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CHAPTER III.

The Call to Arms—The Governor's First War Proclamation—Detail of Militia for the First Regiment—Procurement of Arms—A Notable War Meeting—Popular Feeling in the State—Special Session of the Legislature—Appropriation of a Million Dollars—Other War Measures—Unanimity of the Legislature and People.

The roar of the cannon which echoed from Charleston Harbor throughout the land on the 12th of April, 1861, awoke the soundest sleeper from his dream of peace. The people of Vermont rose with the grand uprising of the North; and thenceforward for four years the main thought of the people of the State, without distinction of party, sex or condition, was how they should do the most to aid the Government in its task of quelling rebellion, and preserving the union of the States.

The news of the surrender of Fort Sumter and President Lincoln's first call for 75,000 troops reached Vermont on the 14th of April. The first was received with most intense indignation; the latter with inexpressible satisfaction. There had been so much talk by public men of want of constitutional power to compel a seceding State to remain in the Union, and of absence of authority to enforce the laws of the United States except through the formal process of the issuing of writs from a United States Court, to be executed by a United States Marshal, and Mr. Lincoln's own spirit and utterances had been so conciliatory and peaceable that the people had come almost to doubt the Government's power of self preservation, and at least to wonder at what

stage of rebellion it could be and would be exerted. The President's call to arms "by virtue of powers in me vested by the Constitution and the laws," his announcement that the first duty of the troops would be "to repossess the forts, places and property" which had been seized from the Union, and his appeal to all loyal citizens to "maintain the honor, the integrity and existence of our National Union, and the perpetuity of popular government, and to redress wrongs already long enough endured," settled all such doubts and were hailed with a feeling of relief and joy past all expression.

The response of the State in its organic capacity was prompt. Governor Fairbanks at once issued a proclamation announcing the outbreak of armed rebellion, the receipt of a requisition from the President of the United States, calling for a regiment for immediate service, and the issuance of the necessary orders for immediate response thereto; and calling a special session of the Legislature, to organize, arm and equip the militia, and to cooperate with the general Government in the suppression of the Southern insurrection. This proclamation bore even date with President Lincoln's proclamation, and is believed to have antedated by at least a day all similar proclamations issued by the Governors of the other Free States.

The circular of the Secretary of War, accompanying the President's requisition, called for one regiment of infantry, of 780 men, from Vermont. The State, as we have shown, had not a regiment in readiness to march. Colonel Stannard, of the Fourth Militia Regiment, indeed notified Adjutant General Baxter that his regiment would be ready to march at twelve hours notice;¹ but it consisted of but four companies, numbering all told less than 200 men, and these were really in no condition to take the field, though they would

¹ Colonel Stannard is believed to have been the first Vermonter to volunteer, after the call for troops.

have gone as they were if the offer had been accepted. Several companies in other regiments indicated their readiness to march at a day's notice. Governor Fairbanks replied to the Secretary of War that he would place a regiment at his disposal as soon as it could be equipped; and gave immediate orders to Adjutant General Baxter for the detailing of ten companies of the Uniform Militia, and to Quartermaster General Davis to procure the necessary knapsacks, overcoats, blankets, and camp equipage. General Davis went at once to the Springfield (Mass.) armory for rifled muskets to fully arm the regiment, the State having then but 500 rifled muskets. Colonel Ingersoll, in command of the armory, would not deliver the arms without an order from the Ordnance Department at Washington, or from Governor Andrew of Massachusetts. General Davis obtained overcoats and blankets for the regiment, such as were being procured for the Massachusetts volunteers, in Boston. The more spirited of the company commanders had at the first news of the call for troops abandoned their customary business, thrown open the armories of the companies and commenced recruiting, with prompt and ample response from the young men of their respective towns.

On the evening of April 19th the field officers of the several Militia regiments met at Burlington, by order of Adjutant General Baxter, to consult with him and General Jackman and to select the companies which were to form the First Regiment of Vermont Volunteers. Eight companies—the Bradford, Brandon, Burlington, Northfield, Rutland, St. Albans, Swanton and Woodstock companies—were reported as substantially full and in efficient condition. From the several other companies reported as less fully prepared, the Middlebury and Cavendish companies were

selected to make up the quota for the "Vermont Contingent." The companies all commenced active drill, and put themselves in readiness to obey marching orders.

