Don't You Know That There's a War On?  
A History of the Kansas State Guard in World War II

by Christopher C. Lovett

Today's National Guard is responsible for maintaining the security of the state during natural disasters and periods of local disturbances. The Guard also functions as a reserve for the U.S. Army. This mission of the National Guard is part of an early American tradition based upon local defense. The origins of this custom can be traced to Henry II's Assize of Arms of 1181, which eventually became the foundation for the Anglo-American colonial militia system. The need for militia service was particularly crucial on the frontier, where the necessity existed to protect both home and loved ones from hostile Indian incursions. As the nation grew, the practice persisted in its peripheral regions. A pertinent question arises: Did the closure of the frontier in 1890 terminate this aspect of the American heritage?

In examining this query, the issue of the emerging police powers of the state must be resolved. One method of ascertaining the impact of this convention in modern America is to study the history of the Kansas State Guard. To most Kansans the State Guard is far from being a household word; but despite its anonymity, the State Guard made a valuable contribution to the total war effort in World Wars I and II by handling those functions normally assigned to the National Guard in peacetime. The responsibilities during World War II were so vast that the Kansas Highway Patrol, which was organized

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Lyon Company stands for inspection during field maneuvers held in the early 1940s.
in 1937, could not adequately guarantee the necessary assistance that state authorities expected. As a consequence, the State Guard was conceived.

The State Guard had its origins in 1917 with the U.S. entry into World War I. In Kansas, following the declaration of war, the governor established the State Council of Defense in Topeka. The purpose of the defense council was, according to Prof. Frank W. Blackmar, "to mobilize all of the resources of the state for the support of the war." Kansas City organized a Home Guard Company, the first of 150 similar units formed in the state.\(^1\)

The State Guard General Orders are in the possession of the Kansas Army National Guard (KSANG) at the State Defense Building in Topeka, Kansas. Outside of the General Orders, the material used can be easily located in the Browne file maintained by the 10th Military History Detachment, KSANG. Only the personal intervention of a concerned citizen, Chief Warrant Officer Carl F. Nelson (ret.), saved the material from complete destruction following the death of Charles H. Browne, Jr.

1. Kansas State Adjutant General, History and Roster of the Kansas State Guard (Topeka: Kansas State Printer, 1925), 5.

The growth of Home Guard units was not only a response to the wave of national paranoia that swept the country following the entry into the European struggle but it served as an instrument to check possible labor agitation in urban areas. Tales of German espionage reported by the press affected most Kansans. The public, in a sudden burst of patriotic zeal, sought German agents at every turn. Naturally, Kansans of German extraction were placed under suspicion, especially if they still retained traces of an accent. The official record of the Kansas State Guard noted in 1925, "Every community had its tales based upon its imaginings of pro-German activities."\(^2\)

In such a milieu, the Home Guard evolved. A major problem for the organizers was that no one had any previous military experience, and as a consequence, military order and discipline were usually absent. Of course this had a detrimental effect upon

2. Ibid.
the utility of the Home Guard. Also, the sponsors wished to keep any resemblance to the army at a minimum. In 1917, recruitment materials manifested this phenomenon stating that the Home Guard "is a civilian organization and has no connection with the military service of the state of Kansas or the United States." A table of organization for the Home Guard reflected a loose structure that matched the prevailing philosophy of the time. The Kansas Defense Council, when it established the Home Guard, proposed that each company should have a commander, surgeon, recorder, and treasurer. Mayors had the authority to nominate company commanders. In other localities, county sheriffs received similar powers.3

Local patriotic groups were encouraged to have their members join the Home Guard, and drill was conducted weekly at specific locations. The State of Kansas made every effort to keep the Home Guard provisioned. Congress simplified the task on June 14 when it voted to supply arms to Home Guard formations. Furthermore, Gov. Arthur Capper requested on September 26 that the War Department supply one hundred rifles for the Kansas City company. The unit needed the arms to provide security in the industrial sections of the city. The original appeal was returned, and the state was advised to forward to Washington estimates of the actual number of rifles required to arm all the units in the state. Kansas delayed its recommendations until after the Home Guard was disbanded and replaced by a permanent organization.4

The Home Guard failed to meet the needs of the state of Kansas, since it would not serve beyond the specific geographic boundaries in which the unit was organized. Consequently, another body had to be created that could fulfill the mission of the National Guard while it was in federal service. The logical solution was the Kansas State Guard, which was created by an executive order signed by Governor Capper on February 15, 1918. State Guardsmen were now subject to call-ups and could serve anywhere within the state. Because of local, and possibly anti-military, bias most of the Home Guardsmen did not reenlist and were mustered out on that date.5

