



100th Anniversary of World War I:

First Army  
Celebrating 100 Years of Service

This MONTH in military history

- 1610 First Anglo-Powhatan War
- 1846 U.S. Forces capture Santa Fe, New Mexico
- 1861 Battle of Wilson’s Creek
- 1942 Invasion of Guadalcanal
- 1943 German troops Evacuate Sicily
- 1945 Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- 1949 Establishment of DoD
- 1965 7th Marines land at Chu Lai
- 1967 Operation Cochise
- 1972 Last U.S. combat unit leaves South Vietnam

As A Matter of Fact

Major Flagler, third Arsenal commandant, used ice skates to inspect work on the power dam. During one inspection, he fell through the ice and was saved by Milton Howard, the first black employee at RIA. Howard Street in the new housing area is named after him.

August Trivia!

- 1. In what year did Rock Island Arsenal reach its peak employment during World War II?
- 2. On what day was Colonel Davenport Murdered?
- 3. During which war did the New York City League of Women Voters start a “Know Your Onions” campaign?

Last Month’s Answers

- 1. They were all older than 45.
- 2. All died on the same vessel.
- 3. The Mark VIII Tank.

After the United States entered the Great War on 6 April 1917, America rushed to prepare its military for war...a war shaped by technological advances achieved over the past three years of trench warfare in Europe. To confront the Central Powers of Imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary, however, the United States would need to dramatically increase the strength of its Army from 98,000 active duty personnel, 45,000 of which were stationed abroad. Additionally on active duty were a little more than 100,000 National Guard Soldiers due to the disturbance along the Mexico/ US border also known as the Punitive Campaign.

The National Defense Act of 1916 was passed in order to increase size of the peacetime Army. The Act authorized the active Army be increased to a total strength of 165,000 active duty Soldiers over a five year period. Unfortunately, the United States entry into WWI would happen prior to any increases taking place. The act additionally authorized expansions to the National Guard, which would see an increase to approximately 450,000. The ‘National Army’, referred to in the Act as a volunteer army, would be created in a time of war and as was assumed would be made up of volunteers in two increments of 500,000 each based on Presidential direction and need of additional Soldiers. Despite these initial pre-war estimates, America’s need for a large army would eventually allow it to grow to almost four million men at its greatest strength during the war.

With American troops slowly arriving in France and American combat power increasing, General John J Pershing, the new Commander of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) commissioned a study of the

French and British experiences in controlling large numbers of Soldiers in the field. Starting in June of 1917 the study would conclude that the AEF would need to create “Field Armies” in order to manage the number of American Soldiers that would soon be arriving. General Pershing appointed Major Hugh A. Drum with the task of developing the design for the new American field army. Creatively it would be named First Army.

On 24 July 1918, the AEF General Order 120 was published forming the First United States Army under the command of General John J. Pershing, with the headquarters to be established in La Ferte-sous-Jouarre, France. General Order 120 would take effect on 10 August 1918. Drum, the new First Army Chief

of Staff and recently promoted to LTC, had a lot of work to do in building the new First Army.

The formation of First Army established parity between the AEF and the Allied Armies. By creating a field army General Pershing would become an Army commander. This put him on equal footing with his Allied counterparts which made it more difficult for the Allies to voice their desire to use American manpower in a piecemeal fashion, scattered across their already exhausted formations. This desire to use American Soldiers as replacements was known as amalgamation. The founding of a field army consolidated American forces under their own national command, standing and fighting as a single entity and simplifying American command and control in the field.

Additionally, the creation of First Army was supported by President Woodrow Wilson as a way to ease domestic and allied political tension on the matter. The formation of First Army, and successive numbered armies, organized American forces as a fresh, powerful, effective fighting force more than capable of holding its own against battle-hardened enemies.

By late September 1918, First Army led the way in the first American led engagement of the war which successfully cleared the Saint-Mihiel Salient of German occupation. First Army then prepared to shift its operations to the north in a new offensive near the Argonne Forest and the Meuse River. The effort to organize and train the AEF as a unified American command had proved successful and greatly lifted the morale and confidence of Pershing’s young army, which help to turn the tide of the war that had stagnated into stalemate.

