
The George C. Marshall Lecture in Military History

The Duality of the American Military Tradition: A Commentary



Edward M. Coffman*

The second George C. Marshall Lecture in Military History was jointly sponsored by the George C. Marshall Foundation and the Society for Military History. It was delivered on 31 March 2000 at the Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri. The purpose of the lecture series is to honor the accomplishments of a distinguished scholar in the field of military history; to demonstrate to members of the historical profession and the general public the relevance of military history and the contributions of its practitioners; and to commemorate the interest in history of George C. Marshall (1880–1959), former U.S. Army Chief of Staff (1939–45), Secretary of State (1947–49), and Secretary of Defense (1950–51).

SEVERAL years ago, an ad man called from Milwaukee to ask me to check out an advertisement that he had just written. Rather than calling up images of scantily clad maidens or cute infants, he wanted to exploit the American military tradition to encourage people to purchase his product. The blurb he read to me included a list of five or six famous American battles. I have forgotten all but one—Dunkirk—because that, understandably, struck a jarring note. When I told him that Dunkirk was not an American battle, he pressed me at length. Why wasn't it? Weren't there American participants in it? and so on. I held my ground until he finally hung up. I never saw the finished ad but, a few days later, I received in the mail a coffee cup with the logo of the ad agency emblazoned on its side.

I tell this story not to point out the difficulty in changing a made-up mind or to boast of having received a token compensation for my exper-

* I wish to express my appreciation to Jerry M. Cooper, Conrad C. Crane, Paul J. Jacobsmeyer, and Timothy K. Nenninger for their help.

tise (a rare occurrence as we historians all know), but to illustrate the rather shaky grasp that Americans have of their country's military tradition. As one might expect, the Chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee in August 1940 demonstrated a firmer grasp of this tradition when he tried to calm the fears of those Americans who were concerned about the condition of our armed forces after the German army had taken France out of the war. Senator Robert R. Reynolds of North Carolina emphasized that Americans are different from other peoples because "our boys learn to shoot from the time they put on knee pants." By way of illustration, he pointed out that the mountaineers in his state "draw a bead on a squirrel a hundred yards away and aim at the right eye . . . [if they hit him in the body,] they think that is unsportsmanlike." Why should we be worried about the German blitzkrieg? He went on to say: "I am not . . . 'afear'd' of Hitler coming over here, because if he does, he will get the worst licking he ever had in his life, because our boys have been trained to shoot."¹ Aside from his assumption that the United States would not become involved in World War II unless invaded, and his obvious lack of understanding of modern warfare, Bob Reynolds certainly showed a clear understanding of a basic tenet of the American military tradition—that the citizenry could be depended upon to defend this country. And, of course, they have throughout our history.

Since World War II, many Americans have relied too much on the movies for their knowledge of military tradition. After all, John Wayne did fight, on the screen, heroically from the Alamo, through the Civil War and Indian wars, and as a sailor, soldier, and marine in World War II before he finally wound up in the Special Forces in Vietnam—all without ever actually being in the service. If the fans paid close attention to his roles, however, they should have noticed that in several of his films he was not an amateur civilian springing to arms to save the day, but a long-serving professional soldier, sailor, or marine. It is unlikely that Wayne's sympathetic portrayals of the hard-bitten, old Cavalry Captain Brittles in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* and the relentlessly tough Marine Sergeant Stryker in *Sands of Iwo Jima* caused any of his viewers to re-examine whatever notions they had about the American military tradition. But, at least, these characters did point up a different aspect of that tradition.

