



U.S. ARMY

15 YEARS  
Issue 8

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## THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE U.S. ARMY: 1917-1919

When the United States entered World War One in April 1917, the Army was far from ready to fight a global war. The Punitive Expedition in Mexico had highlighted some massive deficiencies in the Army's ability to mobilize and deploy. To address these issues changes were made to partially address them in the National Defense Act of 1916 but mostly had not been implemented prior to the start of the war. The U.S. military had previously been more accustomed to small-scale conflicts and frontier warfare. Now it faced the enormous challenge of transforming its small force into one capable of conducting modern, large-scale operations against seasoned European adversaries. Over the next two years, the Army would undergo a dramatic evolution, embracing new organizational strategies, improvements to its logistics systems, and tactical doctrines that would shape American military operations for decades to come.

At the outbreak of the war, the U.S. Army had approximately 127,500 soldiers—far too few to engage in sustained combat against the Central Powers. The battle of Arras fought from 9 April 1917 to 16 May 1917 resulted in over 158,000 British casualties alone. The rapid expansion required not just recruitment but a fundamental restructuring of military organization. The Army had to adapt its command structures and training its officers in modern warfare doctrines. This necessity led to the borrowing and adaptation of the French staff system, a framework designed to streamline decision-making and operational planning in large-scale battles.

One of the most significant steps in the Army's professionalization was its adoption of the French staff system. The American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), led by General John J. Pershing, recognized that the sheer size and complexity of modern warfare demanded a more structured and efficient approach to command and control. The French staff system, refined through years of European warfare, provided a clear hierarchy in decision-making, with specialized officers handling intelligence, logistics, and operations.

By incorporating this model, the U.S. Army established a structured approach to organizing divisions and corps, ensuring that command decisions were well-informed and strategically executed. This system improved the coordination of artillery, infantry, and logistical movements, allowing the AEF to operate with greater efficiency in the latter stages of the war. The implementation of the staff system also cultivated a new generation of professionally trained officers, setting the stage for the modernization of the American military well beyond World War One.

As the Army rapidly expanded, the challenge of managing over 2.5 million soldiers became a logistical and administrative undertaking of unprecedented scale. The U.S. had to mobilize, train, equip, and deploy an immense force in a short period, requiring sweeping reforms to recruitment, transportation, and supply chains.

Training camps were established across the country to transform recruits into effective combat Soldiers. Officers were trained through programs modeled after European military schools, ensuring that leadership at various levels could effectively command large formations. Meanwhile, new logistical frameworks ensured that supplies—food, ammunition, and medical support—kept pace with the growing demands of the Army.

By the time of the Meuse-Argonne offensive in September 1918, the American Army had evolved into a formidable force capable of executing complex operations. The professionalization efforts bore fruit as U.S. divisions demonstrated increasing effectiveness in combat, contributing to the final Allied offensives that pressured Germany into seeking an armistice.

The lessons learned during this period shaped the future of the U.S. military. The adoption of a structured staff system, enhanced logistical capabilities, and modernized training programs laid the foundation for the Army's evolution in the 20th century. The experience of managing massive troop deployments and coordinating large-scale operations became invaluable during World War Two, where similar challenges emerged on an even greater scale.

Between 1917 and 1919, the U.S. Army transitioned from a relatively small force into a powerful, organized military capable of conducting complex operations on the world stage. The rapid evolution of the Army during World War One not only contributed to the Allied victory but also set the course for the professionalization of the U.S. military in the modern era.

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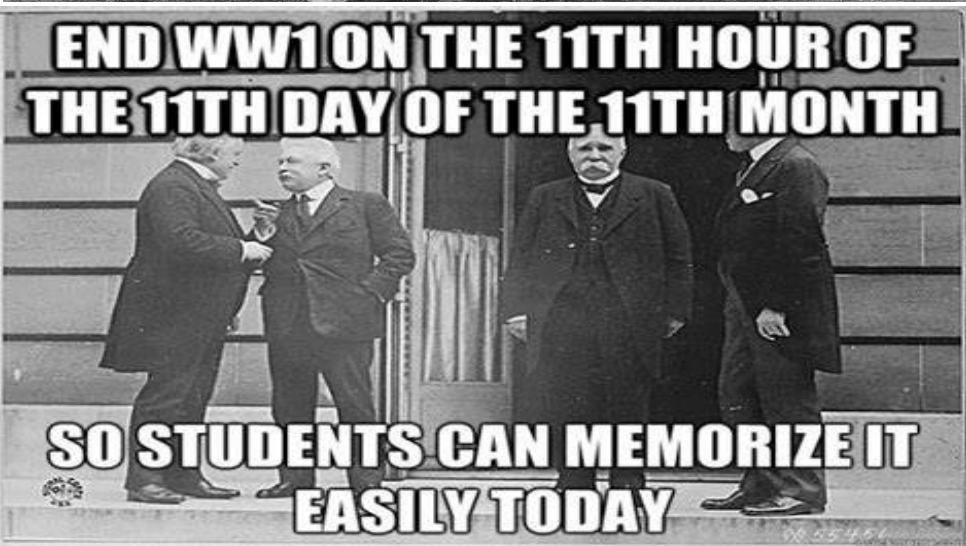
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### MANUFACTURING CONCERNS

When World War One started, the United States lagged behind in technology in almost everyway. The European armies had rapid fire artillery, large numbers of machineguns, tanks and manufacturing capacity to name a few. The Army fought to modernize and encourage manufacturing to ramp up to support the largest Army in American history. Within months contracts at Remington and Winchester firearms plants were retooling to start production of the M1917 U.S. Enfield rifles. Over 2.1 million rifles would be produced between 1917-1919. The Army owned arsenals such as Springfield and Rock Island were expanding their workforce and moving to 24 hour shifts to increase production. During the same period combined they would produce 593,253 rifles. Additionally the Army looked to Britain and France for modern artillery. The French M1897 cannon would be produced by Rock Island Arsenal with the help of French advisors. Unfortunately the first guns would roll of the production line by the first part of November 1918. This was taken as a lesson learned, the slow rate of development and production must never happen again.



1. What was one of the biggest challenges to the expansion of the U.S. Army at the start of WWI?
2. How did the U.S. Army address logistics challenges of transporting Soldiers and supplies to Europe during WWI?
3. What would become the primary challenge faced by the U.S. Army Medical Corps in WWI?

### LAST MONTH'S ANSWERS

1. Who was the Rock Island Arsenal commander that went on to become Chief of Ordnance?  
COL Daniel Webster Flagler
2. What Indian Wars battle was instrumental in the improvement of small arm accuracy?  
The Battle of Little Big Horn
3. What future president led the 1st Volunteer Cavalry in Cuba?  
Theodore Roosevelt

MAY TRIVIA

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