



## THE ARMY'S FORMATIVE YEARS 1783-1858

On June 14, 2025, the United States Army will celebrate its 250th birthday. Established in 1775, the Army has evolved significantly from its initial formation to become one of the world's most powerful military organizations.

**Post-Revolutionary Period and Early Challenges** After achieving independence, the Army faced numerous challenges such as Shays' Rebellion, the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, and westward expansion. These conflicts led to critical innovations and the establishment of the United States Military Academy at West Point, which played a vital role in professionalizing and developing leadership within the Army. This period was crucial in shaping the Army's operational capacity and its role in American national identity, governance, and power.

**Post-Revolutionary Vulnerabilities** The post-revolutionary war period highlighted significant vulnerabilities in the Nation's defense system. Congress directed General Washington to discharge most of the newly established Federal Army, leaving only a token force. There was a disdain within Congress and the U.S. as a whole for a large standing national Army due to experiences with British rule. The early American consensus was that national defense should rely on a "well-regulated and disciplined militia." However, the absence of a permanent national Army proved unstable, leading to the need for the Army to redefine itself in the face of national crises.

**Shays' Rebellion and the Need for a Standing Army** Shays' Rebellion in 1786-1787 underscored the critical need for a standing military force capable of addressing domestic unrest. Led by disillusioned former Revolutionary War soldiers, the rebellion attempted to seize government arsenals in Massachusetts. The inability of state militias to quell the rebellion quickly highlighted the country's military readiness fragility. This event played a key role in drafting the U.S. Constitution, establishing a stronger federal government with the authority to maintain a standing military.

**Establishment of the United States Military Academy at West Point** One significant outcome of the post-Revolutionary period was the establishment of the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1802. Before West Point, there was no formal system for training officers within the Army. The Academy provided a steady pipeline of qualified leaders, ensuring the Army was better equipped to handle future challenges. West Point marked a pivotal shift toward the professionalization of the Army, offering rigorous education in engineering, military strategy, and leadership.

**War of 1812 and the Need for Greater Professionalism** The War of 1812 tested the new Nation's military capabilities in a direct confrontation with a foreign power. The war highlighted deficiencies in training systems, logistical infrastructure, contracting capability and command structure. In response Congress created several departments to address these issues, including a quartermaster department and the Office of the Commissary General of Purchases. By the war's end, it was clear that the Army needed an increase in professionalism and organization.

**Mexican-American War and the Evolution of Military Doctrine** The Mexican-American War (1846-1848) marked a pivotal moment for the Army, showcasing its growing capabilities in strategy and logistics. It was also the first time the Army, on a large scale had acted as an expeditionary force. However, the conflict also highlighted deficiencies in logistics and the reliance on volunteers. The war underscored the need for a robust, well-equipped Army to serve national goals.

**Evolution of Logistics Infrastructure** One of the most important developments during this time of transformation was the evolution of the Army's logistics infrastructure. In the early years, the lack of logistical capacity hampered military readiness. By the late 19th century, the Army's logistics capabilities became increasingly sophisticated, particularly with the establishment of the National Arsenal System. This infrastructure was critical to the Army's readiness, particularly in times of war or national crisis.

The 250-year history of the U.S. Army is a story of continuous evolution, adapting to new challenges, growth and innovating to overcome obstacles, and maintaining readiness to defend the Nation. From the Revolutionary War to the modern era, the Army has undergone significant transformations in operational strategies and institutional frameworks. As the Army celebrates its 250th birthday, it stands as a testament to the strength, resilience, and dedication of its service members.

### LAST SURVIVORS OF THE REVOLUTION

At the start of the American Civil War there was an effort made to seek out any surviving Soldiers of the American Revolution and to capture their stories. Elias Hillard, a congregational church pastor from Connecticut did his best to find and preserve their stories. He published a book in 1864 with the results of six of interviews as well as having their pictures taken with the new photographic technology. One of those Soldiers was Connecticut-based Daniel Waldo. Waldo turned 16 in September 1778, and was drafted into the military the following April. His responsibilities were more of a laborer than the soldier and was discharged after a month of service. In April 1780 he would voluntarily join the Connecticut militia which was well established by this time. After serving in several skirmishes against the British Waldo would end up being captured by British loyalists along with most of the senior officers of his Connecticut militia. He was fortunate as he would be paroled and exchanged after two months of confinement. Waldo was purportedly the only person to have voted for George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. He would go on to live to the age of 102 passing away in 1864 only a short time after his picture was taken.



**DANIEL WALDO, AGED 102,**  
ONE OF THE SURVIVORS OF THE REVOLUTION.  
Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1864, by  
N. A. & R. A. Moore, of Hartford, in the clerk's office of the  
district court of Connecticut.

### FEBRUARY TRIVIA

1. How many officers from the war of 1812 were still serving at the start of the Civil War?
2. Who was the Army officer who described Los Angeles, in 1859, as a cow town that had no chance of anything more of that?
3. In 1855 what was the literacy rate of the Army?

### LAST MONTH'S ANSWERS

1. How old was the youngest American Soldier during the revolution?  
Richard Lord Jones (3d CT Regiment) was just 10 years old
2. Who was known to be terrible at dancing but once spent three straight hours on the dance floor?  
George Washington
3. Who wrote the new American Army's first manual?  
Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben (1779)



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