



# LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

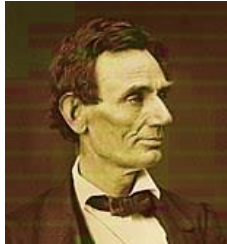
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## *Racing to Washington to Protect the Capitol from Insurrectionists<sup>1</sup>*

Short 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 protecting our democratic values. It has happened before. The historic events at the start of the Civil War are a lesson in honor and courage, as well as a great example of patriotism.

### *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, he began readying Massachusetts Volunteer Militia units,<sup>2</sup> which had lain relatively dormant since the end of hostilities of the War of 1812.



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



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 8<sup>th</sup> 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:

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<sup>1</sup> 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, family documents, and augmented by internet background sources.

<sup>2</sup> The 1792 Federal Militia Act established the organization structure, enlistment, and training requirements of the state militias, to consist of every "free able-bodied white male citizen" between ages 18 and 45. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these were referred to as the "National Guard."

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"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 until on Friday, April 12<sup>th</sup> 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. Surrounded on all sides by hostile Confederate forces, Washington was 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 15<sup>th</sup>, Lincoln telegraphed messages to all northern governors for 75,000 soldiers, pleading for emergency assistance.<sup>3</sup> 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.

Governor Andrew immediately activated 15,000 Massachusetts militiamen. The 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment from Greater Boston<sup>4</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment from Essex County north of Boston were prepared and ready to deploy. According to Beverly's *Citizen*:

"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... 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."

"On the morning of [April] 16th the companies [from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Regiments] began to arrive in Boston. Before nightfall every company...had reported at headquarters for duty."

Logistical supplies of tents, food, and munitions were arriving to be loaded on the trains.<sup>5</sup>

## *Race to Washington*

The Massachusetts 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment, with Col. Edward F. Jones in command, left for Washington first, soon followed by the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment from Essex County. As the steam-fired train engine chugged along the route, citizens turned out to cheer. When the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment reached New York on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>, they urged the New York regiments to follow behind quickly. Being the anniversary of the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the 19<sup>th</sup> of April symbolized patriotism. Captain Porter's grandfather, Nathaniel Porter, aged thirteen in 1775, fought in that battle.

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<sup>3</sup> By law, calling up local militias was limited to a 90 day tour of duty.

<sup>4</sup> Composed of company units from Middlesex County, and including units from Boston, Lowell, Lawrence, Acton, Groton, Stoneham & Worcester.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

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The earlier departing 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment was already in Philadelphia heading toward Baltimore. Prior to entering Baltimore, the 6th Regiment's Colonel Jones went car to car with his 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 Baltimore's center, there was no direct rail connection connecting the incoming line from Philadelphia and the outgoing line to Washington. The stations were ten blocks away. Engines had to be disconnected, and then the rail cars were hauled by a team of horses between the two stations.

## *Baltimore Riots*

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



The mob attacked 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 soldiers were wounded and left behind for medical care. Hundreds of civilians were injured.



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

## *Rebuilding the Railroad*

By the time the train transporting the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment reached Philadelphia on April 19<sup>th</sup>, the information about the dangers ahead in Baltimore triggered a change of plans to avoid Baltimore altogether. Concerned that the next rounds 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 route from Annapolis to Washington.

