition to giving reduced fares had the train crews arrange decorations of flowers, flags and evergreens on the locomotive, all of which was done according to the reporter with "exquisite taste."⁸⁸ The program alone occupied a column in the local paper. The afternoon and evening of July first was taken up with the reception of visiting companies by the Lafayette military and July second was given over to a trip to the Tippecanoe Battle-ground where Henry S. Lane was the speaker of the day. July third was the Sabbath and the day was observed in Lafayette, representatives from various colleges of the state presiding at the meetings. The climax of the encampment came on July Fourth when the companies under general command of H. W. Ellsworth, famous Zouave commander from Chicago, with Lew Wallace second in command, performed before the crowds. The military evolutions were only incidental, however, for the poet laureate of the occasion recited an original poem lasting over one hour. Following this recital the Honorable Thomas Corwin of Ohio, speaker of the day, announced that he was too ill to speak, after which he proceeded to edify his hearers for more than two hours.⁸⁹ Then to remind the audience that this was a military encampment, a Louisville company presented the intricacies of Zouave drill.

The climax of the celebration came with the great soiree and festival of Monday night where music was furnished by military bands and "a thousand burners reflected their radiance on the beauty and chivalry." Socially and oratorically the encampment was a complete success, but its military achievements were somewhat less evident. The story of this encampment as well as that of inter-city visits and dress parades indicate that the companies themselves were much more interested in self expression than in efficiency. Drill was incidental to display, and no mimic war complete unless there were crinolined ladies in the offing.

One evidence of this very casual interest in efficiency is evidenced by the character and results of target practice. The Indianapolis Grays marched to their target-shooting escorting

⁸⁷ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 7, 1859.

⁸⁸ *Lafayette Daily Courier*, July 5, 1859.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, July 5, 1859.

a target borne by a giant negro. Of the target shooting at one hundred yards, a writer complains that "the distance was entirely too short for the long range of the new rifle guns. They could have done much better at two or three hundred yards."⁴⁰ The target practice of the same company eight months later does not impress the editor. The attendance was small and if some of the shooting was very good some of it was very poor.⁴¹ The Indianapolis Guards were equally deficient as marksmen. Shooting at a target eighteen inches in diameter at a range of eighty yards, they achieved rather startling results: "Some hit the ground fifty feet in front, some hit eight foot up the tree, some hit the fence five feet on either side; a good many more hit the tree close about the target."⁴² But no one made a bull's-eye, and, despite editorial qualifications, the shooting was disconcertingly inaccurate for a group of young men but one generation removed from the frontier.

We dwell on this ineffectiveness because it indicates that the companies in general had slight interest in the professional side of military training. These companies had little or no instruction in musketry; and bayonets, often gold tipped, were looked upon as highly ornamental rather than useful. Certain Zouave companies, such as the Ellsworth Zouaves of Chicago developed real proficiency with the bayonet, as did some of the rest of the militia companies but the general average in such work was very low. The trip of the Milwaukee Light Guards to the East in 1859 and the really superlative exhibition of the Chicago Zouaves in their tour of the country in 1860 gave a false impression of the general situation. There is a note of eloquent exaggeration in this comment of the *New York Herald* on the visit of the Milwaukee Company to that city: "It is thus we do up our military matters in this country. We have a million men in arms, all volunteers and soldiers *con amore*—and all without expense to the government. We have a million and a half just such well drilled men as these regularly enrolled in the U. S."⁴³

The fact is, however, that most companies were neither well drilled nor disciplined. Even state militia companies became insubordinate and during the same year the *Herald* was

⁴⁰ *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, Aug. 15, 1859.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, April 26, 1860.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1857.

