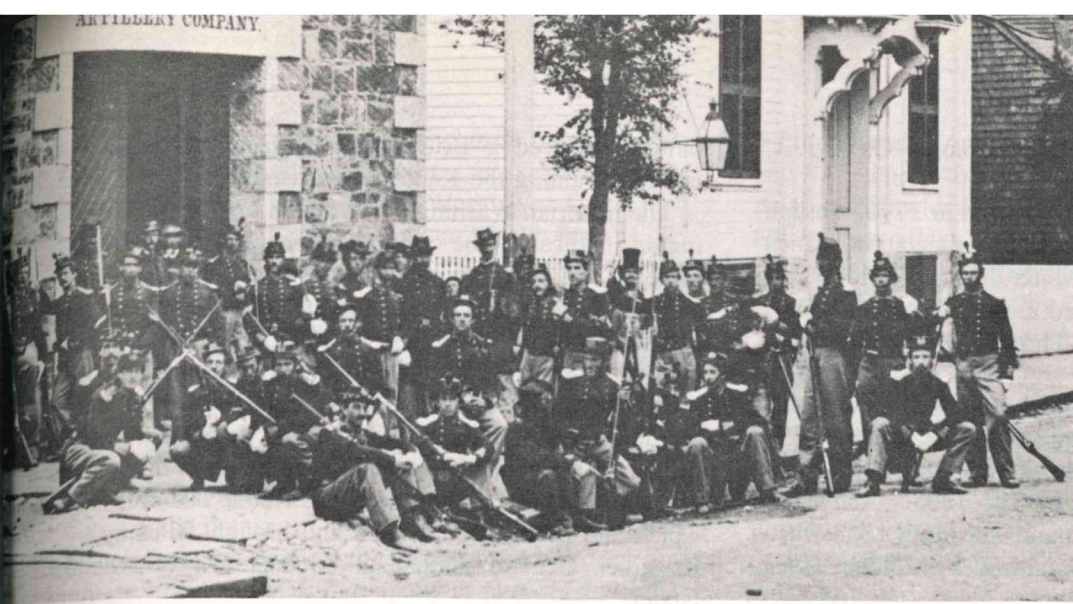


RHODE ISLAND YEARBOOK



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*Newport Artillery Company
(photo taken shortly before
1880) Original armory was
badly damaged by fire in 1906*

Rhode Island's Chartered Commands

By CAPT. FRANK C. PRITCHARD
R.I. Army National Guard

DEFENSE was an individual consideration in Rhode Island's earliest days — when a yell from a wife or child or the too-enthusiastic bark of a faithful dog sent a man scrambling nervously for his blunderbus, musket balls and precious black powder.

Despite the number of settlers (mostly discontents from Massachusetts) migrating into the land of Conanicus, defense was still a strongly-essential and common interest. Cabin after cabin was being built. Seed was being planted with less apprehension of Indian attack. For, while the settler fashioned his home and the plowman broke his land, a neighbor or two, with awesome-looking weapon in hand, kept watch over the woods for trouble.

The settlers came in greater numbers. Portsmouth, by 1638, was being called a town and its inhabitants had already held the first town meeting. Safety and protection from "the savages" — defense — was of prime concern.

As a result, it was decided that every inhabitant of the town be equipped with arms and perform certain military duties. At later meetings, Portsmouth formed a military unit. By August of 1698, every man capable of bearing arms reported to a general muster, and Rhode Island saw her first mobilization of a militia.

Following Portsmouth's move, other military companies were formed by other settlements. Providence was next to have a militia. Settlements, north and south, developed unofficial common defense unions. Drill and discipline were essential.

With defense a natural preoccupation, the Military System of Rhode Island was enacted under law — only

little more than ten years after Roger Williams had set foot at Providence. Laws were adopted to make it mandatory for men of certain towns to drill on certain days. Even public land was put aside for drill ground.

Service became obligatory in the "Train Bands," as the military companies were being called. Those obligations sometimes were harsh.