Indeed, there is a duality of the American military tradition. Russell F. Weigley, the distinguished historian who has written so much and so well on the American Army, succinctly explained why in his *History of the United States Army*: "A history of the United States Army must be, however, a history of two armies. Inheritance from England, geography, and democratic ideology have given the country two: a Regular Army of

1. Quotations are from a lengthy excerpt of Reynolds's speech in Louis Smith, *American Democracy and Military Power: A Study of Civil Control of the Military Power in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 252.

professional soldiers and a citizen army of various components variously known as militia, National Guards, Organized Reserves, selectees."²

Wars naturally dominate the military tradition. Significant issues are involved, large numbers of the populace are in uniform, lives are at stake, and the sacrifices are great. In peacetime, veteran organizations and other patriotic groups dedicate themselves to commemorating the wars. In both the professional service and the civilian components, regiments perpetuate this memory with the battle honors on their colors, their distinctive insignia, and some, after World War I, with the Fourraguerre and, after World War II, the Presidential Unit Citation.

In this essay, I intend to show how the history of these two armies has been interwoven with tension and cooperation in the process of giving life to their traditions through World War II.³ The civilian military tradition has always been predominant. After all, it is not only the oldest, but also more Americans have participated in it. From the beginnings of colonization in the early seventeenth century, the English who made the first settlements assumed that fighting was a possibility. Since there was no professional army at hand, they called upon their own knowledge of the militia system in England to organize their defense.⁴ The strengths of this approach were that the system fit their need for local defense and it was much less expensive than maintaining a large group of full-time men at arms. Besides, even if they could have afforded it, there was an inherent fear of such a force. The weakness was that over the years, the concept of obligation to serve, upon which the system depended, lost its sharp edge.

2. Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), xi. In his *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: Free Press, 1987) on page 266, John W. Chambers, II qualifies this definition by saying that the two armies are a small standing army peacetime force and the much larger temporary wartime army.

3. This essay will deal with the Regular Army, the National Guard, and the Army Reserve rather than the regular and civilian components of the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard. The Army has been the largest professional force over the years while the militia has the longest heritage of any military service.

4. For the colonial period, I have depended upon Douglas E. Leach, *Arms For Empire: A Military History of the British Colonies in North America 1607-1763* (New York: Macmillan, 1973) and his *Roots of Conflict: British Armed Forces and Colonial Americans 1677-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); John Shy, *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965) and his *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), Chapter 2; John K. Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), Chapters 1 and 2; and Jerry M. Cooper, *The Militia and the National Guard in America since Colonial Times: A Research Guide* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1993), Chapter 3.

Anyone who surveys the history of the colonial militia quickly becomes aware of the importance of localism. After all, local defense was the primary reason for the system. As the need for such an effort became less real, local interest understandably declined. The system itself varied from colony to colony with those which had more tightly organized communities naturally having a more organized militia. The seventy-odd men of Captain John Parker's company who gathered on Lexington Green on 19 April 1775 were acting in defense of their community against the British regulars who came down the road toward them. While the redcoats quickly swept this opposition aside, the rest of the day became very long indeed for those regulars as militiamen rallied at Concord and along their route back to Boston to snipe at them.⁵ The Revolution thus began and the militias of other New England colonies joined their Massachusetts comrades to besiege Boston. This situation pushed the militia system to a different level. The men who met in the Second Continental Congress realized this and in June of that year, they created a force answerable to them rather than to state governments. This Continental Army, under the command of George Washington, was the closest this alliance of states could come to a regular force controlled by the central government.

Even then, there was deep concern about taking such a drastic step away from the traditional dependence on militia. One of the congressmen, Samuel Adams, wrote in 1776: "A Standing Army, however necessary it may be at some times, is always dangerous to the Liberties of the People. Soldiers are apt to consider themselves as a Body distinct from the rest of the Citizens. . . . Such a Power should be watched with a jealous Eye."⁶ Washington, on the other hand, knew that the Continental Army was necessary to carry on what became a long war. Several years later, as the war dragged on, he spelled out the reason to Congress: "Regular Troops alone are equal to the exigencies of modern war. . . . whenever a substitute is attempted it must prove illusory and ruinous."⁷

As Washington came to understand, however, there was more to modern war than two well-disciplined and well-trained bodies of troops fighting it out on the battlefield. To be sure, the militia did not do well in such battles, but they did serve the valuable purpose of controlling the countryside, of suppressing enemy sympathizers, and harassing foraging

5. Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practices, 1763-1789* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 60-65. I have relied on Higginbotham as well as Mahon, Robert K. Wright, Jr., *The Continental Army* (Washington: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1983), and Mark V. Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996) for my treatment of the Revolutionary War.

