

KEY AREA #2

AMERICAN MILITARY HERITAGE

1. *America's Army has defended this Nation for over two centuries.* During that time our military traditions of service, symbol, and sacrifice have enriched the both the Army and our Nation as a whole.
2. Our younger soldiers and officers have, at times, not been exposed to American Military Heritage prior to entering military service. This deficiency can easily be corrected through educating soldiers on the meaning behind the military signs, symbols, customs, courtesies, and traditions which they see and experience every day. This material can be complemented and strengthened by incorporating lessons from military history, particularly those from the honors and lineage of your specific command into this program.
3. This area is related to every other area, but most particularly to Team Building, Quality Individual Leadership, Ethical Development, and Equal Opportunity.

Historical example and case study:

THE ARMY FLAG

Flags representative of many segments of the Army have existed in the past. The various combat arms had adopted their own flags and field armies, corps, divisions, regiments, and even specific commanders were represented by their own colors, standards, and guidons. No flag was truly symbolic of the Army as a whole. The first official U.S. Army flag was unfurled on June 14, 1956, the 181st anniversary of the establishment of the Army, at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, by then Secretary of the Army Wilbur M. Brucker. The flag was designed to meet the need for one banner to represent the entire Army.

The Army Flag, in the national colors of red, white, and blue with a yellow fringe, had a white field with the War Office seal in blue in its center. Beneath the seal is a scarlet scroll with the inscription "United States Army" in white letters. Below the scroll the numerals "1775" appears in blue to commemorate the year in which the Army was created with the appointment of General George Washington as Commander-in-Chief.

The War Office, whose seal adorns the Army flag, was at first known as the “Board of War and Ordnance.” It was the predecessor of The Department of War, which Congress established in 1789 and retitled as the Department of the Army by the National Security Act of July 1947. The historic War Office seal, somewhat modified from its original, is the design feature that gives to the Army Flag its greatest distinction. The center of the seal depicts a roman breastplate over a jupon, or a leather jacket. Above the breastplate rises a sword upon which rests a Phrygian cap. Rising from the breastplate to the left (facing the viewer) is a pike, or esponenton, flanked by an unidentified organizational color. On the right side rises a musket with fixed bayonet flanked by the National Color. Above the sword is a rattlesnake holding in its mouth a scroll inscribed “This We’ll Defend.” To the lower left of the breastplate is a cannon in front of a drum with two drumsticks. Below the cannon are three cannon balls. To the right is a mortar on a trunion with two powder flasks below.

The flag, from its colors to its heraldic devices, is rich in symbolism that bespeaks to our nation’s and the Army’s origin and heritage. The colors used in the flag were selected for their traditional significance. Red, white, and blue are the colors, of course, of the national flag. Furthermore, those colors symbolize in the language of heraldry the virtues of hardiness and valor (red), purity and innocence (white), and vigilance, perseverance, and justice (blue). Blue is especially significant since it has been the unofficial color of the Army for more than two hundred years, its use reflected in the infantry flag whose use at times had represented the service.

The meaning of the symbols that make up the heraldic design of the seal can be fully understood only in terms of the eighteenth century origin. For example, the placement of the two flags shown on the seal – the organizational and the national flags – are reversed in violation of heraldic custom. The placing of the United States flag on the left (from the flag’s point of view) rather than on the right reflected the tendency of the leaders of the Revolutionary War period to discard traditional European concepts. The display of both an organizational color and the national flag was a common practice of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.

The implements of warfare – cannon, cannon balls, mortar, powder flasks, pike, and rifle – are all of the Revolutionary War type. Their inclusion in the seal reflects the powers and duties of the Board of War for the procurement and handling of artillery, arms, ammunition and other war-like stores belonging to the United States. The pike is of the type carried by subordinate officers of infantry. The drum and drumsticks are symbols of public notification, reflecting the tradition of a citizen militia. Drums also served various military purposes in the eighteenth century, such as the regulation of firing in battle by the drummer's beat. The Phrygian Cap atop the sword's point is the type of cap given to Roman slaves when they were granted freedom. During the French Revolution, the cap was adopted and worn as a "Cap of Liberty." It is thus a traditional symbol of liberty. The coiled rattlesnake and scroll was a symbol that appeared frequently on colonial flags, particularly those representing groups opposed to some aspect of British rule. The exact origin and meaning of this symbol is not known.

Exemplifying selfless service in peace and war, as symbol of national strength and will, and honoring the heroic acts of supreme sacrifice by its members in the name of duty, honor, and country, the Army Flag is a living symbol of the Army's deep taproots in our national history and touches the lives of generations of Americans. In receiving the Army Flag in June 1956, Army Chief of Staff General Maxwell D. Taylor accepted it as the "American Soldier's Flag . . . for those who have gone before us, for those who man our ramparts today, and for those who will stand guard over our freedoms in all of our tomorrow's." The Army Flag remains today a symbol of the Army's achievements in the past and of its readiness to meet the challenges of the future.

This area is directly supported by the following suggested lesson plans contained in this publication:

The Medal
Racism & Sexism
Diversity Training
Values, Attitudes, Behaviors, & Self-awareness
Conflict Management