

History of Milford Militia/National Guard Units

1781-2005

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Under Massachusetts colonial law, all men between the ages of 16 and 60 were required to enroll and serve in the militia. Militiamen generally attended drill eight times a year, elected their officers and noncommissioned officers and were required to furnish their own weapons and equipment.

In the fall of 1774, the Massachusetts Militia was ordered to prepare for possible service. New officers were elected, powder and ammunition was acquired and training was renewed at a level not seen before.

Prior to 1780, the men of the future town of Milford served in either the Mendon minute company or militia company. On 1 July 1781 the Town of Milford was authorized to organize its own militia unit. Capt. Ichabod Thayer, 1st Lt. Samuel Jones and 2d Lt. Nathaniel Parkhurst were commissioned to raise the 7th Company, 3d Regiment, Worcester Brigade. Under state law, all Milford men between 16 and 60 were obligated to enroll in the company and attend monthly training sessions. In 1793, state law changed the obligation to men between the ages of 18 and 45.

In 1787, the Milford company became part of the 2d Regiment, 1st Brigade, 7th Division. Ichabod Thayer was promoted to major and assigned to the staff of the 2d Regiment. Capt. Samuel Jones was elected in his place. Jones served as lieutenant colonel of the 2d Regiment from 1793 to 1798.

Since there was little threat to Milford or Massachusetts, the militia assembled only several times a year. In 1806 the Milford Artillery Company was organized under the command of Capt. Pearly Hunt. The company was issued two cannon for training and for firing salutes on Independence Day and during other patriotic events. Maj. Hunt took command of the new Artillery Battalion, 1st Brigade in 1806.

Milford militia officers took a leading role in militia affairs. Lt.Col. Commandant Samuel Nelson commanded the 2d Regiment from 1803 to 1805. He was succeeded by Lt.Col. Commandant Benjamin Godfrey in 1805. Maj. Levi Chapin took command of the Artillery Battalion in 1810; he was followed by Maj. Zurial Howard in 1814.

In 1807, the Massachusetts Militia was alerted for mobilization when war with Great Britain seemed imminent. The two Milford companies acquired additional weapons, ammunition, and drilled more often. However, it was not until the War of 1812 that Milford militiamen were mobilized. On 8 September 1814, the 40-man Milford Artillery, under the command of Capt. Rufus Thayer, was ordered to march to Boston as part of the protective force raised to defend the

coast from a threatened British invasion. The company remained on active duty until 5 November 1814.

After the war, two Milford officers took command of the 2d Regiment. In 1817 Col. Ariel Bragg took command. He was succeeded by Col. Sullivan Sumner in 1820. That year, the 2d Regiment was transferred to the 6th Division.

On 1 April 1826, Capt. Lewis Johnson was commissioned as the first commander of the Milford Light Infantry. Unlike the enrolled militia, members of the Milford Light Infantry volunteered to join, purchase distinctive full dress uniforms and drill on a regular basis. Such units were designated as volunteer militia as opposed to the enrolled militia made up of men who were required to serve.

The Milford Light Infantry was composed of men in their 20s and 30s who had the time and means to attend meetings and drills. The unit became an important part of Milford and took part in the many patriotic and civic events held in the town. The unit drilled publically and always attracted spectators who admired the intricate drill movements. The elegant uniform, similar to that worn by the cadets of the U.S. Military Academy, attracted recruits who wanted to impress young women.

Interest and participation in the two enrolled companies began to wane. Militia laws were not enforced. Milford Lt. Colonels Lewis Johnson and Peter Corbett, who served as second in command of the 2d Regiment between 1830 and 1834, could not stem the tide.

In 1834 the volunteer militia companies in the 1st Brigade were transferred to the new Light Infantry Regiment of the brigade. In 1839 Col. Orison Underwood of Milford took command.

