

Over There

Celebrating the One Hundredth Anniversary of First Army

“First in Deed”

A new Army and mobilization prior to World War One

Leading up to the United States entry into World War One, a series of extreme transformations took place in US Army policy which led to the identification and correction of previous mobilization failures. The resulting changes in policy and mindsets within the War Department ultimately led to the successful creation of First Army and would create a process to fill its ranks with newly trained recruits.

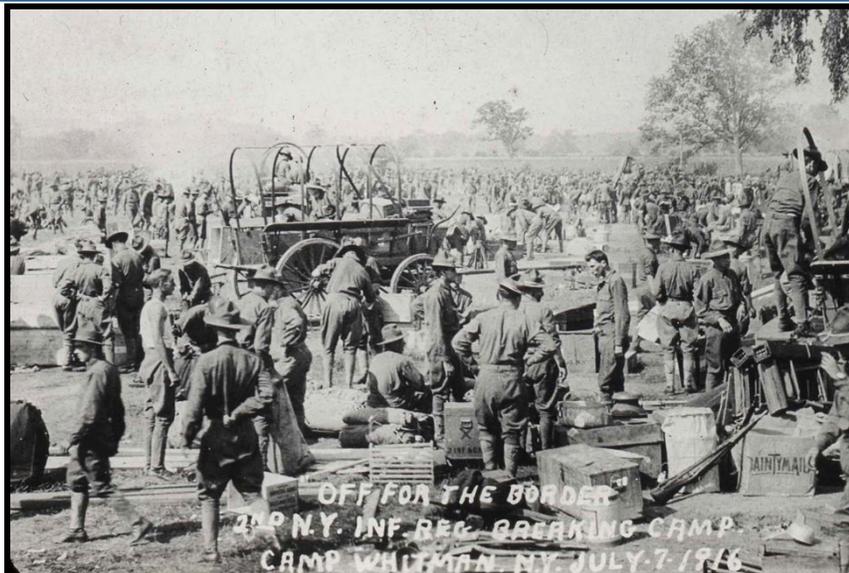
The Army mobilization policy resulting from the Spanish-American War established the Regular Army as the country's first line of defense and early deployment force. The militia (National Guard) forces, with minimal training, would be the second line of defense. A volunteer force, would then be recruited, trained, and deployed after the Regular Army and militia were already engaged in combat. The plan, however, was broken. The Regular Army's force size, controlled by annual appropriations and set by executive order, fell to 53,940 in 1907. Much of the Regular Army was spread out around the world with a third of the force forward-deployed in places like the

Philippines and South Pacific. The remaining troops were scattered on small installations across the US. Loosely organized, States and municipalities retained exclusive control of militia forces. The volunteer force, envisaged as a great volunteer army to be raised and trained after the commencement of hostilities, depended on the first and second lines of defense controlling any situation until the Volunteer Army could be trained and ready for combat. Reality had yet to catch up with grand strategy.

