

CHAPTER III

GUARDING PUBLIC UTILITIES AT THE OUTBREAK OF WAR



WHEN our participation in the World War became imminent, it was recognized that there were internal problems of law and order to be met. From 1914 to 1917, there had existed in our country strong and opposing feelings in relation to the outcome of the war. It was known that the German government maintained a paid staff of propagandists to cultivate sentiments of sympathy for Germany in her struggle with the Allied powers. This propaganda was supplemented by the activities of agents who did not stop at attempts to cultivate pro-German and anti-British sentiment. It became apparent that it was their duty by violence or other means to cause as much damage as possible to the interests of the Allies. This latter activity took the form of destruction of ships laden or about to be laden with war material for shipment overseas, of the sinking of barges transporting remounts for overseas use and of the setting fire to plants of various kinds that were manufacturing war supplies for the Allies.

It was recognized of course that while a substantial percentage of the population of America was of German extraction, the loyalty to their adopted country of the great majority was above question. Nevertheless, so partisan in their justification of the German cause had some of the minority become that prudence demanded preparedness to meet any internal problems that might arise when our government threw in its lot with the Allies for the restraint of the Central Empires.

The city of New York presented a number of grave problems in relation to this subject of possible internal disorder. New York City, the metropolis of America, with a population of more than five millions of people, was dependent for its very life upon the non-interruption of the stream of necessaries which continuously flowed into it. These necessaries were food, fuel and water. Hundreds of trains daily emptied their vast stores of supplies into the city of New York over lines of railroad, which like the spokes of a wheel in relation to the hub, converged upon the city. These roads supplemented by the coastal steamers not only furnished the city with its supplies, but they carried to it great stores of raw material and finished products for shipment overseas. Any interruption of this system even for a few hours would entail very appreciable results. An interruption for a matter of several days would cause suffering to the population and affect the progress of the war. The consumption of water in the city of New York amounted in 1914 to 580,000,000 gallons per day. Damage to the great aqueducts which carried the water from Ashokan and other sources in the Catskill Mountains to the local storage basins of the city would in a short while endanger the safety of the city

by impairing, through lack of water, the ability to fight fire. The fire installation of the city of New York is dependent upon the fresh water system of the city and is not adaptable to the use of the salt water of the East or Hudson River.

On February 3, 1917, which was about two months before the United States entered the war, John Purroy Mitchel, Mayor of the city of New York, made demand upon the Governor of the state of New York for troops to guard the public utilities of the city of New York. On the same day the Governor issued a special order containing this demand and directing the Commanding General of the National Guard and the Commandant of the Naval Militia to issue orders placing the 1st and 10th Regiments of Infantry and the 1st and 2d Battalions of Naval Militia on duty for the purpose mentioned. A copy of this order is included in the Appendix as Exhibit 8.

The organizations mentioned were by telegraph ordered to mobilize the same day. The 1st Infantry was to secure that part of the Aqueduct between Great Neck on the east bank of the Hudson River, two miles north of Cold Spring, to the influent chamber at Kensico, six miles west of Tarrytown. The 10th Infantry, less a detachment to cover the Brooklyn water supply on Long Island, was ordered to secure the Aqueduct on the west bank of the Hudson, from the western uptake of the St. Elmo syphon at Moodna Shaft, opposite Cold Spring, to the Ashokan Lake. The regimental commanders were advised that the character of this service would necessitate the use of small guard detachments and patrols, which would make necessary a system of boarding the men locally, similar to the billeting practice abroad. The winter of 1916-17 was a severe one and the climate in the highlands of the Hudson and in the Catskill Mountains during February and March was most severe. The Naval Militia were employed in guarding the bridges over the East River.

The prompt dispatch of these troops at this time for the protection of the public utilities of the city produced a profound impression upon all. It was evidence that the people of New York, at least, anticipated war and were ready to take care of any local situation that might arise. The service of these troops was necessarily disagreeable at that time of the year and permitted no opportunity for training. The duty was satisfactorily performed and there were no incidents indicating that any real attempt was made to damage the water supply.

The sudden and unexpected action of the troops in taking over the protection of this and other public utilities had served its purpose. When the troops on guard were relieved for concentration after the declaration of war, they should have been replaced by state or municipal police or watchmen specially organized for the purpose. Obviously any attempt to damage public utilities would have to be executed by malefactors employing stealth and to frustrate their attempts by the employment of troops was unnecessarily expensive. Nevertheless troops, federal or state, with their buglers, orderlies, field officers, cooks and what not

having no relation to the job in hand, were continued on this duty throughout the war.

The service of the two regiments mentioned above continued until April 9th, when the President called into the service of the United States the 23d New York Infantry, which was directed to relieve the 1st Infantry in its sector. Nothing is known of the reason for this action, unless it was based upon a plan to have the expense of guarding these utilities made a federal expense instead of an expense upon the city of New York. The expense of maintaining the 1st and 10th Infantry placed on duty by the Governor of the state was borne by the city of New York pursuant to the state law. When the President ordered out the 23d Infantry and directed it to take over the sector then held by the 1st Infantry, the expense of maintaining the 23d Infantry necessarily became a federal charge. However, the President had the same authority over the 1st Infantry that he had over the 23d, and by calling out the former regiment, which was already on the ground and familiar with the condition, money would have been saved and a great deal of unnecessary effort conserved.

The situation was later on further involved by the War Department when additional infantry regiments of New York were called into the active federal service and detailed to guard railways throughout the state, but without any brigadier general to coordinate their work or supervise their discipline. All this was attempted to be done by the authorities at Governors Island, who were dealing at the same time with the troops of numerous other states similarly employed. Needless to say discipline relaxed and there was much waste of time and effort, the effects of which were noticeable for some time after the units rejoined the division.

In the Appendix as Exhibit 9 will be found a table showing the units called out prior to July 15, 1917, and the character of service performed, as well as a table of units called out under the call of July 15, 1917.