In 1840 Massachusetts disbanded the enrolled militia units. In its place were the volunteer militia regiments which made up the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia. The Milford enrolled militia infantry and artillery companies were disbanded. As part of the reorganization, the Milford Light Infantry was redesignated as Company A (Milford Light Infantry), 8th Regiment of Light Infantry.

In 1855, Company A was transferred to the 10th Regiment of Light Infantry. The company also began attending three-day summer camps in addition to its drills and parades. In 1859 the MLI was transferred to the 3d Battalion of Infantry. In April 1861 the Adjutant General decided that the 3d Battalion was no longer needed in the militia and it, including the MLI, was disbanded on 3 May 1861.

In its place was a new volunteer company composed of 74 young Irish American men employed as boot makers. On 3 May 1861, Company H, 9th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was organized under the command of 22-year old Capt. Jeremiah O'Neill. Irish American militia

units had been disbanded in 1855 when the Know- Nothing Party came to power. The 9th Infantry recruited Irish Americans in Boston, Marlborough, Salem, Stoughton as well as Milford. The 9th was mustered into Federal service on 11 June 1861 and saw heavy action in the Peninsula Campaign in the summer of 1862. It served through all the campaigns until June 1864 when it was released from service.

Milford men also served in Company B, 25th Infantry; Company K, 28th Infantry; Company F, 36th Infantry as well as Company G, 40th New York Infantry. A total of 126 men from Milford died during the Civil War.

Milford was authorized a new militia unit in September 1866, when Capt. William Clark organized Company F, 1st Battalion of Infantry. It was quickly redesignated as Company F, 10th Infantry; however, the company was disbanded in a major reduction of the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia in 1876.

There was an interest in obtaining authorization for a militia unit. On 3 January 1879, Capt. Henry J. Bailey organized Company M, 6th Infantry. Bailey was a Civil War veteran and had briefly served as the commander of Company F. Company M was quickly recruited to full strength and began holding weekly drills and one-week summer camps held at Camp Framingham. Company M soon integrated into the social and patriotic fabric of Milford. It also fielded athletic and marksmanship teams. Service in the volunteer militia was as much military as it was social.

Peacetime soldiering came to an end on 13 May 1898 when Company M, 6th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, under the command of Capt. John F. Barrett, was mustered into Federal service at Camp Framingham for duty during the Spanish American War. The 6th was assigned to the 2d Corps which had the mission of capturing the Spanish colony of Puerto Rico.

The 6th Infantry landed on Puerto Rico on 25 July and saw minor action during the campaign. The Milford soldiers wore wool shirts in the hot, steamy climate carrying obsolete Springfield rifles. The Army redeployed National Guard units as quickly as possible back to the U.S. since the troops suffered from malaria. The 6th returned to Boston on 27 October and Company M arrived back in Milford on 3 November.

Beginning in 1903, the War Department instituted a number of reforms that brought the National Guard under the supervision of the Federal government. Company M concentrated on tactical training and marksmanship during drills and summer camps. Rifle qualification was conducted at the unit's rifle range on Cedar St.

Under state law, towns were required to purchase or lease land for use of the militia unit as a rifle range. Milford acquired the land before 1898 which was used by the National Guard for many years.

The Town of Milford was also required by state law to provide suitable quarters for Company M. Many towns built large wood structures for use of its militia company. The state took over the responsibility of housing National Guard units (the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia was redesignated as the Massachusetts National Guard in 1907).

In 1912, the State Armory Commission built the armory at 14 Pearl St. The brick armory consisted of a two-story head house and a drill shed large enough for the entire company to assemble and drill. The cost of the land and armory was \$54,000.

The Milford Armory became Company M's and the town's social center. The unit held dances and also fielded athletic teams that kept the armory open every day. Good times came to an end in 1917.

In the spring of 1917 it was evident that the U.S. would enter World War I on the side of the Allies. On 30 March 1917, the 6th Infantry was ordered into active federal service. Capt. Michael J. Dee and his two officers and 100 enlisted men were sworn into Federal service. Company M guarded railroad bridges for several months to prevent sabotage.

