



The Union Guards, N-SSA

.....this is now

Union Guards, N-SSA

Company A, 19th Regiment, Indiana Volunteer Infantry



96th National Skirmish: 1st A Musket team, 3rd B Musket team, 2nd A Carbine team, 1st Team Aggregate. *Kneeling: Chuck Fulton, Doug Johnson, Mike Jordan, Bobby Hubbard, Mike Lauer. Standing: Bill Jordan, Scott Braden, Jon Patrouch, Ernie Wood, Dean Brown, Phil Spaugy, Tim Greeley, Bob Hubbard, John Robey, Joe Music.*

Founding

The Union Guards organized for N-SSA competition in October of 1983. The group stood its probationary inspection in May 1984 and was accepted into membership in August of that year. It was assigned the seniority number 210MW, meaning that it is the 210th N-SSA member organization and assigned to the Midwest Region.

All the founding members previously had been members of the same N-SSA member organization, the 19th Indiana Infantry. The name Union Guards was taken to maintain a connection with the members' Iron Brigade roots, the original Union Guards having been Company A of the 19th Regiment, Indiana Volunteer Infantry of that famed brigade.

Members resided in Indiana and Ohio, and were experienced skirmishers. The 19th had won many skirmishes, and several regional musket and carbine championships. Five of the original Union Guards had shot together on a national championship carbine team in 1976.

In its first N-SSA competition the Union Guards won the musket company match. Also, the musket company won the Midwest Region musket company championship in its first season of competition. That was only the first of several regional championships.

Purposes

Our organization exists for three main reasons: to skirmish in the North-South Skirmish Association, to honor the soldiers of the American Civil War, and to have a good time. It is important to note that we are neither a reenactment group nor a living-history organization. We are *skirmishers*, meaning we shoot Civil War firearms (rifles, smoothbores, carbines, repeaters, and revolvers) in marksmanship competitions called *skirmishes*. N-SSA rules require that all company (team) matches be shot in uniform, and we choose to wear well-made, authentic uniforms.

Competition

To date, the Union Guards have won several national championships, multiple Midwest Region annual championships with muskets, carbines, and smoothbores, and many regional matches. In addition to wins in the Midwest, our teams have won regional matches in the Chesapeake, Deep South, Northwest, Potomac, and Western regions.

In national competition, the Union Guards have won four Class A1 musket company championships, four team aggregate championships, one Class A1 carbine company championship, two Class B1 smoothbore championships, and three Class C smoothbore championships. The Union Guards were only the second N-SSA member organization to win Class A1 musket company and carbine company championships at the same national skirmish. Every current musket, carbine, and team aggregate trophy in the N-SSA museum is inscribed with the name "Union Guards."

In addition to success with muskets, carbines, and smoothbores, our repeater, and revolver companies have won national skirmish medals.

Additionally, one Union Guard holds the DSCA (Distinguished Shooter Categorized Award) in musket, and several have won national individual championships. Four present or past members have won the musket aggregate trophy (one three times), the most prestigious of the single-arms awards. Two present or past members have won the NRA's Senior Musket Aggregate trophy.

Three present or past Union Guards have been awarded the Robert Miller Award, the N-SSA's highest award for uniform authenticity.

The Midwest Region

The Midwest Region of the N-SSA consists of twelve organizations in the states of Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. The Midwest has the toughest competition in the N-SSA, with six units presently classified as A1 units. Our region has had as many as three companies in the top four in Class A1 national musket championship matches, and four companies in the medal places (top twelve). Midwest units have also won and/or placed in classes A2 and A3 musket. Midwest units are also regular medalists in carbine, smoothbore, repeater, and revolver company matches, and Midwest skirmishers are regular winners in individual matches. Only three organizations have ever won both the musket and carbine company matches at the same national skirmish; two are Midwest units.

The Midwest Region has an exceptional history of service to the N-SSA. Before any other region had had two members elected National Commander the Midwest had provided four. The Midwest has also provided the N-SSA with three Deputy Commanders, three Adjutants, and three Inspectors General, four editors of *The Skirmish Line*, and many staff officers, committee chairmen and committee members.

Tradition of service

Within the Union Guards there is a tradition of service to the association and to the region. Some examples:

Union Guards have served the N-SSA as Commander, Deputy Commander, Adjutant, and Inspector General.

Union Guards have served the Midwest Region as Commander, Deputy Commander, Adjutant, and Inspector.

The design and programming of the N-SSA's membership and statistics computer systems was done by a Union Guard.

A Union Guard designed and maintains the Midwest Region's website.

For six years the editor of *The Skirmish Line* was a Union Guard.

The sound systems currently in use at Fort Shenandoah and in the Midwest Region were built by a Union Guard.

Five present or former Union Guards have directed national skirmishes.

National and regional committee and staff positions usually include Union Guards.

Currently, Union Guards serve the N-SSA as Program Chairman, Range Officer, and Rules Chairman, plus as members of the Small Arms Committee.

In recognition of service to the N-SSA two Union Guards have been awarded the N-SSA's Award of Merit, four Union Guards have received the N-SSA's Distinguished Service Award, four hold the Midwest Region Distinguished Service Award, and three hold the Midwest Region Service Award. The first skirmisher to be awarded the gold Pioneer Patch for volunteer work at Fort Shenandoah is a Union Guard, and another holds the white Pioneer Patch.

