



The American Revolution

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Sons of the American Revolution

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The Continental Line Army: Article 1 of 1

When the First Continental Congress met, Virginia Representative Richard Henry Lee had proposed the forming of a national militia force, but the congress rejected this ambitious idea. The Second Continental Congress on 14 June 1775, passed a resolution creating a coordinating council for the military affairs of all thirteen colonies, and by doing so, established a Continental Line Army. Each colony would raise an army and the said armies would be supplemented by local militias, but at first the financing of the army had to originate from the colonies, since this congress had no power to tax. Wisely, on 15 June 1776, this second congress unanimously elected Virginia Congressman, George Washington, as the Commander-in-Chief for the newly formed Continental Line Army. He would serve with distinction and without compensation throughout the war.

A little history of this period reveals that the Continental Line Army was preceded by militias raised in each of the colonies, and just such a militia effort was displayed in the actions at Lexington and Concord. When this congress organized the Continental Army, approximately 22,000 militiamen were gathered in the Lexington, Concord, and Boston area. All were incorporated into the first army. New York would soon contribute

a 5,000 man New York Continental Line Army. By 1776, each of the colonies had become states in the United States of America, and each state sponsored an army for the protection of all the colonies.

As early as 23 April 1775, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress (Committee of Correspondence) authorized the formation of a colonial army composed of 26 regiments, while New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Connecticut soon followed with smaller forces. The Continental Line Army of 1775 was essentially a New England Army. George Washington organized them into three divisions, six brigades, and 38 regiments. This army consisted of four generals (Artemus Ward, Charles Lee, Philip Schuyler, and Israel Putnam), eight brigadier generals (Seth Pomeroy, Richard Montgomery, David Wooster, William Heath, Joseph Spencer, John Thomas, John Sullivan, and Nathanael Greene), and volunteer soldiers between the ages of 16 and 60. Fifteen year old soldiers were possible, provided they had parental consent.

General Washington submitted recommendations to congress for enlistment periods of one to three years duration for those volunteering after this initial service early in the war. He also encouraged broadening the recruitments well beyond the New England area. Eventually, all states would supply Continental Line Armies. Two of this author's relatives, John and Thomas Donegan, would wear the royal blue and tan trimmed infantry uniform of the North Carolina Continental Line Army, and serve in the 1st and 10th Regiments protecting Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

After the Revolutionary War was concluded and the peace treaty signed, The United States Continental Line Army, over the objections of General George

Washington, was demobilized and disbanded. Following this disbandment, The United States Congress, after rejecting several proposals, created a peacetime military force, known as The First American Regiment. It slowly achieved permanent status as a military infantry regiment within the Regular Army. The lineage of this First American Regiment is carried on today by the 3rd United States Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard). Now that we know the origin of our U. S. Army, we will learn the origin of our Navy and Marine Corps in the next articles.