



LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

Racing to Washington to Protect the Capitol from Insurrectionists¹

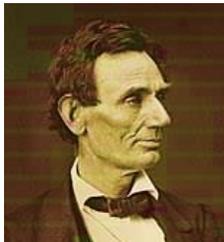
Abridged Version by Robert Porter Lynch ([bio](#)) January 15, 2021

Today's presence of National Guard troops camped in the Capitol Building to protect against Insurrectionists is a tragic new chapter in the evolution of securing our democratic ideals. It has happened before. The Civil War's heroic challenges of insurrection and riots is well worth reliving; a lesson in honor and courage, as well as a great example of patriotism:



Photo Credit: Emily Cochrane
@FSCochrane · Jan 13, 2021

Outbreak of the Civil War



After Lincoln's election in November 1860, the Union was on edge. Insurrection was on the wind. Southerners were threatening secession.

Would war break out? While no one was sure at the dawn of 1861. Newly elected Massachusetts Governor Albion Andrews, an ardent abolitionist, sensed the worst. Soon after assuming office, Andrew began readying Massachusetts volunteer militia units,² which had lain relatively dormant since the end of hostilities of the War of 1812.



In the town of Beverly, a bastion of abolitionist fervor, my great, great grandfather, Captain Francis E. Porter, aged 37, was the leader of Company "E," attached to the 8th Light Infantry Regiment of Volunteers.

The official order by Governor Andrew announced in the Beverly *Citizen* newspaper ordering the populace to be ready at all times to furnish her quota of troops upon any requisition of the President of the United States. The paper added: "In accordance with this order, Captain Porter has notified Company E to meet at the Armory Monday next at seven o'clock."

The *Citizen* subsequently reported:

¹ The basis of this story is primarily from *History of Essex County, Massachusetts*, J.W. Lewis & Co. Philadelphia, 1887, section on Beverly, pp 730-734 augmented by family documents and various internet background sources.

² The 1792 Federal Militia Act established the organization structure, enlistment, and training requirements of the state militias. Militias consisted of every "free able-bodied white male citizen" between ages 18 and 45, organized as members of a unit in each town. By the end of the 19th century, these were referred to as the National Guard.

"Company "E," at a special meeting in response to the order of Governor Andrew, had a full and enthusiastic rally; sixty-seven readily volunteered for any service that might be required of them by the government."

The winds of war continued to swirl for the next three months. On Friday, April 12th Fort Sumter, at the entrance to Charleston harbor in South Carolina, was attacked by insurrectionists.

President Lincoln was on high alert. The entire standing Army was composed of a small force of 16,000 men, mostly deployed to the western frontier fighting Indians or assigned to coastal forts. Washington was surrounded on all sides by hostile Confederate forces just waiting to be overtaken by armed marauders from Virginia or Maryland at any time.

Desperate for reinforcements, Lincoln's only defense could come from state militias, just as in 1814 after the British invaded Washington.

Lincoln's Urgent Call for Protection

On Monday, April 15th, Lincoln telegraphed messages to all northern governors for 75,000 soldiers, pleading for emergency assistance.³ Of all the states, Massachusetts was at the highest state of readiness to respond rapidly, but it was 450 miles away, a long distance with the primitive railroads at the time.⁴

Governor Andrew immediately responded to Lincoln's request by ordering the activation of 15,000 Massachusetts militiamen. The 6th Regiment from Boston⁵ and the 8th Regiment⁶ from Essex County north of Boston were prepared and ready to deploy. According to Beverly's *Citizen*, written with patriotic zeal:

"Captain Porter, having received his orders at five pm on April 15th, immediately notified his men in person, reporting ready for duty that night.

"The company is composed of young men who are carried away from the scenes of home and cherished associations to serve the land of their birth in the hour of need, and most cheerfully have they responded to the call.

"Early on Tuesday morning the flag of the Beverly Light Infantry was waving on their armory.... Mustering in full ranks and, with music. Before leaving, each officer was the recipient of a splendid sword and revolver, along with gifts from friends."

