



# An Illustrated look at New England's Dizzying Array of Early War Uniforms

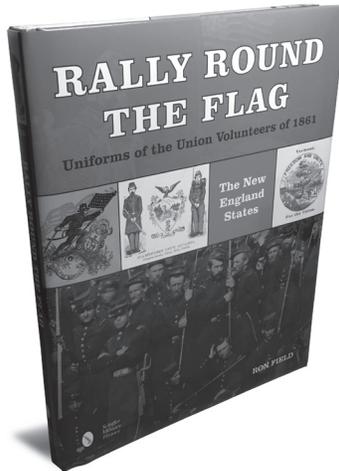
BY RONALD S. CODDINGTON

From its early days as a hotbed of colonial rebellion to its role during the Civil War as a prolific supplier of men and materials, the six states of New England have served as a powerhouse for American ideals and revolutionary action.

When it came to conformity of Civil War uniforms however, New England was no different than any other region of the country, North or South.

"The clothing and equipping of these troops was anything but straightforward," Ron Field observes in the introduction to his new book, *Rally Round the Flag—Uniforms of the Union Volunteers of 1861: The New England States*. He adds, "The textile industry in New England had to gear up to the demands of war and the work force, and some mills worked around the clock to meet contract deadlines. There was also a great reliance on volunteer help to turn the cloth into uniforms."

What follows the introduction is a dizzying array of uniform styles, heavily illustrated with original photographs reproduced in full color. Massachusetts volunteers sporting impossibly large bearskin caps. Rhode Island fishermen and Connecticut Yankees



*Rally Round the Flag—Uniforms of the Union Volunteers of 1861: The New England States*

By Ron Field  
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dressed in dark blue uniforms. Lumbermen from Maine and dairy farmers from Vermont attired in gray outfits. New Hampshire boys wearing distinctive Havelock hats that make them look like anything but Union soldiers. The images are organized in chapters by state, accompanied by text detailing the uniforms, their makers and the organizations that wore them.

British-born Ron Field is eminently qualified for this work. He has authored and co-authored more than 40 books and is an internationally acknowledged expert on U.S. military history. He is also a senior editor for *Military Images* magazine.

*Rally Round the Flag* traces only the first few months of the war. Field notes, "The first efforts at the standardization of uniform color did not occur until August 1861, following confusion, mistaken identity, and incidents of friendly fire during the battles of Big Bethel and First Bull Run."

This volume, the first in a planned series that will include the Mid-Atlantic States and Western States, is recommended for the serious student of Union uniforms as well as the casual reader interested in Civil War portrait photography.



Sixth-plate ambrotype by Benson C. Hazelton of Boston. Author's collection.

In this modified excerpt from the book, author Ron Field details the Edmands hat, issued early in the war to select units from Massachusetts.

Supplied by Houghton, Sawyer & Co., of Boston, the Edmands hat was reported in the *Salem Register* on May 2, 1861, as "a style of head dress...combining several suggestions of practical men who have seen service in warm latitudes, [and] has been prepared and offered to our State authorities by General B.F. Edmands. It is in appearance a combination of the old continental, the army and the Kossuth hats, and is designed to afford the best means of protecting the head from the sun's rays and consequently sunstroke. Messrs. Houghton, Sawyer & Co. have contracted to furnish hats of this style to our State authorities." Designed by Benjamin F. Edmands, commander of the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia (MVM) during the 1850s and member of the Boston Committee on Military Supplies, it was made of gray felt and was looped up on three sides, although photographic evidence shows examples looped up on four sides, which may indicate that the supplier contracted the work out to different hatters who had differing interpretations of the design. These hats were also embellished with strips of vertical, red tape trim sewn around each buttonhole through which the brim was looped up and fastened to the crown. Based on both written and photographic evidence, the Edmands hat was issued to the 3rd and 4th MVM, and the 10th and 11th Massachusetts infantries. In July 1861 the hats were purchased via the Ohio branch of Houghton, Sawyer & Co. for issue to the 34th and 54th Ohio infantries.

The Edmands hat was not popular with some Massachusetts troops. When his regiment received them during the last week of June 1861, Lt. Joseph K. Newell of the 10th Massachusetts Infantry recorded in his diary, "hats, 'what hats!' of unmentionable dirty, light drab color, that were discarded as soon as caps could be obtained."