

# West Virginia Historical Society



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## Soldiers in the Strike

by Virginia Wood

7 A English, Jr H. S., April 12, 1916

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Virginia Wood was a nine year old resident of Cabin Creek when the Cabin Creek-Paint Creek Strike occurred in 1912. Her father, Walter Seal Wood, was the Superintendent of the Paint Creek Collieries Mine at Standard. According to the manuscript, the family lived at Mucklow (now Gallagher) in 1912. In 1913, Walter S. Wood, his wife Lucy Archer Sims Wood and their family moved to Charleston where Virginia wrote this report for her 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Class in 1916. While the report does not indicate the school she attended, the family lived at 1400 Virginia Street and she possibly attended the Mercer School. In 1929 Virginia married Charles P. Walker of Richmond, Virginia. She moved back to Charleston in the 1970s and passed away on June 4, 1986. The original of the manuscript is part of a collection, AR - 1754, contributed to the West Virginia Department of Archives and History by former state Archivist, Kyle McCormick. The original document contains pictures which were not of sufficient quality to lend themselves to reproduction. Our thanks to the West Virginia Department of Archives and History for permission to reprint this manuscript.

The manuscript provides an excellent view of activities of West Virginia National Guard soldiers from the eyes of a nine year old and her family. Misspellings have been corrected to provide ease of reading.

(Explanatory footnotes have been added by the Editor, the WVHS *Quarterly*.)

The strike of 1912 was so great that the state militia was called out. The first were located about a half a mile above our house. The others were stationed along the creek from one to five miles apart.

When the soldiers first arrived they put up tents. They are tan and small. They are large enough for two persons to sleep in. The next day the soldiers were busy unloading supplies. The first thing to do is to fix headquarters. The captain and lieutenants had one large tent with a floor, desks and a table, also two cots. In every company the tents were like streets facing each other. The soldiers dug little ditches around each tent. The soldiers had in their tents a box or desk and two cots, under the cots were used for shelves. The picket line was thrown up. That included the whole camp. It was so that no one could enter or leave without a pass. A pass is a written permit from

an officer. The soldiers white wash all buildings and trees. This is done twice a month to make it sanitary. One of the companies started collecting stones and whitewashing them. They then made an oblong square and in it they spelling the name of the company. This looked nice to visitors to tell one company from another. The companies had each tents numbered as one, D. Each soldier made camp as much as like home as possible.

Every soldier thinks of something to eat no matter where he is. If he is hungry he has little energy. The kitchen had a large stove also some selves and a low bench. It is all screened in. Every company has its cook and assistant. Outside there is a shelf to put the washings(?) The food was cooked in clothes boilers. The way they emptied their garbage is interesting. The corporal and his ten men dug a large round hole and lined it with rocks. These rocks were kept red hot. The garbage was throw into it and tin cans melt and all the water goes to steam. This is very sanitary.

Martial Law was enforced. This gave the soldiers the right to go through the houses and tear up everything. There was a man from another district who was hunting, he came to a camp. He had with him a gun, pick, and an axe. He also had a possum. The soldiers arrested him, kept him in the gaurdhouse over night gave him his breakfast. Then turned him loose.

Among the companies that came was company D from Spencer. After three days Lieutenant Moonchester<sup>1</sup> got a leave for four days. He came back bringing with him his wife. He came to Mother and asked her if she would let Mrs Moonchester stay at our house. Mother consented and she stayed two weeks. this gave us more privileges.

We went to camp one day and stayed until six o'clock. We got there about nine o'clock. The soldiers were all sitting down and cleaning their guns. Just then a bugle sounded and every soldier took his gun for roll call. They formed in four lines, then the captains called roll. The flag went up a blank gun sounded this meant inspection. They then formed and went to field. This was going to cost them about two hours of drilling in the hot sun. They went through charges, and parade drilling and several other fancy things. This was pleasant to those who were in the shade but not to those who were drilling. It was near twelve o'clock when they stopped and very soon dinner was served from boilers just outside of the kitchen. The dinner was beans, boiled meat, com on the

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<sup>1</sup>Lt. Moonchester could not be identified. According to the Adjutant General Report for that period, the Lt. for Company D was Harry S. Holswade who was later Captain of the Company.

cob, and cold corn bread also coffee. We ate this from the tin plate, cup, knife and fork from the knapsack. Every one had enough to eat. At two o'clock they changed picket men. Some of the soldiers wrote letters, read, talked. Some went to the swimming hole. They took with them a cake of soap to wash their pants or shirts. They would swim about and have a good time for a little while. Then they went to work, washing their clothes by rubbing the soap on them and swimming around. Each soldier has his gun to clean and fix for five o'clock inspection. The soldiers each had to help chop trees for fire wood. Some of the men went out on Monday to get wood and began gambling. They were caught at it. They were told not to play cards any more for a week. One of them did and was put in his tent with a loaded gun and guard to force obedience this so-called guard house.

