

Home Guard ^[1]

Home Guard

by David A. Norris, 2006

Although the term "Home Guard" appears in the names of several North Carolina military units raised early in the [Civil War](#) ^[2], it usually refers to the statewide organization formed by an act of the [General Assembly](#) ^[3] of 7 July 1863. The Home Guard replaced the [militia](#) ^[4], the ranks of which had been filled, except for officers, by Confederate conscription. The Home Guard included all able-bodied white males between the ages of 18 and 50 who were exempt from Confederate service, excepting only the [governor](#) ^[5], judges, members of the General Assembly and Congress, clergymen, county [sheriffs](#) ^[6], [registers of deeds](#) ^[7], and [clerks of court](#) ^[8].

The first organization of the Home Guard consisted of approximately 12,500 men. They were arranged mostly in battalions of one to five companies from the same county. Eight regiments were formed from large counties or from combining the battalions of smaller adjacent counties. Four counties that could only muster a few men contributed one company each. While called up for duty, men of the Home Guard were paid by the state at the same rate that their rank would entitle them to in Confederate service. In the fiscal year 1863-64 the state budgeted \$100,000 for Home Guard pay.

The duties of the Home Guard were to catch deserters; to guard bridges, supply depots, and other strategic points; to break up armed gangs of deserters that plagued many areas; and to aid in repelling Union invasions of the state. Members also performed guard duty at [Salisbury Prison](#) ^[9] in late 1864. Home Guard units in the [Piedmont](#) ^[10] and the [Mountains](#) ^[11] were often too small and scattered to accomplish much against Union forces and armed deserters. Loyal Union men dodged Home Guard service or performed their duties halfheartedly; many other men were reluctant to leave their homes and families unprotected.

Despite low numbers and poor morale, the Home Guard sometimes performed well, even late in the war. In October 1863 the Home Guard of [Cherokee County](#) ^[12], with some Confederate cavalry and Cherokee soldiers of [Thomas's Legion](#) ^[13], pursued and captured most of a Unionist guerrilla band under Goldman Bryson. On 6 Apr. 1865 [Asheville](#) ^[14]'s Home Guard helped to drive off a large force of Union cavalry. On 17 Apr. 1865, 80 men of the [Burke County](#) ^[15] Home Guard under Col. T. G. Walton fought two brigades of Union cavalry for some time before being outflanked at Rocky Ford near Morganton.

The occasional brutality of Home Guard activities is graphically depicted in [Charles Frazier](#) ^[16]'s National Book Award-winning novel, *Cold Mountain* (1998), and the major [motion picture](#) ^[17] based on the book that was released in 2003.

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