



LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

Racing to Washington to Protect the Capitol from Insurrectionists¹

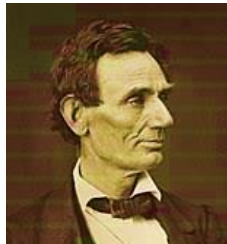
by Robert Porter Lynch ([bio](#)) January 15, 2021

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, riots, and quick thinking is well worth reliving:



Photo Credit: Emily Cochrane @ESCochrane · 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 sensed the worst. Andrew was an abolitionist and had engaged in the legal defense of fugitive slaves against owners seeking their return. 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, three organized companies attached to the 8th Regiment of Light Infantry had dwindled to just one. My great, great grandfather, Captain Francis E. Porter, aged 37, was the Captain leading Company "E," Beverly's sole remaining unit. He and his Regiment played a central role in saving the Capitol from Insurrectionists.

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, family documents, plus a variety of other internet background sources.

² Massachusetts formed the nation's first militia units in 1636, organizing companies in local communities into three separate regiments. The Federal Militia Act of 1792 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 local unit. 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. State legislatures were authorized to organize local units into divisions and regiments.

Beverly was a center of the Anti-Slavery fervor, as evidenced by its voting record: Lincoln/Hamlin: 739, Bell/Everett: 120, Douglas: 72, and Jefferson Davis: 23.³

On January 19th, 1861 the official order by Governor Andrew was printed in the Beverly *Citizen* newspaper 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." Andrew was committed to promoting younger and more vigorous leaders, and contracting for updated armaments, equipment, and supplies. The *Citizen* subsequently reported:

"Company "E," at a special meeting in response to the order of Governor Andrew, had a full and enthusiastic rally, and *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. Telegraph operators clicked the news via Morse Code to Washington and then northward.

President Lincoln had only been in office for a little over a month was on high alert. A small force of 16,000 men were in the entire standing Army; most were deployed to the western frontier fighting Indians or assigned to coastal forts. Thus, they were unavailable to defend Washington, which was surrounded on all sides by hostile Confederate forces. Lincoln knew Washington could be easily overtaken by a small marauding armed mob from Virginia or Maryland at any time.

Desperate for reinforcements, Lincoln's only defense could come from state militias.⁴ (now called National Guard Units), just as they had done in 1814 after the British invaded Washington.

Lincoln's Urgent Call for Protection

Monday, April 15th, Lincoln sent urgent messages to all the northern governors for 75,000 soldiers pleading for emergency assistance.⁵ Of all the states, Massachusetts was the only one capable of responding rapidly, but it was nearly 450 miles away, a long distance with the primitive railroads at the time.⁶

That same day Governor Andrew responded to Lincoln's telegram by ordering the activation of 15,000 Massachusetts militiamen. "The drum-beat of the long roll had been struck" according the *Citizen*. The 6th Regiment in Boston⁷ and the 8th Regiment north of Boston were prepared and ready to deploy. Company E of the 8th Regiment was the first in Massachusetts to report for duty; according to the *Citizen*:

³ This was not a pro-slavery vote. Misguided northern Democrats believed Davis would prevent a Civil War.

⁴ In 1861 Connecticut was the first state to rename its militia as "National Guard," which became near universal following the Civil War. The 1916 National Defense Act mandated the use of "National Guard" for all organized militia.

⁵ By law, calling up local militias was limited to a 90 day tour of duty.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Composed of company units from Boston, Lowell, Lawrence, Acton, Groton, Stoneham & Worcester.

“Captain Porter having received his orders at five pm on April 15th, when he 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. The *Citizen* reported the company mustered in full ranks and, with music, marched to the train 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.

“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.”

"On the morning of the 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" [until Thursday as other companies from Salem, Concord, and Marblehead were arriving and 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. On April 20th, a mass meeting was held in the town-hall, and patriotic speeches were made by many citizens. The relief fund, at the close of the meeting amounted to three thousand dollars.”

