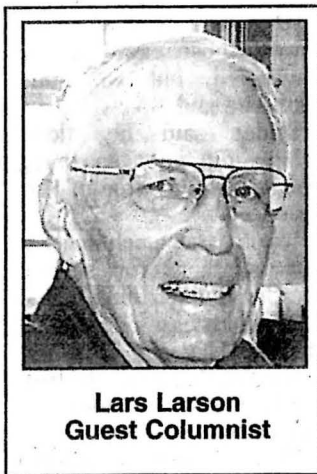


# Washburn's naval militia 8/19/10

In April 1909 the Wisconsin legislature, in common with several other states bordering on the oceans or the Great Lakes, created a state militia battalion composed of four companies. On February 28 1912 a company was organized in Washburn with 60 members and Herbert H. Peavey as commander. Among the original members were Amos Hansen, Carl Ungrodt, Olaf Olson, Harvey DeMars, Jay Fletcher, Asa Willey, Hiram Hansen, and George Walters, men who would become well known in the community in future years.

The company met ever Wednesday evening on the second floor of the Town Hall, which was leased from the city. The jail and hose house occupied the first floor. Uniforms and 60 Springfield rifles were soon received to outfit the company, but a "28 foot cutter" and a "28 foot whaleboat," and a "3 inch gun" and a "gatling gun" (an early machine gun), which the company was supposed to receive, apparently were never delivered. The militia members renovated the rooms of the second floor of the Town Hall, which was now know as the armory. They also put in a new hardware floor in the drill hall, paid for with the proceeds from a "grand ball" held at the opera hall. A furnace, donated by the Barksdale Works manager, was also



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installed. The two front rooms of the first floor of the armory were converted into club rooms for the militia association, organized to "promote efficiency among the members and the development of good fellowship and socialibility."

In September 1912 the "boys," as the Times referred to the militia members, participated in their first annual ten day cruise on board the Navy ship, Essex. The ship stopped at Chicago, Milwaukee, and Mackinaw Island, passing through the locks at the Sault St. Marie. Most of the men "enjoyed it immensely," but a few complained that they were not given the shore liberty that they were promised and were "assigned to the hardest work on the boat."

Another exciting event was the participation of 13 men from the company in a "great naval review" in the Atlantic, off New York City in October

1912. An interesting account of their adventure was provided to the Washburn News by militia member, Olaf Olson. On Wednesday, October 9th the men boarded a sleeper train at Ashland, which took them to Chicago, then to Detroit and on through Canada to Niagara Falls and finally to Jersey City, on the morning of October 11th. The next morning they were transported to the battleship, Iowa, where they were assigned quarters. "And now begins the hardest part to explain," Olson declared, "for the most of us had never seen such sights as we saw for the next three days, and most of us may never see them again. You may imagine 128 battleships drawn up in two lines between here and Ashland, and in the evening every ship was decorated from stem to stern and from the top of the masts to the water line by electric lights, enough to outline each ship." On Monday, October 14th, the Secretary of War and the President inspected the fleet, accompanied by thundering salutes from the guns of 128 ships. The next day the fleet paraded past the President, who was on his yacht, the Mayflower, and then headed out to sea. On Wednesday, October 16th, the fleet arrived in Philadelphia, and the next morning the men boarded a sleeper train to Washington, D.C. and

then to Chicago, arriving on Friday morning, October 17th. They returned to Washburn the next day.

On April 21 1914 the United States occupied the Mexican City of Vera Cruz, to prevent the delivery of arms to a rebel army. War with Mexico appeared imminent, creating much excitement among the men of the Washburn naval militia, who expected that they would "be called to the front at any moment" and were anxious to get into the fight. However, war was averted, the occupation of Vera Cruz ended on November 23rd, so the call to the Washburn militia never came.

On August 8 1914 ten members of the company departed for the annual ten day cruise of the Great Lakes. They traveled by train to Marquette, Michigan, where they joined militia units from Michigan on board the training ship, Yantic. The News noted that "They were equipped with rifles, bayonets, cartridge belts and canteens." The Yantic participated along with several other Great Lakes training ships in naval exercises, then toured the lakes until the cruise ended on August 18th.

But enlistments expired, no one re-enlisted, and the company was mustered out of the naval service on February 27 1915.