APPENDIX 6

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES

GENERAL ORDERS {  
No. 120 } FRANCE, July 24, 1918.

I. In accordance with authority contained in War Department cablegram (No. 743), the First Army, American Expeditionary Forces, is organized as indicated hereinafter, to take effect August 10, 1918.

II. The First Army, American Expeditionary Forces, will consist of the following organizations:

A. HEADQUARTERS

Station—La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, Department of Seine-et-Marne, France.

Commander—Gen. John J. Pershing, United States Army.

General Staff:

Chief of Staff—Lieut. Col. Hugh A. Drum, G. S.

Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1—Lieut. Col. Jens Bugge, G. S.

Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2—Lieut. Col. Willey Howell, G. S.

Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3—Col. Robert McCleave, G. S.

Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4—Lieut. Col. John L. DeWitt, G. S.

Assistant Chief of Staff, G-5—Lieut. Col. Lewis H. Watkins, G. S.

Chief of Artillery—Maj. Gen. Edward F. McGlachlin, N. A.

Administrative and technical services:

Adjutant General—Col. Joseph F. Barnes, A. G. D.

Inspector General—Col. Jacob C. Johnson, I. G. D.

Judge Advocate—Lieut. Col. Blanton Winship, J. A.

Chief Quartermaster—Maj. George Luberoff, Q. M. R. C.

Chief Surgeon—Col. Alexander N. Stark, M. C.

Chief Engineer—Brig. Gen. Jay J. Morrow, N. A.

Chief Signal Officer—Lieut. Col. Parker Hitt, S. C.

Chief Ordnance Officer—Col. Edward P. O'Hern, Ordnance Department, N. A.

Chief of Air Service—Col. William Mitchell, S. C.

Chief of Motor Transport Corps—Col. William H. Winters, Q. M. C.

Chief of Chemical Warfare Service—(To be designated later).

Chief of Tank Corps—(To be designated later).

Logistics of Moving an Army

The ability of an Army to operate in a combat environment depends on a huge number of factors. Of these the ability to effectively shoot, move and communicate are near the top. As was previously discussed, First Army would see its first major engagement in the reduction of the Saint-Mihiel Salient. As part of the American Expeditionary Forces commander, General Pershing’s, negotiation with the other Allied commanders, it was agreed that the American First Army would take command and control of the planned offensive to reduce the Saint-Mihiel salient but would have to be prepared to stabilize the front following the battle, and then immediately disengage and move to participate in the upcoming Meuse-Argonne offensive.

This agreement would test the newly formed First Army staff who would have to

disengage, move approximately 600,000 personnel, over 3,000 artillery pieces, 40,000 tons of artillery ammunition, and other accompanying supplies 50 miles away. Artillery ammunition alone had to be replenished at the rate of 3000 tons a day. About 428,000 of the 600,000 Soldiers would be transported using motor vehicles the remaining would have to march the full distance. All of this was limited to one light rail line and only three main roads. All had to be accomplished in a 14 day period. The main architect of this critical move was COL George C. Marshall.

While the move did not fully go as planned it was ultimately successful. There were some factors such as weather and unforeseen traffic congestion that caused a majority of problems. In large part due to the hard work of senior staff including COL

Marshall’s ability to adapt to the ever changing situation, First Army achieved all of General Pershing’s requirements. COL Marshall even managed to find time to personally go into the field to resolve some of the traffic issues. Overall the movement served as a valuable education for the AEF and First Army staff.

Many of the crucial lessons learned in the AEF with this move would aid the young officers later in their careers as well as assist the American Army in WWII. 26 years later General George Patton would make a very similar move with the American Third Army to come to support the Americans engaged in the Battle of the Bulge surrounding Bastogne. The success of the 1944 move was in large part due to the 1918 lessons of the AEF move as well as aggressive leadership and staff work.