

The 'Bayfield Rifles' began to fire when name changed

In July, 1871 the Bayfield Press reported that there was "talk in town of getting up a militia company."

The Press declared it a "splendid idea," suggesting that the company be named the Bayfield Zowaves. The name Zowave originated with the French Army in Algeria in 1837, which recruited men from the Zouaoua, a Berber tribe located on the Mediterranean Sea.

Their colorful uniforms consisted of an open-fronted jacket and baggy trousers. The name and the uniform were adopted by some volunteer regiments of the Union Army in the Civil War and used by organizations of veterans after the war.

The Press suggested that Zowave uniforms could be secured for a Bayfield militia company "at low figures and would look well."

On February 25, 1873 a rifle company consisting of 60 men was organized under the state militia law, armed with Springfield breech-loading rifles. Apparently the name and the uniforms suggested by the Press did not appeal to the men and the new militia unit was given the simple but appropriate name, the Bayfield Rifles.

As was common practice in the militia, commissioned and non-commissioned officers were elected by the rank and file — Robinson D. Pike was elected as captain, John Gargneu (Gargnon or Gonyon) as 1st lieutenant, and Duffy AS 2ND LIEUTENANT

The company received 60 Springfield breech-loading rifles and ammunition, and "three non-commissioned officers' swords and belts," on June 3, 1873. They received their uniforms in June 1876, described as "a gray cap, jacket and trousers."

Aside from occasional drills and parades to show off their military "smartness" to the ladies, the company activities appear to have been primarily social and ceremonial.

For example, on New Year's Eve in 1877 the Rifles, as they were known, sponsored a ball attended by 70 couples. The Bayfield Press reported, "The music was excellent and the party all in all the most successful one ever given in Bayfield. The Rifles are to be congratulated."

Then in February 1879, the Rifles sponsored the fourth annual military ball at Smith's hotel. The Bayfield Press noted that "The music was delightful and the dances new and interesting. The supper was elaborate and tempting and such as to satisfy the most fastidious. Indeed, it was pronounced to have been the most enjoyable of all the pleasant parties gotten up by the Rifles."

The Bayfield Rifles saw "action," such as it was, in the so-called "Ashland War" in early 1873. In December 1872 construction of the railroad from the south was suspended at Colby because of inclement weather and the financial difficulties of the construction company.



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The company immediately discharged 1,200 men but they were not paid until several days later. Most of them left the area peacefully on foot for Superior, but the men in one of the camps demanded pay for this additional waiting time, not just to the date work was suspended.

When their demand was refused, the men attempted to seize the payroll money, and the railroad paymaster fled to Ashland. The next day, January 1 1873, the men from the camp arrived in Ashland. The town chairman ordered the saloons closed, although they continued to do business through the back doors.

Apprehensive as to what the angry men might do, the town chairman requested assistance from the sheriff. Several wagons were dispatched to Bayfield and soon returned with 42 armed members of the Bayfield Rifles, and an old brass cannon, under the command of Captain Robinson Pike. The company quickly restored order, remaining in Ashland for 10 days.

As a state militia company, the Bayfield Rifles was to be inspected annually in the summer by a representative of the state Adjutant General. Many men of the authorized strength of 60 could not be present during the summer because of employment in logging or fishing, however, so the company was unable to pass these inspections satisfactorily.

In March 1880, a special law was approved that authorized inspections of the Bayfield Rifles during the winter. Interest in the company gradually faded, however, and by 1882 there were no members reported. The company was officially disbanded by the Adjutant General in 1883, and an item in the Ashland Weekly Press in March 1883 stated that "the Bayfield Rifles had removed to Ashland."

A roster of the Bayfield Rifles from September 1873 includes the following men in addition to the three commissioned officers: Sergeants — Birdsey B. Wade, 1st Sergeant; Sol Boutin; W.J. Herbert; W.L. Portock; J.L. Turner; Corporals — Edward Boutin, 1st Corporal; Nelson Drouilliard; G.W. Carrington; Fred Herbert; Louis Bachand; Privates — Benjamin Albano; Edward Boutin, Jr.; Nelson Boutin, Jr.; Ira Butterfield; J.D. Crittendon; John Drouilliard; Antoine Denomie; Charles Goslin; William LaPointe; Robbert Morrin; William Niquette; H.H. Picard; L.L. Sargent; Andrew Tate; and many others.