"The wishes of every loyal citizen and lover of his country go with them. After they had entered the train, and as it left, cheer after cheer rose from the assembled multitude who had gathered to witness their departure."

³ By law, calling up local militias was limited to a 90-day tour of duty.

⁴ While trains were capable of burst of speed up to 60 mph in 1860, the realities of train travel for long distances presented numerous impediments. Several cities along the route, including Boston, had no central station for incoming and outgoing rail systems. Most major rivers, like the Hudson in New York City, did not have bridges, requiring putting train cars on ferries to cross rivers. Every 100 miles the steam engines required more water.

⁵ Composed mainly of company units from Middlesex County, and also including units from Boston, Lowell, Lawrence, Acton, Groton, Stoneham & Worcester.

⁶ Having only 8 Companies, but needing 10 for a full Regiment, companies from Salem & Pittsfield were added.

“Then they marched to the station to take the 10:30 train for Boston, being frequently greeted by the waving of handkerchiefs by the young ladies in the shoe factories along Railroad Avenue.”

"On the morning of [April] 16th the companies [from the 6th and 8th Regiments] began to arrive in Boston, and before nightfall every company that had received its order in time reported at headquarters for duty. On arrival at Boston the company marched to Faneuil Hall, where they quartered" awaiting other companies to arrive while the necessary logistical supplies of tents, food, and munitions arrived to be loaded on the train."

“Subscriptions were started for a relief fund for soldiers' families in town, and had reached the amount of two thousand eight hundred dollars on the morning of their departure... The ladies of Beverly organized a society for the furnishing of clothing and other necessities for the militia of the state. One hundred and thirteen ladies attended the first meeting.”

Race to Washington

The Massachusetts 6th Regiment, mainly from Middlesex County, with Col. Edward F. Jones in command, left for Washington first, soon followed by Essex County's 8th Regiment. As the steam-fired train engine chugged along the route, citizens turned out to cheer. When the 8th Regiment reached New York on the morning of the 19th, they urged the New York regiments to follow behind quickly.

Being the anniversary of the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the 19th of April symbolized patriotism. Captain Porter's grandfather, Nathaniel Porter, aged thirteen in 1775, had fought in that battle.