Nevertheless, recruitment enabled the State Guard to form 281 companies, with an average company composed of sixty-five men for an effective total strength of approximately twenty thousand. Members in the State Guard did not necessarily fulfill a recruit's military obligation under the provisions of Selective Service. Officially, guardsmen "joined the organization to benefit by such military instruction as might be imparted by its officers." Training was conducted during weekly drills on both company and battalion levels. An obvious problem was the issuance of arms, always in short supply. Fortunately, with the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, the War Department had a surplus of weapons held from shipment and available for distribution to the states, pending final disposition with the Russian government. These the War Department finally issued, and Kansas received 1,275 rifles. In time, a number of the weapons reached the hands of select State Guard formations on a trial basis. It was soon discovered that guardsmen abused and damaged many of the rifles eventually forcing their recall on April 30, 1919.6

Meanwhile, on May 4, 1918, the War Department informed the state of Kansas that it was authorized to form two regiments of National Guard infantry. The War Department's reasons for this were twofold: one, it still indicated dissatisfaction with the State Guard, and two, it assisted in the transition to peace-

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 5.
5. Ibid., 6-7.
6. Ibid., 15.
time needs following the end of the war. It was hoped this could be accomplished through the active enlistment of State Guardsmen. Since the new units would not be sent to France, it was assumed that this would spur recruitment. National Guard officials were shocked when enlistment figures were lower than originally anticipated. The office of the adjutant general claimed, “In some localities of the state in which recruiting for the National Guard was begun there was evidence of an undercurrent of antagonism on the part of officers and enlisted men of the State Guard.” Much of the anti-Guard sentiment stemmed from direct loyalty to the State Guard and an inherent distrust of the National Guard as a pillar of the nation’s military ethic. Consequently, only six companies entered National Guard service. Gov. Henry J. Allen responded by demobilizing the State Guard on November 11, 1919.7

During World War I, the State Guard furnished valuable service by actively promoting the general war effort. In addition to drills, it provided assistance in Liberty Bond drives, Red Cross work, patriotic parades and security details, and acted as a safety valve for the state’s nationalistic spirit. This was accomplished without financial reward. In the course of those duties, all expenses were usually paid through either personal or civic contributions. Thus, the need for the State Guard came to an end with the demobilization of November 11, 1919. Although the State Guard was mothballed, the organizational structure was available should the need arise again for mobilization.8

The next occasion for the services of the State Guard occurred well before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. On December 23, 1940, as a consequence of the increasing tension in Europe, the National Guard was federalized. The logical response to the crisis came from the Kansas legislature with the passage of the State Guard Act of April 15, 1941. Under this legislation, the Kansas State Guard consisted of one regiment of infantry divided into companies and battalions. The regiment was designated as the First Infantry Regiment of the Kansas State Guard, and its authorized strength was not to exceed thirty-three companies.9

In many ways the State and National guards were a study in contrasts. One striking difference was that the State Guard was not subject to call-up.

Col. Charles H. Browne, shown in 1932, was appointed to command the First Regiment of the Kansas State Guard after medical results excluded him from active duty in the National Guard.

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
and federal authorities considered the State Guard as "solely a state military organization." But membership in the State Guard did not exclude an individual from his Selective Service obligation. The War Department's 1941 regulations, however, clearly stated that "the State authority concerned should provide for the prompt discharge from the State Guard of such of its members as are inducted, enlisted, or otherwise engaged in the active military service of the United States." The principal change occurred only after World War II when Congress passed the Selective Service Act of 1948, which functioned as a tool to replenish the reserve components. A young man then wishing to avoid Selective Service could join either the Reserves or the National Guard in lieu of two years active duty in the U.S. Army.

Despite the unique features of the State Guard, the secretary of war remained basically in charge of the training, organization, and supply of State Guard units "while any part of the National Guard of the State concerned is in active federal service." The authority for establishing and maintaining a State Guard was found in Article I, Section 10, clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution. Soldiers in State Guard units were considered legitimate combatants and were covered under the rules of war. Likewise, their personal affairs fell within the jurisdiction of the state in which they resided in terms of obligations to creditors and other civic responsibilities directed by the state.

When the Kansas National Guard was federalized and sent to Camp Robinson, Arkansas, on December 28, 1940, many of the senior officers were declared unfit for active duty following their physical examinations. This caused quite a stir, particularly when Col. Charles H. Browne, Sr., the commander of the 137th Infantry, was rejected. Colonel Browne did not accept this decision lying down and appealed the medical officers' verdict; consequently, he received another physical at Walter Reed Army Hospital. The findings there, as at Camp Robinson, were the same—unfit for further military service because of hypertension due to hardening of the arteries.

