



The Surrender at Saratoga

# A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S CORPS

BY CPT DAVID S. NIEKERK

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We trace the origins of today's Adjutant General's Corps back to the mighty Roman legions. The Romans used the Latin word "ADJUTAR" in describing a key member of the commander's staff, one holding a strong position and ably assisting the commander in battle. During the 16th and 17th century France became the great European military power under the reign of the Bourbon Kings. France gained this position of military superiority by advances in military strategy and organization. One of these advances was the creation of adjutants general as assistants to commanding generals in the field. The British, recognizing this French advantage, started awarding the title of Adjutant General to capable chiefs of staff and executive officers in the field.

The American Continental Congress resolved there be an Adjutant General of the Continental Army on June 16, 1775. The following day, using the democratic principles of voting by secret ballot, they selected Horatio Gates, a former British Army Major, as the first Adjutant General of the Continental Army, with the rank of Brigadier General. With this appointment, the Adjutant General's Corps holds the birthright as the oldest combat service support branch of the Army.

Adjutant General Gates capably served General Washington, with duties including sending out all scouting parties, intelligence collecting, headquarters administration, and even keeping the correct time for synchronizing the watches in all Army units. He also first established the tradition of the Adjutant General assisting the commander in the field. General Gates proved himself to be an able assistant to General Washington as well as a successful Army field commander. Following his strategic victory over British Lieutenant General Sir John Burgoyne at Saratoga on October 17, 1777, the Congress awarded General Gates our nation's highest honor, the Congressional Gold Medal. Today, the Adjutant General's Corps Regiment recognizes members of its rank for exceptionally meritorious service by inducting them into the Military Order of Horatio Gates and awarding them an exact replica of the original Horatio Gates Gold medal, struck in bronze by the U.S. Mint using the original die.

On August 1, 1782, Congress adopted a new regulation on the Department of the Adjutant General. This regulation officially established the rank, pay, and benefits of adjutants general and brigade majors. This is the first official mention of the Department of the Adjutant General by Congress. Besides the duties already mentioned, adjutants general officers administered the Army pension system for 56,466 former soldiers and 39,287 war widows; authenticated and distributed all Army regulations; made the regular Army returns and reports to Congress; and served as assistant inspector generals.

By the act of November 5, 1783, the Congress reduced the Regular Army to 75 men and disbanded the staff. The Army went without an Adjutant General's Department from 1783 until July 1798. On July 16, 1798, the Congress called into service a provisional Army of 10,000 men consisting of 12 regiments of infantry and six troops of Dragoons. Congress also reinstated the Adjutant General's Department with assistant adjutants general positions filled by officers of the line. On March 3, 1799, the Adjutant General and Inspector General positions combined under the Adjutant General. To quickly distinguish the adjutants general officers on the battlefield the War Department ordered the wearing of a white plume in the hat of all adjutants general. This marks the first distinctive insignia for the Adjutant General's Corps.

From 1800 to 1812 our military structure didn't include chiefs of staff so adjutants general performed these duties. Adjutants general were the only officers in the Army invested with the authority to speak for the commander. These officers had to be soldiers of good character, judgment, and experience.

The Act of March 3, 1813, granted the Adjutant General's Department legal entity. With this act of recognition Congress expected adjutants general officers to provide exceptional leadership for the Army. An example of this combat leadership is seen in the American assault on York, Canada, during the War of 1812. Adjutant General Zebulon M. Pike led the victorious attack and was killed on the battlefield by the explosion of a British ammunition bunker. Among the Army heroes of the War of 1812 were these adjutants general: Colonel Winfield Scott at the capture of Fort George, Brigadier General Edmund P. Gaines for his defense of Fort Erie, and Brigadier General Alexander Macomb for repulsing the British attack on Plattsburg. All were awarded congressional gold medals for valor in combat.

The first graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point joined the Adjutant General's Department on July 7, 1839. The first two graduates assigned, Samuel Cooper and Lorenzo Thomas, both served as The Adjutant General during the Civil War, Cooper for the South and Thomas for the North.

In 1847, the Adjutant General's Department first became responsible for recruiting the Regular Army force. Besides obtaining new recruits, Adjutants General officers commanded the recruit depots, organized recruits into companies and regiments, and moved these recruit units to their new commands.