While the State officers were thus giving their utmost energies to secure prompt response to the President's call the people of Vermont were seconding their efforts in all possible ways. Public meetings were held in every considerable town and village in the State to express the loyal sentiments of the people, to encourage volunteers, to pledge men for the Union, and money to equip them and to support their families in their absence. One of the first of these may be briefly described as a sample of all. It was called in Burlington by a number of leading citizens of the 17th of April, and met on the evening of the 18th. The town hall, holding over a thousand persons, was filled to overflowing and hundred went away from the doors unable to gain entrance. The meeting was called to order by Hon. George W. Benedict, and President Calvin Pease of the University of Vermont, was made Chairman. Hon. George P. Marsh, then on the eve of his departure as United States Minister to Italy, was the principal speaker. He said: "Our people, slow to move, are now roused, and are swayed by a spirit mightier than any that has stirred them since Bunker Hill. Party distinctions are dropped, millions of money are offered to the Government, and volunteers to any number needed are pouring to the rendezvous. They will before long meet the Southrons face to face, and I venture to predict will make good General Washington's description, when he gave it as the result of his observations, that the Northern soldiers if not in as great a hurry as some others to get *into* battle, were also not in so great a hurry to gout out of it. From the scenes and labors of this time of trial, I, in the discharge of the duties to which I have been called, must go. It is for you to remain and like our ancestors of revolutionary memory to pledge your lives, your fortunes and your sacred honor

to the Constitution we have sworn to maintain. The Legislature has been called to meet in special session. If you would give your representative his instructions tell him to advocate the appropriation by the State of half a million of dollars in money, and the raising not of one regiment but of four, six, ten or twenty regiments if necessary, for the support of the Government." As Mr. Marsh spoke a large United States flag was flung from one of the galleries in the hall, and as the eyes of the audience fell on the broad folds of red, white and blue, they sprang to their feet, cheering with contagious and electric enthusiasm, till many of them burst into tears and cried like children, with overpowering emotion. Stirring speeches were made by Hon. George F. Edmunds, J. S. Adams, and other citizens. A leading democrat, I. B. Bowdish, said he had been one of the hardest of hardshell democrats; he had believed as well as he could that the negro was born to servitude and that his condition was improved by it in this country; but having stood up for the rights of the South, he now stood up for the North and for the flag. Civil war had begun, and he knew of no polite way of carrying it on. He was for appropriating every dollar and for sending every available man if necessary to settle this question. Resolutions were unanimously adopted instructing the representative of Burlington in the Legislature to vote for a war appropriation of \$500,000, and in favor of pledging the entire military force of the State for the support of the Federal Government. Subscription lists for men and money were opened; twenty-one volunteers (in addition to a number already enlisted) enrolled their names on the spot, and several thousand dollars were pledged for the support of the families of volunteers during their absence.

Similar scenes were witnessed all over the State. The public meetings and flag-raising were so numerous that the newspapers could not chronicle them and noticed only the

larger and more notable of them. The stars and stripes flew from almost every public building and from thousands of private ones, to an extent limited only by the supply of red, white and blue bunting, which fell far short of the demand. The offers of money for the equipment of volunteers and for the support of their families during their absence in the army aggregated hundreds of thousands of dollars. The two Montpelier banks each placed \$25,000 at the disposal of Governor Fairbanks for the equipment of troops. The Bank of Burlington tendered ten per cent of its capital for the same purpose and more if needed. The Bank of St. Albans made a similar offer. James R. Langdon, of Montpelier, offered to the State \$20,000 from his private fortune. Thomas McDaniels, at a war meeting held in Bennington, tendered \$10,000 to the State authorities. At a meeting in St. Johnsbury, the firm of E. & T. Fairbanks pledge \$2,000 to a fund for the support of families of volunteers. At a meeting in Winooski, William C. Harding headed a similar paper with \$1,000, and offered to make it \$10,000 if needed. T. W. Park, Esq., of San Francisco, California, sent to Governor Fairbanks his check for \$1,000 to help fit out the sons of his native State for battle, or to support the families of those who should fall in defence of the flag. F. P. Fletcher of Bridport, pledged \$1,000 a year during the war to assist the families of volunteers. Many towns voted considerable sums to be raised on the Grand List, and still larger amounts were pledged on subscription papers for the equipment of the Militia and for the support of the families of volunteers. Men and money were thus tendered all over the State. The students of the University of Vermont and of Middlebury College organized themselves into military companies and began drilling. The services of every man in the State capable of drilling a squad of recruits were called into use. All the railroad and transportation companies tendered their lines and boats to the Governor, free,

