



Painting of the Rev. Jacob Duché as he offers the first prayer for the Continental Congress 7 September 1774 in Philadelphia. Original painting by Tompkins Harrison Matteson, 1848. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

# The Birth of the U.S. Army

In its first session in the summer of 1789, Congress faced numerous decisions regarding the administration of policies granted in the recently ratified U.S. Constitution. These included approving President George Washington's cabinet appointees and federal judges, setting up the federal treasury, writing the Bill of Rights and further amending the Constitution, determining how to deal with Native American neighbors, preparing a plan to reduce the Revolutionary War debt, and deciding on a location for the U.S. capital. Lastly, it needed to come to terms on the creation of one national, professional U.S. military.

While vestiges of the Continental Army still remained from American Revolution, there was no official U.S. army.

Under the Articles of Confederation (the precursor to the Constitution, ratified in 1781), individual states had the power to organize civilian-soldier militias, but the Articles held no real long-term solutions for a professional national military. Recognizing this as a serious shortfall to the security of the new Nation, Washington wrote a letter to the members of Congress on 7 August 1789 urging them to authorize an official U.S. military.

Washington wrote, "It may not be amiss to observe that I am particularly anxious it should receive an early attention as circumstances will admit, because it is now in our power to avail ourselves of the military knowledge disseminated throughout the several States by means of the many



well-instructed officers and soldiers of the late Army, a resource which is daily diminishing by death and other causes."

Secretary of War Henry Knox read Washington's letter to Congress on 7 August. After the reading, the House of Representatives "ordered" that creating a military would be added to their agenda, and members began discussing the budget for maintaining this then-theoretical military as well as how much to spend on Native American encounters. However, the Senate necessitated a second letter from the president before it took action on the matter.

A 10 August letter from Washington urged the Senate to create an army, since both the House and Senate had passed legislation that stated Native American encounters were a matter of the federal government, not individual states. Without having a professional military working for the federal government, he reasoned, Congress has no way of enforcing their Native American policies. The members of the Senate agreed to add creating the military to the end of its agenda and to consider the measure before Congress broke. On the last day of session, 29 September, the Senate, after returning it to the House twice, passed the bill that established the armed forces of the United States of America. This created the base for the current professional military, the largest employer in the United States. ■

## *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States Tuesday, September 29, 1789*

*The House proceeded to reconsider the last amendment proposed by the Senate to the bill, entitled "An act to recognize and adapt to the Constitution of the United States, the establishment of the troops raised under the resolves of the United States in Congress assembled, and for other purposes therein mentioned:" Whereupon,*

*Resolved, That this House doth recede from their disagreement to the said amendment.*

*Ordered, That the Clerk of this House do acquaint the Senate therewith....*

*Mr. Partridge reported, from the Committee for Enrolled Bills, that the committee had examined two enrolled bills, one, entitled "An act to recognize and adapt to the Constitution of the United States, the establishment of the troops raised under the resolves of the United States in Congress assembled, and for other purposes therein mentioned;" the other, entitled "An act to allow the Baron de Glaubeck, the pay of Captain in the Army of the United States;" also, an enrolled resolve for continuing John White, John Wright, and Joshua Dawson, in office until the fourth of February, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine, and had found the same to be truly enrolled: Whereupon,*

*Mr. Speaker signed the said enrolled bills and resolve.*

*Ordered, That the doorkeeper of this House do provide one or more stoves, and necessary fuel, for the accommodation of the House at its next session.*

*Ordered, That a message be sent to the Senate, to inform them that this House, having completed the business before them, are now about to proceed to close the present session, by an adjournment on their part, agreeably to the order of the twenty-sixth instant; and that the Clerk of this House do go with the said message.*