New caps and pom-poms replaced the old chapeaus with flowing plumes in 1851. The distinctive pom-pom colors for adjutants general were the white upper third and buff the bottom two-thirds being buff. In 1853 the Judge Advocate General, a brevet major, was attached for duty to the Adjutant General's Department.

In 1861, two assistant adjutants general, Major McDowell and Captain Franklin, drew up the plans organizing more than 500,000 volunteers entering the Union Army during the Civil War. During the war, adjutants general served in many different positions: Major General and Brigadier General of volunteers, Adjutants General of the Army of the Potomac, Provost Marshal General, Assistant Inspector General duty, and staff officer positions with the Military Departments, the War Department, and the General in Chief. Following the Civil War, adjutants general officers performed the massive job of compiling all the records of the war, both North and South. The AG Department also discharged more than 800,000 soldiers enlisted during the conflicts. While these soldiers were being discharged, AG officers enlisted 36,000 new recruits for the Regular Army.

The Adjutant General's Department took over all unfinished business of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in 1872. Adjutants general officers provided food, clothing, housing and even taught school for refugees and recently freed slaves in the rehabilitating South. These officers did such a good job as educators, the Army tasked the Department in 1881 with setting up and supervising the post school system. By 1882, they established 147 schools enrolling 975 enlisted soldiers and 1,100 children.

On December 14, 1872, the old Topographic Engineers shield became the symbol of the Adjutant General's Department. Thirteen embossed stars replaced the letters "T.E." on the upper third of the shield creating the crest worn by all Adjutant General's Corps officers today.

From 1886 to 1903, the Division of Military Information within the Adjutant General's Department experienced a very rapid growth. Many adjutants general officers contributed to the efforts of gathering information for the department. Officers collected and classified military information on the United States and foreign countries, prepared briefings and handouts for instructing future military attaches, issued maps, prepared militia mobilization plans, and even supervised the Army Museum of Military Relics.

During the Spanish-American War, adjutants general officers played a key role in mustering into military service 100,000 volunteers inducted during the months of April and May 1898. President William McKinley consulted directly with Adjutant General Henry Corbin on all matters of military policy. During the war, six adjutants general officers served as generals commanding volunteer units while others served as staff officers with the Army in the field. Rewarding his vital service during the war, Adjutant General Corbin earned promotion to Lieutenant General and command of the newly formed Division of the Philippines.

West Point graduates, usually former cavalry officers, almost exclusively received the appointments as adjutants general from 1839 to 1901. This practice began to change with Acts of February 2, 1901 and March 2, 1901. The first act discontinued appointments into the Adjutant General's Department, setting up a system of 4-year staff details instead. The second act allowed volunteer officers to be appointed to 15 of the assistant adjutants general majors positions then authorized within the department.

Prior to the February 14, 1903 Congressional bill creating the Army Staff, the Adjutant General's Department was the most important department in the Army. Assistant adjutants general performed duties now associated with the Chief of Staff and served as the principal advisors to the Secretary of War on all military administrative and command matters. With the 1903 creation of a General Staff Corps, the duties of assistant adjutants general focused on the recruiting service and supervision of the militia, including preparation of the annual Congressional report on the status of the militia.

The April 23, 1904 Act of Congress changed the Adjutant General's Department title to the Military Secretary's Department. This title lasted until the Act of March 2, 1907 redesignated the Military Secretary's Department as The Adjutant General's Department. The act capitalized the word "THE" for the first time when describing The Adjutant General as the head of this department. The act also designated the officers of the department as adjutant generals instead of assistant adjutants general.

In 1912, Congress tasked the Adjutant General's Department with collecting, classifying, and publishing the military records of the American military history maintained for the nation by the Adjutant General's Department. The collection included the records of all officers and enlisted men having performed military service since the Revolutionary War, all Army unit histories and operational reports, records of the Army Medical Department and Provost Marshal General's Bureau, records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, and even the complete records of the Confederate Army and government during the Civil War.

In 1914, the Army tried a new system of regimental recruiting. This was such a dismal failure, recruiting returned to the able charge of adjutant generals before the end of the year. On June 30, 1915, the elite Adjutant General's Department consisted of 23 officers and 581 civilian employees. In this same year Congress vested control of the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks in the Adjutant General and his capable corps of officers. The National Defense Act of 1916 expanded adjutant general's responsibilities for performing

the Army's personnel management functions including officer and enlisted assignments, promotions, transfers, retirements and discharges.