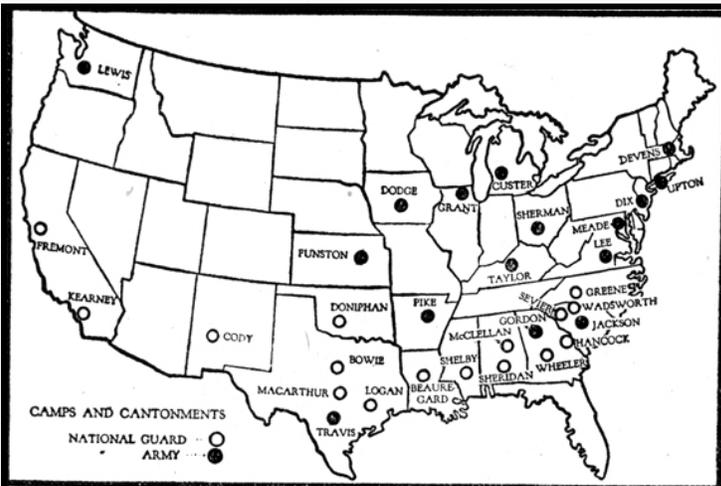
Appointed as the Army Chief of Staff in 1910, General Leonard Wood initiated the first of a number of changes during his term when he conducted a massive staff re-organization, appalled by the “mass of inconsequential matter” which cluttered General Staff operations. By establishing a new General Staff system Wood fixed many of the command and control issues in the Army but much remained to be corrected for future expeditionary missions. In the spring of 1912 a series of articles were published by Secretary of War Henry Stimson titled “What is the Matter with our Army?” Stimson partly answered this question in the final article of the series: “The trouble with the Army comes down, therefore, to our lack of an intelligent military policy in dealing with it.”¹ As a start toward the development of an intelligent military policy, Secretary Stimson directed the General Staff to prepare a report on “The Organization of the Land Forces of the United States.” This report (known as the Stimson Plan) constituted the first overall comprehensive statement of military policy prepared by the General Staff. It covered nearly every phase of the military mobilization program in detail. The broad subjects considered in the report included ten points. The most important were: (1) the necessity of a reserve system; (2) the tactical organization of mobile troops; (3) raising and organizing the national volunteer forces; (4) considerations determining the strength, composition, and organization of the land forces of the United States; (5) a council of national defense. As a result of the study, the Army initiated a series of new policies and small increases in the Regular Army force.²

The passage of The National Defense Act of 1916 brought the most dramatic changes in addressing the issues plaguing the Army and represented the most comprehensive piece of military legislation to date in the Army's history. The Act hugely expanded upon the previous small changes begun by the Stimson Plan. The Act stipulated, “that the Army of the United States shall consist of the Regular Army, the Volunteer Army, the Officers' Reserve Corps, the Enlisted Reserve Corps, and the National Guard while in the service of the United States, and such other land forces as are now or may hereafter be authorized by law.” More specifically, the act provided that the Regular Army should be increased to 175,000 over five years.³

The passage of National Defense Act of 1916 drew support from an external movement known as the “Preparedness Movement” which sought to prepare the United States for entry into the war already raging in Europe. This movement drew support from former President Theodore Roosevelt, former Secretary of War Elijah Root, Stimson and General Wood. President Wilson, however, did not fully support the movement as he had won re-election on a campaign focused on keeping the US out of the war. After the sinking of the HMS Lusitania and the



2nd New York Infantry mobilizing for service on the Mexican border 1916



Above: National Army Soldiers training in 1917 after the US entered the war.

Left: National Guard and National Army training camps established in 1917.

public release of the Zimmerman note not even Wilson could deny that the US would have to alter its isolationist policy.

The first major test of the National Defense Act came 15 days after its passage when the new "National Guard" units were mobilized in support of General John Pershing's Mexican Punitive Campaign. After being nationalized Guard organizations were dispatched to the border as soon as they were in any degree of readiness. "On August 31, 1916, . . . the troops in the Southern Department consisted of 2,160 officers and 45,873 enlisted men of the Regular Army, and 5,446 officers and 105,080 enlisted men of the National Guard, a total of 7,606 officers and 150,953 enlisted men in that department!"⁴ This show of force deterred the outlaw Mexican Army under Poncho Villa from attacking General Pershing's column and a sufficient degree of stability was achieved on the border to permit the demobilization of the Guard late in 1916.

The mobilization of troops in the Southern Department constituted an excellent school of application. Their officers received valuable training in handling large numbers of men, transportation and supply systems were tested, and the weaknesses of the National Guard clearly demonstrated. The old weaknesses—lack of training, lack of equipment, and lack of manpower—still existed. Morale suffered, in some part because of poor indoctrination of the men themselves, but principally because of preventable hardships and shortages of supplies as stated in an Annual War Department report of 1917.