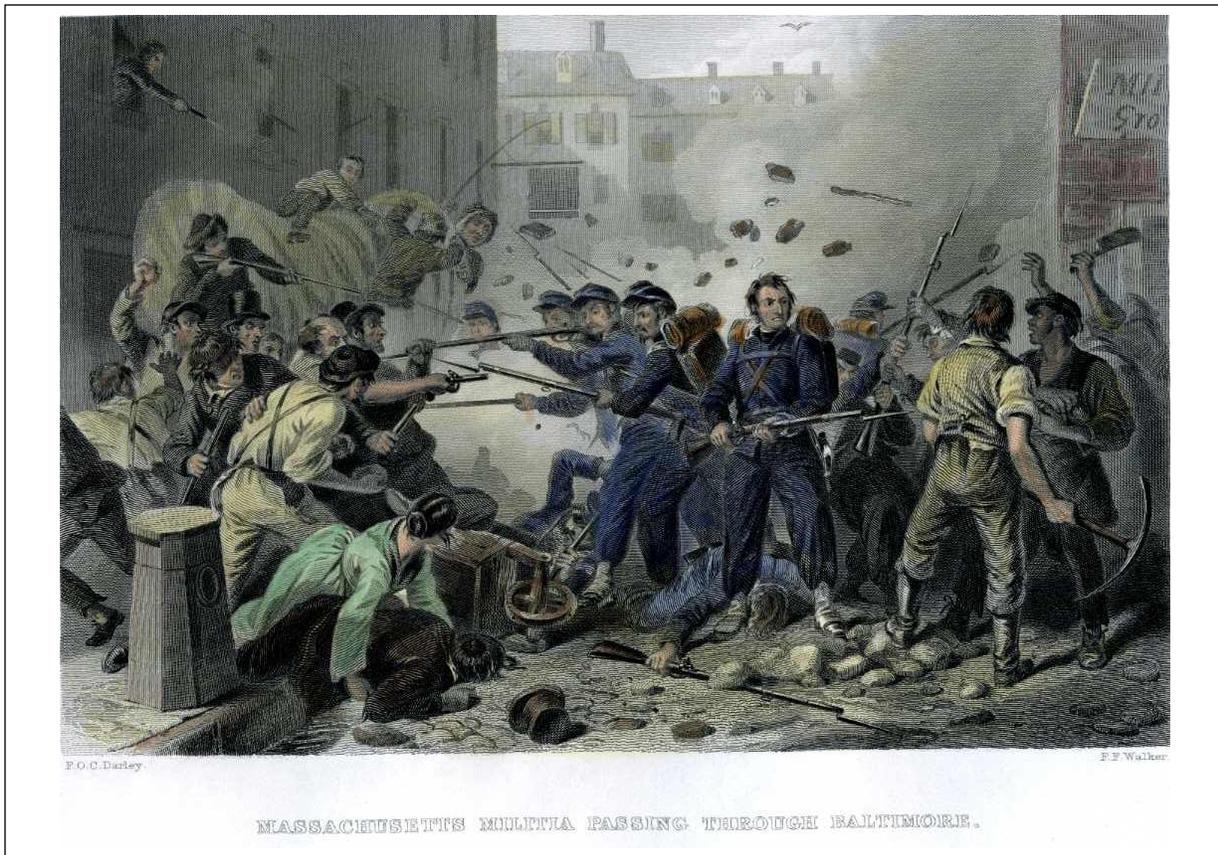
The earlier departing 6th Regiment was already in Philadelphia heading toward Baltimore. A “pilot” locomotive was requisitioned to test the tracks for sabotage. Having learned of trouble ahead, prior to entering Baltimore, the 6th Regiment's Colonel Edward F. Jones went car to car with the order:

“The regiment will march through Baltimore in column of sections, arms at will. You will undoubtedly be insulted, abused, and perhaps, assaulted, to which you must pay no attention whatever, but march with your faces to the front, and pay no attention to the mob, even if they throw stones, bricks, or other missiles; but if you are fired upon and any one of you is hit, your officers will order you to fire. Do not fire into any promiscuous crowds, but select any man whom you may see aiming at you, and be sure you drop him.”

Because of an ordinance preventing the construction of rail lines through the city's center, there was no direct rail connection between the Philadelphia & Baltimore Railroad's President Street Station and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad's Camden Station (ten blocks to the west). Engines had to be decoupled, then the rail cars were hauled by a team of horses between the two stations.

Baltimore Riots

While the 6th Regiment's rail cars were being transported more than a mile between stations, the insurrectionist mob grew to an estimated at 10,000, attacked the cars, derauling one of them, stopped the horses, and blocked the route with sand and ship's anchors. Stymied and under attack, four companies of the 6th Regiment, consisting of about 240 soldiers, scurried out of the cars and began marching in formation through the city. This further excited the mob, who harassed the Union soldiers, breaking store windows, and becoming violent. Eventually the soldiers were surrounded and in grave danger.



The mob attacked the rear companies of the regiment with "bricks, paving stones, and pistols."



Shots rang out from stores and houses. The Union forces reacted; several soldiers fired back into the mob. A huge brawl ensued.

The Baltimore police, recognizing the authority of Federal troops, intervened, risking their lives by forcibly blocking the crowd to let the soldiers pass.

Four soldiers and twelve civilians were killed in the riot, the first casualties of the Civil War. Thirty-six of the regiment were wounded, and left behind for medical care. Hundreds of civilians were injured.

The Massachusetts Volunteers, composed of many descendants of the Battles of Lexington and Concord, earned the nickname “Minutemen of '61.”

