

This Day in History... April 23, 1908

Founding of the U.S. Army Reserve

The forerunner of the US Army Reserve was established on April 23, 1908. It was the nation's first federal reserve – providing fully-trained and prepared troops in times of need. Today, there are over 815,000 reservists in all the branches.

According to the United States code, the purpose of the Reserve is “to provide trained units and qualified persons available for active duty in the armed forces, in time of war or national emergency, and at such other times as the national security may require, to fill the needs of the armed forces whenever more units and persons are needed than are in the regular components.”



The first US Army reservists were in the Medical Corps.

From America's early history, the regular Army was supplemented by state militias and volunteers in times of conflict. The training and preparedness of these troops was inconsistent. By the start of the 20th century, American leaders took note of the detailed mobilization plans most European nations had in place. They felt it was time for the US to improve its military preparedness with increased federal involvement.

The first major step in this direction came on April 23, 1908. On that date, Congress passed a bill creating the US Army Medical Reserve Corps. It allowed the Army to create a reserve corps of medical officers that could be called to active duty in times of emergency. This is considered the official predecessor of the US Army Reserve and America's first federal reserve.

In 1912, Congress passed the Army Appropriations Act, which created the Regular Army Reserve, separate from the Medical Reserve founded four years earlier. The Army Reserve was called up for the first time in 1916 during the tensions between the US and Mexico caused by Pancho Villa. That same year, Congress passed the National Defense Act of 1916 that created the Officers Reserve Corps, Enlisted Reserve Corps, and the Reserve Officers Training Corps. The following year, the Medical Reserve Corps merged with the Officers Reserve Corps.



Truman served during World War I and reached the rank of colonel in the Army Reserve.

By the time the US entered World War I, there were 21,543 officer reservists and 35,000 enlisted reservists. The Medical Reserve was particularly impressive – Medical Reserve officers outnumbered regular Army doctors by more than four to one and about half of the nurses were reservists. By war's end, about 90,000 officers and 80,000 enlists reservists had served in every division of the American Expeditionary Force.

In the inter-war years, the reservists were called upon for other services. Most notably, more than 30,000 officers commanded 2,700 Civilian Conservation Corps camps as part of one of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs. During World War II, about a quarter of the Army's officers were reservists – a total of more than 200,000. After the war, Congress acknowledged the major role the reserves had played in the conflict and authorized retirement and drill pay in 1948.

During the Korean War, more than 400 reserve units served, totaling more than 240,000 soldiers. It was also during this conflict that Congress changed the structure of the reserve, dividing it into a Ready Reserve, Standby Reserve, and Retired Reserve. During the Berlin Crisis of 1961, over 69,000 Army reservists were called to active duty. President Johnson didn't make a large call-up for the Vietnam War, but 3,500 reservists did participate in the fighting.



The Army National Guard is an organized militia force and federal reserve force of the US, with over 336,000 personnel.

During Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, more than 84,000 Army reservists participated at home and in combat. Since then, the Army Reserve have been in near-constant service in combat, humanitarian, and peacekeeping operations around the world.

America's reserve force today consists of seven different groups: Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Coast Guard Reserve, Army National Guard, and Air National Guard. These total over 815,00 troops, with the Army Reserve and Army National Guard comprising more than half of that force. And if you're curious, the Navy Reserve was established on March 3, 1915; the Marines on August 29, 1916; the Coast Guard on June 23, 1939; and the Air Force on April 14, 1948.



This 1955 stamp was issued to honor all of America's Armed Forces reserve units.



Rickenbacker was a reservist during WWI – he was the highest scoring US fighter ace and earned the Medal of Honor.



Reagan joined the reserves in 1937 and was part of the 1st Motion Picture Unit during WWII.

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