



# Bullet'n Backstory

Joint Munitions Command

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Commemorating the 250th Birthday of the U.S. Army

## Esprit de Corps: The Early National Period (1800-1812)

With the signing of the Treaty of Mortefontaine in September 1800, the United States was free from foreign wars for the time being, with the exceptions of intermittent Native American skirmishes in the Ohio territory. Authorization for the wartime Provisional Army expired, re-establishing the U.S. Army at its pre-war size. The next major change came on March 16, 1802, when President Thomas Jefferson signed the Military Peace Establishment Act into law, fixing the parameters of the peacetime Army of the United States. The act, which Jefferson helped draft, specified the organization and functions of the Army in 29 sections, summarized as follows:

Sec. 1 - 1 Regiment of Artillery, 2 Regiments of Infantry

Sec. 2 - In each Artillery Regiment, Col., Lt. Col., 4 Maj., Adjutant, and 20 Companies. In each Company, Capt., 1st Lt., 2nd Lt., 2 cadets, 4 Sgt., 4 Cpl., 4 musicians, 8 artificers, and 56 Pvt. in 5 Battalions. In each Infantry Regiment, Col., Lt. Col., Maj., Adjutant, Sgt. Maj., 2 teachers of music, in 10 Companies. In each Company, Capt., 1st Lt., 2nd Lt., Ensign, 4 Sgt., 4 Cpl., 4 musicians, and 64 Pvt.

Sec. 3 - Brig. Gen, Aide-de-Camp, Adjutant, Inspector of the Army, Paymaster of the Army, 7 paymasters, 2 district assistants [quartermasters], 3 military agents, 2 surgeons, 25 assistants.

Sec. 4 thru 25 - Rules for pay, equipment, widows, and orphans.

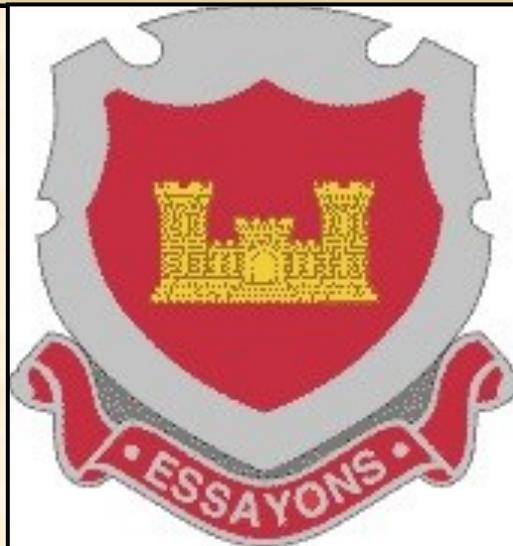
Sec. 26 and 28 - Corps of Engineers established at West Point, New York, as a military academy, with 1 engineer, 6 assistant engineers, and 20 cadets.

Sec. 29 - Repeals existing contradictory acts.

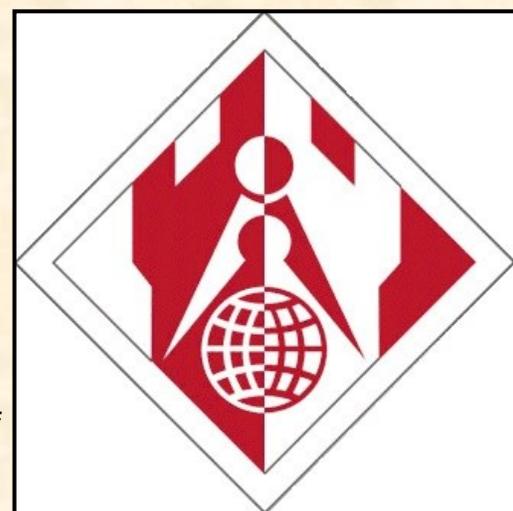
This act represents the formal creation of the current Corps of Engineers, but it was not the first unit of its kind. The Continental Congress established a separate Corps of Engineers in May 1779. After the Revolutionary War, the Corps was disbanded, only to be re-established during the presidency of George Washington, when it was combined with the artillery and called the Corps of Artillerists and Engineers. With Jefferson's signature, the 1802 act established the kernel of what the Corps would become. Soon, world events challenged both the future of American diplomacy and the effectiveness of the American military. Tensions between the United States and the major powers of Europe erupted in May 1803, when Britain declared war on Napoleonic France. The Americans preferred to remain neutral, retaining both nations as trading partners, but neither Britain nor France wanted such an arrangement. Recognizing the need to concentrate on the British threat, Napoleon Bonaparte set aside French ambitions in North America and acquired money for the war by concluding the Louisiana Purchase with Jefferson in July 1803. The British saw this as a betrayal. The situation worsened in November 1804, when the United States and Sauk leaders signed Quashquame's Treaty. Meant to be a peace agreement, it only highlighted the rivalry between the nations while effectively separating the Sauk, who signed the treaty, from those who allied with Britain.

