Creating the Modern Army

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Creating the Citizen Army, 1919–1925
Despite the disappointments felt about the National Defense Act of 1920, it was still greeted with significant enthusiasm in the army, both for the provisions it contained and for the hopes it offered in terms of finally providing stability and the legislative, political, and popular foundations on which to begin a process of rebuilding after the demoralizing experience of the immediate postwar years. Far more important, the act provided the army with a major new mission—training the civilian components of the new citizen army. This seemed to promise not only to be highly satisfying professionally but also to provide the military widespread support from the American public.

The army’s experience in the first five years of the 1920s tested these hopeful expectations. These years were dominated by two developments: the experience of organizing the civilian components and the efforts to establish a positive relationship with the government and with the American public. Regarding the latter, the hopes of widespread governmental and popular support were cruelly shattered. This disillusionment came quickly and dominated the army’s first two years after the act’s passage. Indeed, these initial years of the new order turned out to be one of the most dismal periods in the history of the interwar army.

The major problem at this time was that the political and popular landscape had undergone an immense change after the war, especially as the new decade opened. The Republicans’ landslide victory in the 1920 election made them the dominant party in Washington throughout the decade. While the party had almost always been friendlier to the army than the Democrats, the postwar Republicans were highly focused on instituting government efficiency and economy that could result in tax reduction. At the same time, the public was becoming increasingly isolationist and had little interest in building an army suitable for fighting another major international war. As such, Americans began to look
on the army as, at best, a necessary evil, the expense of which ought to be reduced at every opportunity. Many in Congress were all too happy to cater to this mood.

Given that the primary reason for the deterioration of the army’s relationship with Congress rested on the issue of financial support, the confrontations were chiefly focused on the annual appropriations bills. In that regard, Congress made it clear as early as the fall of 1920 that it did not feel bound to support the personnel levels of 18,000 officers and 280,000 men authorized in the National Defense Act. Even before President Wilson signed the act, Congress passed an appropriation bill providing funding for only 175,000 men and 17,000 officers. Secretary of War Baker thought that the defense act allowed him to continue to recruit the army to the levels authorized. This led to an immediate confrontation with Congress in which Baker was called before House Military Affairs Committee to explain why he was recruiting an army in excess of that allowed in the appropriations act. The secretary gave in, while an angry Senate debated as to whether he had violated a law. Then, in July 1921, a new appropriations act reduced the army further to 150,000 men and 14,000 officers. The following year, operating in the warmth generated by the success of the Washington Naval Disarmament Conference, members of the military subcommittee in the House were ready to cut the army again. This led to a bitter fight, but in the end Congress passed an appropriations bill reducing the army to 125,000 men and fewer than 12,000 officers.

On top of this, in 1921, lawmakers passed the Budget and Accounting Act that called on the government to submit to them a single unified budget and created a new bureaucrat, the director of the budget, to carry this out. In addition, Congress reorganized its committee structure to ensure that it would produce a coherent budget. In the past, matters concerning the army in the annual appropriations bill were handled in the military-affairs committees. These panels traditionally attracted congressmen and senators with a distinct interest in military matters, so that members were usually knowledgeable about and, on balance, friendly to the army. Under the new arrangement adopted in early 1921, all matters dealing with appropriations went to the appropriations committees in both chambers, which then had military subcommittees deal with army matters. Appropriations committees tended to attract congressmen interested in economy in government; thus, those assigned to military subcommittees were less interested in and knowledgeable about matters other than financial. As a result, the army suddenly found its budget estimates facing scrutiny first by an economizing director of the budget and then by congressional subcommittees prepared to be hostile.
The 1922 reduction came as a shock to the army. Beyond the actual reduction of officers, it also specified the number to remain in each grade, thus requiring the separation or demotion of nearly 2,300 officers. Overall, this crisis was devastating for army morale. Nearly one out of eight officers was affected, and many more felt threatened. Moreover, this was the third personnel reduction suffered by the army in eighteen months. All of this seemed to dash any hope that the 1920 National Defense Act was going to provide any stabilization or a chance to build a new force. Both Secretary of War John W. Weeks and Chief of Staff General Pershing stressed the negative effect on morale in their annual reports, and professional journals viewed the act as monumental in consequence. The army exploded in anger over the measure. While most of this was contained in the service publications, some expressed interest in taking political action while Pershing learned that servicemen in Congress were beginning to organize as a bloc.