Three clear conclusions could be drawn from the mobilization on the Mexican border in 1916: first, the mobilization involved economic as well as military factors. Second, the National Guard as constituted would not furnish an adequate second line of defense in its current form; third, the volunteer system failed to produce sufficient manpower even when national feelings were at a peak. These conclusions were apparent at least six months before the US declaration of war on Germany on 6 April 1914. Although the American entry into World War One came too early for many of the provisions of National Defense Act of 1916 to fully take place the lessons learned proved extremely valuable and allowed a better system to develop for the type of large scale mobilization that was needed for the war.⁵ Army leaders learned that the volunteer model in a mass mobilization was insufficient; and that the Army would need a the draft to fully build up its numbers. In total 2,820,296 Soldiers would be inducted into service accounting for 67 percent of the total force.

Even after all of the discussion, in organization, personnel, troops, supplies, and plans; the War Department on 6 April 1917 was only marginally prepared to face the gigantic military mobilization before it. The major improvements since the Spanish-American War had been the institution of the General Staff and the National Defense Act of 1916. Although imperfect in organization, inadequate in numbers, the General Staff developed into an efficient planning machine which brought order out of confusion and enabled the United States to make a major contribution to the winning of the war.⁶

For further reading into mobilization please see the Center for Military History pamphlet History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army, access free using the below link; http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/104/104-10/CMH_Pub_104-10.pdf

1. "Report of the Secretary of War," War Department Annual Reports 1912, pp. 69-128.

2. Memo, WCD to CofS, 13 Mar 16 and Memo, Sec, GS to Ch, WCD, 15 Mar 16, sub : Furlough to reserve instead of discharge by purchase. WCD 8106, Doc 19. Records of WDGS. National Archives.

3. " Act of June 3, 1916, 64th Cong., 1st sess., "An Act for making further and more official provision for the national defense and for other purposes." (Popularly referred to as the National Defense Act of 1916.)

4. "Report of the Secretary of War," War Department Annual Reports, 1916, p. 13

5. "Report of the Mustering in of tin? National Guard in the Central Division." NG File ".70.01 Reports [Box 433]. National Archives.

6. KREIDBERG, Marvin. HISTORY OF MILITARY MOBILIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY 1775-1945. Department of the Army. (1955) Pg. 240

First Army Patch



Standard First Army Patch



First Army Balloon Corps Patch



First Army Aero Squadron Patch



First Army Military Police Patch

The First Army Patch is officially designated by Army Institute of Heraldry as the symbolism for the Class A patch: "The red and white of the background are the colors used in flags for Armies. The letter "A" represents "Army" and is also the first letter of the alphabet suggesting "First Army." The background is stated as "A black letter "A" was approved as the authorized insignia by the Commanding General, American Expedition Force, on November 16, 1918 and approved by the War Department on May 27, 1922. The background was added on November 17, 1950. (TIOH Drawing Number A-1-1)." The standard "A" patch was officially authorized however there were hundreds of different versions seen of variations made in theater mainly after the war had ended and were worn in victory parades in the US.

Military Humor



This was part of a series of cartoons published in *The Bystander* which was a British weekly tabloid magazine that featured reviews, topical drawings, cartoons and short stories. The Artist was British Army Captain Bruce Bairnsfather. The cartoons were meant to poke fun at the current living situation of the average "Tommy" Soldier with the intent to raise morale and in a way to tell the story of the average Soldier. Later the cartoons would be a part of a series of *Fragments from France*.

Editor's Note

As we continue in this new series of newsletters to report on the activities of the First Army in World War One and World War Two we would like to extend the invitation to all First Army friends to invite former First Army members (Soldiers and civilians) to read and contribute to this newsletter as well. These newsletters are intended to be a means to educate our First Army family about our own history and to inspire discussion. The intent is to publish a bi-monthly newsletter until the First Army Centennial highlighting First Army history as well as relevant. Additionally, the newsletter will spotlight the First Army Brigades and Battalions history as well as a little Army humor. We are additionally searching for World War Two First Army veterans. If you know of any please contact us.

If you have a request for additional information or you would like to have a specific topic covered please contact 1st Lt. Kevin Braafladt kevin.d.braafladt.mil@mail.mil for story submission requirements. All stories are subject to editing by the First Army Historian.