Once through Baltimore, the 6th Regiment found the railway to Washington strewn with obstacles, tracks torn up and the telegraph severed as the insurrectionist mob was still in seething in full force. Maryland Governor Hicks and Baltimore Mayor Brown ordered railroad bridges destroyed to prevent further Federal troops transiting. Nevertheless, the 6th Regiment reached Washington late on April 19th, just four days after receiving the call to duty. They were greeted by a relieved Lincoln, and barracked in the Senate Chamber.

However, until the mob was suppressed in Baltimore, and that city came under union control, another route to Washington had to be opened.

Rebuilding the Railroad

By the time the train transporting the 8th Regiment reached Philadelphia on April 19th, the information about the dangers ahead in Baltimore triggered General Butler to change plans, avoiding Baltimore altogether. Concerned that the next round of troops would not be able to reach Washington via Baltimore, Major General Patterson, commander of the region, ordered General Butler to open a more secure a route from Annapolis to Washington.



Steam Train Ferry Maryland in New York Harbor after the War – Connecticut Historical Society

The 8th Massachusetts then commandeered the steamer *Maryland*, a train ferry, at the Susquehanna River north of Havre de Grace. Butler’s regiment arrived at the state capital at Annapolis on Saturday, April 20. The Governor and Mayor of Annapolis both protested vigorously. Butler strong-armed them into permitting troops to land, saying, “I must land, for my troops are hungry.” State and local

authorities retorted, "No one will sell them anything." Butler's guile suggested that an Army was not restrained by the necessity of using money to acquire food when famished.

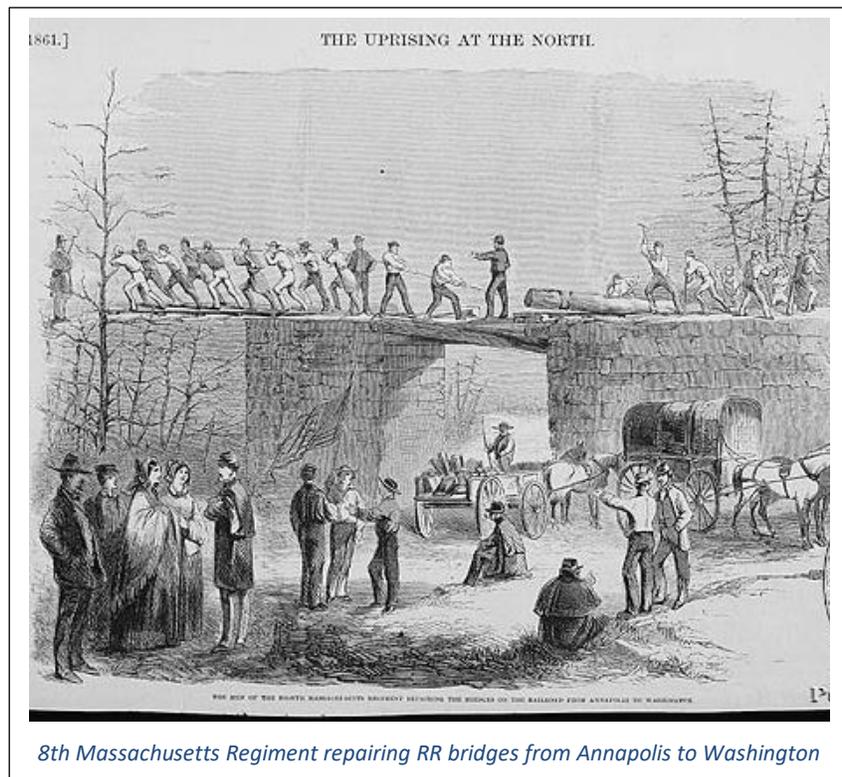
General Butler found the railroad engine-roundhouse locked up. He had it broken open, and discovered the engine all in pieces.

"Who knows anything about an engine?"