The impact of the three reductions between 1920 and 1922 went beyond the need to force officers and enlisted men out of the army. Each led to a consequent reorganization. These restructurings often wiped out a year’s building efforts within organizations, leaving them in worse shape than before and with considerable internal frustration. This sense of growing destabilization was aggravated by the efforts already underway to reorganize the army in accordance with the National Defense Act, which involved an unusual number of reassignments and transfers. Moreover, concurrent efforts to reduce transportation outlays shifted some of the associated cost burdens of such moves to the officers themselves. Finally, reductions in military personnel were more than matched by those in the army’s civilian workforce, increasing the duties for officers and men already overworked. On several occasions, senior officers making surprise post inspections found lieutenants having to take turns at evening guard duty. The budget reductions of 1921 and 1922 set the pattern for the relationship of the army with the president and Congress for the remainder of the interwar period. As William Odom points out, “the tiny appropriations for military activities largely shaped the history of the interwar army.” Then, in his conclusion, he charges, “First and foremost, budget limitations explain the army’s failure to develop adequate doctrine in the interwar years.” Finally, on a day-to-day basis, as Secretary of War Weeks noted in his annual report for 1922, “economy has literally become the primary consideration of every departmental undertaking.”

The highly negative consequences of these reductions on morale was aggravated by issues outside of appropriations. Living quarters were a major problem. The postwar policy of concentrating units in the regional division cantonments built during the war meant that officers and men had to live in structures
generally meant for temporary use. As these buildings rapidly deteriorated during the ensuing years, housing issues became increasingly demoralizing. Officers seeking to live off post with their families often found options limited and rents unexpectedly high. The massive personnel turnover in the army since 1918 also put a severe strain on its internal cohesiveness. By the summer of 1922, the old army that existed prior to America’s entry into the First World War had all but disappeared. Seventy-five percent of current officers had joined the military during or after the conflict, while the bulk of enlisted men had joined postwar. Normal socialization processes were seriously disrupted. The homogeneity of thought and outlook developed over a long period of time by means of shared education and experiences was all but lost in the officer corps, only a small percentage of whom shared a West Point training in common.

This internal dysfunction was aggravated by personnel issues, the most significant of which was implementation of the single-list promotion system called for by the National Defense Act. Prior to 1920, promotions occurred within individual branches and bureaus, a system that worked to the advantage of officers in the bureaus and to the disadvantage of those in the combat branches. The new system placed all officers on a single list by date of rank, thereby ending the latter’s disadvantaged position. While the single list was favored by many, its implementation was a source of bitter controversy. Position on the final list was, of course, vitally important, hence all officers were personally interested in the process by which sequence was determined. Unfortunately, given the anomalies regarding the composition of the officer corps in 1920, producing a list that would satisfy everyone as fair proved to be extremely difficult. The necessity of collating the officers of a number of different branches, each with its own particularity; the war, which had resulted in a vast influx of new officers under variety of circumstances; numerous cases of officers departing after the war and then returning; and a perception of sloppy recordkeeping made the development of a seemingly fair system for recognizing longevity of service all but impossible. The result was myriad cases of officers who were increasingly outspoken over presumed injustices. By April 1921, dissatisfaction over promotion had reached the point that some lieutenants and captains began organizing to protest to Congress. Other officers took to the courts to bring suits regarding the single list.

The most important outside cause of low morale, however, was the growing perception that Americans were uninterested in the army or even hostile toward it. When Colonel Palmer submitted America in Arms, a revised edition of an earlier book, to his agent in 1924, the man could find no publisher for it, reporting to his client, “interest in the Army . . . is at its lowest ebb.” The perceived
promise that the army would be accepted as an integral part of society seemed inherent in the military policy of the National Defense Act 1920, causing many officers to receive it enthusiastically. Signs that traditional antimilitary attitudes were reasserting themselves, therefore, threatened the entire myth structure surrounding that legislation, creating a further source of depression. More important, any military policy under the defense act would work only with sufficient public interest to ensure a solid stream of volunteers into the civilian components. As Pershing said in a public speech, “The success of our National Defense plan depends on the quality of our citizenship.” Hence, evidence of public indifference to the army was more than a major disappointment in regard to the act’s promises, it could also spell doom for the policy on which the act itself was based. Yet many in the army could sense that public interest in the military was continuing to fade. By 1923 and 1924, articles warning citizens to wake up to the need for preparedness once again appeared in professional journals, while those discussing how pursuit of the military policy established in the National Defense Act would end the army’s isolation diminished.