A trick they would work on the guards was the soldiers would have passes, say for every night, as the guard would look only at the date, signature they would go in an out day and night.

The Bluefield company came past our house one day. Mother tried to get their pictures. When they found this out they began to act like a lot of boys throwing up their caps and shouting. The captain called them down very severely. He said they ought to act like gentlemen instead of a lot of boys without any manners and

not to forget that they were soldiers representing the government to restore peace. The picture was not very good.

One day we took our kodak to the camp. We were with a captain who was a photographer in Huntington. He showed Mother how to take the different pictures. They were drilling as usual. After the drilling one of the boys ran to his tent and got a watermelon and ran into a field to eat it. The tentmate and his chum chased after him. They overtook him. He had cut a piece. When the captain saw him the men had their revolvers pointed at him. The captain said wait a minute. They looked up. He snapped the picture. The soldiers instead of going to Mount Gretna, Pennsylvania<sup>2</sup> where they usually went they had to come to the strike. This was a great grief to them. The target was put up. It was built like a house made of logs. They filled it with sand. When finished it was about seven feet through, fourteen feet wide and eighteen feet long. On top was placed the target it was about six feet square in

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<sup>2</sup>The West Virginia National Guard planned to go to Mt. Gretna in the first two weeks of July for its annual encampment but was delayed because of strike related violence on Paint Creek. When the situation improved, the Guard was permitted to leave the state and had just arrived at Mt. Gretna on July 26, 1912 when a battle occurred at Mucklow between miners and Baldwin-Felts guards. The soldiers were immediately recalled to West Virginia and arrived in Pratt, West Virginia on July 27.

the center was a large black circle around this was red rings. At this the soldiers shot. There was much quarreling about this. A flag went out if you shot to near the right or left. There was a wire station from the field to the target. The soldiers would get fifty feet away then one hundred to three hundred. I could shoot some but I had never tried at the bull's eye with a "West Virginian." One day a boy came and told the captain something. The captain asked me if I wanted to shoot. I said, "Yes" He took me to the field and after I had three tries (only hit the bulls eye once) the same boy came and had three tries. The captain graded our shooting like he would do a soldiers.

When the soldiers left they were very glad. The yells they gave you would have though a school had let out for the summer. We all thought the strike was over and were so glad. I am sorry to say it was not.

About a month later the soldiers were called back this was a great disappointment to them. The headquarters were then located at Pratt on Paint Creek Junction. They had every thing fixed up as before. Martial law was again enforced. I was away then. Coming back, one day we wanted to see about the baggage. We started to open the door of the waiting room when an officer came up and said, "Anyone in there you want to see! We said we wanted to see the agent. Around to the next door please. When we got home I

asked papa what it was and why we could not go in. He said it was the gaurdhouse. Here they were putting the rioters. We knew better next time.

It was not long after till the soldiers left for good. They all were very glad to go home from the strike. Everyone was glad that the strike was over. The miners were back at work once more.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The West Virginia National Guard spent nearly a year on duty, during three separate mobilizations, in the Paint and Cabin Creek Strike zone. Then, as now, an extended period of mobilization worked hardships on the soldiers, many of whom lost jobs and educational opportunities due to their service.



**William D. "Bill" Wintz, left, receiving his Jenco Foundation Award from Terry Anderson. Looking on is Melody Sands, who handles public relations and marketing for the Jenco Foundation.**

## **ANNUAL MEETING**

**September 26, 2005**

**The West Virginia Historical Society Annual Meeting was held at the Nitro Presbyterian Church on Monday, September 26, 2005. The program was presented by Terry Anderson, who was held captive in Beirut, Lebanon from 1985 to 1991. Anderson, who was an AP Correspondent at the time of his capture, met fellow hostage Rev. Father Lawrence Martin Jenco during their captivity and formed a bond of friendship which lasted until Father Jenco's death in 1996. After moving to Appalachian, Athens, Ohio, Anderson decided to honor his friend by creating the Jenco**

Foundation to recognize residents of Appalachia for their service to the region. Bill Wintz, a noted West Virginia historian and member of the West Virginia Historical Society received a “Commendation for Lifetime of Contribution to an Appalachian Community.” Wintz is a past recipient of the WVHS Virgil A. Lewis Award for his contributions to West Virginia history and was the most successful membership chairman in the organization’s history, attracting several hundred new members in the 1970s.

WVHS President, Michael Shock, presided over the meeting which featured patriotic music and a formal flag folding ceremony by the Herbert Thomas chapter of the United States Marine Corps League.

This year’s Annual Meeting was the first since 2003. The threat of flooding in Logan from a tropical storm in September, 2004 forced the cancellation of that year’s annual meeting.

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