Charles Homans of Beverly stepped out of the ranks, stating: "I do, General, I made that locomotive, and can repair her in two hours." The repairs were done swiftly.

After considerable delay, track was re-laid and the engines and cars put in order.

The 8th Massachusetts, now joined by the 7th New York, with great energy began repairing the necessary railroad links, which then became the major transportation route to serve as the military highway to Washington for troop reinforcements, without passing through Baltimore. They then proceeded to Annapolis Junction, a seventeen-mile branch railroad halfway between Baltimore and Washington connecting Annapolis to the main line. The 7th New York sped on into Washington, arriving on April 25th, becoming the first troops to arrive via the by-pass route.



8th Massachusetts Regiment repairing RR bridges from Annapolis to Washington

Saving Old Ironsides

When the 8th Regiment reached Annapolis, they quickly recognized the *U.S.S. Constitution* sitting at the docks. Launched in 1797 in Boston, the ship was revered. To see it in poor condition was shocking.

In 1830, upon learning the Navy was going to scrap the *U.S.S. Constitution*, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., a 21 year who had just graduated from Harvard, wrote his classic poem "Old Ironsides"

*Aye tear her tattered ensign down long has it waved on high,
And many an eye has danced to see that banner in the sky;
Beneath it rung the battle shout, and burst the cannon's roar;—
The meteor of the ocean air shall sweep the clouds no more.*

Schoolchildren started sending pennies for her restoration. The Navy backed down.

By the Civil War, the ship had stubs for masts, her anchors embedded deep in the mud. She was serving as a training platform and dormitory for midshipmen.

Navy Captain Blake, Superintendent of the Academy, learned insurrectionists were scheming to take the *Constitution* as 'the first ship of war to hoist the flag of the Confederacy.' Navy Secretary Gideon Welles ordered Blake to defend the *Constitution* 'at all hazards.' When Brigadier General Butler's ship arrived on April 20th, Blake quickly went aboard to meet the general.

'Won't you save the *Constitution*?' he asked.

Thinking Blake was referring to the central document of the government, Butler responded affirmatively, 'Yes, that is just what I am here for.'

'Are those your orders?' Blake replied with relief. 'Then the old ship is safe.'

Now cognizant they were talking about two different things, Butler stated his orders did not apply to a ship. But Butler was no bureaucrat, immediately seizing the moment, assigning a contingent of troops to protect the *Constitution* and offered to assist if it became necessary to evacuate Old Ironsides, as some of the midshipmen might be insurrectionists. Determined to save the frigate from being torched or taken by another mob, Butler sent an armed contingent to board, where they were met with considerable resistance from Southern sympathizers. A skirmish ensued, but the 8th prevailed. Butler's troops were sufficient to deter saboteurs.

Blake realized securing the Academy in enemy territory would prohibit any regular instruction. He took rapid action, ordering the *Constitution* and the loyal midshipmen, along with the Navy's precious artifacts to depart Annapolis immediately.

Between the 8th Regiment's companies from Beverly, Salem, and Marblehead there were plenty of sailmakers, fishermen, ship builders, coopers, and sailors to refit the ship. Two Companies of the 8th were detached to shepherd her to safety in tow by the steam vessel *Maryland*, eventually bound to Newport, where the Naval Academy would be relocated for the duration of the war.



Eighth Massachusetts taking possession of the U.S.S. Constitution at Annapolis 1861 – Library of Congress

