

When Eggnog Sparked a Riot at West Point

On the night before Christmas in 1826, Captain Ethan Allen Hitchcock turned in shortly before midnight. Visions of sugar plums may not have been dancing in the head of the U.S. Military Academy faculty member, but dreams of a silent night likely were. Although the academy's superintendent, Colonel Sylvanus Thayer, had warned Hitchcock that the cadets inside his dormitory might attempt to throw their traditional Christmas drinking party overnight, all was quiet in West Point, New York, as Thayer drifted asleep snug in his bed inside the North Barracks.

Unbeknownst to Hitchcock, however, a party had already started. Cadets had been secretly smuggling liquor into their barracks for days as Christmas approached, a risky venture that could have resulted in their expulsions because for an Army man, Thayer ran a tight ship. Since the colonel took charge of the academy in 1817, his strict discipline had transformed it from a school in disarray into an elite institution. A West Point graduate himself, Thayer prohibited everything from playing cards to tobacco to even novels. In a bit of leniency, "The Father of West Point" had allowed alcohol on the Fourth of July and Christmas. That changed, however, following a rowdy celebration on July 4, 1825, when cadets engaged in a "snake dance" and hoisted the school's commandant, William Worth, on their shoulders and carried him back to their barracks. [Read More...](#)