for the transportation of troops and munitions of war. The women of the towns from which companies were chosen assembled daily and labored industriously in the making of uniforms for the recruits, and a resolution adopted by an association of 200 ladies of Burlington saying: "We further resolve that we will consider *all* our time and *all* our energies sacred to this object—[the restoration of the authority of the Government]—until it shall be accomplished, and if need be until the end of the war," expressed the devotion of their sex. The State was in a blaze of patriotic feeling which melted all barriers of party, sect or station. Those who did not share it probably did not number one in a thousand of the population. They preserved for the most part a judicious silence. The community was fused into a compact and harmonious mass, instinct with a single purpose—to stand by the Government and to crush the rebellion at whatever cost.

The Legislature met in special session on the 25th of April, with full houses and a numerous attendance of leading citizens, outside of its number. The trains which brought the members to the capital were greeted with a national salute of thirty-four guns from the two brass field pieces captured by General Stark at the battle of Bennington. At the hour Lieutenant Governor Underwood took the chair of the Senate, and Speaker Hunton that of the House. On motion of a leading Democrat, Stephen Thomas of West Fairlee,² the oath of allegiance to the United States Gov-

² The political classification of the two Houses was: Senate, Republicans, 29; Democrats, 1;--House, Republicans, 211; Democrats, 25.

The Democrats in the Legislature and in attendance upon the session held a private meeting the evening before to decide upon their course. Several were in favor of resisting all war measures from the start. Hon. Paul Dillingham, of Waterbury, told them that would never do. "If the Republications propose to raise five regiments" said he to Mr. Thomas, who was to be the leader of the Democrats on the floor of the House, "do you go in for raising ten. If they want half a million for troops, do you move to make it a million." Mr. Thomas's own feeling was in hearty accord with this advice. Other patriots present supported this view of their duty, and from that time on there was no distinction of parties in the Legislature on any war question.

ernment was administered to the members, in addition to the usual oath, which then contained no allusion to the General Government., and after prayer and the usual preliminaries the two Houses met in joint assembly to hear the Governor's message. In this Governor Fairbanks announced that he had already called into the service ten companies of the Militia to form a regiment in response to the requisition of the president, and that the Quartermaster General had procured for them the necessary outfit of overcoats, blankets and camp equipage. In anticipation of further calls for troops for the defence of the National Capital, then in imminent peril from an imposing military force, he urged immediate and efficient action for the organizing of the militia, and ample appropriations for military purposes. Within twenty-four hours thereafter a bill appropriating *one million dollars* for war expenses, had passed both Houses by unanimous votes; and in forty-two hours from the time it met the Legislature had completed its work and adjourned, having also passed acts providing for the organizing, arming and equipment of six more regiments in addition to the one already called for), for two years service; giving to each private seven dollars a month of State pay, in addition to the thirteen dollars offered by the Government; providing for the relief of the families of volunteers at Sate expense in cases of destitution; committing to the Governor the duty of organizing the regiments and appointing the field officers thereof; and laying the first war tax of ten cents on the dollar of the Grand List. This rapid dispatch of business showed the intense desire of the people for immediate action. In the appropriation of a million dollars—a much larger sum than had as yet been voted by any State in proportion to popula-