In August, the 6th reassembled at Camp Framingham. The 6th was ordered to send most of its personnel to the 104th Infantry organizing at Camp Bartlett, Westfield, Mass. Most Company M soldiers were assigned to Company M, 104th Infantry, 26th Division.

A small cadre from Company M, 6th Infantry remained with the unit; the 6th was redesignated as the 4th Pioneer Infantry in February 1918. The 4th did not deploy to France until October 1918 and saw no action.

The 104th Infantry, however, and the 26th "Yankee" Division saw heavy action during World War I. The 26th was the first U.S. Army division to deploy to France; an amazing feat for a National Guard division. The 104th arrived in France on 10 October 1917.

The regiment entered the trenches on 14 February 1918 in the Chemin des Dames sector where the 104th saw its first action. The 104th Infantry particularly distinguished itself during the campaign in Lorraine in April. The French Army awarded the regiment the Croix de Guerre with Gilt Star making the 104th the first U.S. Army unit decorated by a foreign government.

From July to until the end of the war on 11 November, Company M Guardsmen were in almost constant combat. The 104th Infantry was credited with participation in six campaigns. Eight Milford Guardsmen died in the war and dozens were either wounded or gassed. The unit was released from active duty on 29 April 1919 at Camp Devens, Mass.

On 20 June 1919, a handful of Company M veterans reorganized the unit and began recruiting. In 1921 Company M was redesignated as Company C, 181st Infantry; in 1923 it was redesignated as Company I.

Capt. Elbert M. Crockett, who had enlisted in Company M in 1892, was appointed company commander in 1921. World War I veterans recruited and trained men too young for service in the war, Four-hour drills were conducted every week. Two-week summer camps were held at Camp Devens.

The athletic and social activities of the National Guard resumed as well. Company I fielded basketball, baseball and marksmanship teams that competed within the 181st Infantry and other units in the Massachusetts National Guard.

While World War II was going on in Europe, Congress authorized President Franklin Roosevelt to mobilize the National Guard for one year of intensive training. On 16 January 1941, the personnel of Company I assembled at the armory. Capt. John F. Smith and his two officers and 60 enlisted men boarded a train on 18 January for Camp Edwards; the former National Guard installation on Cape Cod that was taken over by the Army.

After Pearl Harbor, the 26th Infantry Division was assigned to coast patrol duty for six months. The 181st Infantry was detached from the 26th and remained on coast patrol duty in Maine from 1942 to 1944. While Company I was stationed in Maine, many of its soldiers were reassigned to infantry units that fought in France and Italy. The company was inactivated at Fort Dix, NJ in February 1944 with the end of the coast patrol mission. By then most of its soldiers had been sent to Europe as replacements.

In late 1946 and early 1947, Company I began to reorganize. It consisted of World War II veterans and men too young to have served in the war. On 24 March 1947, Company I was Federally recognized as a unit in the Massachusetts National Guard. For 11 years, Company I drilled one night a week and attended summer camps at either Camp Edwards or Camp Drum, NY.

In 1959, the Massachusetts Army National Guard underwent a major reorganization. This reorganization and the many that followed were determined by the needs of the Army. During the next 46 years the Milford company was reorganized and redesignated eight times:

1959 Company A, 181st Engineer Battalion

1965 Company A, 241st Engineer Battalion

1967 Company D, 181st Engineer Battalion

1975 Company B, 2d Battalion, 181st Infantry

1988 Company A, 101st Engineer Battalion

1994 Company D, 101st Engineer Battalion

1996 Company A, 181st Engineer Battalion

2005 Support Company, 101st Engineer Battalion

In 2005, Support Company, 101st Engineer Battalion moved from the Milford Armory to the Whitinsville Armory. The Milford Armory was closed and later sold to the town. After 221 years, there was no longer a militia or National Guard unit in Milford. While there is no longer a National Guard unit in the town, the lineage of Milford's former Company M/I is perpetuated and resides with Support Company in Methuen where it moved to in 2011.

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