

## Five Military Branches

There are five military branches: The Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.

**Army:** The Army is commanded by a four-star general, known as the Army Chief of Staff. The Army Chief of Staff reports to the Secretary of the Army (for most matters).

The U.S. Army is the main ground-force of the United States. The Army's function is to protect and defend the United States (and its interests) by way of ground troops, armor (tanks), artillery, attack helicopters, tactical nuclear weapons, etc. The Army is the oldest U.S. Military service, officially established by the Continental Congress on June 14, 1775. The Army is also the largest U.S. Military Service. The Army is supported by two Reserve Forces which can be tapped for trained personnel and equipment during times of need: The Army Reserves, and the Army National Guard. The primary difference between the two is that the Reserves are "owned" and managed by the federal government, and each state "owns" its own National Guard. However, the President of the U.S. or the Secretary of Defense can "activate" state National Guard members into Federal military service during times of need.

**Air Force:** The top military member in the Air Force is the Air Force Chief of Staff. This four-star general reports (for most matters) to the Secretary of the Air Force.

The Air Force is the youngest military service. The Air Force was created in 1947 under the National Security Act of 1947. Prior to 1947, the Air Force was a separate Corps of the Army. The primary mission of the Air Force is to defend the United States (and its interests) through exploitation of air and space. To accomplish this mission, the Air Force operates fighter aircraft, tanker aircraft, light and heavy bomber aircraft, transport aircraft, and helicopters (which are used mainly for rescue of downed-aircrew and special operations missions). The Air Force is also responsible for all military satellites, and controls all of our Nation's strategic nuclear ballistic missiles. There are about 69,000 commissioned officers on active duty in the Air Force, and about 288,000 enlisted members. Like the Arm, the active duty Air Force is supplemented by the Air Force Reserves, and the Air National Guard.

**Navy:** The Navy is commanded by a four-star admiral, called the Chief of Naval Operations.

Like the Army, the Navy was officially established by the Continental Congress in 1775. The Navy's primary mission is to maintain the freedom of the seas. The Navy makes it possible for the U.S. to use the seas where and when our national interests require it. In addition, in times of conflict, the Navy helps to supplement Air Force air power. Navy aircraft carriers can often deploy to areas where fixed runways are impossible. Additionally, Navy ships can attack land targets from miles away (with very heavy guns) and cruise missiles. Navy submarines (fast attack and ballistic missile subs) allow stealth attacks on our enemies from right off their shores. The Navy is also primarily responsible for transporting Marines to areas of conflict. The active duty Navy has about 54,000 officers and 324,000 enlisted personnel. The Navy is supported in times of need by the Naval Reserves. However, unlike the Army and Air Force, there is no Naval National Guard (although a few states have established "Naval Militias.")

**Marine Corps:** The Marines are commanded by a 4-star general called the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Both the Chief of Naval Operations and the Marine Corps Commandant report (for most matters) to the Secretary of the Navy.

The Marines are often referred to as the "Infantry of the Navy". Marines specialize in amphibious operations. In other words, their primary specialty is to assault, capture, and control "beach heads", which then provides a route to attack the enemy from almost any direction. The Marines were officially established on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1775 by the Continental Congress, to act as a landing force for the U.S. Navy. In 1798, however, Congress established the Marine Corps as a separate service. The Marines are generally a "lighter" force when compared to the Army, so they can generally be deployed fast (although the Army has been making great strides in "rapid deployment" in the past few years). For combat operations, the Marines like to be self-sufficient, as much as possible, so they also have their own air power, consisting primarily of fighter and fighter/bomber aircraft and attack helicopters. Even so, the Marines use the Navy for much of their logistical and administrative support. For example, there are no doctors, nurses, or enlisted medics in the Marine Corps. Even medics that accompany the Marines into combat are specially-trained Navy medics. With the exception of the Coast Guard, the Marines are also the smallest service. There are approximately 18,000 officers and 153,000 enlisted personnel on active duty in the Marines. Like the Navy, there is no Marine Corps National Guard, but Marines are supported in times of need by the Marine Corps Reserves.

**Coast Guard:** The Coast Guard does not fall under the Department of Defense. Until recently, the Coast Guard was under the Department of Transportation. Recent legislation has moved the Coast Guard to the newly created Department of Homeland Defense. However, the President of the United States can transfer any and or all assets of the Coast Guard to the Department of the Navy. The Coast Guard is commanded by a 4-star admiral known as the Coast Guard Commandant.

The United States Coast Guard was originally established as the Revenue Cutter Service in 1790. In 1915, it was reformed as the U.S. Coast Guard, under the Treasury Department. In 1967, the Coast Guard was transferred to the Department of Transportation. Legislation passed in 2002 transferred the Coast Guard to the Department of Homeland Security. In peacetime, the Coast Guard is primarily concerned with law enforcement, boating safety, search and rescue, and illegal immigration control. The Coast Guard consists of ships, boats, aircraft, and shore stations that conduct a variety of missions. The Coast Guard is the smallest military service, with about 7,000 officers and 29,000 enlisted on active duty. The Coast Guard is also supported by the Coast Guard Reserves, and a volunteer "Coast Guard Auxiliary" in times of need.