

Brief History of Military in America

Even before the United States was known as the United States, we had a military force: a group of citizens who came together, along with weapons and equipment, for the purpose of waging war. How else could 13 colonies have achieved their independence from England?

The U.S. military was born on June 14, 1775. On that day, the Continental Congress adopted the Massachusetts Colony's militia as the first unit of what would become a colonial army. On the same day it voted to recruit ten companies of riflemen from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia to march north to join their Massachusetts brethren. On June 15, Congress chose George Washington, a Virginian, to be Commander in Chief. It was a wise political move. Leaders from New England, the hotbed of Rebel activity, felt that choosing a southerner would help win support for war from the southern colonies.

On Nov. 10, 1775, Congress passed a resolution to establish a military force that could battle on the high seas. The main tasks of the Continental Marines were ship-to-ship fighting and ship security. These early versions of the Army and Navy did their jobs admirably. As we all know, the United States achieved independence from Great Britain in 1783. A little over a century later, the invention of the airplane created one more fighting front: the skies. The United States Air Force began as a division of the Army and became a separate branch of the military in 1947.

Today's military now has five branches, each with distinct roles and responsibilities. They are:

- The Army, primarily responsible for land-based military operations.
- The Navy. Its stated mission is "to maintain, train and equip combat-ready naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas."
- The Marine Corps. It is a land and sea infantry with specialized functions, such as assault, capture, and control of enemy locations.
- The Air Force. It is the aerospace branch of the military, organized primarily for offensive and defensive air operations.
- The Coast Guard. It is primarily concerned with border law enforcement, boating safety, sea rescue, and illegal immigration control.

Despite the long history of a national military, we Americans have actually counted more heavily on state-level military forces to protect us. Known originally as militias, these forces today are generally organized as state branches of the National Guard.

The Indiana National Guard traces its history to 1801, prior to statehood, when volunteer militia companies were organized as protection for pioneers against Native Americans. The predecessor to today's 151st Infantry Regiment fought with General William Henry Harrison at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811 when "The Prophet," brother of the famous Shawnee leader Tecumseh, was defeated.

In 1916 Indiana units were called for duty on the Mexican Border. In 1917 the entire National Guard was mobilized for service in World War I. Although Guard units are primarily assigned duties within state borders, such as law enforcement and emergency aid following disasters, they are available to help other states and to supplement the federal Armed Forces as needed. Recently, state National Guard units have been called on to assist in the war in Iraq and other global missions



Authority for both the federal and state defense forces can be found in the United States Constitution. Article 1, Section 8 gives Congress the power to raise and support armies, provide and maintain a navy; make rules for the regulation of land and naval forces, and call up state militia “to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions.”

The Indiana Constitution states, in Article 12, Section 1: “A militia shall be provided and shall consist of all persons over the age of seventeen years, except those persons who may be exempted by the laws of the United States or of this state.”

Throughout history, service in the Armed Forces has variously been required by law – as during the Civil War, World War II and Vietnam War – and voluntary, as it is today. Some policymakers advocate a mandatory period of service for all Americans because of concerns that families with lower income and education levels bear a disproportionate share of military service and sacrifice. The educational and training benefits that go along with military service are often cited as the reason young Americans enroll in the Armed Forces or their Reserve divisions.

Sometimes, the public fully supports military action as it did in World War II. In December 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in an effort to so weaken the U.S. Navy that it could no longer threaten Japan’s southward expansion. The attack brought the United States wholeheartedly into a war that eventually would end aggressive German expansion across Europe and the mass killing of Jews by Hitler during the Holocaust. More than 400,000 U.S. service members lost their lives in World War II, a military sacrifice exceeded only by the loss of life that occurred during the Civil War.

Other times, U.S. engagement causes deep division as occurred during the Vietnam War, which stretched from 1961 to 1973 and took more than 89,000 American lives. The United States joined that war in an effort to stop the spread of communism from North to South Vietnam, but eventually withdrew combat troops in response to public dissatisfaction with continued loss of life in what was increasingly seen as an unjustified intervention.

Some groups, such as the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), oppose military service because they believe killing of any of God’s children can never be justified. In times of forced military service, citizens with sincere religious beliefs against war may apply for alternative service through what is called conscientious objection.

Even when wars are unpopular, as in Vietnam, members of the Armed Services legally must perform the constitutional duty they are assigned. It comes with the job, just as it did when Nathan Hale so willingly went spying on the British during the American Revolution, an act for which he proudly paid the ultimate price. From the time of George Washington to today, service members have always represented public service at its most sacrificial. As Americans, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to those heroic citizens willing to risk their lives for the common good.



HOMEWORK - REVIEWING THE LESSON

1.Explain the birth of the U.S. military.

2.List the five branches of the federal military today and describe some of the differences between them.

3.Explain the role of state military forces in our American system.

4.In what way do members of the Armed Forces work for the good of all Americans?