But Colonel Browne's military career was far from over. The State Military Board appointed him on May 8 to the post of commanding officer of the First Regiment of the Kansas State Guard. This also coincided with the start of an active recruitment campaign which culminated with the creation of eight battalions of thirty-three companies for the Kansas State Guard. The state adjutant general, M. R. McLean, indicated that the state was seeking volunteers between the ages of twenty-one and fifty. The manpower level of the new State Guard was set at 1,360 men and 120 officers. Each company was to be located at a site of a National Guard armory. Unlike regular army and National Guard companies, State Guard units were designated according to their locality. Dodge City, Horton, Garden City, and Hiawatha became the first municipalities to have recruiting officers. The Holton Signal claimed on May 15, "No effort will be made to enlist young men of draft age who might later be called into active service although they are not barred." Apparently, the ideal recruits for the State Guard were veterans of World War I and former National Guardsmen or

11. Ibid.
Posing for the camera of the Coffeyville Journal are "fifth columnists" apprehended during training exercises in October 1941.

personnel with CMTC (Campus Military Training Corps) and ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) experience.\textsuperscript{13}

The recruiting drive, which began in early May, was well under way. Age requirements differed between the ranks. For those seeking commissions as officers, the maximum age was sixty-four, while those in the enlisted ranks were expected to be between the ages of twenty-one and fifty. Age restrictions varied, like the results of the physical examinations, during the course of the war to meet manpower needs. In terms of supply, the State Military Board was obligated to furnish uniforms and arms to the State Guard. At times this caused considerable confusion. According to Army Regulations 850-250, "The uniform prescribed and furnished by the state for its State guard should be unmistakably different from that of any Federal military force and from that heretofore authorized for certain units of the National Guard of the several States." Also, the uniform designated was to be marked in such a way as to clearly identify the wearer as a member of the State Guard. The State Guard was not to compete with the War Department in the procurement of uniforms. This even included the selection of sleeve braid. The Kansas State Guard could choose any color other than brown, gold, yellow, black, and forest green to be "worn on all overcoats, coats and shirts." The Kansas State Guard selected two uniforms. The summer dress uniform was composed of cotton khaki with a black tie. On the left shoulder, a blue-and-yellow patch was worn to signify membership in the State Guard. The Fruehauf Southwest Uniform Company of Wichita produced the green gabardine winter uniform. A green-and-yellow triangular patch was used with this uniform. Enlisted brass

Riot control was an important phase of instruction at Hutchinson and Topeka summer encampments.
Members of the Wyandotte Company take time to relax during the Topeka summer encampment of 1942.

was taken from surplus stocks from the pre-1917 period. On the other hand, a Kansas City, Missouri, firm, the Green Jewelry Company, designed and manufactured the officers’ brass.¹⁴

Kansas officials ultimately hoped to attract former veterans and National Guard personnel to the ranks of the Kansas State Guard, but the organization was not totally closed to other interested parties. Those wishing to join the State Guard were urged to attend organizational meetings held at their local armories. The typical company was composed of three officers—a captain, a first lieutenant, and a second lieutenant—and forty enlisted men. The object was to complete the recruitment as quickly as possible so that physicals, uniforms, and other necessary equipment could be ordered. Physicians who performed physicals received a dollar per applicant. Although state authorities originally notified recruits that they should not expect compensation unless the State Guard was activated, the legislature did make some form of monetary contribution in recognition of guard service. To underscore this point, the Topeka Daily Capital earlier claimed, “No pay will be allowed unless the State Guard is called into active service, then the pay will be the same provided for officers and men of comparable rank in the United States Army.” The Kansas legislature made a conscious effort to arrange financial remuneration for State Guard personnel. In March 1943, a pay increase that covered grades E-1 through O-3 was authorized to go into effect after July 1 of that year. This applied to those who participated in weekly drills for no less than one and a half hours for no more than five training periods per month. For such service, a private could expect $5.60, a corporal $8.00, a second lieutenant $12.50, and a captain $25.00.¹⁵

By the end of May 1941, twenty-one states, mainly in the West, had organized State Guard elements. An additional eight states were in the process of establishing units of their own. According to War Department sources, “the status of each member is that of a lawful belligerent as a soldier in the military service of his state.”¹⁶ As a consequence, military specialists designed instruction to meet the specific mission and tasks established for the State Guard. Unit commanders were responsible for directing the training sequence to meet that objective on the local level. As in all military units, the battalion and company commanders were accountable for maintaining the appropriate levels of discipline and morale among their troops.¹⁷

