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*photos by Megan Clugh*



The Army War College celebrated the National Guard birthday in the Letort View Community Center Dec. 4. Known originally as the militia, the National Guard turns 372 years young Dec. 13. It all started in 1636 when the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which functioned as the colony's legislature, ordered existing militia companies from the towns surrounding Boston to form into three regiments: North, South and East.



Col. Jerry Cusic, Army War College student and member of the Army National Guard, (left) and a U.S. Air National Guard representative cut the cake at the National Guard birthday Dec. 4 in the Letort View Community Center.



**Army National Guard members of the Army War College Class of 2009 pose for a photo.**



**Staff Sgt. Kevin Betton represented current operations Soldiers at the ceremony.**

*(courtesy National Guard website)*

### **Happy 371th Birthday National Guard!**

What is a few years younger than the Mayflower Compact (1620); a lot older than the Declaration of Independence (1776) and U.S. Constitution (1787); predates the U.S. Army, Navy and Marine Corps by 139 years; and is 311 years older than the Air Force?

Answer: The National Guard.

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While other English colonies like Virginia and Spanish colonies like Florida and Puerto Rico had individual towns with militia companies before 1636, Massachusetts was the first place in the New World where the population was large enough to justify organizing companies into regiments for command and control. These regiments became a kind of military "family" for members. Although their names have been changed and individual companies have come and gone, the three regiments still exist in the Massachusetts National Guard.

In retrospect, a string of 20-year career enlistments divides the Guard's life span into more than 18 "generations." The differences between generation one and the current 19th generation are countless. Yet, even as the National Guard has transformed many times, it remains true to the Founder's intent of a citizens' Army; and, for the last three generations, a citizens' Air Force.

The American colonies adopted the English militia system, which obligated all males to possess arms and participate in the defense of the community. This early militia enforced local laws and battled Britain's enemies in America. Now, a force of more than 450,000 men and women serve voluntarily and can be deployed anywhere in the world.

From its very beginnings, the United States has been a militia –Guard nation. The existence of and need for the colonial militia was ratified by the Founding Fathers in the Constitution. Congress specifically defined those missions the militia would be used for: "to Execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections, and repel Invasions."

Since then, Congress has enacted several militia and defense acts to strengthen the National Guard. The first of these laws, passed in 1792, governed the militia for 111 years of the country's existence.

The [Militia Act of 1903](#) created the modern National Guard and affirmed the National Guard as the nation's primary organized combat reserve force. The [National Defense Act of 1947](#) established the [Air National Guard](#) as a separate reserve component at the same time it established a separate Air Force.

In 372 years and more than eighteen 20-year enlistments, the weapons and technology have changed drastically, but the Guard's contribution to the nation's defense has remained paramount.

Generation seven rallied to battle the British at Lexington and Concord. Generation 12 faced off, brother against brother, in the Civil War. Generation 14 "Remembered the Maine" during the Spanish-American War. Generation 16 was already on duty when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Generation 19 will never forget and is still responding to 9/11.

In 1636, the militia's primary firearm was the crude matchlock musket which could take 56 steps to load and fire. Nearly one-third of militia Soldiers carried only a long pole, or pike, into combat. Today, the Guard's small-arms arsenal includes M-16 and M-4 rifles, and the Squad Automatic Weapon which fires of 750 rounds per minute.

Our colonial forefathers could not have imagined much of what their descendants can use in combat today – jet fighters, tanks, satellite radios, laser-guided munitions, global positioning systems, rocket artillery, and countless other high-tech devices.

Now, after 372 years, what does the future hold for this always ready and reliable force?

Future National Guard generations will continue to employ all of the modern technology at its disposal at home and abroad. At the core, however, today's National Guard members and yesterday's Minutemen remain the same person: citizens with the conviction that their military service is required to make their nation and communities a safer and better place.

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