

# Good example of research paper on united states military history: 1700-1900

[Countries](#), [England](#)



## - Introduction

Although the United States is a young nation, she has had a background that is full of conflict. Because the birth of the United States was born from a bloody conflict with Britain, it seems unsurprising that much of the early days of the nation was also full of conflict. Some of these conflicts were necessary conflicts, while others, looking back with perfect hindsight, were more avoidable. Regardless of how avoidable or unavoidable the conflicts in the United States of America were during the early years of the colony, however, they were very important for the development of wartime technology, as well as the development of military tactics and strategy that would continue to be used for many years. These ever-evolving tactics and weapons were particularly important in the never-ceasing conflicts that the United States faced during this time period.

The development of new military technology and strategy is always a double-edged sword: the massive destruction that can be done with modern-day human weaponry is unparalleled, but so too is the deterrent effect that is achieved through the existence of this type of weaponry. While it is impossible to unwaveringly support the improvement of military-grade weaponry and tactics, tracking their development throughout United States military history serves to teach lessons about the past that it may be difficult to learn through other means or strategies.

## - Colonial Wars

The colonial wars in the United States took place from the late 1600s to the Revolutionary War. It was not a war in the modern sense of the word; instead, it was more a group of skirmishes carried out between the settlers,

as well as between the settlers and the Native Americans whose land they were infringing upon (Chambers and Anderson). During these skirmishes, settlers commonly used muskets and bayonets to fight with each other; most of the people fighting with each other during this time period were primarily hunters, and they used whatever weaponry they had on hand to fight (Chambers and Anderson).

Although these settlers sometimes organized into small militias, for the most part, the major military operations carried out at the time were done by the British naval forces. The British naval forces were easily the most powerful in the world; for any kind of organized attack, the British navy was relied upon to fight and organize (Chambers and Anderson). The frontier wilderness was really where the settlers and their militias excelled in fighting; these individuals fighting in the wilderness were laying the groundwork for the fight against the British that would come later, learning the terrain and developing ways to attack and ambush those unaware of how to navigate in the dense northern forests (Chambers and Anderson).

Most of the conflicts that the United States-- although she was not the United States at this point, but merely the thirteen British colonies-- faced at this point were conflicts with Native Americans. The militias that were formed during this time were volunteer only, and the British army and navy were relied upon for any real conflict. Towards the mid 1700s, the colonies became embroiled in the French and Indian War, in which Britain became victorious over the French and took over all the colonies in North America (Chambers and Anderson). The loss of the colonies to the British was a strategic nightmare for the French, who could feel their empire slipping

away; however, they did not have the power to fight the British navy, and conceded their loss (Chambers and Anderson). The colonies participated in this war, with the militias acting as volunteer support to the British forces (Chambers and Anderson).

#### - Revolutionary War

The Revolutionary War in the United States took place from 1775-1783, and took place between the British and the thirteen colonies in America.

Although some claim that the American Revolutionary War was about freedom from oppression, in reality, there were a plethora of reasons that the British and the colonies began to fight (Chambers and Anderson). The British made a series of decisions that placed the colonies on tighter restrictions, including instituting martial law in Boston; the colonists did not appreciate this kind of behavior from the British, whom they saw as oppressors, and began to revolt (Chambers and Anderson).

Much like the colonial skirmishes that took place leading up to the Revolutionary War, the Revolutionary War itself was fought using cannons, muskets, bayonets, and so on; these are old styles of weapons, and while they could do significant damage, they were also relatively inaccurate (Chambers and Anderson). The British, although much better equipped to fight a war, were not ready for the type of guerilla warfare that the Americans were used to (Chambers and Anderson). Used to skirmishing in the woods with Native Americans, the colonists were much more flexible and capable of outmaneuvering the British forces, who were not able to engage the colonists in any kind of naval warfare-- or, indeed, any traditional type of warfare at all (Chambers and Anderson).

