

1920: National Defense Act of 1920

Study: National Defense Act of 1920 (James E. Hewes, Jr., *From Root to McNamara: Army Organization and Administration, 1900-1963*. U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1975)

Purpose: The National Defense Act 1920 amended the National Defense Act of 1916. Congress made these changes based on the lessons it drew from the Army's experience during World War I.

Outcome: The act established the Army of the United States as an organization of three components: the Regular Army, the National Guard, and the Organized Reserves. It charged the War Department with mobilization planning and preparation for war, assigning the industrial procurement function to the Assistant Secretary of War and the military aspects to the General Staff. (The two additional assistant secretaries of war established during the war were eliminated.) The act defined the functions and responsibilities of the Chief of Staff, emphasizing that he was to act under the direction of the Secretary of War and the President as their agent. Congress added several new wartime agencies as permanent bureaus: the Finance Department, the Chemical Warfare Service, the Air Service, and a new one, the Chief of Chaplains. It also extended the bureau system to the combat arms by creating the Office of the Chief of Infantry and the Office of the Chief of Cavalry in addition to the existing Chiefs of Field Artillery and Coast Artillery. Congress did not prescribe the General Staff's organization. When General John J. Pershing became Chief of Staff in 1921 he reorganized the General Staff along the lines he had used for his American Expeditionary Forces General Headquarters staff during the war. The reorganized War Department General Staff had five divisions: G-1, Personnel; G-2, Intelligence; G-3, Training and Operations; G-4, Supply; and a War Plans Division. Congress, however, retained the provision of the National Defense Act of 1916 that prohibited the General Staff from interfering with the technical and administrative bureaus' activities.

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