6. As quoted in Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802* (New York: Free Press, 1975), 2.

7. As quoted in Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War*, 273.

parties of British soldiers when they ventured into their areas. And Washington made use of this valuable asset.⁸ When asked by Congress to submit plans for a postwar military establishment, Washington recognized the value of the militia as well as regulars by calling for "A regular and standing force" to be complemented by "A Well organized Militia; upon a Plan that will pervade all the States."⁹

Throughout the eighties and the early nineties, the central government attempted to police the frontier with more or less ad hoc forces. The adoption of the Constitution and a stronger central government did not solve the military problem. Indeed, the old fears engendered by localism were enhanced. This meant that efforts to create a more effective militia died with the Militia Act of 1792 which, although it prescribed a uniform militia system, made no provisions for either funding or supervision.¹⁰

The victory of "Mad Anthony" Wayne's legion over the Indians at Fallen Timbers in 1794 helped save the idea of a Regular Army. Even the Jeffersonians who came to power in 1801 were willing to accept, albeit reluctantly, the concept of a standing army, but there was a caveat, as Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin indicated: "The distribution of our little army to distant garrisons where hardly any other inhabitant is to be found is the most eligible arrangement of that perhaps necessary evil that can be contrived."¹¹ In addition to accepting the necessity of regulars as a frontier constabulary, President Thomas Jefferson in 1802 established the United States Military Academy which would become the soul of the professional military ethos.

In 1812, the United States went to war. Thousands upon thousands of militiamen entered and left active service in brief intervals while national government leaders tried to build up a force capable of meeting the British in battle. The disputes that arose between several states and the federal government, the poor condition of the militia, and their refusal to cross into Canada did not help the war effort. Despite the many defeats, there were some victories—none more notable than the Battle of New Orleans.

Andrew Jackson, a general of volunteers who did not receive a Regular Army commission until 1814, led a motley force of regulars, militia, and volunteers to a stunning victory over veterans of the Napoleonic War. Although the battle had no effect on the outcome of the war, which had ended some weeks earlier, it etched in the American consciousness the

8. *Ibid.*, Chapter 12.

9. John M. Palmer, *Washington, Lincoln, Wilson: Three War Statesmen* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1930), 20.

10. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, Chapter 7, and Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 51–54.

11. As quoted in Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784–1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3.

powerful image of the frontier rifleman and validated the traditional dependence on citizen soldiers. At least, Kentuckians thought so as they gloried in the song, "The Hunters of Kentucky:"

We are a hardy, freeborn race

 And if daring foe annoys,
 Whate'er his strength and forces,
 We'll show him that Kentucky boys
 Are 'alligator horses.'
 O Kentucky, the hunters of Kentucky,
 The hunters of Kentucky!"¹²

Despite such bombast, the militia system went into even deeper decline after the War of 1812. Secretary of War James Barbour was so concerned in 1826 that he appointed a board to study the problem. After poring over letters from state adjutants general and other interested parties who gave examples of just how bad the situation was, the board concluded that the key was that there were simply too many men in the obligated age group, eighteen to forty-five, to organize and train properly.¹³ Still, ten years later, the War Department counted on that great mass. In his Report on Fortifications, the Army's Chief Engineer may have taken pride in listing an estimate of the number of militiamen expected to come to the defenses of nine major port cities. Some clerk or low-ranking officer interpolated from the 1830 census that 987,145—very close to a million—would spring to arms not overnight, but in eleven days after the initial call.¹⁴ This was fantasy. In fact, over the next couple of decades only a handful of volunteer militia units would be available for such service.