One of the odddest moments in the history of the State Guard occurred when the War Department recalled the Guard’s weapons on April 11, 1942. The War Department’s decision came because of the Allied rifle shortage. The action of the War Department affected not only the State Guard throughout the country but also the National Rifle Association, whose members purchased surplus 1903 Springfields and 1917 Enfields, and regular Military Police (MP) units.¹⁸ Both MP and State Guard battalions obtained shotguns. According to the War Department, shot:

¹⁴. General Orders, No. 2, April 28, 1941; General Orders, No. 1, April 15, 1941, 2; “Recruiting for Home Guards,” Topeka Daily Capital, May 5, 1941.


¹⁶. “State Guard Units to Meet Minimum Army Training Requirements,” War Department, Bureau of Public Relations, May 22, 1941, 1.

¹⁷. Ibid., 2; “Preference to Military Men in Topeka Unit of State Guard,” Topeka Daily Capital, May 8, 1941.

¹⁸. General Orders, No. 4, June 11, 1943, 1.
guns would “fully meet their requirements.” Colonel Browne addressed this problem in a memorandum sent to all State Guard units from his Horton headquarters. He indicated that the Military Police had already been issued riot guns and it was possible that the State Guard would shortly receive similar weapons. The Paola company turned in its forty rifles, and in the interim, the local American Legion Post agreed to allow the use of ten Krag rifles for training purposes. Finally, the Paola unit acquired an additional twenty-five rifles from a Spanish-American War veterans organization. Despite these efforts, the company remained equipped with shotguns. A typical Kansas State Guard company was furnished with thirty-eight shotguns and two Thompson submachine guns.

Company-level training occurred during weekly drills. A typical Monday evening assembly in Sabetha, for example, included scouting and patrolling in a combat environment as well as a lecture on chemical warfare by Corp. M. V. Chase, a chemistry teacher from the local high school. The following week the Sabetha company implemented its newfound skills in solving a tactical problem, which according to the Sabetha Herald was to be conducted “under simulated combat conditions . . . if weather permits.” This included scouting and patrolling; “extended order deployment and advancing on an enemy will be put into practice by the men.”

It appeared that regimental headquarters at Horton established the weekly training schedules. All the units in the Kansas State Guard, for instance, covered a similar instructional format at roughly the same time.

Special courses were provided for the professional enrichment of officers and enlisted personnel. These classes reviewed a wide range of subjects designed to improve training on the company and battalion levels. A one-day educational session convened in

22. Ibid.; Miami Republican, April 17, 1942.
Topeka on May 3, 1942, at the capitol. All officers were expected to attend. The cost of the class was paid by the Kansas State Guard, with officers receiving five dollars per day and three cents a mile for transportation to and from Topeka. The adjutant general’s office provided room and board. The State Guard not only established professional training facilities but also held test mobilizations to maintain training at peak levels.

On December 9, 1941, following the declaration of war, Colonel Browne ordered the first statewide test mobilization. Telegrams were sent to all battalion commanders:

You are directed to order test mobilization without expense all units your battalion Tuesday, December 9, 1 to 5 p.m., with guard details established at utilities and other facilities essential to National Defense. No prior publicity desired. Company commanders will telegraph regimental headquarters that evening number of officers and men mobilized, with written report in duplicate forward the following day.—Browne, Colonel.

Almost everyone took part in the exercise. Gov. Payne Ratner cancelled his scheduled activities, including ground-breaking ceremonies at the Jayhawk Ordnance Plant at Pittsburg. Ratner called in leading state officials to ascertain what could be done to insure the security of the state. Brig. Gen. Robert C. Rodgers, commanding general of Fort Riley, suggested that the “most vulnerable points” in the state were bridges. Consequently, the Kansas State Guard was assigned the duty during the mobilization to secure highway bridges and protect vital defense industries, utilities, and railroads from a simulated enemy attack.

A direct result of the mobilization was an expansion of the State Guard, with additional units established in Topeka and Wichita. Simultaneously, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson sent a telegram to Governor Ratner warning him of possible fifth column activities within the state during the Christmas holidays. Ratner informed the press that “the State Guard would be on duty but would not be mobilized in uniform.”