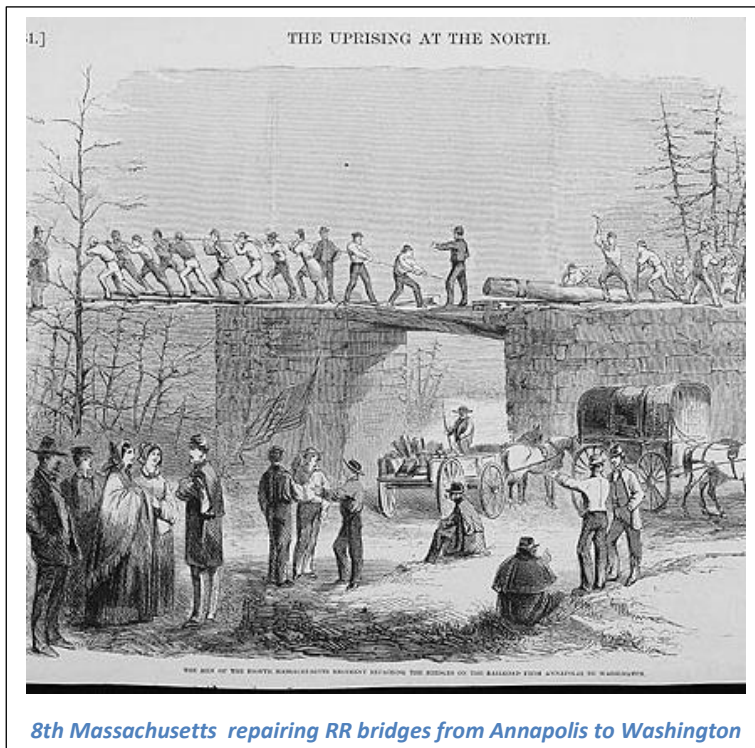
The 8th Massachusetts commandeered the steamer *Maryland*, a train ferry, at the Susquehanna River north of Havre de Grace. Butler's 8<sup>th</sup> arrived at the state capital at Annapolis on Saturday, April 20.

General Butler found the railroad engine roundhouse locked up. He had it broken open to discover the engine all in pieces.

"Who knows anything about a steam engine?"

A man from Porter's Beverly Company stepped out of the ranks stating:

"I do, General, I made that locomotive, and can repair her in two hours."



After considerable delay, track was re-laid and the engines and cars put in order by the men of the Eighth, who were now joined by the 7th New York. The new Annapolis route bypassing Baltimore became the major transportation route to serve as the military highway to Washington for troop reinforcements. The 7th New York sped on into Washington, arriving on April 25<sup>th</sup>, becoming the first troops to arrive via the by-pass route.

## *Saving Old Ironsides*

When the 8<sup>th</sup> 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. By the Civil War, the ship had stubs for masts, and her anchors embedded deep in the mud, where she served as a training platform and dormitory for midshipmen.