During the Mexican War, the decay of the militia system became even more obvious as the federal government depended on volunteer units rather than militia to support the regulars. For the Regular Army, this war is particularly significant because that organization, which had come into existence as a frontier constabulary only six decades earlier, came of age as an army with its victories in Mexico. Taylor's and Scott's campaigns added great luster to its reputation and contributed greatly to the professional tradition. At the same time, tension developed between the regulars

12. As quoted in Thomas D. Clark, *The Kentucky* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942), 405. For the militia in the War of 1812, see Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, Chapter 5, and C. Edward Skeen, *Citizen Soldiers in the War of 1812* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999).

13. The report is in *American State Papers: Military Affairs* (reprinted, Buffalo, N.Y.: W. S. Hein, 1998), 3: 388–92.

14. The chart which shows the day-to-day accumulation of militiamen appears on page 71 of Senate Document #293 (18 April 1836), 24th Congress, First Session, Serial Set # 282.

and their civilian masters. President James K. Polk's actions in appointing inexperienced and more or less competent politicians brigadier generals, and in trying to make Senator Thomas H. Benton, who had been a militia colonel in the War of 1812, General-in-Chief, threatened the regulars' belief in their priority due to professional experience.

It is significant that battleflags from that war hung in the old Cadet Chapel at West Point until the 1970s. Only 1,271 cadets had graduated since the founding of the Academy through 1845 and, given the lack of retirement, most were still junior officers. They and their colleagues who had left the army and held higher rank in volunteer regiments earned the tribute of Winfield Scott who commanded the force that took Mexico City. "I give it as my fixed opinion, that but for our graduated cadets, the war between the United States and Mexico might, and probably would have lasted some four or five years, with, in its first half, more defeats than victories falling to our share; whereas, in less than two campaigns, we conquered a great country and a peace, without the loss of a single battle or skirmish." Over the years, first year cadets memorized Scott's Fixed Opinion as a part of required plebe knowledge; thus, the tradition was inculcated in generation after generation. Then or later, few civilians probably ever heard of it.¹⁵

In the antebellum era, most Americans who gave any consideration to military tradition still thought in terms of the frontier riflemen of New Orleans or the Minutemen of the Revolutionary War. In the process, some artists embellished the facts into legend as prints of the action on Lexington Green illustrate. The earliest portrayal, which came out in 1775, showed British regulars in their rigid formation while the colonists are fleeing. An 1830 print gives more space to the colonists, some of whom were shown firing at the British. Twenty-five years later, the fighting colonists, standing firm, completely dominate the scene.¹⁶

During the 1850s, the gap expanded between the professionals who then looked to their Mexican War laurels and the civilians who were more stirred by the memory of the Minutemen. While citizen soldiers were dazzled by the uniforms and fancy drills of the volunteer companies, regulars could not help but become more conscious of their difference from the amateur soldiery. Their duty on the frontier or in the small forts along the coast was not a hobby to be indulged on occasion. Meantime, those

15. As quoted in *Bugle Notes: 1977-1981* (n.p., n.d.), 176. The number of graduates is in *Register of Graduates and Former Cadets 1802-1990* (West Point, N.Y.: West Point Alumni Foundation, 1990), 270. Conrad C. Crane (telephone, 22 February 2000) said that the flags were removed from the Old Cadet Chapel in order to be better preserved. He also checked and found that Scott's Fixed Opinion is still a part of required plebe knowledge. Holman Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor: Soldier of the Republic* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941), 219-21.