Besides bearing the cost of providing his own armament, a man might find himself an officer of a company against his will. The duties were demanding and often, therefore, neglected. But the law saw to that, too. By 1649 the Colonial Assembly passed a law that made it a punishable violation not to accept a commission. Failure to do so was subject to a heavy fine.

After organization, military units blossomed in proportion with the blossoming population. The threat of war with the French and Indians fostered Rhode Island's first cavalry troop. Combined companies were effected by the possibility of the King Philip War. With each new threat, Rhode Island saw new independent military organizations added to her rolls.

Today, of those hundreds of organized, then disbanded, military units, only eight have survived the years, still chartered and still active.

The *United Train of Artillery* was formed in 1775 when the *Providence Fusileers* merged with the *Providence Train of Artillery*. It remains today under the command of Colonel William E. Petit.

The *Bristol Train of Artillery*, under the command of Captain Samuel Wardwell, was one of a number of commands chartered in Rhode Island in 1794. It is, however, the only command chartered in that year that

survives today and is headed by Colonel Oswald A. Thomas of Bristol.

The *Cranston Blues* were organized in 1790. Joseph Potter was the first captain of the organization, which lasted until 1831. It was revived during World War I by act of legislature and served as one of the companies of the State Guard. Colonel Thomas D. Murphy heads the *Cranston Blues* today.

The *Kentish Artillery* survives today in name only under Colonel Joseph H. Rawson. Organized in 1797 by Captain Job Greene as the *Kentish Light Infantry*, it became the *Kentish Artillery* in 1805. Active on Rhode Island chartered command rolls until 1833 when it was disbanded, it was reorganized by Colonel Peleg W. Westcott in 1853.

Commanded by Captain Job Angell, the *First Light Infantry* came into existence in 1818, chartered as a company attached to the *Second Regiment*. It became a full regiment in 1844, under Captain William Brown who became the company's first colonel. Steven Butaka of Smithfield is the company's colonel today.

One of a number of commands chartered in the early 1840's, and considered one of the most loyal to the governor when Thomas Dorr attempted to usurp the state's highest office, was the *Warren Guard*, under the command of Captain Samuel Pierce. It is now known as the *Warren Artillery*.

Two of Rhode Island's oldest and best-known chartered commands are the *Kentish Guards* and the *Newport Artillery Company*.

The present *Kentish Guards* Armory shadows the spot where 197 years ago, 49 citizens of East Greenwich, Coventry and Warwick entered into a union "to establish and constitute a military independent company."

Many of the colonists were dissatisfied with the outlandish tea tax, the stamp act and the Boston Port Bill. The result was the split in political amenities, Tories being patrons to the wishes of the British crown, and patriots eager for self-government and independence.

Through a number of small incidences, the separation grew until the Tories threatened to march into the town of East Greenwich and burn down the courthouse and the entire town.

On Oct. 29, 1774, the general assembly granted a charter to the group known as the *Kentish Guards*, "forming them, and those who should be joined unto them, into an independent company."

The charter, which limits the company to 100 men, gave the governor of the state the power of activation, and to commission officers, a law that is still firm today.

The *Kentish Guardsmen* wasted no time in organizing. Nathanael Greene, Jr., who had gone to Boston to purchase a musket and witnessed a British military

parade, induced a British drill sergeant to desert in favor of training the *Kentish Guardsmen*.

The historian Washington Irving, in his *Life of Washington*, indicated the amount of success the British sergeant had in training the *Guardsmen* when he wrote:

"... One of the encampments (which Washington observed on an inspection in 1775) was in striking contrast to the rest, and might well compare with those of the British for order and exactness. Here were tents and marquees pitched in the English style; soldiers were drilled, well equipped; everything had an air of discipline and subordination. These were the Rhode Island troops which had been raised, drilled and brought to camp by Brigadier General Nathanael Greene, Jr., of Rhode Island."

Anxious for action, the *Guards* set out to aid the men of Lexington and Concord when word reached them that the British had been driven back to Boston. They returned to East Greenwich, however, failing to receive the Governor's permission to march on to Boston, and at their own expense erected Fort Daniel. Chepewanoxet Marina stands near the site of the old Fort, credited with saving East Greenwich from the Narragansett Bay — terrorizing vessels of British Captain Wallace.

