

This Day in History... June 14, 1775

Continental Army Formed

On June 14, 1775, the Second Continental Congress established the Continental Army, the precursor of the United States Army.

Prior to the American Revolutionary War, the colonies had their own militias composed of citizen-soldiers. During larger threats, such as the French and Indian War (1754-63), they created temporary provincial regiments.

By the 1770s, relations with Britain began to deteriorate, and the colonists started to form militias for a possible war. After Britain passed the Intolerable Acts in 1774 to punish Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party, many of the militias stepped up their training. In the fall of 1774, Richard Henry Lee was among several colonists to call for the creation of a national militia, but the First Continental Congress rejected the idea.

The following spring, as tensions continued to rise, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress created its own colonial army of 26 company regiments on April 23. Other colonies soon followed, including New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.



Washington took command of the Continental Army on July 3, 1775.

That June, the Massachusetts Congress addressed the Second Continental Congress and requested that they take over authority of the colonial army. With support from John Adams among others, the Second Continental Congress agreed to take command of the Boston troops. They also recognized the need for greater defense and passed a resolution creating the Continental Army. This included appropriating \$2 million in support of the troops around Boston and New York City. Congress also authorized the creation of 10 companies of expert riflemen (who later became known as the 1st Continental Regiment) from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, who were sent to Boston to support the militia there. The following day, the Continental Congress unanimously elected George Washington commander-in-chief of the Continental Army.

About a month later, Congress asked all the colonies to form their own militia companies from "all able bodied effective men, between sixteen and fifty years of age." Congress, as well as many colonists, didn't want a standing army, but they also needed to have the discipline to face an organized British force. Enlistment periods ranged from one to three years. Over the course of the war, the units were dissolved and reorganized several times. Reportedly, the Continental Army never contained more than 17,000 men at one time. Additionally, after the British guaranteed freedom to any Blacks who served in their Army, the Continental Army did the same. Black people made up about one-fifth of the Continental Army in the north. (This was the last time the US army was fully integrated until the Korean War.)

The Continental Army began its service in Massachusetts, but moved on to New York following the evacuation of Boston. They spent the next five years battling the British in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania at such notable battles as Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine, and Germantown.

Because it was such a young military force, the Continental Army was plagued with issues from the beginning, including poor planning and training, short enlistments, and rivalries between the states. While patriotism drove early recruits, incentives were needed to convince men to join later in the war. However, the leadership of George Washington and other officers helped to keep the Army together and learn from mistakes with each battle.

After the war ended with the Treaty of Paris, the Continental Army was largely disbanded in 1783. It would be over 10 years before America created its permanent Army.



Stamp picturing the uniform of the Continental Army.



Stamp issued to honor the US Army's role in World War II.

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