



The First Border Wall: The Great Militia Mobilization Along the Mexican Border in 1916

Floyd Gibbons

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Floyd Phillips Gibbons (1887 – 1939) was the war correspondent for the Chicago Tribune during the 1916 Mobilization on the Mexican Border, as well as during World War I.

Between June 1915 and June 1916 raiders from Mexico attacked persons on American soil 38 times, resulting in the deaths of 26 soldiers and 11 civilians. Reacting to the Glenn Springs raid, the Army transferred three regiments of regulars to the border and also called up state militia units from Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico on May 8. On June 15, 1916, another attempted raid by Mexican border-crossers, this at San Ygnacio, Texas, 30 miles downstream from Laredo, was repulsed by soldiers with casualties to both sides. As a result, using powers granted by passage of the National Defense Act of 1916, which established the United States National Guard, Wilson on June 18 fully mobilized Guard units from the remainder of the states and the District of Columbia for duty on the border. More than 140,000 National Guard troops were called up,

Guard units participated in three skirmishes at Camp Stephen J. Little on the Arizona border in July 1916. The final action of the three, occurring January 26, 1917, resulted in an all-day border skirmish between Utah cavalymen and Mexicans in which the guardsmen were reinforced and ten Mexicans were killed or wounded. The border security mission proved an excellent training environment for the officers and men of the National Guard, who were again inducted into federal service after the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917.

Gibbons writes:

"September, 1916. WITHOUT a single man killed in action, without a single engagement with an enemy, without the firing of a hostile shot, the armed civilian forces of the United States, numbering approximately 100,000 men, have been drawn up in more or less military array along the nation's border for more than two months. These American citizens left their many homes and families, their jobs, stores, and factories, when war was in the air. A national crisis was at hand—or at least everybody was led to believe that it was. In each troop-train that hurried borderward, guardsmen were hoping and praying that hostilities would not begin until they had reached the firing line. It was a glorious sight for those who believed that one bugle blast from the porte-cochere of the White House and "a million men would spring to arms."

Originally published in 1917; may contain an occasional imperfection.

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