The 8th Enters Washington

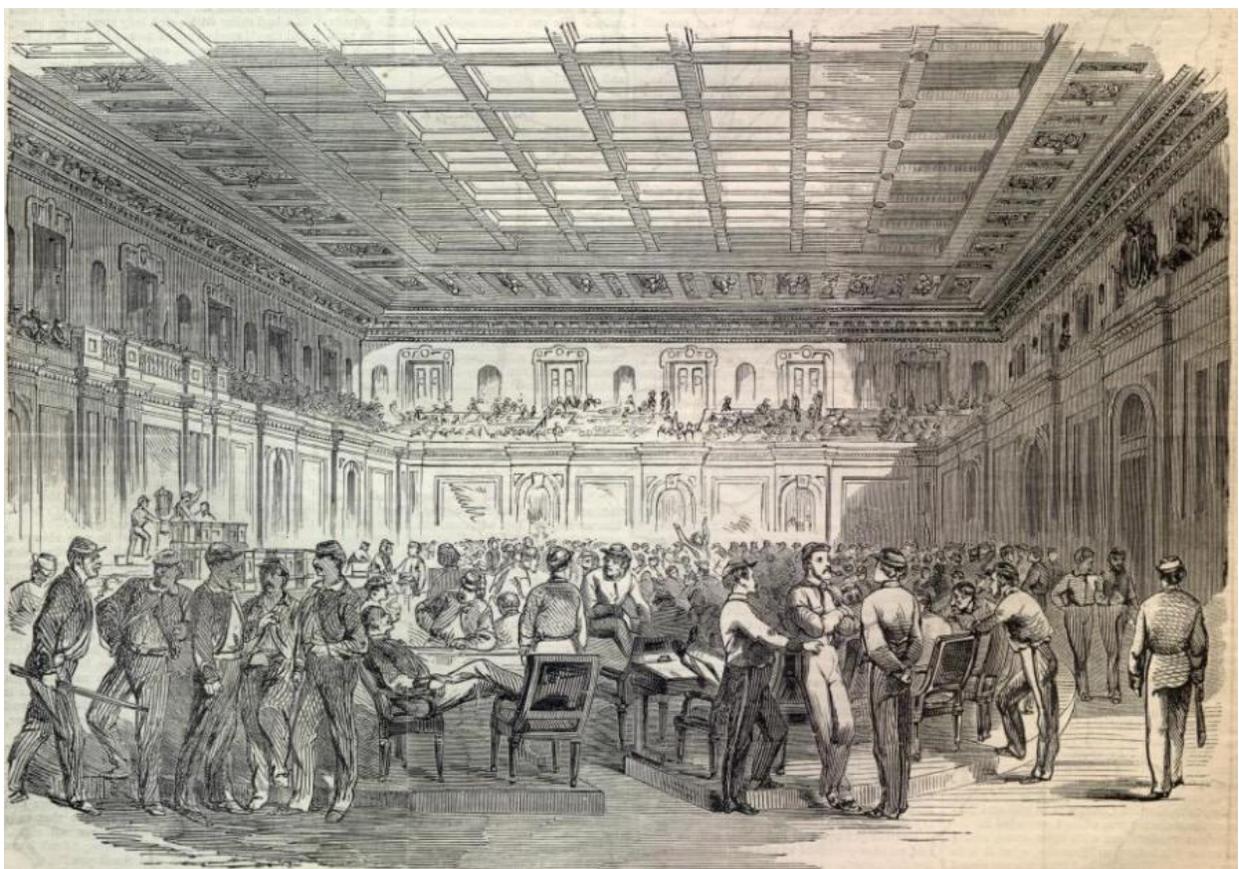
The 8th Regiment arrived in Washington on the afternoon of Friday, April 26th, eight days after its departure from Boston. They were greeted by President Lincoln. One of the company wrote home that week, that the President stated:

"Three cheers for the Eighth Regiment of Massachusetts, who can build locomotives, lay railroad tracks and re-take the *Constitution*."

Lincoln personally visited and congratulated the achievement of Charles Homans of the Beverly Light Infantry, who reconstructed the locomotive. A member of the New York 7th Regiment, writing a letter home, said that Homans was the "deus ex machina," who found his mark written on the disabled locomotive at Annapolis, and superintended its construction. Referring to the achievements of the 8th Regiment at Annapolis, the *National Intelligencer* newspaper the next morning remarked:

"We doubt whether any other single regiment in the country could furnish such a ready contingent to reconstruct a steam engine, lay a railroad track, and bend the sails of a man-of-war.