In a move reminiscent of the origins of the American Revolution, Britain tried to crack down on its former colonies. The former mother country had never been shy about stopping and boarding American vessels in search of contraband and deserters. In May 1805, the Admiralty Court formalized this policy, leading to a rise in the seizure of American vessels. Jefferson responded with the April 1806 Non-Importation Act, an ineffective effort to pressure Britain into backing down. Britain did not change its policies and blockaded most American ports until the act was repealed.

Jefferson negotiated with Britain, and achieved some concessions, but a permanent peace remained elusive as tensions continued to rise in the Northwest Territory and British ships continued to board American ships and impress sailors into service. The latter issue came to a head in June 1807 with the *Chesapeake-Leopold* Affair, during which the HMS *Leopold* attacked and captured the USS *Chesapeake* in a search for British deserters. The incident created an uproar in the United States, but



Engineer Regimental Insignia



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Officers of the *Chesapeake* offering their swords to officers of the *Leopold* - c. 1900



Battle of Tippecanoe - Kurtz & Allison, 1889

**This Month in Military History**

**April 2, 1513:** Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León becomes the first known European to reach the region of America he names *La Florida*. After landing on its east coast, he claims ownership on behalf of Spain.

**April 5, 1943:** Allies conduct a bombing raid on the Minerva car factory in Mortsel, Belgium, to stop the repair of Luftwaffe planes. Stray bombs kill 936 civilians, the biggest single loss of Belgian civilians in World War II.

**April 8, 217:** During the long fall of the Roman Empire, Caracalla is assassinated after 17 years as emperor. His replacement, Marcus Macrinus only lasts one year in the position before he is also overthrown.

**April 11, 1241:** During the Mongolian invasion of Hungary, an army under Batu Khan defeats Hungarian King Béla at the Battle of Mohi, resulting in 30,000 Hungarian casualties, compared to hundreds of Mongols.

**April 14, 1931:** Two days after candidates supporting a Spanish democratic republic win an overwhelming victory in municipal elections, the military declares its inability to protect the monarchy. King Alfonso XIII flees and the Second Democratic Republic (1931-1939) begins.

**April 17, 642:** Tulga, Visigothic King of Hispania, is deposed in a military coup in Toledo by Chindasuinth after just three years on the throne. Tulga is forcibly tonsured (given a monk's haircut) and exiled to a monastery, where he soon dies.

**April 20, 1653:** Oliver Cromwell and 40 musketeers take over and depose the English "Rump" Parliament after it fails to establish a caretaker government. Afterward, Cromwell creates the Barebone's Parliament to work on the details of a new Constitution.

**April 23, 1014:** Irish King Brian Boru defeats a Viking army at the Battle of Clontarf on the east coast of Ireland, freeing the island from foreign control. In the process, 90% of each army and nearly all of the assembled leaders, including Boru, are killed.

**April 26, 1828:** In support of Greece's struggle for independence, Russia declares war on Turkey. After eight years of conflict, Greek independence is achieved in 1829. After a few years failing to form a stable republic, the government becomes a kingdom in 1832, one which will last 90 years.

**April 29, 1429:** After nearly seven months under siege by England and its continental allies, the French city of Orléans rallies with the arrival of Joan of Arc. Nine days later, the siege collapses, leading to a string of French victories in the Hundred Years' War.

Britain responded to American complaints with the Orders in Council in November 1807, which effectively banned neutral shipping in wartime. France soon did the same with its Milan Decree. Though facing hostility from his two largest trading partners, Jefferson knew the United States was not prepared to go to war. Again hoping economic pressure would work, he signed the Embargo Act of 1807, which stopped all foreign imports. This did not change Europe's approach to neutrality. It was also wildly unpopular in the United States, though it did help spur the growth of the American textile industry.

Any hope of avoiding further escalation with Britain ended with the eruption of Tecumseh's War. In the first decade of the 1800s, Native tribes in the Northwest Territory faced difficulties from both settlers and competing tribal alliances with Britain and the United States. A significant leader at the time was religious prophet Tenskwatawa, who rejected European ways and punished his followers for cooperating with settlers. In 1808, Tenskwatawa and his brother Tecumseh retreated to west central Indiana and built the village of Prophetstown. There, they gathered thousands of warriors from more than a dozen tribes to resist further settlement. When Britain approached Tecumseh with an offer of alliance, the U.S. government authorized William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana Territory, to use force against the assembly at Prophetstown. In November 1811, Harrison marched to the village with 1,000 men and arranged to meet with Tenskwatawa the next day to negotiate a peace. However, the prophet did not trust U.S. motives and instead led a surprise pre-dawn attack on Harrison's camp. After a stout defense by U.S. soldiers, the Native coalition withdrew. The victors then burned Prophetstown to celebrate winning what they called the Battle of Tippecanoe.

Delayed communication was the final step on the road to war. In May 1812, Prime Minister Spencer Percival was assassinated and Robert Jenkinson replaced him. Jenkinson immediately attempted to calm tensions with the United States, unaware that President James Madison had already asked Congress for a declaration of war. The U.S. had no idea of the change in circumstance and officially initiated the War of 1812 on June 18, two days after the British government revoked the Orders in Council.

**JMC Historical Document Collection**

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