The General Staff tried several ways to counter this perceived indifference or to explain it in a manner that would preserve confidence in the defense act. One such approach was to argue that this apparent indifference was actually a failure in the army’s public relations. Thus the solution was for the army to become more savvy and develop additional publicity. Articles appeared in professional journals discussing how commanders could get items into the local press and encouraging officers to go out and spread the army message to service clubs and other organizations.

Some blamed this indifference on rising materialism in the United States, arguing that opulence eroded citizen interest in the common good. But by far the favored response was to blame public apathy on alleged conspiratorial activities of dissidents, particularly communists and pacifists, to deliberately mislead Americans. While military journals generally stayed well clear of political issues, beginning in 1920 their interest in dissident activities, increasingly interpreted as being aimed at undercutting citizens’ respect for and interest in the army, began to blossom in a way seen neither before nor after this period.

The army had always identified with conservative and institutional forces in society and was never particularly tolerant of political dissidents. Even before the war, professional journals had occasionally voiced criticism of dissident movements while praising patriotic movements. There were, however, two major changes in the thinking of army personnel, both of which followed the reductions forced by Congress, though not linked to them directly. One was a
new tendency to connect the emergence of the Soviet Union and Bolshevism to American dissidents as part of an international conspiracy of native dissidents funded and directed by Moscow. As the editor of *Infantry Journal* put it, “This is the boring from within process that we have heard so much about.”

The second was a rising concern with the threat posed by organized pacifism. This was precipitated by the 1921 Washington Naval Disarmament Conference, so, the concern in the army initially was limited to countering the idea of disarmament rather than pacifism itself. This effort to explain public apathy or even hostility to the army on alleged communist conspiracies or pacifist agitation continued well into 1923, then slowly died as relations between the army and the Congress improved.

Overall, outside of the conflict with lawmakers over appropriations, the major sources of army discontent in 1921 and 1922 were clearly temporary in nature and largely the product of reorganizations. By late 1922, the army worked out most, though not all, problems as it had found ways to cope with them. Yet while temporary, the disruptive issues were intense and often mutually reinforcing, producing deeply felt frustration and widespread pessimism. As a result, the initial enthusiasm generated by the presumed opportunities of the National Defense Act was severely dampened.

In 1923 the situation of the army began to improve. In his annual training message to the army in January, Chief of Staff Pershing admitted that the past year had “been one of uncertainty, hardships, and disappointments.” He then declared, “we have entered a new year of great promise” and listed numerous reasons for his hopeful prognosis. Pershing was not alone in this optimism. It was also voiced in service journals, and indeed, they were right. The situation for the army did begin to improve markedly toward the end of 1922, so that the next two years, 1923 and 1924, could be seen as a kind of golden age for the National Defense Act army. It appeared that the great promise of the 1920 legislation finally seemed to be coming true. This sense of well-being was the product of three quite noticeable trends. First, relations between the army and Congress visibly improved. While these relations continued to center on appropriations, the wording of the budget act as accepted and interpreted in both Congress and the army meant that the legislative process itself no longer stirred discontent, even though they differed on the level of funding required. Second, the long-awaited stability had arrived. In 1922 the army underwent its last mandated reductions and subsequent reorganization. Hence, the military could now focus its attention on carrying out its assigned missions in the defense act, especially training the civilian components. By 1924, the army had developed a training cycle, with
a focus on summer camps. While exhausting, the annual cycle and camps provided officers with considerable satisfaction with their accomplishment and an overall sense that the army had definitely entered a stabilizing building period. Third, efforts were being made to reduce the remaining sources of discontent, including poor housing. So, the 1923–24 period was seen as one of growth, stability, purpose, and hope.

The most visible, if not most significant, of these characteristics was the improvement in relations with Congress. This was due largely to both the army and, especially, Congress reaching a modus vivendi regarding the new budget system. Under the system, all branches of government submitted estimates of appropriations to the director of the budget, who then fit them into the president’s overall budget programs. The services were then requested to support the final budget proposal before Congress. While the army followed the system in the fall of 1921, many lawmakers refused to be bound by it, feeling that Congress still had principal control over the purse strings. Thus, in the appropriations for fiscal year 1922–23, the army had to go through the humiliation of seeing its estimates cut twice, first by the director of budget and then by Congress, with the latter resulting in the painful reductions of 1922. By the fall of 1922, House members had been brought into line on the issue of the budget process, and the army was reassured that they understood that the estimates submitted were the president’s, not the War Department’s, resulting in little likelihood of further drastic cuts.25