It was during this time that the first “ American spies” were utilized by George Washington. Washington needed to know where the British were and what they were planning, so he employed a number of individuals who were tasked with discovering British plans. McPherson writes, “ Washington’s small band included a young Quaker torn between political principle and family loyalty, a swashbuckling sailor addicted to the perils of espionage, a hard-drinking barkeep, a Yale-educated cavalryman and friend of the doomed Nathan Hale, and a peaceful, sickly farmer who begged Washington to let him retire but who always came through in the end In an era when gentlemen were officers, and gentlemen didn’t spy, he possessed an extraordinary talent for deception—and proved an adept spymaster” (McPherson). Although Washington is considered to be an honest man and a gentleman, he recognized that knowing the enemy’s plan before the enemy knew his was a valuable tool, and it is one that he used to his advantage throughout the Revolutionary War (McPherson).

#### - War of 1812

After the loss of the Revolutionary War to the colonists, it was only a short time before the United States and Britain met in conflict again. The War of 1812 started in 1812 and went on for two years; it was a war that was, for many intents and purposes, an extension of the tensions and aggressions that had grown out of the Revolutionary War (Chambers and Anderson). The war itself was unique, because it was fought in three separate locations, using three separate tactics: the first was the naval battle, in which warships and privateers attacked both merchant ships and other warships alike (Chambers and Anderson). The British were responsible for a blockade of the

United States; this was a highly effective tactic and one which the north would use on the southern states in the United States during the American Civil War (Chambers and Anderson).

Next, there were land battles fought in this war: because much of the fighting was done on American and Canadian soil, the British found that they faced the same problems that they had during the Revolutionary War with their inflexible military and opponent who knew the terrain much better.

Finally, the American South was also the scene of a number of battles; this area was torn with war, and the Americans defeated the British in a number of significant battles on open soil in the southern theater of the War of 1812 (Chambers and Anderson). The British conducted a number of raids, but were by and large incapable of breaking through American and Canadian lines of defense (Chambers and Anderson).

#### - Mexican-American War

In what would become one of the great American expansionist victories in the early years of the United States, the Mexican-American War resulted in Americans marching west and taking over a number of territories that had previously belonged to Mexico. The Mexican-American War took place from 1846-1848, and proved that American military power was only growing (Mets and Jessup). Although still a young country, the United States was churning under the philosophy of “ Manifest Destiny,” or the westward expansion into virgin territory to claim new lands for the country (Mets and Jessup).

However, Mexico was unwilling to give up her rights to Texas, New Mexico, and California, despite the fact that Texans had already declared independence from Mexico (Mets and Jessup).

This era is another in which American history sees great Generals emerging; to this day, some of these names are commonplace. For instance, General Zachary Taylor invaded a number of territories and was successful, moving westward and eventually south to the Mexican capital, where he was able to force a deal with Mexico (Mets and Jessup). The United States bought the territories of New Mexico and California from Mexico for very little as a result of their military victories (Mets and Jessup).

#### - American Civil War

It is, of course, difficult to do justice to the conflict that was the American Civil War in only a short span of text; huge tomes have been dedicated to this topic, and still more information remains to be uncovered. However, there are a few issues that should be noted as important insofar as the American Civil War is concerned. Although the American Civil War raged only from 1861 to 1864, it was a hugely destructive war in the history of the United States. Huge numbers of Americans died, and the conditions on the battlefield were awful (Coffman). According to Coffman, more than 650, 000 soldiers lost their lives in this particular conflict-- and all of those lives lost were American lives, something which is very unusual in war (Coffman). This was the first time in United States history in which a draft-- also called conscription-- was used to mobilize enough people to fight on both sides. Neither side was willing to give in to the political or financial demands of the other, and the states split down ideological and geographical lines over the subjects of slavery and states' rights (Coffman). The Union-- the Northern states-- used a naval blockade of the important Southern ports and the mouth of the Mississippi river to great effect (Coffman). Coffman suggests

that it was this blockade that weakened the South enough to encourage their eventual surrender, although other sources disagree (Coffman). However, this blockade was strategically very important-- it also allowed for the development of the first ironclad warships, which were traditional warships that had iron hulls instead of wooden hulls (Coffman). This made them much more difficult to sink (Coffman).