16. The prints appear following page 34 in Stewart H. Holbrook, *Lost Men of American History* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

regular officers who studied the profession of arms looked to Napoleon and the French as models rather than to the Minutemen.¹⁷

There was something else about the Regular Army that bonded men as well as their wives and children, who also identified themselves as of this or that regiment. In place of the community pride and loyalty that characterized the powerful force of localism for militiamen, army people gave their pride and loyalty to the regiment. This flourished during the nineteenth century and into the twentieth when individuals might stay for decades in the same unit. Hunter Liggett, who spent nineteen years in the Fifth Infantry, later in the century summed up what this meant: "A man's regiment was his home and his career. . . . The old spirit of competitive local pride is the easiest and best of stimulants of army *esprit de corps*."¹⁸ The creation of regimental insignias and the adoption, in some units, of songs helped cement this loyalty and sense of tradition. How could any one who has ever paraded with the Seventh Cavalry Regiment forget the rollicking lilt of "Garry Owen"? I know I won't.

With the advent of the Civil War, professional officers had to accept the fact that hundreds of thousands of civilians temporarily turned soldier would have to carry on the war. Some militia units did see service, but the great mass of men, including some conscripts, served in units organized by their states yet under direct national control.¹⁹ On the battlefields, leaders emerged and made their marks. There were the West Pointers—Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, Philip H. Sheridan, Robert E. Lee, Thomas Jonathan Jackson, and James Longstreet, to name a few. And there were the civilians—Nathan Bedford Forrest, John A. Logan, and John B. Gordon, who went from country lawyer to corps commander in Lee's Army and of whom one Johnny Reb said: "He's most the prettiest thing you ever did see on a field of fight. It 'ud put fight into a whipped chicken just to look at him!"²⁰ And there was Nelson A. Miles, whose work as a clerk in a crockery store was far removed from that required of a division commander in the Army of the Potomac.

After the war, all of the Johnny Rebs and most of the Yankees simply went home, but they kept the memory of the war alive throughout their lifetimes which in many instances stretched well into the twentieth century. They had carried the burden of the fighting and could be reckoned as military experts in their communities. Some, to include Gordon and Logan, became senators, held elective office, and thus had platforms for

17. William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784–1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 359–62.

18. Hunter Liggett, *A. E. F.: Ten Years Ago in France* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1928), 269, and Coffman, *The Old Army*, 233.

19. Chambers, *To Raise An Army*, 33, 45–57.

20. Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 3 vols. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1942–44), 3: xxxiv.

their views. Black Jack Logan, who had excelled as a commander, had a reason to be hostile to the regulars in the postwar period. The fact that William T. Sherman had replaced him as an army commander with another general whose major qualification was that he was a graduate of the Military Academy, understandably rankled him. He led attacks on the professionals in the halls of Congress and celebrated the citizen soldier tradition in a lengthy tome, *The Volunteer Soldier of America*.²¹

Regardless of their attitude toward regulars, all veterans knew from experience that most of the fighting was done by civilians like them. So the citizen soldier tradition became even more firmly embedded in memory but with a qualification. There was less reference to Lexington and Concord and more to Gettysburg and other great Civil War battles which dwarfed those earlier actions.

In the 1870s, Emory Upton, a West Pointer and successful combat commander during the Civil War, brooded about what he considered dangerous flaws in his nation's military policy. After a lengthy tour in which he observed armies in both Europe and Asia, he began work on a treatise to present his views. On the first page of his Introduction written in 1880, he clearly stated his premise and pointed out the different attitudes of soldiers and civilians as he immediately took a sharp dig at the accepted military tradition. "Our military policy, or, as many would affirm, our want of it, has now been tested during more than a century. . . . while military men, from painful experience, are united as to its defects and dangers, our final success in each conflict has so blinded the popular mind, as to induce the belief that as a nation we are invincible."²² His argument, which he supported with a mass of facts and figures, was that the lack of a large Regular Army had resulted in great loss in lives as well as money. His solution was a large Regular Army backed up by national volunteers. As for the militia, he thought it should be maintained merely as state troops with local missions. Regular officers welcomed Upton's work because he articulated their attitude toward the citizen military tradition. Few civilians probably had even heard of it. Indeed, some were unaware that there was an army, as one officer discovered in the 1880s when a woman said, upon learning he was a regular, "Why, I supposed the Army was all disbanded at the close of the war."²³

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, there was a revival of the militia which began to be known as the National Guard. In part, this was a response to the states' need for troops to deal with civil

21. John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order* (New York: Free Press, 1993); Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), 21.