Cannons also were emplaced at the entrance of the East Greenwich Harbor during this period. They were — in consideration of their historic value — moved to the West Point Military Academy after the Revolutionary War.

The *Kentish Guards* performed other services of historic importance during the Revolutionary War: in battles of Prudence Island, Warwick Neck, the Spencer Expedition of Rhode Island and the Tiverton Sullivan Expedition. They captured British Gun Batteries at Jamestown and on a number of occasions drove off British plunder parties at Potowomut, Wickford and Warwick Neck. The *Kentish Guards* claim to have provided more officers of importance to the Continental Army than any other unit in the colonies: 32 of 35 *Guardsmen* who joined the Continental forces became officers, three of them colonels, one a Brigadier General and one a Major General: Nathanael Greene, Jr., who ranked second to George Washington.

The *Kentish Guards*, in 1842, recognizing the charter government, served faithfully in suppressing the Dorr Rebellion.

The Armory occupied by the *Guards* today was built in the next year, 1843, after the General Assembly of Rhode Island donated \$1,000 to the *Kentish Guards*, in recognition and gratitude for past loyal services.

They continued to serve faithfully in every other major disturbance. In 1861, they were the first company outside the City of Providence to answer President

Lincoln's call for volunteers. Eighteen members saw federal service when the company was alerted to the Spanish-American War. During World War I, 162 men entered the federal service and in World War II, 75 joined.

It has also been present in many of the observances and celebrations in the State of Rhode Island. In 1869, the *Kentish Guards* instituted Memorial Day in East Greenwich, and have been conspicuous to this day in providing escorts to the Grand Army of the Republic and American Legion on this holiday.

One of the reasons for remaining in existence is "to preserve the image of our earlier comrades in arms through frequent public exhibitions of the uniforms and military traditions of our company at parades and other historically commemorative events throughout the year," according to their code.

But they don't limit themselves to pageantry alone, continuing "to hold ourselves in readiness to provide whatever services may properly be required by the surrounding communities and the state."

The present *Kentish Guard* is under the command of Colonel James W. Tingley, Jr., of Warwick.

Eighteen men who considered themselves "the principal inhabitants of the town" started the *Newport Artillery Company* in 1741. Its participation in military events spanned nearly 144 years — from its organization until the end of World War I — when it became militarily inactive.

The *Newport Artillery Company* today, under the direction of Col. Francis W. Gauthier, is a focal point in Rhode Island historical societies as a museum of foreign and domestic military regalia.

During the Revolution, the *Artillery Company* was dormant and disbanded, but contributed one Colonel John Malbone, the commanding officer, and a small group of men to the Nation's fight for independence.

In 1792, some of the old members talked of reorganizing and on August 1, a renewal of the original charter was granted by the General Assembly.

During the War of 1812, the company wanted to take charge of the batteries at Easton's Point, and offered its services to the Secretary of War. The offer was accepted in 1814. The company, also at that time, took charge of another company stationed at Fort Greene (Now Battery Park) and held them until Feb. 21, 1815.

In 1826, the company escorted the remains of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry to his initial burial place in Newport. They also formed an escort for Presidents Monroe, Jackson and Fillmore when they visited the city.

Like most of the sympathizing commands, the *Newport Artillery Company* came to the aid of the state's constitutional government during the Dorr Rebellion.

Joining troops from Bristol, Warren, East Greenwich and Providence, the company faced Dorr and his armed party of 200 who had entrenched themselves on Federal Hill. Dorr, after the *Newport Artillery Company* took the right of line, withdrew with his men before any violence began.

The immediate volunteers of the *Newport Artillery Company*, answering President Lincoln's plea for personnel during the Civil War, joined other Rhode Island volunteers to form the state's "F" militia.

The company was stationed at Fort Adams during the Spanish-American War. It tried to volunteer as a unit during World War I, in which it had been assigned to guard the railroad bridge in Tiverton. Because the federal military could not accept entire units manned by their own officers, the offer could not be taken. In May 1918, however, the *Artillery Company* and other state organizations joined in forming the Rhode Island State Guard comprising more than 2,000 men.