“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

Boston's 6th Regiment under the Brigade Command of General Butler left for Washington first. That afternoon it was quickly followed by Beverly's 8th Regiment. Along the route citizens turned out to cheer the Regiments along the way.

When the Massachusetts 8th brigade 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, it was a day of energized courage. Captain Porter's grandfather, Nathaniel Porter, aged thirteen in 1775, had fought in that battle eighty-six years earlier.

By the time the train transporting the 8th Regiment reached Philadelphia, the earlier departing 6th Regiment had sped along to Baltimore where they were attacked by the Southern mob.

On April 19, the anniversary of the Revolution, Col. Jones's 6th Regiment expected to trudge into Baltimore, anticipating resistance. A “pilot” locomotive was requisitioned to test the tracks for sabotage.

Prior to entering Baltimore, the 6th Regiment gained important intelligence that armed conflict was likely and its presence "would be resisted." Colonel Jones went car to car reading 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 the city's center, there was no direct rail connection between the Philadelphia and Baltimore Railroad's President Street Station and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad's Camden Station (ten blocks to the west). Engines had to be disconnected. 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 transported the ten blocks between stations, the insurrectionist mob, 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, four companies of the Regiment,



consisting of about 240 soldiers, scurried out of the cars and began marching in formation through the city. This further excited the mob, harassing the Union soldiers, breaking store windows, and causing

damage, eventually surrounding the soldiers. 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 as several soldiers fired into the mob. A huge brawl ensued. The Baltimore police, recognizing the Federal authority, intervened blocking the crowd. As the soldiers fought their way toward Camden Station, much of their equipment was left behind, including their marching band's instruments. The 6th Regiment, composed of many descendants of Lexington and Concord earned the



nickname "Minute men of '61." 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.

Rebuilding the Railroad

Once through Baltimore the 6th Regiment found the railway to Washington strewn with obstacles and the telegraph severed as the insurrectionist mob was in seething in full force. The tracks had been torn up and engines blocked the tracks, sabotaged by the secessionists. 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 Lincoln, then barracked in the Senate Chamber.

