

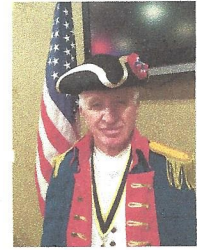


# The American Revolution

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Sons of the American Revolution

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## Militia

### Article 1 of 4

Good morning readers! I am taking you way back in time and to a location remote to our usual colonial American locale. My story can be found within the *Anglo Saxon Chronicles*. The years are the 850's and the location is South England, where the Kingdoms of East Anglia, Mercia and Wessex existed along the Salisbury Plains. All three of these domains were loosely organized fiefdoms of minor regional kings. We are concentrating on Wessex, because it is there from 839 to 858 AD that Anglo Saxon King Aethelwulf reigned and raised a family. You probably never heard of this person, but his fifth son, Alfred, is familiar to you.

These folks are the origin of Teutonic roots in ancient England. In the 860's young Alfred succeeded his father to the throne and inherited his kingdom. That same period of time is marked by the first of many raids by Scandinavian Vikings. One by one the Vikings crushed and conquered these small kingdoms. Finally, only Wessex and King Alfred remained. Self appointed Viking King Guthorm, The Dane, slowly maneuvered his army across South England between 876 and 878 AD, destroying and conquering all opposition. Alfred and his small army were forced to hide and avoid destruction by Guthorm; guerrilla warfare followed. Alfred's improved army engaged

Guthorm's army on the downs near Edington. There King Alfred fought against the entire Dane host and put them into flight. Guthorm's army made a stand at Chippenham, but sued for peace after six weeks of Alfred's siege.

In the aftermath of this great battle, King Alfred brought about many improvements within his kingdom. He created a system of fortified strongholds known as *burhs* (the forerunner of a city borough). Typically the *burhs* or cities were walled and sat upon steep embankments. Sometimes a flooded canal formed an outer ring around the city wall. Cities and towns were strategically dispersed across the countryside, so as to provide a self-supporting protective network. Every peasant within the kingdom was given enough land for a self-sustaining family farm. These agricultural units were called *hides*. In exchange for a *hide*, the family had to provide one able-bodied male for castle duty. In times of danger or attack, this family volunteer was responsible for defending one meter of rampart on the town wall. Villages were never built more than 30 kilometers from the *burhs*. What is described here is a community of people banding together and dedicated to the common defense and welfare. The owners of *hides* in King Alfred's kingdom were certainly citizen-soldiers, and the colonial American term, *militiamen*, is fitting for them. This is one of several reasons why history still refers to him as Alfred, The Great.

A citizen-soldier, militiaman army is an ancient idea. A citizen-soldier defense was an ever present need in American colonial life. Having a prepared defense was obvious to even the dullest citizen. The reader has seen in the first article of this series concerning colonial life prior to 1774, that militia duty was a social requirement,

whether one resided in the Massachusetts Colony, as did Major Hoyt's forefathers or called the Virginia Colony home as did my forefathers. John Hollis and two sons, William and Burr were citizen-soldiers in Fairfax, Virginia. They served under command of their neighbor, George Washington, a commissioned officer in the British Army. In our next article, we will explore how colonial America employed this citizen-soldier concept for protection during the American Revolution.