

This Day in History... May 21, 1868

Birth of John L. Hines

General John Leonard “Birdie” Hines was born on May 21, 1868, in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. During World War I, Hines successively commanded a regiment, brigade, division, and corps in combat. He was the first person to do that since the Civil War.

The son of Irish immigrants, Hines graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1891. He was commissioned a second lieutenant of infantry with the 2nd Infantry Regiment. Between 1891 and 1898, he served with the regiment in Nebraska and Montana.

Hines went on to serve in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, participating in the Battle of San Juan Hill. He also fought in the Philippines during the Philippine-American War. In 1898, he was selected to serve as a Veteran Companion of the Pennsylvania Commandery of the Military Order of Foreign Wars. Hines also participated in the Mexican Punitive Expedition under General John J. Pershing.



This Distinguished Soldier stamp includes a photo of Hines and the insignia of the 4th Infantry Division.



Hines earned the Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism in 1918.

Hines’s superior leadership skills were recognized by General John J. Pershing, who was commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe during World War I. Hines’s dedication paid off, and Hines rose in rank quickly during the war. In 1917, he was promoted from major to lieutenant colonel. He then progressed to colonel, brigadier general, and in August 1918, Hines was promoted to major general – advancing four grades in 16 months.

During World War I, Hines successively commanded a regiment, brigade, division, and corps in combat. Prior to Hines, the last leader to accomplish such a feat was Lt. Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson during the American Civil War. In 1918, Hines earned the Distinguished Service Cross, the Army’s second-highest award for valor, for “extraordinary heroism in action near Berzy-le-Sec, France, July 21, 1918.”

Hines took command of the 4th Division in August 1918 and led them at St. Mihiel and in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Hines took over command of the III Corps near the end of the war, leading them during the war’s final battles and occupation of Germany.

After the war, Hines was promoted to permanent major general in March 1921. In the postwar years, he commanded the 5th Division, 2nd Division, and VIII Corps Area. He was made deputy chief of staff of the Army in 1922, and succeeded John J. Pershing as Army chief of staff in 1924. In that role, he “stressed the need for balance in funding and personnel for all parts of the permanent establishment, pointed up the effects of strength deficiencies upon Army capability to meet the provisions of the National Defense Act of 1920, and urged action on housing and promotions to promote personnel retention.”

From 1926 to 1930, Hines commanded the IX Corps Area in California. He then served as commanding general of the Philippine Department until his retirement in 1932. Hines was promoted to four-star general by a Special Act of Congress in 1940. Hines died at Walter Reed Army Hospital at the age of 100 on October 13, 1968.

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