

## ***Branches of the Military***

### ***The Marine Corps***



They've been called Devil Dogs, Leathernecks and Jarheads. But whatever you choose to call them, call them when you need a fast and furious fighting force! The Marine Corps is sometimes called the "Infantry of the Navy" because it specializes in amphibious (land *and* sea) operations. Their main function has always been to assault, capture, and control "beach heads." A beach head is a secure area on the waterfront, through which friendly troops can safely pass on their way to strike the enemy.

The Marines began life on 10 November 1775 as part of the Navy. In 1798, however, Congress established the Marine Corps as a separate service. While amphibious operations are their primary specialty, in recent years, the Marines have expanded into other ground-combat operations, as well. The Marines are generally a "lighter" force when compared to the Army, allowing them to be deployed faster (although the Army has been practicing and improving its "rapid deployment" in recent years). Marines have a reputation for being independent, and they energetically encourage that perception. For combat operations, they like to be as self-sufficient as possible, so they also have their own air power, consisting primarily of fighter and fighter/bomber aircraft and attack helicopters. They do still use the Navy for much of their logistical and administrative support. For example, there are no doctors, nurses, or enlisted medics in the Marine Corps. Even the medics that accompany Marines into combat are specially-trained Navy medics.

With the exception of the Coast Guard, the Marines are also the smallest service. There are approximately 18,000 officers and 153,000 enlisted personnel on active duty in the Marines. Like the Navy, there is no Marine Corps National Guard, but Marines are supported in times of need by the Marine Corps Reserves. The Marine recruiting slogan: "*The Few. The Proud. The Marines.*" reflects both the size of the service and the fierce

devotion that Marines feel toward their branch of the military. It is said that there is no such thing as a “*former* Marine.” The rallying cry of the Marines is “Semper Fi!” an abbreviation of the Marine motto “Semper Fidelis,” which is Latin for “always faithful.” Once again, the motto reinforces the conviction that you never really leave “the Corps”! The Marine hymn (“From the Halls of Montezuma...”) – a familiar tune even to those with no military background – gently tweaks the other services with a verse that says “*if the Army and the Navy ever look on Heaven’s scenes, they will find the streets are guarded by the United States Marines.*” Hoo-Rah.

## ***The Army***



There is no way to sum up the history of the Army in a few short sentences. It is the oldest, largest, and most complex branch of America's Armed Forces. The U.S. Army traces its roots back to the civilian line of defense formed in 1775 to confront the professional soldiers of the British Empire. From a group of ragged, wildly outnumbered farmers and craftsmen who were sick of being pushed around by the King has grown the world's greatest fighting force.

The Army protects America and her interests by land, and has forces around the world that can be moved quickly. The Army is made up of three parts: the "Regular Army," the reserves and the Army National Guard. The Army National Guard and Army Reserve train soldiers to provide help to people during disasters, although modern reservists and guardsmen often find themselves serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and other global hotspots. The difference between the Reserves and the National Guard is that the Reserves are "owned" and managed by the federal government, and each state "owns" its own National Guard. But the President of the United States or the Secretary of Defense "activate" state National Guardsmen into Federal military service during times of need.

Although the Colonial Army, America's first Army, was disbanded after we won our independence from Great Britain in 1776, our founding fathers soon figured out that freedom wouldn't last very long unless there were men willing to fight and die to protect it. And these protectors couldn't just be available on an "as needed" basis – they needed to be ready to defend liberty at a moment's notice. America's first "standing Army" called the Legion of the United States was established in 1791. It is interesting to note that this first official Army came about, in part, because the newly-minted Americans were getting the snot kicked out of them by the Indians (Native Americans), most notably by Blue Jacket, Little Turtle and Buckongahelas in the Battle of the Wabash.

Although the Army suffered a series of losses during the War of 1812 – America's

second tangle with the British – it performed well enough to preserve our new country and chase away the pesky Brits for good.

The Army was, of course, pivotal in America’s victory over the axis powers in World War II. Thousands of soldiers gave their lives defending our country against Germany, Japan and Italy.

As of Spring 2007 the “regular Army” had about 507,082 active duty personnel. “Active Duty” means the “regular Army” plus those Reservists who are currently working in a full-time capacity. It does not include part-time Reservists and National Guardsmen (often called “weekend warriors” because of their limited duty). When you add in the Guard and the Reserves, there are over a million men and women defending America on behalf of the U.S. Army.