The present

Our membership stays stable at around twenty-five members. Union Guards live in central Indiana, southern Michigan, central and western Ohio, and northwest Virginia. Membership is not restricted to any geographic area, just by how far one is willing to drive to skirmish. We have only two common characteristics: great interest in the history of the American Civil War, and a love of competitive shooting. Because of our interest in history several of our members make presentations on Civil War weapons, uniforms, and soldier life to school and civic groups.

We are a family-friendly organization. Several wives and children grace the camp, and wives have been active and contributing shooters.

We participate in all Midwest Region skirmishes, so we regularly shoot at Centerburg and Pleasant Hill, Ohio and Batesville, Indiana. The Midwest usually has a half-dozen regional competitions each year. In addition to our own regionals we often field teams at Defiance, Ohio (Northwest Region) in July and at Eva, Tennessee (Deep South Region) in November. Frequently the Guards will take road trips to other places, and we often field teams at non-national events at Fort Shenandoah.

Our participation in national skirmishes is a given, and it is unusual not to have every member present at a national. In fact, most Union Guards attend every regional skirmish and both nationals in a year.

Most Union Guards shoot company matches with both musket and carbine. There is a growing interest in smoothbore and single-shot breechloader competition. Some members now compete on three, four, or even five teams at national skirmishes, and three or four at regionals. We customarily enter two musket teams, three carbine teams, three or four smoothbore teams, and a breechloader team at regional skirmishes, also a revolver team at national skirmishes. As interest increases in the newer matches, more teams will be entered to accommodate the interested.

A typical national skirmish will see two musket, two carbine, three smoothbore, and one each of revolver and single-shot breechloader companies.

We host a Midwest Regional skirmish in August of each year at the Pleasant Hill, Ohio VFW Post 6557. Profits from the skirmish go into our general fund, and are used to help pay costs of registering our teams at other skirmishes.

Our ages range from young to sixty-something, and our skirmishing experience ranges from little to over forty-five years.

Membership

To become a member of the Union Guards a person's name is presented to the membership by a qualified member who is that person's sponsor. If the unit agrees (and it usually does) the person serves one year as a probationary member. The purpose of the period of probation is to allow the members and the probationer to get to know each other and make sure that both sides believe membership would be in the best interests of all parties. During that time the person may participate in all team activities, and will shoot wherever the team selection process places him or her. At the end of the probationary year a final vote is taken, and, if the unit agrees, the probationer becomes a member. After two more years the new member may hold office and may sponsor persons for probationary membership.

We have two officers: a Commander (president) and an Adjutant (secretary/treasurer). Both serve one year terms, and elections are held at the Fall National Skirmish.

Our dues are paid semi-annually (\$120) and that plus the profit from our annual Midwest regional skirmish cover the costs of national and regional dues, and our team registrations.

The uniform

The uniform we wear is an important symbol of our identity, because one of our purposes is to honor the soldiers of the American Civil War, especially the Iron Brigade, of which the Union Guards was a part. We also carry and display full-size replicas of the national and regimental colors of the 19th Indiana Infantry.

The Union Guards' uniform appearance is that of the 19th Indiana Infantry at the time of the battle of Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863). All members wear the tall, black felt Regular Army hat (the "Hardee" hat) with the corps badge and all or part of the regulation insignia, and all wear sky blue enlisted foot soldier trousers. Many members wear military-style vests over their period shirts. For outerwear a member may wear either the US enlisted men's four-button blouse, or the enlisted men's infantry coat, both of dark blue wool.

We seldom shoot in coats or blouses unless the weather is cool. On a hot day the vests usually disappear and we shoot in shirt sleeves. The typical Civil War soldier was youthful and wiry. Most of us are neither, so we opt for comfort.

Most members wear army-issue-style brogans, but some prefer brogan-like modern shoes. Some members wear the government-issue-style white canvas lace-up gaiters (a few were still in the field at Gettysburg), some stuff their pants legs into their stockings, and some leave their pants legs free. The American volunteer soldier was not as observant of Army regulations in the field as he was concerned for his small comforts. We concur.

Skirmishing equipment

The unit will assist new members in arming and outfitting themselves, and usually has access to “loaner” uniform parts, firearms, and equipment for the beginning skirmisher. The Guards also maintain an up-to-date list of good sources for firearms, uniforms, and equipment.

Each member is encouraged to try out the whole spectrum of skirmish-approved rifles and rifle-muskets, and to decide which arm “fits” best. We use a wide variety of arms of different caliber, length, sight radius, and rear sight placement. Teammates will assist in the selection and acquisition process.

The M1855 rifle-musket accoutrement set is a good universal choice, and is available from some vendors as a package deal.

Team selection

The team selection process we use is not unique to the Union Guards, but few units have used it as successfully as we have. Each musket shooter who is a regular member may cast a ballot indicating his opinion as to the eight best musket shooters (A team) and the next eight best shooters (B team). The Adjutant tallies the votes, and he and the Commander post the team lists. The Commander and the Adjutant have some latitude to adjust the makeup of the teams based on their own observations.

Carbine, repeater, smoothbore, and revolver teams are picked the same way, with the members who shoot each of those arms picking their teams.

We do not count claims of hits, nor have a pre-skirmish qualification system, nor keep any type of statistical records. We *do* observe one another shoot in competition, and it is not difficult to quickly see who is doing consistently well and who is not. Our ballots are usually close to unanimous.

We also observe each other in order to assist our fellow Guards. We cannot coach one another during an event, but we offer observations and advice after an event is completed. We work hard to improve ourselves and each other. Together, we improve the performances of our teams.