22. Emory Upton, *The Military Policy of the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1904), vii.

23. Coffman, *The Old Army*, 215.

disorders. In 1871, the formation of the National Guard Association provided a vehicle for promoting their interests. Many joined the Guard units for the same reasons their fathers had joined the volunteer militia companies—the attraction of the uniform, the zest for competition in drill meets, the social activities, and the camaraderie. On the eve of the war with Spain, Lieutenant George B. Duncan made it clear in an article published in *North American Review* that it would be a crime to send such men to battle. It was time for the nation to break with its traditional anti-standing army bias and support a large regular army. He posited that: “The cornerstone of the superstructure of opposition to a standing army has been our isolation.” Then, he posed the question: “Are we still isolated?” and went on to answer: “The genius of invention has changed all the essential conditions of a few years ago. Time and space are being rapidly annihilated.” His conclusion was that the nation must have an army comparable in size to those of the great powers with whom it might come into conflict.²⁴

When the nation did go to war in the spring of 1898, however, civilians in Guard and hastily organized volunteer units made up the bulk of the army. But in the larger Philippine War which followed, the War Department did gain more control over volunteers when it broke tradition by organizing them in national rather than state units.²⁵ During the two decades between the Spanish-American War and World War I, the interests of the National Guard and the Regular Army merged when the question was to improve the quality of the Guard but clashed bitterly over the issue of federal control. In 1903, after 111 ineffectual years, Congress replaced the Militia Act of 1792 with the Dick Act, which maintained the obligatory provision but specified the difference between organized and unorganized militia. It upgraded the armament of the Guard and provided funding for this purpose. In fact, during the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, the government spent almost three times as much money (some \$60 million) on the Guard as it had throughout the previous century.²⁶

One of the greatest weaknesses of the Militia Act was the lack of supervision. The Dick Act and supplementary laws tied funding to supervision. Energetic young officers like Lieutenant George C. Marshall instructed and inspected summer camps and served throughout the year with the Guard. This was a win-win situation with these lieutenants and

24. George B. Duncan, “Reasons for Increasing the Regular Army,” *North American Review* 166 (April 1898): 451.

25. Brian M. Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899–1902* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 125–26.

26. Jerry M. Cooper, *The Rise of the National Guard: The Evolution of the American Militia, 1865–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 109–12, and Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 138–41.

captains gaining experience at dealing with larger units than they could ever hope to see in the garrison, and in the meantime learning about Guardsmen and their problems while the Guard profited from their professional expertise.²⁷

Despite the friendships that developed between regular and Guard officers and obvious areas of common interest, there still remained the basic difference over state vs. national control. When World War I evoked the Preparedness Movement and a civilian lobby emerged which was not controlled by the Guard, Secretary of War Lindley M. Garrison and his advisers thought that the time was ripe to settle the issue. They proposed that Congress should create a large national reserve force to be named the Continental Army after Washington's regulars. Neither Congress nor President Woodrow Wilson accepted their plan. Instead, the National Defense Act of 1916 recognized the Guard as the first line of defense after the regulars and mandated that Guardsmen had to take a dual oath to both federal and state governments and could be drafted into federal service.²⁸

Within weeks, Guard units found themselves on federal service patrolling the Mexican Border. In early 1917, Guardsmen returned home for a brief respite before war broke out with Germany. During that interim, War Department planners worked out a conscription plan that Congress adopted soon after the war began. During the mobilization, the War Department took the state designations away from Guard units, merged regiments, and relieved countless officers, including nearly all Guard generals, from command. Men volunteered for both the Guard and the Regular Army and initially division designations were set aside for them as well as for the draftees who were in the National Army. As the war progressed, the divisions lost whatever special character they may have had as their losses were replaced by whoever was available. Eventually, 72 percent of the army came from the draft in stark contrast to the Civil War make-up, which included only 8 percent draftees. In August 1918, Army Chief of Staff Peyton C. March ordered that there would be no formal distinction between Guardsmen, regulars, and draftees.²⁹