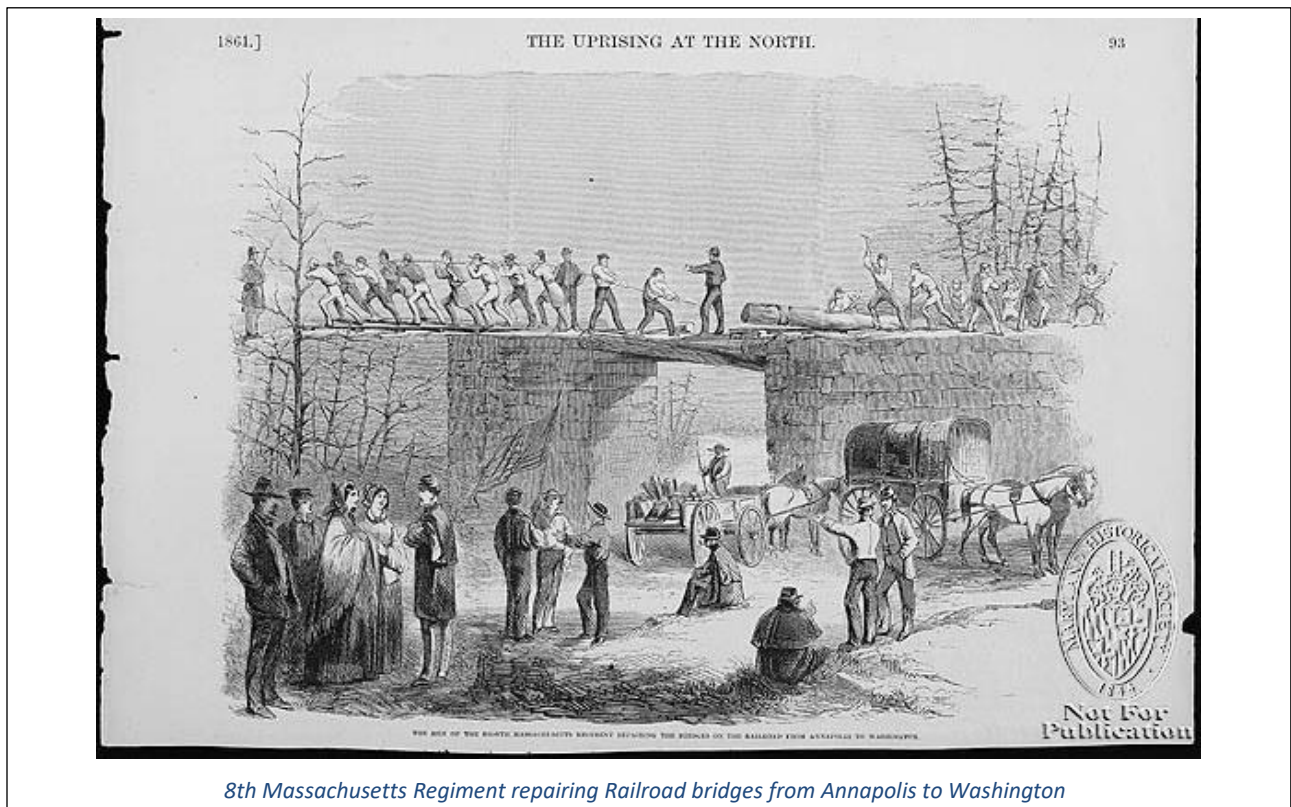
Until the mob was suppressed in Baltimore, and that city came under union control, another route to Washington had to be opened. Concerned that troops would not be able to reach Washington via Baltimore, Major General Patterson, commander of the Department of Washington (Pennsylvania, Delaware,

Maryland, and the District of Columbia), on April 19th ordered Brigadier General Butler of the 8th Massachusetts to open and secure a route from Annapolis through Annapolis Junction to Washington.

The 8th Massachusetts commandeered the steamer *Maryland*, a train ferry, at the Susquehanna River, arriving at Annapolis on Saturday, April 20. The Governor of Maryland and Mayor of Annapolis protested vigorously. Butler strong-armed them into permitting troops to land at Annapolis, saying, "I must land, for my troops are hungry." State and local authorities retorted that "No one will sell them anything." Butler's guile made itself evident when he suggested an Army was not restrained by the necessity of using money to acquire food when famished.

The 8th Massachusetts, now joined by the 7th New York, then proceeded to Annapolis Junction (a branch railroad of seventeen miles halfway between Baltimore and Washington connecting Annapolis with the Baltimore and Washington Railroad). The 7th New York went on to Washington, arriving on April 25th, becoming the first troops to arrive via the by-pass route.

Meanwhile the 8th Massachusetts Regiment began constructing a "by-pass" via Annapolis, the capital of Maryland southeast of Baltimore. With great energy and enthusiasm, they created the necessary railroad links, which then became the major transportation route to serve as the military highway to Washington for Eastern troops without passing through Baltimore.



8th Massachusetts Regiment repairing Railroad bridges from Annapolis to Washington

Upon arrival at Annapolis, General Butler found the railroad engine-house locked up. He had it broken it open, and discovered the engine all in pieces.

"Who knows anything about a steam engine?"

One man from Porter's Company stepped out of the ranks and said: "I do, General, I made that locomotive, and can repair her in two hours." Charles Homans did the repairs swiftly.

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

Saving Old Ironsides

When the 8th Regiment reached Annapolis, which was the home of the Naval Academy, they quickly recognized the *U.S.S. Constitution*. Launched in 1797 in Boston, the ship was revered. To see it in such poor condition was shocking.