In the meantime, patterns of activity within the army were also regularized in a way that provided a significant number of officers and troops with a focus for activity in areas that seemed rewarding and constructive. The main focal point was the training of citizen components in summer camps. These began for some of the component units in 1921 and spread and expanded thereafter, with the rhythm of the army year beginning to develop around them. In the fall, the General Staff would draw up overall training regimens for the civilian components based on its own plans as well as on anticipated appropriations. These would be disseminated along with tentative appropriations to corps-area commanders during the winter. The corps-area commanders would select camp commanders and staff, assigning them specific training duties, as well as officers and troops to assist. Camp commanders and their staff would develop training plans for each group assigned to them. Shortly before the citizen units showed up, officers and troops assigned to assist in training would arrive. By mid-summer, when this training was in full swing, 50 percent or more of the combat troops on duty with the Regular Army in the United States would be involved in instruction.
At the completion of the camps, camp commanders compiled reports and recommendations for improvement in subsequent years. These were combined with feedback from the chiefs of branches on training and served as a major input in the General Staff development of training plans in the fall as the cycle began again. Within this cycle, all other events, including school programs within the Regular Army and personal leaves and transfer dates for officers, were fixed by the schedule of summer camps.

The good years ended with a major effort to invigorate public interest in the vision of the citizen army. This effort was a so-called Defense Test held in September 1924. Ostensibly, the purpose of this exercise was to test mobilization plans and the ability of civilian components to meet objectives by having an actual one-day test mobilization. It was intended to be highly visible, having been scheduled for September 12, 1924, the sixth anniversary of the Battle of Saint-Mihiel and, more than coincidentally, the day prior to Pershing’s retirement as chief of staff. As such, it was basically planned to be a nationwide patriotic fete to honor the army and Pershing as well as a symbolic proclamation that the structure called for in the defense act was now in place. Much of the army’s activity in 1924 was based on making the defense test a success. All field-training activities outside of summer camps were canceled in preparation. Much of the planning for the test focused on community involvement so that the day on which local units mobilized would be marked by parades, patriotic speeches, and other forms of public manifestations of support. The announcement of the test aroused significant opposition from pacifist groups. This delighted the army, anticipating that it would give the defense test additional significance as a public victory over pacifists.

The day itself was a great success. Community committees, headed by local notables and supported by local social organizations and industries, planned parades and ceremonies. Local National Guard and Officer Reserve units mobilized conspicuously, with public displays of weapons in a holiday atmosphere. Nationwide, the army estimated that nearly seventeen million people in over 6,500 communities participated in the festivities in some way or another. Looking over the results, Pershing remarked with satisfaction, “I believe it has come to stay,” and plans were made to hold a similar defense test annually. But, like many of the other efforts to portray the integration of the army with the people inherent in the National Defense Act, the defense test was only an illusion. Americans were willing to take a paid day’s vacation from work to celebrate victory in the world war and to cheer on their friends and neighbors in the National Guard and organized reserves. But they were not willing to do it
annually. The defense test held in 1925 was a dismal failure in this regard; plans for a defense test in 1926 were quietly dropped.

Thus, while the golden age of the new citizen army ended in an apparent public triumph, that success was—like much of the rest of the golden age—an illusion, leaving the army’s confidence in its relationship with the American public fragile and highly vulnerable to its first encounter with reality. The major source of fragility was the officers’ considerable doubt that Americans really wanted the citizen army they were attempting to build. While efforts in Congress to reduce the Regular Army’s size ended in 1922, officers could find precious little evidence anywhere else that the public was interested in cooperating with the military in building an adequate defense structure based on citizen-soldier components. As a result, the stabilization of 1923–24 did little to reassure them that there was any real purpose in their enterprise. Further strain from additional evidence of public indifference could easily lead to a state of crisis, as the army would lose confidence in the military policy to which it had committed.

The experience of the army in 1925 produced that strain, creating a near crisis of disorientation and confidence as the military policy seemed to be failing. Morale again sagged. The number of officer resignations, which had been declining in the past several years, rose by 10 percent in fiscal year 1925 and by nearly 30 percent in fiscal year 1926, while desertions among enlisted men followed a similar trend. Some of the causes of the problem were familiar, with money at the top of the list. But others were new. The court-martial of air advocate Brigadier General Billy Mitchell was a source of discomfort to those involved and a source of division in the upper circles of the army. There were also growing complaints about the extraordinary and exhaustive effort required annually to run the summer training camps. For enlisted men, these meant long marches to and from the camps, four-to-six-month separations from family, hard physical labor, and long periods of living in tents. Moreover, other units, already skeletonized by personnel reductions, were drained further by the needs of the camps. For officers, they meant major annual disruptions of both their professional and personal lives, as their own training and that of their units had to take place in less-desirable periods. In 1924 all summer leaves were canceled to provide officers for the camps. As a result of all this, one military journal editorialized at the end of 1925 that efforts to carry out the mission of training civilian components were “wrecking” the army.

