



Bullet'n Backstory

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Establishing the U.S. Army: 248 Years of Evolution

As tensions rose between the American Colonies and Great Britain in the early 1770s, Colonial leaders began to propose the creation of a formal defensive force. Early efforts proceeded in a makeshift manner as various authorities worked to shore up individual colonial militias. Richard Henry Lee proposed the creation of a national army as early as 1774, but his suggestion was rejected by the First Continental Congress. In the first half of 1775, several colonies instituted formal efforts to shore up their defenses. The Massachusetts Provisional Congress led the way on April 23 by establishing a colonial army, consisting of 26 company regiments. Soon thereafter, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut follow suit.

On June 14, 1775, the Second Continental Congress established the Continental Army as a national defensive force. The first elements of this new army consisted of pre-existing colonial militias, particularly those assembled near Boston and New York City. Congress bolstered these forces by raising 10 companies of riflemen from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia. In 1776, these companies would become the 1st Continental Regiment. To lead the new Army, Congress unanimously elected George Washington as Commander-in-Chief on June 15. A day later, Congress made the first effort to organize and support the Army by forming the first four departments: the Adjutant General's Corps, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Finance Corps, and the Quartermasters Corps.

At the conclusion of the war in 1783, American leaders argued about whether the new nation needed a standing Army and, if so, what form it should take. The earliest post-war force consisted of 2,631 troops and irregular colonial militias, primarily stationed on the borders of Canada, Florida, and the western frontier. Soon, most of these forces were disbanded as a result of American distrust of standing armies. However, this did not last long. Continued conflicts with Native Americans in the west prompted efforts to train a standing

army. This led, in 1792, to the establishment of the Legion of the United States. Formed at Fort Lafayette (Pennsylvania), this Legion soon moved to forts along the Ohio River, and moved into the Ohio Territory to quell Native resistance there. Victory at the Battle of Fallen Timbers (August 1794) led to the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, which opened this part of the frontier to settlement. In 1796, the Legion was renamed the United States Army.

By the time of the War of 1812, the United States had a professionally trained army. Though the U.S. Army achieved some victories in the Niagara Campaign of 1814, the force proved too small to effectively counter the British on every front, resulting in the invasion and burning of Washington, D.C. The small size of the Army led to an overreliance on state militias, which were inconsistent in their training, abilities, and effectiveness. These militias led to the failed invasion of Canada, but proved critical at the Battle of New Orleans. As a result of the problems identified in this conflict, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun reorganized the Army into regional bureaus, with bureau chiefs acting both as advisors to the Secretary of War and commanders in the field.

For the next three decades, the primary role of the U.S. Army was control of Native Americans in Florida and along the western frontier. This changed with the onset of the Mexican-American War (1848-50), at which point the standing Army of 6,000 regulars to 115,000, joined by additional volunteer units. Collectively, these forces were successful



Infantry of the Continental Army
Henry Alexander Ogden



Free Men of Colour and Choctaw Indian Volunteers at New Orleans, Louisiana (1982)
H. Charles McBarron

on all three fronts of the war: the southwest, northern Mexico, and Mexico City. However, following the conclusion of the war, the Army contracted again. By 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, the force consisted of 16,006 men, including 14,926 enlisted and 1,080 officers.

The small size of the Army, combined with the resignation of many soldiers and officers from seceding Confederate states, required the Union Army to rely on Volunteer Regiments and then conscripted forces. The Volunteer Army outnumbered the Regular Army so much, new units above the regimental level had to be formed to exert effective control. These included regional armies (named for rivers) made up of brigades, divisions, and corps. Over 2.2 million men would serve in the Union Army during the war, after which the volunteer forces were disbanded, resulting in a standing Army of 57,000 by the end of 1866. This force largely fought Native Americans on the western frontier, resulting in over 1,000 engagements. They all participated in the brief Spanish-American War, which again saw the significant influence of volunteer regiments.

The 20th century saw several reorganizations of the U.S. Army. During the first decade, the U.S. War College and General Staff were created and the National Guard was formally adopted as a trained reserve for the regular Army. In the 1910s, the Army Air Corps was created, and the standing Army was divided into 12 geographic districts within four departments. To support World War I, the Army conscripted new troops in 1917, resulting in a force of nearly 2 million men serving in France. This system would repeat create sizable Army presence in World War II (8.3 million), the Korean War (1.4 million), and the Vietnam War (1.6 million). Through the end of the Cold War, the size of the U.S. Army steadily dropped. Since 1990, with the exception of surges, the Army has hovered around 500,000 men and women. ~ ~ *Dr. Paul-Thomas Ferguson*



U.S. Infantry during the Vietnam War

JMC Historical Document Collection

The JMC Public and Congressional Affairs Office (PCA) maintains the JMC Archives, which collects and maintains historically significant records, including: emails, manuscripts, letters, reports, studies, images, videos, films, photographs, oral history interviews, briefings, SOPs, policies, decision papers, memoranda, statistics, newspapers, newsletters, brochures, maps, blue prints, drawings, artifacts, and more. Such records are pertinent to the Army’s institutional knowledge of active and predecessor installations, the ammunition industrial base, and JMC missions. JMC regularly uses these materials to research command history, and to answer research queries. When JMC workers leave positions or make physical moves, it is vital that their records be assessed before disposal. If employees are uncertain about the historical value of materials, the best policy is to make the items available to Command Historian Keri Pleasant (keri.j.pleasant.civ@army.mil) or Archivist Paul Ferguson

This Month in Strange History

- June 1, 1877:** U.S. troops are authorized to pursue bandits across the southern border into Mexico.
- June 1, 1944:** Allied generals meet in Portsmouth, England, to finalize planning for the D-Day invasion of Normandy. Those present include George S. Patton (U.S.), Omar Bradley (U.S.), Bernard Montgomery (UK), Miles Dempsey (UK), and Harry Crerar (CA).
- June 3, 1784:** The 3rd Infantry Regiment is formed by an act of the U.S. Congress, making it the first full regiment of Regular Army Infantry in the American Army.
- June 7, 1912:** The U.S. Army tests the viability of mounting machine guns on airplanes.
- June 7, 1862:** Union General Benjamin Butler orders the hanging of New Orleans resident William Mumford for tearing down the U.S. flag hanging over the U.S. mint.
- June 11, 1864:** The Battle of Trevilian Station begins in Louisa County, Virginia. It will become the largest all-cavalry battle in the American Civil War.
- June 14, 1775:** The first U.S. Army forms as the Continental Army to battle the British in the American Revolutionary War.
- June 14, 1777:** The continental Congress replaces the Gran Union flag with the Stars & Stripes flag designed by Francis Hopkinson.
- June 17, 1775:** British troops in Boston launch an attack on colonial forces entrenched on Bunker Hill and Breed’s Hill. The British took the positions after the colonists ran out of ammunition and retreated. However, the British suffered more than twice the casualties of the defenders, discouraging them from conducting frontal attacks against defensive works in the future.
- June 21, 1898:** U.S. forces capture Guam from Spain during the Spanish-American War.
- June 25, 1876:** Sioux and Cheyenne warriors under Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull decisively defeat the U.S. 7th cavalry, under Brevet Major General George Armstrong Custer, at the Battle of Little Big Horn, also known as Custer’s Last Stand.
- June 28, 1863:** Unhappy with the progress of the Army of the Potomac in the Eastern Theater of the U.S. Civil War, especially after the disastrous Battle of Chancellorsville, President Abraham Lincoln replaces Gen. Joseph Hooker with Gen. George Meade.