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 arrived by ship on April 20, 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



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

In 1830, upon learning the Navy was going to scrap the U.S.S. Constitution, Oliver Wendell Holmes, 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.*

School children started sending pennies for her restoration, and the Navy backed down.

By the Civil War, the ship had stubs for mast, and her anchors were embedded deep in the mud at Annapolis, where she served as a training platform for midshipmen.

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

evacuate the ship, as some of the midshipmen might be insurrectionists.

Determined to save "Old Ironsides" from being torched or taken by another mob, Butler sent an armed contingent to board the ship, 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. Thus, Blake took rapid action, ordering the *Constitution* and the midshipmen, along with the Navy's precious artifacts to depart Annapolis immediately. The 8th detached two companies to help her back to the safety of Northern waters.

The 8th Enters Washington

The 8th Regiment arrived in Washington on the afternoon of Friday, April 26th, eight days after its departure from Boston.

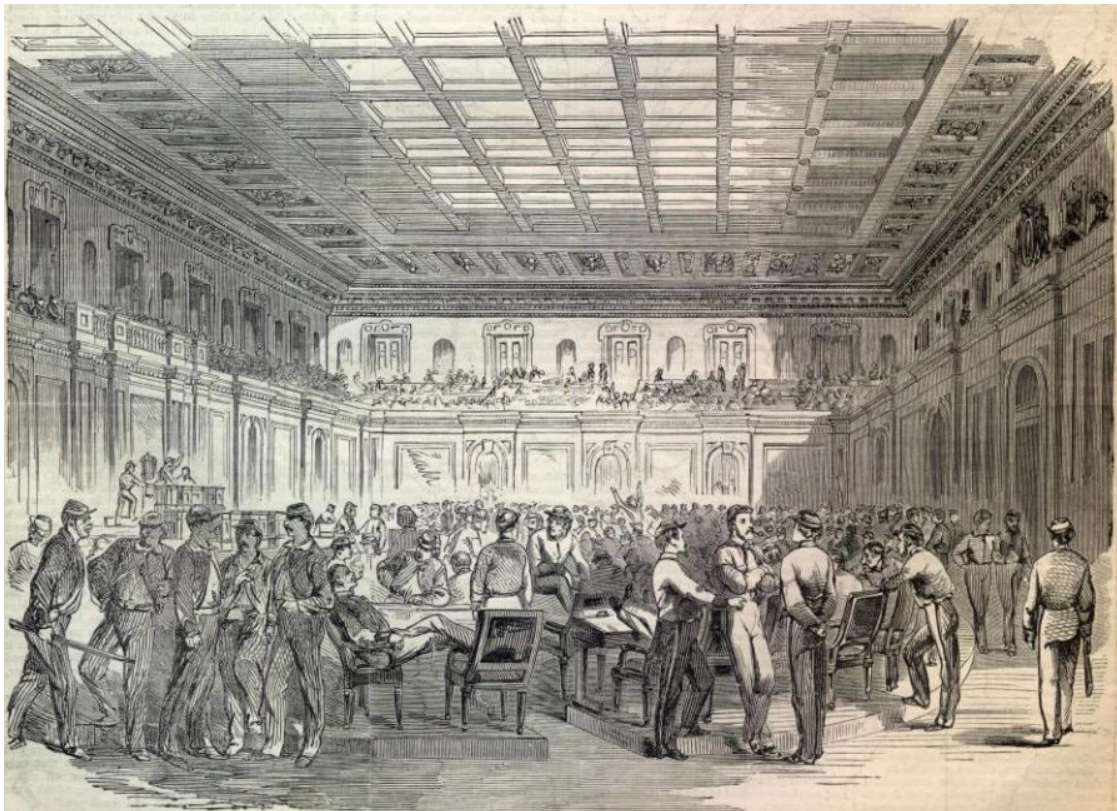
They were greeted by President Lincoln. One of the company wrote home that week, stating:

"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 at the opening moments of the war. 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.