In the 1990s, the Army decided to quantify what it stands for by creating seven core values that it expects of its soldiers:

1. **Loyalty** - Bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, your unit, and fellow Soldiers.
2. **Duty** - Fulfill your obligations.
3. **Respect** - Treat others as they should be treated.
4. **Selfless Service** - Put the welfare of the nation, the Army, and your subordinates before your own.
5. **Honor** - Live the Army Values.
6. **Integrity** - Do what's right, both legally and morally.
7. **Personal Courage** - Face fear, danger, or adversity, both physical and moral.

These values, in addition to being individually significant, together form the acronym “LDRSHIP” (leadership).

## ***The Air Force***



The Air Force is the brash and daring youngest branch of the American military. The Air Force defends the skies above our country and, thus, protects the land beneath them. Once those skies were limited by the reach of technology, but today the Air Force domain extends out into space. As far as man can fly, the Air Force has men and machines keeping vigil, ready to do at a moment's notice what this branch of the Armed Forces does best..."fly and fight." The newest of all the services, the Air Force was named a separate branch of the Armed Forces in 1947. Prior to that, it was known as the Army Air Force or Army Air Corps.

Union troops were the first American army to harness the sky for military purposes. Since the airplane had not been invented during the Civil War, the northern troops used hot-air balloons to spy on Confederate troop movements and numbers. A permanent military aviation service was not instituted until 1907. But it would be another forty years before a real, independent air force was born. In 1907, airplanes were part of the Army Signal Corps, but few took the aviation potential too seriously.

In fact, many of those in charge of the government and the military were skeptical about the concept of "air power." They did not believe airplanes could ever be used effectively to fight and win wars. Many of these leaders simply closed their ears and minds, refusing to listen to the arguments of those who saw the vast potential of aviation to protect and defend America. Several brave men stepped forward to argue the benefits of aerial warfare. In some cases their efforts to stand against prevailing military wisdom left their military careers badly damaged or completely destroyed. But these early advocates for aviation inspired others to pick up the banner and continue the battle in favor of air power.

Perhaps because of its early struggles or because of the adventure and excitement associated with flight, the Air Force "personality" has always had a bit of an impudent

swagger and a wink. Like all branches of the service, Air Force pride is tangible.

To accomplish its mission to protect America's skies, the Air Force operates fighter aircraft, tanker aircraft, light and heavy bomber aircraft, transport aircraft, and helicopters (which are used mainly for rescue of downed-aircrew, and special operations missions).

The Air Force is also responsible for all military satellites, and controls all of our Nation's strategic nuclear ballistic missiles. There are about 69,000 commissioned officers on active duty in the Air Force, and about 288,000 enlisted members. Like the Army, the active duty Air Force is supplemented by the Air Force Reserves, and the Air National Guard.

## *The Navy*



By 1775, Americans (who weren't even officially Americans yet) were debating and discussing the role of the Navy. The Continental Navy was born on October 13, 1775, a mere four months after the Continental Army. By establishing a Navy our unofficial "new country" was telling the world that it had control of its borders and the waters that washed over our sandy beaches.

Until the advent of airplanes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the oceans were the only way Americans could visit Europe and other continents -- and vice versa. The Navy not only protected America from foreign invaders but it also protected merchant ships from piracy. In fact, the modern U.S. Navy is ramping up its efforts to capture and prosecute pirates. Today's pirates bear little resemblance to Captain Jack Sparrow of "Pirates of the Caribbean" fame, but they are nonetheless a threat that has united the Coast Guard and the Navy against all who threaten the American people and their economic interests.

The U.S. Navy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is responsible for controlling and defending American forces and interests at sea. To do so, it uses equipment and manpower over, under and on the water, sending out ships, submarines, and aircraft to any of the world's oceans. The Navy also helps transport soldiers and supplies for other branches of the military and is responsible for the upkeep of missile submarines.

Naval aviation caught the spotlight in the 1980s when the film "Top Gun" told the fictional story of a group of young pilots attending the Navy's Fighter Weapons School. Like the Air Force's "Red Flag" program, "Top Gun" is essentially graduate school for pilots.