A reluctant draftee, Alvin C. York, came out of this war as America's most famous hero. This tall, lanky Tennessee mountaineer sharpshooter,

27. Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Education of a General, 1880-1939* (New York: Viking, 1963), 100, 115-17, and Larry I. Bland, ed., *George C. Marshall Interviews and Reminiscences for Forrest C. Pogue* (Lexington, Va.: George C. Marshall Foundation, 1991), 158-59, 161-62, 170.

28. Cooper, *Rise of the National Guard*, 143, 154, and Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, Chapter 4.

29. Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 73; Cooper, *Rise of the National Guard*, 169; Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 161-63; and Edward M. Coffman, *The Hilt of the Sword: The Career of Peyton C. March* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 130.

who took on an enemy battalion in the Argonne Forest, was as close to the frontier rifleman and Minuteman as one could get in the twentieth century. Then and later, on the eve of World War II when his story became a popular movie, and on down to today, the celebration of Sergeant York was an affirmation of the citizen soldier tradition.

After the so-called "War To End All Wars," when Congress sat down to make military policy, hostility again flared between regulars and Guardsmen. Steeped in Uptonian ideas, War Department leaders proposed a large standing army with a universal military training (UMT) program and wanted to leave the Guard as mere state troops. This provoked the president of the National Guard Association, Bennett Clark, to issue a clarion call "to build up the Guard and smash the Regular Army."³⁰ Not surprisingly, civilians had more influence than professional soldiers with Congress, which soon dismissed the War Department plan, made provision for the Guard, and cut universal military training from the bill which became law in 1920.

Despite the acrimonious start, relations between the Regular Army and National Guard were good during the twenties and thirties. The federal government upped its support to \$32 million annually, more than five times the highest annual total in the pre-World War I years.³¹ Regulars continued on their rounds of instruction and supervision. Among them was Colonel George C. Marshall, who served as Senior Instructor of the Illinois National Guard from 1933 to 1936. Marshall saw clearly that the Guard's key problems were lack of time for sufficient training and the political element in the officer corps. At the same time, he was acutely aware of the gap between professional and amateur soldiers and "the misunderstandings and difficulties that often blossom between the War Department's necessities and the National Guard desires."³²

Three years after he left Chicago as a new brigadier general, Marshall was a full general and Chief of Staff of the Army. As the nation began to prepare for war, he needed all of his experience and understanding of citizen soldiery to deal with the disgruntlement of National Guard officers during the mobilization. The President called up the first Guard units on the same day that the Selective Service Act was passed in September 1940. Over the next nine months, Guard units came on active duty and demonstrated the weaknesses Marshall had observed in Illinois. As regular, reserve, and Guard officers took up their increased responsibilities when units were created or expanded, all components had men who suffered from physical disabilities, were over age, or were simply unable to

30. Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 170.

31. Cooper, *Rise of the National Guard*, 175.

32. The quotation is from Marshall to Hugh A. Drum, 7 November 1934, in Larry I. Bland, ed., *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 1: 444.

meet the demands of their jobs. Although a higher number of regular field grade officers were retired than Guardsmen, their lot was not as newsworthy as that of the Guard division commanders. When the commander of the division made up of Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska Guard units was relieved, Bennett Clark, the former NGA president who was then a Missouri senator, protested: "It is, of course, the old Army game which does not intend to leave a National Guard officer . . . in command of a National Guard division." He was close to the mark—only one Guardsman, Major General Robert S. Beightler of Ohio, remained in command of his division throughout the war.³³

