Famed Company H Quietly Fades Away

Hampton Dunn
‘COMPANY H IS DISMISSED!’

They went away smiling, these surviving members of Tampa’s famed Company H after their farewell dinner on November 7, 1980, at the Seville Restaurant. First mustered for service in the Mexican War in 1914, the group has held annual reunions since. But no more. They broke out the wine and celebrated their last get-together - and then just faded away. Left to right: Herbert Gray, John Forsythe, Eric Fabian, Lt. Gen. Sumter L. Lowry, Joe Butzloff, Ed Olsen and Ralph Rouse.

-TAMPA TIMES Photo
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By HAMPTON DUNN

Amid the noise and merrymaking of a Friday evening crowd at Tampa’s Seville Restaurant, a dramatic and historic moment took place on November 7, 1980, in a dark corner of the huge dining room.

That was the instant Sumter Lowry "dismissed" the pitifully few survivors of famed Company H, 124th U.S. Infantry, ending an organization that had been in existence since 1914. The unit was put together by the now retired Lieutenant General to volunteer for duty on the Mexican border. They fought together down there and later in France, during World War I. They have had annual reunions from the end of World War I.
But no more. Old soldiers never die, said General Douglas MacArthur, they just fade away. So this genial group of adventuresome soldiers plan no further get-togethers. They're all mighty old - the General is 88, the others about the same - and it becomes more burdensome every year to make the effort to go out socially.

On this final, festive occasion, though, they had a high old time, joshing each other, shouting so their buddies could hear, drinking a toast from a bottle of fine wine they've been saving for decades for this very occasion, looking at scrapbooks and photos, and feasting on Spanish food. They also heard a proclamation from Mayor Bob Martinez, praising them in glowing terms for their service.

A few days later, General Lowry wrote this writer, who was a guest at several of the annual reunions and the final one as well:

“This Reunion brought back many memories but it was a sad occasion for me. I look back to 1914 - 66 years ago and remember each one of these veterans as a
virile strong man with his life before him and now they are just seven old men with their life’s work almost completed.

“I certainly cannot complain about what the Lord has given me in my lifetime - I am a very lucky man!”

At that last party, Lowry probably best expressed the love, affection and camaraderie these men still have for each other when he said:

"When we get to heaven, our former top sergeant, Harold McGucken, will be standing next to St. Peter to greet us. And he'll personally lead each one of us to that section set aside for the old soldiers of Company H where love and friendship will be ours forever."

So be it.

THE ORIGINAL ROSTER OF COMPANY H

Here is the original roster of Company H, 2nd Florida Infantry, as certified in 1963 by Maj. Gen. Henry W. McMillan, former Adjutant General:

S. L. Lowry, Jr., Captain.
