

The Formation & First Battles of The Bedford Minuteman Company

Prelude to War



Between the years 1763 and 1774, the English government's attempts to gain more effective economic and political control over its colonies, and the intent of many of those colonists in America to maintain their hard-gained independence of activity in many areas, had brought about a gradual deterioration in affiliation between the two. Especially so was the situation in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, where conditions had often gone beyond mere differences in thought and word.

So, it was in the latter part of 1774 the Town of Bedford readily satisfied the suggestion of the Provincial Congress (an improvised government to offset the closing of the Massachusetts General Court by the English government) to delegate a portion of its local militia to "Minutemen Status", which group was to be prepared to muster and respond "on the moment" to any overt action on the part of the British deemed a threat to colonists established rights. All military companies were urged to perfect themselves in military discipline. The town was urged to procure and distribute free arms and bayonets as well as provisions and supplies.

On March 20, 1775, the town meeting heard the second article before the town that had been continued over from last meeting on the 27th day of January. It was voted that all twenty-five Minutemen would be paid one shilling per week until the first of May next, they be exercising four hours in a week and two shillings to be allowed two officers to equip themselves according to the advice of the Congress.

The Company Assembled

In Bedford the committee of inspection consisted of Moses Abbott, Thomas Page, Ebenezer Page, John Reed, and Edward Stearns. Every man able to carry a musket had come forward to answer the call. The officers elected were Jonathan Willson age 43, Captain; Moses Abbott age 48, First Lieutenant; Timothy Jones age 38, Second Lieutenant; and Nathaniel Page, Standard Bearer. These officers were to assemble and elect field officers and enlist one quarter of the men enrolled. The men and officers thus elected became known as the Bedford Minutemen. The youngest man in the company was seventeen and the oldest forty-eight consisting of farmers, shop owners, and millers.

The terms of the Minuteman enlistment paper stated the truth that was in every heart:

We will, to the utmost of our powers and abilities, defend all and every one of our charter rights, liberties, and privileges; and all will hold ourselves in readiness at a minute's warning, with arms and ammunition thus to do.



Long before the firing started in Lexington, Bedford's Minutemen had been warned by Lexington's Captain Parker, who had sent two young men, Benjamin Tidd and Nathaniel Monroe into Bedford as couriers.

The men rode up to the door of Cornet Page's house, and striking the door shouted, "Get up, Nat Page; the Redcoats are out."

The oldest structure in the center of Bedford is the historically significant Fitch Tavern. It was here, while Jeremiah Fitch, a sergeant of the Bedford Militia company, was operating it as a tavern, that twenty-six Bedford Minutemen gathered on the morning of April 19, 1775, following the alarm that the British were on the march from Boston.

It was in the tap room that Mr. Fitch called the Minutemen to gather about the warmth of the fireplace while young Lydia Fitch served up cold cornmeal mush and hot buttered rum. Captain Jonathan Wilson looked into the eyes of his men and spoke the famous words, "It is a cold breakfast, boys, but we'll give the British a hot dinner; we'll have every dog of them before night." The Minutemen then marched on foot to Concord, joining the fifty men of the Bedford Militia in route. The Bedford Minutemen marched to one fifer and one drummer on that morning.

The Shot Heard 'Round The World

Being one of the first groups to arrive at the North Bridge, as well as one of the largest contingents – seventy-seven men – the Bedford men did battle there against the British troops, alongside their fellow minutemen and militia companies, on that memorable day in American history.

The standard of the Bedford Minutemen, carried by Cornet Nathaniel Page and the only flag at the altercation, has since become known as the Bedford Flag and is recognized as the first flag to fly over an organized "American" fighting force in the resistance to British rule.



Bedford Minutemen had no losses at Concord Bridge as Nathaniel Page proudly carried the Bedford Flag becoming the first flag to be taken into an American battle. Warily the British retreated toward Boston confronting the Bedford Minutemen that were among the first to engage them in the most severe fighting of the day. It was at Merriam's Corner in Concord that the Bedford companies had their first casualties. Job Lane was severely wounded, and Captain of the Bedford Minuteman Company Jonathan Wilson was mortally wounded. Captain

Wilson was carried into the Merriam's house, where he later died. It was with sad hearts that the Bedford men carried back the body of their brave Captain.

Grief that day could not keep the Bedford Minutemen from their sworn duty to their fellow Minutemen; before the day was over, they would again assemble for the long march to Cambridge and the continuing battles.

The Men of the Bedford Minuteman Company

Captain Jonathan Willson

1st Lt. Moses Abbott

2nd Lt. Timothy Jones

Sgt. Christopher Page

Sgt. Seth Saultmarsh

Sgt. Asa Fassett

Sgt. Ebenezer Fitch

Oliver Bacon, Drummer

Jonas Welch, Fifer

Joseph Meeds

Reuben Bacon

Jonas Gleason

Jabez Russell

Thomas Bacon

Nathaniel Page

Moses Fitch

David Bacon

Elijah Bacon

Benjamin Bacon

Timothy Johnson

Ephraim Smith

Obediah Johnson

David Reed

Nathan Bowman

Asa Duren

Benjamin Winship

William Merriam