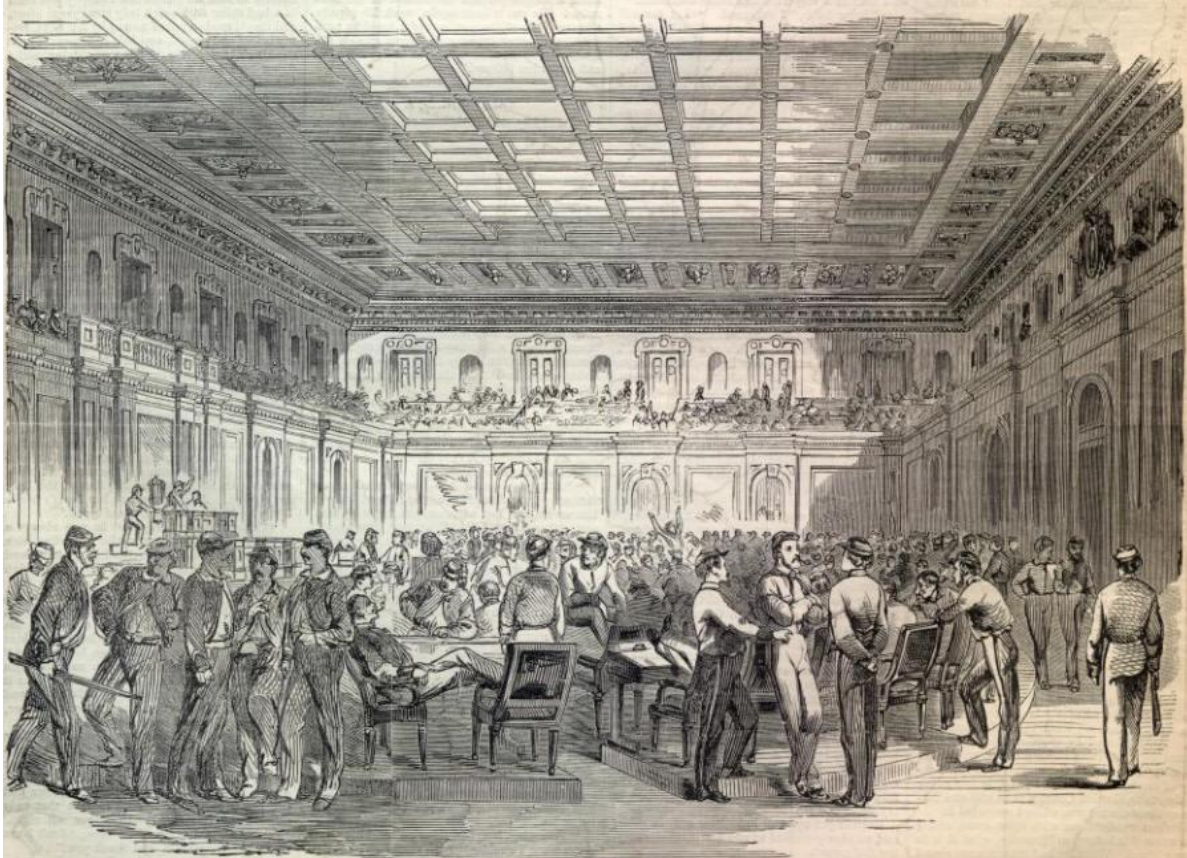
Insurrectionists were scheming to take the *Constitution* as 'the first ship of war to hoist the flag of the Confederacy.' General Butler, immediately seized the moment, assigning a contingent of troops to

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protect the *Constitution*. In coordination with the Academy's Navy Superintendent, the *Constitution* departed Annapolis ultimately bound for Newport, where the Naval Academy would be relocated for the duration of the war. Among the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment's companies from Beverly, Salem, and Marblehead there were plenty of sailmakers, fishermen, ship builders, coopers, and sailors. Two Companies were detached to the *Constitution* to refit the ship and to ensure she was seaworthy for her passage north.

## *The 8<sup>th</sup> Enters Washington*

The 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment arrived in Washington on the afternoon of Friday, April 26th, eight days after its departure from Boston. They were greeted by President Lincoln, then barracked in the House of Representatives.



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

One of Captain Porter's Company wrote home that week, quoting the President:

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

Lincoln personally congratulated the achievement of the man who reconstructed the locomotive. A member of the New York 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment, writing a letter home, said he was the "deus ex machina," who found his mark written on the disabled locomotive at Annapolis, and superintended its construction.

In a letter from Captain Porter, dated May 8, 1861, he describes the regiment as in good condition, undergoing thorough drilling, and quartered in the House of Representatives.

## Epilogue

### Strategic Impact

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

1. The Massachusetts 6<sup>th</sup> arrived first on the steps of the Capitol, all the way from Boston in record time, mustering, traveling, fighting through insurgents, and arriving on just four days later. This certainly dampened any thoughts of Confederate attack.
2. Union troops were able to flood into Washington at the rate of up to 5,000 men per day because the 8<sup>th</sup> had secured the railroad supply and communications lines through hostile territory, maintaining adequate logistical supply, while enabling rapid flow of information via telegraph. Wedging Maryland between two solid anchors of Union Forces kept the state neutral during the war.

Without these, a quick Southern attack on Washington could have changed the destiny of the war.

### 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 organized local militia laws. (Today we call this “mandatory service.”) Militia units were required to report for training twice a year. During the 1800s, the local Militia was the foundation for the common defense, embedded into the fabric of community culture. When units were called to action, it was always community action. (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 were a central 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. 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, competence, courage, honor, and ethics. 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.

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 ...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-