Guide to the Proposals for the Reorganization of the Continental Army
MSS.0353

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February 07, 2013
Describing Archives: A Content Standard
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Summary Information

Repository  W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama
Title  Proposals for the Reorganization of the Continental Army
Date  1777
Extent  0.05 Linear feet
Language  English
Abstract  Proposals for reorganizing the Continental Army

Preferred Citation note
Proposals for the Reorganization of the Continental Army, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama
Biographical/Historical note

The Continental Army consisted of troops from all 13 colonies, and after 1776, from all 13 states. When the American Revolutionary War began at the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, the colonial revolutionaries did not have an army. Previously, each colony had relied upon the militia, made up of part-time citizen-soldiers, for local defense, or the raising of temporary "provincial regiments" during specific crises such as the French and Indian War. As tensions with Great Britain increased in the years leading up to the war, colonists began to reform their militia in preparation for the potential conflict. Training of militiamen increased after the passage of the Intolerable Acts in 1774. Colonists such as Richard Henry Lee proposed creating a national militia force, but the First Continental Congress rejected the idea. On 23 April 1775, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress authorized the raising of a colonial army consisting of 26 company regiments, followed shortly by similar but smaller forces raised by New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. On 14 June 1775, the Second Continental Congress decided to proceed with the establishment of a Continental Army for purposes of common defense, adopting the forces already in place outside Boston (22,000 troops) and New York (5,000). It also raised the first ten companies of Continental troops on a one-year enlistment, riflemen from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and Virginia to be used as light infantry, who later became the 1st Continental Regiment in 1776 (the minimum enlistment age was 16 years of age, or 15 with parental consent). On 15 June, the Congress elected George Washington as Commander-in-Chief by unanimous vote. He accepted and served throughout the war without any compensation except for reimbursement of expenses.

As the Continental Congress increasingly adopted the responsibilities and posture of a legislature for a sovereign state, the role of the Continental Army was the subject of considerable debate. There was a general aversion to maintaining a standing army among the Americans; but, on the other hand, the requirements of the war against the British required the discipline and organization of a modern military. As a result, the army went through several distinct phases, characterized by official dissolution and reorganization of units. Soldiers in the Continental Army were citizens who had volunteered to serve in the army (but were paid), and at various times during the war, standard enlistment periods lasted from one to three years. Early in the war, the enlistment periods were short, as the Continental Congress feared the possibility of the Continental Army evolving into a permanent army. The army never reached over 17,000 men. Turnover was a constant problem, particularly in the winter of 1776-1777, and longer enlistments were approved.
The collection contains a 16-page document proposing several points for the reorganization of the Continental Army, including how troops should be recruited from the states, how provisions should be acquired, and how and when officers should be promoted.

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**Administrative Information**

**Publication Information**

W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama January 2009

**Revision Description**

February 2013

**Conditions Governing Access note**

None

**Conditions Governing Use note**

None

**Provenance**

Gift of Harry Sonneborn, 1983

**Processed by**

S. Braden, 2009; updated by Martha Bace, 2013

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**Controlled Access Headings**

**Corporate Name(s)**

- United States. Continental Army.
Geographic Name(s)

- United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783

Subject(s)

- War and Military
### Collection Inventory

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