By securing the Northern railroad supply and communications lines through the hostile state of Maryland, it kept that state neutral during the war and enabled fast information flow along with enable Union troops to flood into Washington at the rate of up to 5,000 per day.

Without these two factors, a 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 the organized Militia. Today we'd call this mandatory service.

During the 1800s, the Militia was understood to be the foundation for the common defense of both community and country. These were always organized at the local level, embedded into the 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 was often 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. Leadership and 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 as a civic obligation and responsibility, it was also an invaluable opportunity for developing the character of young men.

Today, there are hundreds of historic militia groups in numerous villages, towns, and cities, particularly in the Northeast. These are not a group of wild underground anarchists, the report directly to the Adjutant General of their state's National Guard. 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 make meaning of the term "neighbors."



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)

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; on Tuesday the ladies were industriously at work; and on Friday they packed and forwarded over one hundred of the required garments to their brave brothers at the front.

The Eighth Light Infantry's Second and Third Deployments

After being mustered out on August 1st, 1861, at the end of their 90 day deployment, the Regiment continued to train and muster for over a year, with major activities at Camp Banks in neighboring Salem.



Camp Banks Aug 25th, 26th, & 27th 1858 on Winter Island, Salem Harbor. Endicott & Co., Publishers, Depicting entrance to Beverly Harbor, Parker's Lighthouse, Lowell Island, Fort Pickering, Naugus Head, Marblehead Shore, Salem Inner Harbor. Showing: General Butlers Quarters from the Author's Family Collection from Col. Francis E. Porter

The Eighth Infantry was redeployed in November 1862 to New Berne, North Carolina, traveling by transport ship to Beaufort, then traveled by train to New Berne, N.C. where Company K was detailed to defend Fort Totten, armed with 25 guns commanding the westerly approach to the city.

In February, 1863 the Regiment repelled a Confederate attack. In April the unit failed in its attempt to provide relief to support besieged troops at Washington, NC. That month elements of the regiment engaged with Confederate forces at Blount's Creek, N.C., and then joined a reconnaissance force under Gen. Prince, capturing many prisoners during a six-day operation near Core Creek, N.C.

On July 1, 1863 the Eighth Infantry arrived at Baltimore, Maryland where, according to official records, it remained until July 7, when following the Battle of Gettysburg, it led the brigade advance to re-occupy Maryland Heights and intercept the retreating forces of Gen. Robert E. Lee. However, apparently Company "E" of Beverly was detached to another Regiment to engage in the Battle of Gettysburg. Family heritage, reported by my great grandmother, who was Col. Porter's daughter, places him at Gettysburg. Further, Col. Porter's obituary from 1892 states "he died [from the] sickness [that] dates back to the time of his service in the civil-war when by exposure on his march to Gettysburg he contracted a heart trouble, which was finally to end his life."

There is much precedent for such detachments to supplement units that had been severely depleted in prior battles. For example, at Gettysburg the 40th NY (aka the Mozart Regt) was augmented by four companies from Massachusetts, where they were in the Valley of Death facing Devil's Den. Additionally, the Massachusetts 28th Volunteers took horrendous casualties at the Battle of Fredericksburg. By the time of Gettysburg, the 28th Massachusetts had been worn down to just 220 rifles, and four other regiments been thoroughly depleted. On the way to Gettysburg, the 28th Massachusetts Volunteers incurred a long, hard march of 34 miles through the July heat, reaching Gettysburg at 5 a.m., exhausted. This would explain why Porter's unit would have been detached to reinforce another unit.

The Eighth Light Infantry was called to duty for a third and final time in July 1864 to defend Baltimore where it guarded the Northern Central Railroad from attack by Confederate guerillas. After a brief garrison and provost duty in the city of Baltimore, the Eighth returned to Massachusetts, being mustered out of Federal service in November 1864.