In a letter from Captain Francis E. Porter, dated May 8, 1861, he describes the regiment as in good condition, undergoing thorough drilling, and quartered in the House of Representatives. The 6th Massachusetts Volunteers, he added, were the first to reach Washington, and the 8th opened the military route from Annapolis. He said "We should have been the next, had we not received a dispatch from General Scott to stop at Annapolis and guard that post until the arrival of another regiment."



Union Troops Camped in the House of Representatives, Harper's May 1861

Epilogue

Strategic Impact

Taking the long view, both the Massachusetts 6th and 8th Volunteers had a major impact during the opening moments of the war.

1. The 6th arrived first on the steps of the Capitol, all the way from Boston in record time, receiving the President's call to arms on the 15th, mustering, traveling, fighting through insurgents, and arriving on the 19th. Certainly this dampened any thoughts of Confederate attack.
2. By securing the Northern railroad supply and communications lines through the hostile state of Maryland, Union troops were able to flood into Washington at the rate of up to 5,000 men per day, plus maintaining adequate logistical supply, while enabling rapid flow of information via telegraph. This wedged Maryland between two solid anchors of Union Forces, which also contributed to keeping the state neutral during the war.

Without these strategic factors, a Southern attack on Washington could have changed the war's destiny.

Cultural Impact of the Local Militia

In 1792, Congress passed the Militia Law (which remained in effect until 1903) requiring all able-bodied males aged 18-45 to enroll in the organized Militia. Today we would call this "mandatory service." Militia units were required to report for training twice a year; usually after spring planting and after the autumn harvest but before snow fell. Militia members were required to outfit themselves and report for training or mobilization with a musket or rifle, bayonet, flints, cartridge box, bullets or musket balls, haversack or knapsack, and powder horn and gunpowder. Often the local community contributed to these expenses. State legislatures were authorized to organize local units into divisions and regiments.

During the 1800s, the Militia was understood to be the foundation for the common defense for both community and country. These were always organized at the local level, embedded into the fabric of community culture. When units were called to action, it was always community action. (This was also true in Canada; see: [Collaborative Leadership Lessons from Combat](#)) The sense of community spirit often translated into a competitive advantage on the battlefield.

Because participation in the ranks was expected of all male citizens and involved regular drills, the militia units developed a core influence on the comradery of the community. This was far more than learning the discipline of inspections and marching. Annual encampments where the men participated in maneuvers and competitions developed more than military skills such as marksmanship, wall-scaling, etc. Collaborative Leadership, teamwork and trust-building were central organizing principles. Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) were elected by the rank and file based on respect, courage, honor, and ethics as well as (in some cases) financial contribution to the unit's support. Participation in the militia was considered a civic obligation, supporting a balance between one's personal rights and responsibilities. It was also an invaluable opportunity for developing character in young men.

Today, there are hundreds of historic militia groups in numerous villages, towns, and cities, principally in the Northeast.



Example of a Ceremonial Colonial Militia (RI Pawtuxet Rangers, founded by my father initially to reenact battles during the 1976 Bicentennial, still functioning to this day)

These are not a group of wild underground anarchists; they report directly to the Adjutant General of their state's National Guard. Many still use their original centuries-old armories.

While their function is largely ceremonial, such as marching in parades and battle reenactments, they also serve the same cultural function as their 18th century predecessors, building community and character and having social events that give meaning of the term "neighbors."

An anecdote from the *History of Essex County* serves to illustrate the sense of community and patriotism spawned within the local militia units:

"The interdependence of soldiers and citizens is well shown in one little incident of this period. A request was sent from Captain Raymond to Captain Porter, at his home, for a supply of such shirts as the Ladies' Aid Society had furnished them. The letter arrived on Monday; by Tuesday the ladies were industriously at work; and on Friday they packed and forwarded over one hundred of the required [hand-made] garments to their brave brothers at the front."

-30-