Among the personal staff of General Pershing that sailed with him to France on May 28, 1917 was Colonel Benjamin Alvord, Adjutant General of the American Expeditionary Forces. Colonel Alvord established the role of the AG in a modern field army. Strength accounting, officer and enlisted replacement operations, and casualty reporting procedures were all developed under his able guidance. Adjutant General officers also ran the motorcycle dispatch service, officer promotion section of the Personnel Bureau (managing more than 17,600 promotions during the war), postal operations, the Army printing plant, and even the war prison barracks and the YMCA. WWI showed the need for having an adjutant general and a corps of capable adjutant generals serving at army, corps, division and headquarters of services of supply levels of organization.

Following the WWI victory and armistice came the challenge of demobilizing the Army in the shortest possible time with minimum confusion. From November 1918 through June 30, 1919, adjutant generals worked to the point of exhaustion demobilizing more than 2,700,000 soldiers.

When General Pershing became Army Chief of Staff in the summer of 1921 he tasked Major General James G. Harbord with convening a board to recommend a new General Staff organization based on lessons learned during WWI. The new organization increased adjutant general's responsibilities on such broad lines of policy that most issues coming to The Adjutant

General were handled without direct General Staff involvement. This change required adjutant general officers to keep officers of the other staff divisions informed of ongoing actions. This informal communication led to close cooperation and ties between Adjutants General officers and officers of the General Staff. The role of adjutant generals was so vital to the efficient running of the Army Staff, the Secretary of War required all adjutants general to attend a special school on "How the Army Runs" in Washington, D.C., May 5 to 10, 1920.

Throughout the 1920's and 1930's Adjutant General officers served in many key positions in Army headquarters in the War Department, Corps Areas, Army Departments, combat divisions, and at the U.S. Military Academy and at Fort Leavenworth.

Under the Army Reorganization Act of March 9, 1942, the Adjutant General's Department became a branch of the Services of Supply while still remaining a department of the War Department. In order to provide a system of mechanical personnel accounting and eliminate manual administrative burdens in the field, the Machine Records Section of the Adjutant General's office began operating on November 15, 1940.

As a result of a test conducted during the Louisiana Army Maneuvers in the summer of 1941, mobile machine records units became the Primary system for personnel accounting in the field. During WWII, adjutant general officers and soldiers served in 62 mobile units and 28 fixed machine records units, supporting commanders in the field at army, corps and major services of supply organizational levels.

War Department Circular 354, issued in 1944, and Circular 97, issued in 1945, created Adjutant General's Department troops and organizations. AG officers and enlisted troops served in replacement depots, battalions, and companies; in Fixed Machine Records Units and Mobile Machine Records Units, Base Post officers, Postal Regulating Sections, and Army Postal Units; Army Courier Service Units; and in the Army Services Forces and

Army Ground Forces Bands. The AG soldiers wore the Adjutant General's Department insignia, superimposed on metal disks, and braids on their field caps in the colors of the Adjutant General's Department: dark blue and scarlet.

During WWII, 803 officers, 622 enlisted personnel, and 14,141 civilians served in the office of the Adjutant General in Washington, D.C. Many other officers and enlisted soldiers served with the headquarters of the Army Ground Forces, Army Air Forces, Army Services Forces and headquarters of theaters, armies, corps, divisions and bases overseas. AG officers also served on the staff and faculty of Army schools and as administrative officers in the disciplinary barracks, ports of embarkation, reception centers, and separation centers.

Following WWII, Adjutant General's officers faced the administrative challenge of returning to civilian life more than six million soldiers while ensuring these soldiers didn't lose any of their future veterans rights because of improper records filing. At an average rate of more than half a million discharges a month, AG officers supervised the process of filing and storing completed induction and discharge records at the Records Administration Center, St. Louis, Missouri. History records this success as the greatest administrative task ever attempted and successfully completed by the military service of any nation. Even with this redeployment discharge operation, AG officers still managed the worldwide military postal system during a time when five million addresses changed in eight months while entire units ranging in size from companies to entire armies were inactivated.