But the major problem that dominated the army’s experience in 1925 was, again, its relations with the government. In this regard, there was significant disorientation caused by the fact that friends and enemies seemed to change
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places. Traditionally, the army tended to see itself as part of the executive branch of government, so that the president, as commander in chief, was an ally. Congress, on the other hand, as the parsimonious controller of the purse strings, was the enemy. In 1925 the two seemed to switch roles. One main reason for this was the 1921 budget act, which, as interpreted by the president, the director of the budget, and Congress, made the director, as an agent of the president, the true controller of the purse strings. While this had been apparent in 1923 and 1924, it was not a source of antagonism since the army had not demanded of the president more than he was sure to grant. So, once Congress had accepted the new budget system, little was left for Congress and the army to contest.

As was the case earlier in the 1920s, the primary factor in the 1925 crisis was again the budget, but this time the dispute was between the army and the president. Tensions were precipitated by demands from the new president, Calvin Coolidge, for more significant cuts in the army budget. The dispute was distressing not only because Coolidge’s demands threatened the army with new reductions and destabilization reminiscent of the reductions of 1921 and 1922 but also because they came from the president. While the army had learned, to some extent, how to deal with a querulous Congress by referral to the president’s policy and appeal to public opinion, it was at a loss as to how to deal with a seemingly unreasonable president.

The situation was complicated by two other factors. First, ever since the passage of the National Defense Act of 1920, the army had, to some extent, been living beyond its means. While it carefully kept expenditures within limits set by annual appropriations, it was still able to draw freely on a large store of surplus uniforms, supplies, and munitions left over from the war. These leftover materials were particularly useful in subsidizing the training of civilian components. But this practice carried with it the danger that, when these stocks were exhausted, the army would need a sudden increase in appropriations to maintain the same level of training. Beginning in 1924, Secretary of War Weeks included in his annual reports a warning that the exhaustion of stocks would necessitate an increase in expenditures in hopes that this would make such a future increase more acceptable.37

The second factor was increasing anger in the army over the nature of budget practices, which seemed designed to shield those who were making the cuts, including the president and Congress, from having to take responsibility for them. Under the new guidelines issued by President Coolidge, the army was to keep secret the estimates it sent to the director of the budget. The director would then cut the army’s estimates and send his recommendation to the
House Appropriations Committee, still under the wrap of secrecy. In the military subcommittee, the army was restricted to testifying in support of the budget director’s proposal, with all such testimony given in secret. The substance of the hearings and subcommittee budget recommendations were then sent to all House members in massive volumes only a few days before the scheduled vote. But if the subcommittee made no substantial cuts, the figures were said to represent all that the army asked for. Hence, if the budget passed as presented, the army bore the responsibility for living within the appropriations approved.38 During the winter of 1924–25, the navy attempted to revolt against the system by having a friendly congressman on the House Naval Affairs Committee demand an end to the secrecy of these procedures, but the administration successfully squelched the initiative.39

The major crisis in the relations between the army, the president, and the director of the budget came in the summer of 1925. In May the budget director, Herbert M. Lord, notified the army that the president wanted to cut taxes and so was calling for another reduction in spending.40 The War Department responded that, due to the near exhaustion of surplus items, it would actually require a $16 million increase over the amount appropriated for fiscal 1926. Lord, in turn, demanded a list of all training activities, both for the Regular Army and for the civilian components, with the intention of slashing them in half. He threatened to reduce the army school system, the value of which he did not see.41 The General Staff was outraged that the budget director had now taken upon himself the power to determine army policy. In the face of this uproar, the president backed down. Instead, Coolidge sent a letter to the secretary of war calling on the War Department to propose reductions in its own budget amounting to $35 million over three years.42