While the war raged, in November 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated that he favored a postwar military policy based on universal military training. General Marshall endorsed this program, prepared by the same officer, John M. Palmer, who had worked up the UMT plan in 1919. Predictably, the president of the National Guard Association, Ellard A. Walsh, who had been relieved of division command during the mobilization, was outraged. He exclaimed: "The War Department has never overlooked an opportunity to destroy the National Guard."³⁴ Earlier, in July, a letter to General Marshall from Lesley J. McNair, the commander of Army Ground Forces (AGF) who was in charge of training, if known, would have confirmed Walsh's darkest suspicions. Less than two weeks before he was killed in the air strike that preceded the breakout in Normandy, McNair wrote: "One of the great lessons of the present war is that the National Guard . . . contributed nothing to National Defense." He concluded with the recommendation: "That the National Guard be dispensed with as a component of the Army of the United States."³⁵

This was not something that George Marshall wanted to hear. After all, as he said later: "I feel the National Guard is part and parcel of our system and we will always have it with us." In response to McNair, the Director of the Special Planning Division of the general staff explained: "the War Department obviously cannot report to Congress that no National Guard system can be dependable or efficient until every effort

33. The quotation is from Bland, ed., *Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, 2: 649; Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Ordeal and Hope, 1939-1942* (New York: Viking, 1966), 82-83, 99-100. Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 187. Beightler's 37th Division performed well in the Pacific Theater. Another Guard general, Raymond S. McLain, commanded with distinction a division and corps in the European Theater.

34. As quoted in *Time*, 27 November 1944, 65. Also see *Time*, 20 November 1944, 64. Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Statesman, 1945-1959* (New York: Viking, 1987), 430.

35. Lesley J. McNair to Chief of Staff (Attn: Special Planning Division), 12 July 1944, 370.01, Headquarters, AGF General Correspondence, 1942-1948, Record Group 337, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.

has been made to evolve such a system.”³⁶ In mid-August, some three weeks after McNair’s death, his headquarters dispatched a seven-page memo detailing means of improving the Guard. The crucial point was that the Guard must change “from too close state control to closer federal supervision.”³⁷

Since World War II, the nation has fought three wars and maintained a military force larger than even Emory Upton could have imagined. Guard and reserve units continue to serve but under increasing federal control. As a result of the severe reduction in the Regular Army over the last decade, civilian soldiers now make up more than half of the total army. With the multiple peacekeeping missions currently underway, the amount of time they spend on active duty has increased more than ten-fold over that served in the eighties. While much of this burden has fallen on civil affairs, military police, medical, and engineering units, in March 2000 a Guard division headquarters and support troops from Texas began a nine-month tour in command of the American sector in Bosnia.³⁸

The two traditions that have run their parallel course for so many years still live. A set of stamps issued this year embodies the dual strand. This group of four stamps commemorates the two World Wars with portraits of two regular generals—John L. Hines and Omar Bradley—and two civilians turned military heroes—Sergeant York and Audie Murphy. The pride, loyalty, and camaraderie of service in units, be they regular, Guard, or reserve, vivify these traditions as does the memory of those veterans who once served in the great wartime armies. And, one could argue that the tensions between the professionals and the amateurs have enhanced those traditions. Despite the strong currents of indifference and ignorance among the American public, countervailing forces perpetuate the military traditions. The realities of being a world power require that considerable numbers of men and women serve in the military. They and those who have not served but are interested in the inherent human drama involved in meeting the challenges of the battlefield will ensure that both aspects of the American military tradition will be remembered.

36. W. F. Tompkins to Commanding General, AGF, 24 July 1944, *ibid.* The Marshall quotation is in Bland, ed., *Marshall Interviews*, 257.

37. R. A. Meredith, to Chief of Staff (Attn: Special Planning Division), 16 August 1944, 370.01, Headquarters AGF Correspondence 1942–1948, Record Group 337 NARA; Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 195–96.

38. *New York Times*, 24 January 2000.

Copyright of Journal of Military History is the property of Society for Military History and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.