⁴³ *New York Herald*, July 12, 1859.

indulging its paeon of praise, a New York Highland regiment threatened mutiny because it could not wear kilts and was placated only when the governor surrendered to the extent of allowing plaid trousers.⁴⁴

Volunteer companies were sometimes disrupted by racial conflicts, by disagreements as to the election of officers and often by refusal to partake in a celebration because not awarded a place of honor in a parade. Indianapolis and Lafayette companies were fair weather companies and generally called off drill when it rained. They gave the amateur rather than the professional soldier's reason, for they held it would spoil their uniforms, but neglected to add that bedraggled plumes would not appeal to the fair sex. The *Military Gazette* recognized some of the limitations of the volunteer company when it declared that, "Fancy parades and too many excursions tell in the long run on our military organizations."⁴⁵

The professional observer was the first to display the critical attitude, but the spectator was not slow to follow his lead. The onlooker was especially critical of the pomp and pride of the volunteer companies. Organizations were formed to burlesque the actions of the volunteers. The Irishtown Rangers marched to target practice carrying augers for weapons, inspired by the music of hand organs and tin trumpets. Leslie's ran a series of cartoons on the volunteer soldier. One of these cartoons pictured a volunteer armed to the teeth and arrayed in all the characteristic pomp and splendor of the time. Nearby stood two small boys. One addressed the other: "Hi, Bill! Here's one of the rifle corpses! Let him shoot at you for a penny. I seen him a practicing at the mark."⁴⁶

A journalist in Ohio offered a broadsword as a prize to the heaviest man mustering with the Falstaff Guards.⁴⁷ In New York the Fat Man's Guard held an occasional parade displaying as the central attraction a corpulent negro target bearer. Sometimes the most serious endeavors afforded considerable of the burlesque. "Corporal" writing to the *Military Gazette* in 1860 described a military convention in Cincinnati: "As usual on such occasions we had a superfluity of epaulettes to a modicum of muskets—the officers came very

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Jan. 7, 1859.

⁴⁵ *Military Gazette*, Nov. 15, 1860.

⁴⁶ *Leslie's Weekly*, June 2, 1860.

⁴⁷ *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, Sept. 4, 1858.

near entirely masking the rank and file. To command all told, about 200 men, there was a Major General and staff, two Brigadier Generals and staff, a Lieutenant Colonel, a Major; and I don't know how many Captains and Subalterns."

Some of the officers, "Corporal" held, were neither ornamental nor useful. Not one was equipped according to his grade. Not one had a decently caparisoned horse. The privates in the independent companies were well supplied with swords and epaulettes and in some cases quite out-dressed their officers, who in some instances had resorted to the regalia of a local lodge. As the witness avers, the result was picturesque but unmilitary.⁴⁸

Not all the organizations were so inefficient. Included in the militia companies of the various states were well organized regiments such as the New York Seventh or the Massachusetts Eighth. Among independent companies there was the really unique and spectacular organization—the Chicago Zouaves. This company was known earlier as the National Guard Cadets, but was reorganized into a Zouave company by Colonel Ellsworth—killed during the Civil War while hauling down a Confederate flag at Alexandria. The purposes of the company as stated by the *Chicago Press and Tribune* were "social enjoyment and physical education." From the time that Ellsworth took command the organization was under severe discipline. Drill was held from three to six times a week and shirkers were quickly dropped from the company. The "Golden Rule" was adopted, the cadets taking pledge not to enter a public, billiard, drinking or gambling hall while members of the company. When not in uniform they were to wear badges of membership so that the public could know them and judge of their conduct. Such regulations were noteworthy for a period when convivial celebrations were the rule. Moreover, the rules were rigidly enforced. Twelve men were expelled on one occasion for failure to live up to their pledges. The regulations were indubitably onerous and only the personality of Ellsworth coupled with the prospect of a long tour of the East kept the men in line.⁴⁹

When the company began its much heralded trip there were only forty-seven survivors out of an original group of

⁴⁸ *Military Gazette*, March 1, 1860.

⁴⁹ H. H. Miller, *Reminiscences of Chicago during the Civil War*, p. 21.

two hundred. These men had been selected on the same principle that a football coach selects the members of his team. They were required to keep rigid training rules.⁵⁰ Before beginning the tour, they drilled three hours every night for six nights a week. The regulation movements were only a small part of their program, gymnastic stunts and extremely intricate evolutions being also included in their nightly drills.