Naval pilots supply operations on land and on sea, flying off the ridiculously short (and usually bouncing) runways of America's aircraft carriers. Navy aircraft carriers often deploy to areas where fixed runways are impossible. A carrier typically carries about 80

aircraft. Most of these are fighters or fighter-bombers. In addition to the air support, Naval ships can attack land targets from miles away using heavy guns with tremendous distance or via cruise missiles. Navy submarines (fast attack and ballistic missile subs) allow sneak attacks on our enemies from right off their shores.

The Navy is also has primary responsibility for transporting Marines to areas of conflict. The active duty Navy has about 54,000 officers, and 324,000 enlisted personnel. The Navy is supported in times of need by the Naval Reserves. But, unlike the Army and Air Force, there is no Naval National Guard.

Despite the rivalry that exists between the Armed Services, each one supports and watches out for the other. Like a group of competitive siblings, they tease each other until one of them is threatened or placed in harm's way. Then the united spirit breaks through and they "circle the wagons" to focus on their primary duty – protecting and defending the United States of America.

### ***United States Coast Guard***



The Coast Guard is the only branch of the Armed Forces that is not under the control of the Department of Defense. Because the Coast Guard mission is (very broadly) to “guard the coast” of the United States, it is now overseen by the Department of Homeland Security.

In addition to supporting America’s national defense, the Coast Guard is involved in maritime (sea-going) law enforcement, mariner assistance, and search and rescue missions. The Coast Guard is very active in drug enforcement and environmental protection in our ports, waterways and along the coastlines. It also has jurisdiction in international waters. In time of war, the Coast Guard helps serve the Navy in securing America’s coastline.

The history of the Coast Guard is complicated, to say the least, because it was born of five different government agencies. These agencies were originally independent but had overlapping responsibilities which sometimes made it difficult for anyone to figure out who was doing what! Eventually, the Revenue Cutter Service, the Lighthouse Service, the Steamboat Inspection Service, the Bureau of Navigation, and the Lifesaving Service, were all united under the umbrella of the Coast Guard.

During prohibition in the 1920s (when alcohol was illegal in the United States), the Coast Guard cutters worked overtime battling “rum runners” in what was known as “the Rum War at Sea.”

Although Americans sometimes think the Coast Guard serves only on the waters in and around the continental U.S., the Guard has actually fought in almost every war since the signing of the Constitution in 1789.

Today, one of the Coast Guard’s key missions is boating safety on American waters. Over 14 million boats in the U.S. require the on-going vigilance of the Coast Guard.

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Pleasure boating became popular after World War II and required the Coast Guard to focus not only on punishing those who break the safety laws, but on educating boat owners and enthusiasts on those laws. The Coast Guard Auxiliary was created in 1939 as a volunteer arm of the service. Today the Auxiliary assists with education and enforcement in order to make American waters as safe as possible.

And, of course, in the wake of Sept. 11, 2001, the Coast Guard became a critical tool in securing and patrolling our nation's borders and waterways for any terrorist activity. It is an ongoing mission that demands round-the-clock vigilance by those who wear the Coast Guard uniform.

As of 2005, The United States Coast Guard has approximately 39,000 men and women on active duty, plus 8,100 reservists, 7,000 full-time civilian employees and 35,000 in the auxiliary.

***Summary***

Most Americans rarely pause to reflect on the fact that, as we work, sleep, play and go about our daily business, our freedom to do so is being protected by men and women in uniform. They stand watch on land, by sea, and in the air. They are on call 24-hours a day and they take their mission very seriously. It is no accident that America has continued to grow and thrive for over 230 years. This has happened because young men (and now young women) have been willing to risk – and often give up – their lives in order to keep America safe. These brave GIs are not affiliated with a specific political party, or ideology or geography. They are as diverse as America herself and are deserving of our nation's gratitude.

**Trivia:** America has SEVEN uniformed services – two more than the five we have just learned about. Who are the other two, you ask? The first is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA). NOAA warns of dangerous weather and oversees conditions in the air and at sea. The second is the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (PHSCC). These guys are part of the US Public Health Service. When you see the Surgeon General and he (or she) is wearing a uniform – it's the uniform of the PHSCC. Now aren't you glad you asked?