AG responsibilities following WWII included caring for and rehabilitating military prisoners, managing the world's largest publishing operation, determining the final status of personnel listed as missing in action, and maintaining the Regular Army recruiting campaign. The size of this recruiting effort is seen when it is considered that during the months of December 1945 until February 1946, more men enlisted in the Army than there were soldiers serving in the Army during the attack on Pearl Harbor. By January 31, 1948, 371 officers, 207 enlisted personnel, and 3,581 civilians worked in the 25 branches of the Adjutant General's Department in Washington, D.C., with an additional 175 officers, 382 enlisted personnel, and 6,053 civilians working in Army records and publications depots and at the Adjutant General School.

During the period between WWII and the Korean War, Adjutant General officers exercised general supervision of the miscellaneous administrative services of the Department of the Army. In 1947 this included maintaining the individual demobilized personnel records of 22,275,000 personnel and 18,000,000 IBM machine punch cards for military strength accounting. It also included the handling of 1,728,689 pieces of mail per month through AG Post Officers; the managing of \$25,000,000 for printing Army Publications; and transacting in December, 255,972 money orders, worth \$12,657,627.82 for soldiers stationed outside the continental United States.

The National Security Act of 1947 redesignated the War Department as the Department of the Army and transferred some former AG records functions to the newly created Department of the Air Force. The Army Organization Act of 1950 redesignated the Adjutant General's Department as the Adjutant General's Corps, making it a separate branch of the Army. On March 1, 1950, AG officers received responsibility for the Special Services Division from the Army Special Staff and on April 6, 1950 the Career Management Division from the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1. In September 1951, the AG first established the Armed Forces Examining Stations at main recruiting stations under the supervision of Adjutant General officers. On July 23, 1951, Brigadier General John A. Klein became the first person to hold the title Deputy The Adjutant General.

## AG HISTORY

During the Korean War, Adjutant General officers served at theater, army, corps, and division level. AG officers played a key role in supervising the exchange of sick and wounded POWs, known as operations Little Switch and Big Switch. AG officers also ran the personnel rotation system for the combat zone, the first time this had ever been tried on a total force scale.

In February 1949, the Army Courier Service became the Security Courier Service under the Army-Air Force Security Courier Service. AG officers continued their traditional role as commanders of courier units as they had ever since the Army Courier Service was first constituted under the Adjutant General on December 24, 1941. In May 1965, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, designated the U.S. Army as the permanent Executive Agent for the Armed Forces Courier Service. Adjutant General officers once again performed this vital service for the Army Chief of Staff.

During the 1960's, the increased use of automatic data processing systems in meeting the Army's management needs for timely information saw Adjutant General officers take the lead in the use of this advanced technology. Adjutant General officers set up and performed the early processing, planning, systems engineering, and automated data processing operations for the Army.

In 1959, under the guidance of AG officers, the Army Functional Files system (TAFFS) replaced the old Decimal Files System of 1914. Always improving on the written word within the Army, Adjutant General correspondence management training specialists trained over 4,500 persons in 1959 using the AG published DA Pamphlet 1-10, "Improve Your Writing."

On March 1, 1962, Adjutant General officers took over control of the U.S. Army Officer Evaluation Center. This center received and administered tests to Army officers as required under the Research and Development Officer Prediction Task Force. On May 1, 1962, responsibility for the Institute of Heraldry was transferred from the Quartermaster General to The Adjutant General.

In 1966, Adjutant General officers assumed Army responsibility for the administration of the Ready Reserve Mobilization Reinforcement Pool. Adjutants generals once again enhanced Army education when on 9 August 1967 the Corps became responsible for distributing information on the educational materials available through the Army school system.

During the 1960's and early 1970's, adjutant generals served with distinction during another American conflict, the Vietnam War. Serving in various headquarters including battalion, separate brigade, division, corps and major commands, adjutants generals proved themselves astute and innovative officers. They planned, developed, and managed the vital personnel and administrative support systems required in the combat environment.

Today, the Adjutant General's Corps is in the process of redefining its role on the battlefield and coming up with new means of enhancing our capability of providing quality service support to the soldier.

Through the more than two centuries of our existence the Adjutant General's Corps has developed the functions which we see today as the independent staff agencies of the Inspector General, the Judge Advocate General, the Provost Marshal, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, and the Chief of Military History. All of these staff positions owe their foundation to the Adjutant Generals of the past. Our mission remains constant and

clear--to be the vanguard of personnel administrative support on the battlefield and to the Army as a whole. Our pride in the past is only surpassed by our optimism for the future.

## **SOURCES**

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