

Donald L Martin
National Patriotic Instructor
SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR

LINCOLN'S BUGLER * Dec 2009

The Seventh Independent Company, Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, also known as The Union Light Guard, was formed in 1863 by Governor Tod of Ohio. Hiram Cook was a member of that unit. Following the Civil War he returned to his home in Circleville, Ohio and opened a book store. Mr. E. O. Crites was his business partner until 1910. Mr. Cook related to Crites many of his Civil War experiences and in 1940 Mrs. Crites wrote a feature article for the *Columbus Citizen* in which she brought color and life to a fascinating story which might well have been forgotten.

The Union Light Guard was the brainchild of Ohio's Governor Tod. One a visit to Washington he noticed the unguarded situation of the Capitol, and the President. He began to recruit his 'Guard' by taking one man from each of Ohio's counties. Mr. Cook heard that the Governor had offered the President a bodyguard of 100 men all to be mounted on black horses. He was obsessed with the idea of being a part of this group. He traveled by stage coach to Columbus and presented himself at the recruiting office. He was disheartened to learn that there was to be a representative from each county and that one had not been picked from his home county, but yet the total unit quota had been filled. It became evident that two recruits had been taken from several counties with larger populations. He argued eloquently for his home county, to no avail, until the officer told him that he needed a bugler. Cook convinced the officer he could play the bugle and was on his way to Washington with the unit on December 22, 1863.

The unit reported to the Secretary of War and was assigned duty in and around the city. A strong detail was placed near the President's house, the Treasury Building, War Office and other public buildings. Mr. Cook, as the bugler, rode near the head of the troop and was always near the President's carriage when it was being escorted by the Cavalrymen. He recalled several amusing incidents which occurred during his service as bodyguard; one of which Mrs. Crites included in her article:

"It was his custom to visit the different departments of the government each day. We always accompanied him on these rounds. One evening the President and Mrs. Lincoln was invited to dinner at the home of some friends. On this day he had failed to go to the War Department, so on their way he ordered the carriage stopped to make this official call. Mr. Lincoln went into the building. Mrs. Lincoln and Tad remained in the carriage. He stayed so long that his wife became impatient and irritated. She ordered the carriage on. Some of the guard went with her, while some of us waited for the President. Finally he came out. As he approached he asked where Mrs. Lincoln was. We told him she would not wait longer and had gone on. It was the only time I ever seen President Lincoln thoroughly provoked. He said sharply, 'Well get me something to ride. I can't walk.' A couple of the men quickly produced a very small horse. He mounted and urged the horse into a gallop. He wore a stove-pipe hat. His feet almost touched the ground. A white handkerchief carelessly thrust into his pocket hung half way out, flapping as he rode. Such a sight! I can see him to this day!"

"The evening of April 14, 1865, was warm and spring-like. Mr. Cook and his fellow bugler were strolling in front of the barracks when his friend suggested they go to Ford's Theater that evening. He had heard that the President and Mrs. Lincoln were planning to attend the production of 'Our American Cousin' starring Laura Keene. Cook felt that it would be unwise for them both to leave and so he urged his friend to go, sounded tattoo and went upstairs to his sleeping quarters."

The rest of this story is in Mr. Cook's own words as set down for us by Mrs. Crites: "At the sound of taps all went to bed except me. Somehow, I cannot tell why, I had a feeling of impending peril. I did not

undress, but sat on my cot, in the stillness and darkness, with my head in my hands. Presently, I heard someone running on the brick walk leading to the front door. A man shouted up the stairs, 'Call out the guards! Seward has been attacked.' I jumped to my feet and sounded 'Boots and Saddles.' In just seven minutes we were mounted and on our way to Seward's residence. Our horses galloped so fast over the cobble stones that the sparks from their shoes seemed to light our way. When we were running at full speed, a man rushed from the sidewalk into the street and flagged us with his white sleeved arms. 'For God's sake, go to Ford's Theater. President Lincoln has been shot!" We wheeled our horses so suddenly that some of them fell on the rough street and riders were injured. The rest of us hurried to Ford's Theater. As we neared the scene of the tragedy, the surging excited mob gave way before us. Then we checked our horses and we saw by the dim theater lights, men carrying the limp figure of President Lincoln from the building.

The awed silence of the people was broken by the anxious query, 'where shall we take him?' At that moment a young man came forward and said, 'Carry him to my room.' He pointed to a brick house on the opposite side of the street. They followed him across the street as he led the way and carried their burden up the high steps. As the door closed behind them the crowd that had watched silently while the President was borne away became an angry, excited mob. With difficulty we cleared the street and stood guard until 7 o'clock in the morning when the President died. Two hours later the body, wrapped in an American flag was taken through hushed streets to an upper room in the private apartment in the White House.

On Tuesday morning it was placed on a magnificent bier in the center of the great East room. Steadily, all day long, a silent line of men, women and children filed past the casket and at night when the gates were closed, Lafayette Park and the adjoining streets were still packed with people waiting admission.

Wednesday was the day of the funeral. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon the booming of cannons and tolling of bells announced the close of the service, after which the casket was taken to the Capitol where it was placed in the rotunda. On Thursday the doors were opened and in spite of a steady rain the scenes of Tuesday were repeated. Thousands of people ascended the long flight of stairs leading to the East entrance and passed through the large circular room to take a last look at the body of their beloved President. During all this time the members of our company were on guard. At 6 o'clock the following morning, members of the cabinet, and a number of other dignitaries followed the coffin to the railway station where the funeral train waited to carry the body from Washington to Springfield.

A great crowd of people had gathered for the last scene of the tragedy. They stood in absolute silence with uncovered heads, while I raised my bugle to my lips and sounded taps over the body of Abraham Lincoln."

*Based on an article by Trudy R. Yates