Conditions deteriorated after World War I, and enlistments into the *Newport Artillery Company* declined considerably. For 15 years — after a large part of the company's remaining military relics had been plundered or destroyed — the *Artillery Company* was a command on paper only. However, around 1962, a group of men from Newport sought to reorganize the company. Permission from the state was granted.

Housing for the company had been a problem since its beginning. At first, volunteers met in the homes of other members. As the numbers of the organization grew, an old schoolhouse, the Clarke Street School, lo-

Robert L. Noel, Lieutenant Colonel of *Kentish Guards*, R.I.N.



cated on the lot where the Armory museum now stands, was the meeting place. In 1796, a small gun house was erected behind the Colony House (still standing in Newport), but that too had to be abandoned when a street was to be run through that area.

They now decided to erect a building of their own. In an attempt to raise the needed funds, a lottery was organized. That met with failure; too few cared enough to contribute. Members of the company took the only alternative, and taking charge of the project themselves, began work in 1833.

The cornerstone of the building (23 Clarke Street) was laid on April 19, 1833, in commemoration of the Battle of Lexington. The deed to the property was dated Sept. 10, on the anniversary of the Battle of Lake Erie. The project was delayed for awhile, because of insufficient funds to raise the roof. A woman interested in the structure, however, solved that with a measure of money, and on April 29, 1836, the first drill was held in the Armory.

The organization seemed to be back in business — fresh recruits, eager for drill, and the building itself expanded. In 1906, however, a fire razed the building and destroyed many of its treasured relics.

When rebuilt, a second story was added to the building for officers' quarters and recreation facilities. It remains the same today. The entire ground floor, once the drill hall, houses foreign and domestic military displays dating back to the sixteenth century.

One of the prize possessions of the museum is a letter dated 1794 to the company by General George Washington. A gold locket accompanied the letter with a portion of Washington's hair. It, and a lock of hair from the Duke of Wellington, are still on display.

A number of items contribute to the memory of the United States' military ventures — from a flintlock musket, one of the *Artillery Company's* original purchases, to a newly-received semi-automatic weapon used by the

Viet Cong. In between are the full dress Civil War uniform of Major General Benjamin F. Butler; a Confederate Army sabre; a marlin spike from the *USS Constellation*; the complete sleeve braids and buttons worn by the late Fleet Admiral Chester A. Nimitz, and much more.

Foreign items include the 11 colorful, gaudy uniforms of soldiers once controlled by the world's richest ruler, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and a powder cannister used by the Germans for the cannon which shelled Paris during World War I.

The banner of Sir Samuel Auchmutty, which once graced the walls of the Henry VII chapel in Westminster Abbey, taken down to make room for new banners of knights commissioned in World War I, is now located at the *Newport Artillery Company* museum.

A great number of significant military personalities — General Dwight D. Eisenhower, General Mark Clark, Admiral Nimitz, the Duke of Gloucester, H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, Earl Montbatten of Burma among them — have donated personal military items to the museum.

Dozens of countries are represented in the foreign exhibitions — including Nationalist and Red China — in line with the museum's goal in "presenting a panorama of world military history."

The museum is open from May to September, Wednesday through Sunday, from 1 to 5 p.m. or by appointment.

With modernization, and the highly trained and highly efficient military of America today, independent military organizations of Rhode Island may seem to have fallen by the wayside. But not in prestige. Very few states can claim the honor of having had so many outstanding military organizations — organizations whose willing men never failed to answer any call. The eight existing today attest to Rhode Island's historic military background and to the men who made it glorious.

The Bristol Train of Artillery — 1969 officers — Left to right: Sergeant Arthur Martin, Second Lieutenant Joseph Silvia, Brigadier General Raymond A. Thomas, First Lieutenant George Tanuri, Colonel Oswald A. Thomas, Commanding Officer, Major Antonia Sylvia, Aide to the Commanding Officer, Captain William T. Prince, Major Amadeo DiMarcellis