The president’s request created a crisis in the General Staff, seen in two weekly meetings of its Legislative Committee.43 The need for $16 million just to stay even and Coolidge’s demand for an eventual $35 million reduction, together with Lord’s cavalier attitude toward the training of civilian components, brought the General Staff to reconsider seriously for the first time its support of the National Defense Act and even its traditional loyalty to the president. In wide-ranging discussions, some members of the committee proposed severe reductions in the civilian components to save the Regular Army. Others proposed a rebellion along the line of that taken by the General Staff in 1915 against Secretary of War Garrison. They would propose a budget based on the 13,000-officer, 150,000-man army that reflected the staff’s professional opinion as to the minimum necessary to carry out the missions assigned by the National Defense Act. If this was cut by
the director of the budget, a member of Congress would call upon the General Staff for a report as to the army’s ability to carry out the military policy in the National Defense Act. Such an inquiry would then allow the army to avoid the rule of secrecy imposed by the administration. After a period of indecision, the committee decided to take a far more moderate path, developing a budget recommendation that included an increase, although not the full $16 million it felt was needed. Rumors then surfaced that Lord proposed cutting even that budget by $7–8 million, sending the leadership of the General Staff into a new round of meetings. They were, again, divided between one group who looked for new ways to economize and save as many Regular Army personnel and civilian components as possible and a second, more radical group that called for deeper cuts in personnel coupled with a proposal that Congress repeal the National Defense Act, since the army could no longer carry out the mission that law assigned it. In the end moderates again carried the day, leading the War Department to further reduce costs by suspending recruiting in the National Guard, reducing the size of the Regular Army to 115,000 men, and trimming allotments to other components. While this measure ended the immediate budget crisis, the experience left army leadership angry with the Coolidge administration and with a significantly reduced sense of commitment to the defense act.

While it may have seemed disorienting to be in conflict with the executive branch in regard to the budget, this was, in fact, only one area of such conflict. Individual officers and servicemen also found themselves for the first time at odds with several executive agencies, including the Internal Revenue Service and the newly created Comptroller General, whose fiscal policies appeared in the army to be capricious and arbitrary.

What was probably most disturbing to army officers was the sense that they had been abandoned in the face of a new foe. As professional agents of the government, and especially its executive branch, officers felt they had a right to protection by that branch from outside attacks. In the past, the president had often come to the army’s aid when it was beleaguered, especially by Congress. The fact that the president now was unwilling to protect the military from his own administrators, leaving officers to fight in their own defense by means of test cases in the courts supported by round after round of contributions to legal funds, left many feeling abandoned.

Army officers responded to this demoralizing situation in several ways. One was a reappearance of some forms of conspiracy theory and renewed attacks on pacifists. Antipacifist agitation had all but disappeared from the professional journals by early 1925. It began to appear with increasing frequency in the
second half of that year after Coolidge’s budget battle with the army. Moreover, the nature of the attacks had changed. The old vision of pacifism as a dupe of an international communist conspiracy had all but died. Instead, pacifism now was linked with materialism and efforts at economy.50

But the most important response, although in line with others, was a notable decline of interest in and enthusiasm for the National Defense Act and its military policy. Colonel Thomas Hammond, one of the officer architects of the defense act and other legislation surrounding it, was still speaking in its behalf at the end of 1925. *Infantry Journal* reprinted part of one of his speeches in November 1925.51 But that was the last article favorable to the act to appear in the publication for a long time. Elsewhere, army officers in public addresses and articles were beginning to show a real skepticism of the military policy of the National Defense Act. Major General John L. Hines, as deputy chief of staff, stated to a supportive audience at the national convention of the National Guard Association in December 1924: “I consider the National Defense Act of 1920, . . . a splendid piece of legislation. It is good, however, only to the extent to which it is backed up by the people of the United States. Otherwise, it is a dead letter and worth no more than the paper on which it is printed.”52 Editorials in many of the service journals made the same argument, that the military policy of the defense act, however desirable it may have been, was dependent on popular support for its success. Yet that backing was nowhere visible.53

There was also, in speeches and articles, a noticeable return to the vision of the military profession as one isolated from the public. This was seen a bit in the fall of 1922, after the officer elimination and demotion crisis. In 1925, articles began to appear with significant references to the nation’s traditional unwillingness to adopt a realistic military policy.54 By late 1924 and throughout 1925, this outlook started to become common in speeches by military leaders and in articles in military journals.55

Thus, while the Regular Army began the project of organizing the new citizen army called for by the National Defense Act of 1920 with the happy expectation that it would enjoy the full support of the both the American government and people, by 1925, it was clear that there would be no such support. This was a severe disappointment, leaving the army and its leadership with the question of whether to continue with these efforts or to give up and return to basing U.S. military policy on the traditional model of a Regular Army that could be expanded in time of emergency by means of volunteers or conscripts.