tion³--and in the provisions for recruiting volunteers for two years, while as yet the Government had called for only three months' troops, and for adding to the quota called for six more regiments—which would be Vermont's share of an army of 600,000 men—the Legislature expressed the general conviction of the members that the war was not to be one of short duration or small dimensions—and in these respects as well as in the unanimity and stern resolution which characterized all the action and utterances of the session, the legislature well represented the people of Vermont⁴. There were sharp discussions over the size of the war appropriation, and over the question whether the regimental officers should be elected or appointed, but in these the side which was for the larger service and most effective organization, easily carried the day. The unique provision for the families of the volunteers especially entitles this Legislature to lasting honor. Under this, in no case could the needy families of soldiers in the field be deemed or become town paupers. If in want they were to be, and in practice thereafter were, treated as the beneficiaries of the State, and were supplied, under the care of State agents, with all that they required. This provision and that of giving State pay to the soldiers, which eventually took about four millions of dollars from the

³ "Vermont has a population of but about 300,000, mostly farmers, and yet has made an appropriation of \$1,000,000 to aid in maintaining the stars and stripes. Many have done nobly; but none, resources considered, have equaled this."—*N. Y. World, April 28, 1861.*

⁴ At the close of one of the sessions of the House on the first day, a member proposed that the representatives rise and sing "The Star Spangled Banner." The members rose, but no one could start the tune and they had to sit down without singing. At the close of the evening session, however, another effort was made with better success. A choir of twenty-five singers, each provided with a small national flag, occupied one of the galleries and sang the patriotic anthem with great spirit and much waving of banners, the members and spectators joining in the refrain with the utmost enthusiasm.

State treasury, were without precedent, and had few if any parallels in other States.

By the energetic efforts of the State officers and of the patriotic women who assisted in the making of the uniforms (which were of gray cloth) the first regiment was armed and equipped in a marvelously short time, considering that every State was then in the market as a purchase of arms and munitions, and that of various essential articles there was a very scant supply in the country. By the 30th day of April everything needed was provided, and the companies received orders to rendezvous at Rutland.

While the organization and equipment of the First Regiment was in progress, the informal enrollment of volunteers by recruiting officers, self-appointed or selected by the citizens, had been going on all over the State with great activity;⁵ and before the regiment was mustered into the United States service the State authorities began preparations for the organization of two more regiments. Commissions for the recruiting of troops for these were issued by Governor Fairbanks on the 7th of May; and within three days the services of *fifty-six* full companies were tendered to the Adjutant-General. Of these only twenty could be then accepted, but the turn of each and all came in due time.⁶

⁵ Charles M. Bliss, then of Woodford, Vermont, claims to have been the first volunteer who put his name to an agreement to serve for the war. On the 19th of April, 1861, upon learning of President Lincoln's first call for troops, Mr. Bliss drew up a paper which he signed and offered to others to sign, pledging his services as a soldier for the war. Mr. Bliss enlisted in the Second Regiment, and served till discharged after the Peninsula campaign, on account of disability resulting from Chickahominy fever.

⁶ The spirit of these early volunteers may be inferred from incidents similar to the following, which were occurring all over the State: a young man working in a saw-mill in Jericho, decided to volunteer. Thereupon, by working all night he got a free day, in the forenoon of which he rode twenty miles to Burlington to engage a man to take his place in the mill. He returned to Jericho in the afternoon and evening; started his saw at 11 P.M., and sawed all night; next morning walked five miles to take the train for Burlington; enlisted in the company forming there, drilled three hours and took the train back; worked all that night and next day appeared again in the ranks at Burlington, having worked and ridden three days and nights with but an hour or two of rest and less of sleep.

Under the act of the Legislature, the regiments subsequent to the First were to be enlisted for two years. Before any organization under this statute had taken place, President Lincoln's second call for 42,000 volunteers for three years was issued. Official notice immediately followed from Washington, that volunteers could now only be received by the General Government for three years, or during the war if it should end in less time. Under these circumstances the two years' limit fixed by the Vermont act was ignored, and the second and all subsequent regiments were enlisted for three years.