State Guard units conducted their own exercises on the battalion and company levels. These drills were used primarily to maintain morale and to dramatize the need for increased professionalism in the ranks. One exercise, no doubt common to other Kansas State Guard units, occurred at Lake Shawnee east of Topeka on April 12, 1942. The cooperation of the Civil Air Patrol highlighted the maneuvers when, during the early phase of the exercise, Capt. St. Elmo Else took it upon himself to attack the battalion command post with flour-sack “bombs.” According to press reports, “some of Kansas’ best military minds” were wiped out, including Colonel Browne and Gen. C. I. Martin, the assistant adjutant general. Local guardsmen failed to recognize the plane as hostile and notified the pilot by signal to “drop a message.” The message received was not what the guardsmen expected—“surrender at once,” followed by a series of four flour-sack bombs which were scored as direct hits on the command post. In criticizing the air raid, Colonel Browne noted that rifle fire would have been more effective as a deterrent than the concentrated fire of machine guns. Browne claimed, “They [the riflemen] would fire into the motor; they would shoot the pilot in the cockpit.”

Not all State Guard activities were devoted solely to military training, but in times of civil emergencies the Kansas State Guard was there to fill in while the Kansas National Guard was at war. For example, mobilization took place for the Dodge City, Garden City, and Great Bend companies on April 28 to respond to the flood along the Arkansas River. The cresting of the Arkansas presented a clear danger to those communities in the flood’s path, for the waters were higher than they had been in 1921 and even reached the Dodge City Armory floor. Through the efforts of the Dodge City company, two hundred homes were evacuated. The Great Bend company helped rescue roughly one hundred families and aided local police and the Highway Patrol in policing the roads and checking the levees along the river. To alleviate the strain and tension among Guard personnel, units worked a schedule of four hours on and four hours off duty. The Great Bend Tribune noted the popularity of the Kansas State Guard. According to the Tribune, “only one man in the unit did not report.”

The first summer drills for the Kansas State Guard were held at Topeka’s fairgrounds and at the State Fair facilities in Hutchinson. The first, second, third,
and fourth battalions were assigned to Topeka for five days of training; the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth battalions were sent to Hutchinson. While attending annual training, guardsmen were put through four days of physical exercise, familiarization and firing of shotguns and Thompson submachine guns, chemical warfare training, use of hand grenades, and domestic disturbance classes. Regular army instructors conducted most of the training. The troops at the Topeka camp were fortunate in one respect: women from the Perry Methodist Church under contract to the State of Kansas provided KP.29

At Hutchinson, the training was identical to that at Topeka. The cadre who managed the Topeka camp traveled with “strong-jawed” Colonel Browne to Hutchinson where, from accounts in the Hutchinson News, “Blistered feet and painful sunburn proved they [the guardsmen] are not hardened soldiers yet.” The atmosphere was strictly professional. An intensive period of training took place each day. Every officer and enlisted man stood guard duty as well as fired his weapon, “first at clay pigeons, then...at small parachutes flung from an airplane.” According to the local newspapers, an important objective of training was “to teach the men to be tough.”30

By 1943 the character of the annual encampments began to change. The training period was extended to a full week, and the division of the regiment into two separate training facilities came to an end. That summer, the full regiment trained at the State Fairgrounds in Hutchinson. The reforms that started in 1943 continued until the conclusion of the war. In 1944 and 1945, annual training was held at Camp Whiteside, Fort Riley, with rifles replacing shotguns in 1945. By 1946 the utility of the State Guard was nearing an end. The war was over, units returned from overseas, and troops were demobilized. The summer training that year was considered “field training,” which may have been indicative of the future role of the Kansas State Guard.31

During the war years the strength of the Kansas State Guard remained relatively stable. By May 31, 1946, the force level of the State Guard stood at 180 officers and 1,156 enlisted men. On January 1, 1947, the First Regiment of the Kansas State Guard was redesignated as the First Infantry Group. Colonel Browne was duly promoted to the rank of brigadier general, fitting compensation for not being assigned to a combat unit. On June 30, 1948, the Kansas State Guard held its last formation.32

The State Guard played a vital role in the success of the war effort. As an organization it was responsible for continuing the duties that were long considered a part of the National Guard. The State Guard’s presence reassured the civil population that they were protected and consequently helped eliminate the wave of local paranoia that occurred in World War I. The State Guard also furnished a useful outlet for those individuals who wished to serve their country but for some reason were unable otherwise to do so. More importantly, the State Guard’s creation indicated that the frontier ethic of providing local security persisted in an age of total war. The legacy of General Browne still is being analyzed in Washington and Topeka for future applicability to insure citizen welfare in future crises.33