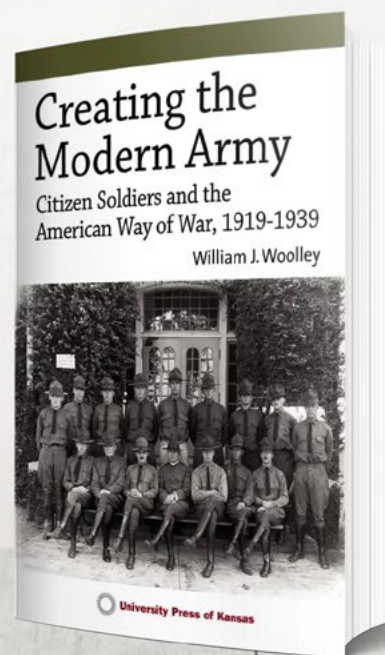


Creating the Modern Army

Citizen-Soldiers and the American Way of War, 1919–1939



William J. Woolley, University Press of Kansas,
Lawrence, 2022, 384 pages

Col. Dean A. Nowowiejski, PhD, U.S. Army, Retired

In his book *Creating the Modern Army: Citizen-Soldiers and the American Way of War, 1919–1939*, William J. Woolley has captivantly explained

the most important legislative act no one has ever heard about, the National Defense Act of 1920. Woolley is professor emeritus of Ripon College, and this book was developed from decades of teaching a seminar on American military institutions there. Woolley shows the academic thoroughness you would expect of an emeritus professor. He is accomplished in both

research and writing, and readers will find this history compelling. What Woolley does is explain the deep origins of the modern U.S. Army.

Serving Army officers will easily recognize the citizen-army institutions created by the National Defense Act of 1920. This act, envisioned by John McCauley Palmer after World War I, created an organized Army Reserve, National Guard, Citizens' Military Training Camps, and the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. The decision to enshrine the citizen-army concept in the National Defense Act decided a debate on the enduring character of the American Army that had raged since before World War I. That debate pitted the preparedness advocates who wanted a large citizen Army against those who advocated for an expandable Army built from a core of professional soldiers. In the Active Army, Army Reserve, and National Guard, the three components of the citizen army created in 1920 endure today. Woolley explains how they evolved during the period between world wars and assesses some of their

Col. Dean A. Nowowiejski, PhD, U.S. Army, retired, serves as the director of the Art of War Scholars Program at the Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. His book *The American Army in Germany, 1918–1923: Success against the Odds* (2021) analyzes the creation and life of the U.S. Army in Germany after World War I.

impact on U.S. performance in World War II. How these entities survived the interwar period is a story of the interaction among the Regular Army, the president, and Congress. Woolley deftly weaves the influence of each into his narrative explanation of interwar trends.

The United States emerged from World War I having successfully expanded the Army to include four million men, based on a wartime draft. There is no doubt that this Army, by sending two million men to

explanation on the four major branches of the interwar Army: infantry, cavalry, field artillery, and coast artillery. Third, he explains how the Army built a progressive system of professional military education. Last, he describes the process of mechanization in the Army, contrasting the infantry and the cavalry.

In the interplay among the American public, Congress, and the president on the issue of a citizen army, there were some surprises. One was the popular-

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France, contributed decisively to the outcome of the war, but the United States had depended on its allies to provide machine guns, airplanes, and tanks. What would prevent this lack of readiness from happening again, especially as the Army shrank back to prewar size? The answer was in the Army institutions offered by the National Defense Act of 1920. The challenge was to maintain the effective readiness of this citizen army in a time of prosperity, waning budgets, isolationism, and disarmament. For most of the decade of the 1920s, the presence of many World War I veterans in the American population helped to keep the National Guard and Army Reserve afloat, but as those veterans aged out of the force, this presented new challenges to keeping all of the parts of the citizen army alive. The Army in the 1930s had to overcome the significant challenges of budget austerity to officer readiness, force size, modernization, and mechanization. It just barely did so, principally because of changes begun at the end of the decade.

Woolley ably traces four trends during the interwar period that shaped the Army as it still exists today. First was the creation of the three components of the Army: the Active Army, Army Reserve, and National Guard. Second, the organization of a system of professional military branches. Woolley concentrates his

ity of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, even in a time of budget austerity and isolationism. This was due in large part to effective partnership with civilian academics on the part of Army leaders. Another was how important the National Guard was to maintain any semblance of readiness in the interwar period. A third was the lost world of the Citizens' Military Training Camps and the Civilian Conservation Corps. These institutions were a critical training ground for the interwar officers corps. In the end, the Army was better prepared for World War II than it would have been without the National Defense Act of 1920 because of the existence of these institutions. They maintained the citizen army that eventually won the war.

This book is essential reading for Army professionals and educators for several reasons. First, it is a must read for military professionals to understand the origins of the Army today, components, branches, education system, and mechanization. Second, this book is an effective historical primer on the important relationships of senior Army leaders with Congress and the administration. Third, it is thorough, well-written, and effective history based on significant primary sources and a lifetime of expertise in the area. *Creating the Modern Army* is essential institutional history for the twenty-first-century professional soldier. ■

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