Newspapers of rival cities commented on the bizarre and unorthodox uniforms of the Zouaves in the caustic phrases that were characteristic of the period, but once they saw the Zouaves from Chicago, they generously acknowledged their error. They came to jeer; they remained to cheer. After the drill occurred in New York City, the *Herald* proclaimed: "The military furore has reached its climax. The gentle muses are dethroned. Mars is now celebrated!!! No company in the world could compete with the Chicago Zouaves." *Leslie's Weekly* of June 28, 1860, declared that they "moved with an ease of motion, a kind of dashing confidence and elasticity which we do not see in any of our companies." *Harper's Weekly* of the same date carried a full page of cartoons celebrating the gymnastic feats of Ellsworth's company. The cartoons represent members of the company scaling walls without ladders, crossing rivers without bridges, skirmishing in a morass on stilts, and accepting the chances of the battlefield by successfully dodging cannonballs.

On another page of the *Weekly*, Harper's bard bursts forth with the following:

THE ZOUAVES

Your Zouave corps, O haughty France!
 We looked on as a wild romance,
 And many a one was heard to scoff
 At Algiers and at Malakoff;
 Nor did we Yankees credit quite
 Their evolutions in the fight.
 But now we're very sure what they
 Have done can here be done to-day,
 When thus before our sight deploys
 The gallant corps from Illinois,—American Zouaves!

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

When General Hardee criticized the company for being showy and without practicable training, Ellsworth drilled "according to Hardee" and then "according to Scott," in the best West Point manner. Everywhere the Zouaves received an ovation. When in the course of their tour, they arrived at Washington, they were reviewed by no less a person than President Buchanan.

When the company returned to Chicago in September, 1860, the men and their leader were greeted with the acclaim accorded a conquering army. Regulations were ignored when the company marched to the Wigwam, where Lincoln had been nominated some weeks earlier. The men were loaded with the spoils of conquest including highly decorated fatigue caps, epaulettes, plumes, badges, medals and cartridge-boxes. The city turned out as for a gala day while the reporters celebrated the event in resonant prose and fervent verse of the ante-bellum vintage.

One month later the Zouaves disbanded. The reaction from the strain of constant drill, and the inability of Ellsworth to give the company his undivided attention were the immediate causes. Incidentally they were following the example of other companies. Everywhere the Volunteers were disappearing while military "fans" were writing letters to the press asking for an explanation or for reassurance. The *Military Gazette* held that the spending of time and money on long trips and the over emphasis on showy uniforms were the causes for the decline of the companies. There is evidence in the newspapers of more impelling causes. In 1859-1860 we find announcements of cricket and baseball games, and there was apparent an increasing interest in rowing and boxing. The new sports required a smaller number of participants, were more competitive in spirit, and had an appeal to individual initiative that attracted American youth. Indiana papers now carried notices of meetings of the Wide-Awakes where formerly dress parades of the military were announced. The College Cadets of Wabash College ceased drill in the early summer of 1860 because it was too hot. Indianapolis volunteer companies were disbanded and in Lafayette interest lagged after the great encampment of 1859.

The decadence of the voluntary company did not mean an aversion to active military service, for many officers and

privates of these companies made enviable records during the Civil War. Ninety-four per cent of the active membership of the Ellsworth Zouaves of 1860 saw service in the war between the states.⁵¹ The Montgomery Guards, College Cadets, Indianapolis Guards and Lafayette Guards made equally good records. The decline of the voluntary military organizations was due not to a decay of the military spirit but to its limitations as a pastime and the high cost of uniforms and equipment.⁵²

The coming of less elaborate sports but more particularly the excitement of the political campaign of 1860 with its stump speeches and torch light processions destroyed interest in the more formal type of drilling and parading. It was much more interesting to join the Wide-Awakes, or a rival marching club where there was a possibility of real hostilities than to maintain the dignified aloofness of a soldier on parade. The political struggle whose outcome presaged something more than mimic battles saw the disappearance of most of the volunteer companies. It was not a military calamity since the amateur company offered little training for the grim business of war. Bright uniforms, military balls, banquets and barbecues were no real preparation for a profession where dealing death and destruction were the objectives. The young man of the fifties was only playing at a game, unconsciously groping towards a national pastime. That it was left to a succeeding generation to develop a permanent national sport was one of the accidents of Fate. War intervened to usurp the time and energy of the young manhood of the sixties. The erstwhile pastime now became a profession. The reward was no longer to be found in the plaudits of the gay throng but rested in the knowledge of the Civil War veterans that they were taking part in the grim game of death whose outcome would determine the fate of the nation.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵² *Kenosha Daily Telegraph*, Nov. 8, 1860.