Much of the Civil War was fought on Southern soil, but it is traditionally split into four theaters: the southern theater, the eastern theater, the western theater, and the Mississippi theater (McPherson). The generals for both sides used ingenious tactics to control numerous strategic points; however, it was the north that finally forced General Robert E. Lee to surrender in Virginia in 1865 (McPherson). The cost of the Civil War was great, and the weapons used were devastating. The musket and bayonet used by both sides caused grievous injuries, and if the musket or bayonet did not kill, then the infection often did. However, the battlefield nursing and medical care paved the way for new developments in medicine and medical procedures (McPherson).

#### - Indian Wars

After the devastating effects of the Civil War, the United States descended once again into the skirmishes that had become common with the Native Americans. Wars broke out between the settlers in the West and the Native Americans for any number of reasons-- most often that there was land infringement on the part of the settlers or the Native Americans, and the other side pushed back against the infringement (Chambers and Anderson). These conflicts often became cyclical. When one group would infringe on another's perceived right to a space or a natural resource, the other group



would push back, leading to decades-long conflict between settlers and Native Americans all over the new American frontier (Chambers and Anderson). Eventually, all of this conflict came to a head when the American government decided to round up the Native Americans and place them on reservations through a number of means, some of which were legal and some of which were not (Chambers and Anderson). According to Chambers and Anderson, there were approximately forty wars which made up the bulk of the conflicts that would become known as the “ Indian Wars” (Chambers and Anderson).

Although these were not wars in the traditional sense, these skirmishes-- which sometimes became all-out battles-- were important in the westward expansion history of the United States. As the American settlers expanded westward, they were more and more unlikely to tolerate Native American settlements on their land; they were unlikely to share resources and much more likely to fight. This is where the “ wild west” trope comes from-- this inability to coexist, and the reliance on war and conflict to solve all types of problems that may arise in the western territories of the United States (Chambers and Anderson). Eventually, this reliance on conflict would lead to the forced resettlement of Native Americans in various reservations strewn across the continental United States (Chambers and Anderson).

#### - Spanish-American War

Although a short war, the Spanish-American war was one which certainly helped to cement America’s place as an up and coming military power in the new world. The Spanish and the Americans fought a number of battles on land and at sea, but the Americans made quick work of the Spanish in a

number of battles (Chambers and Anderson). The Spanish navy was very weak, and although the American navy did not yet rival the British in power or size, with its new ironclad warships it easily outstripped the Spanish in pure power (Chambers and Anderson).

During the Spanish-American war, all the American soldiers were volunteers, which was a strange and unique aspect of a military: before this war, most wars were fought by men conscripted into service. However, the Spanish-American War was fought by volunteers (Chambers and Anderson). This marked a change in American policies towards conscription; although conscription would become important in American military history again, the levels of conscription seen for previous wars would not be common in the United States (Chambers and Anderson).

In the Spanish-American War, the United States received a number of colonies from Spain, including Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, the latter of which would become the theater for another war in a very short time (Chambers and Anderson). The Spanish-American War was truly a war in which the United States was able to flex its new muscles, so to speak-- the United States practiced her military power and set up a number of naval stations around the Pacific. These naval stations would become standard naval stations for the United States, and include such stations as the ones in Hawaii and Guantanamo Bay (Chambers and Anderson).

#### - Conclusions

Early military experience for the United States was formative insofar as recent military history is concerned. The unique circumstances under which the United States was formed and her early battles were fought led to the

establishment of a number of great generals and leaders; from the early days of the United States, Americans have always valued this type of leadership and innovative thinking in military officials.

Today, the United States leads the world in military development. The United States is nearly always first to develop new types of military technologies, and has been at the forefront of military development for at least three quarters of a century, if not longer. Value judgements about this somewhat militaristic nature serve no purpose here; the fact remains that the United States is often on the cutting edge of military technology, and the early conflicts that occurred on American soil with American soldiers directly influenced this drive to be part of military expansion.

While there are benefits to leading the world militarily, there are also detriments: protecting the freedoms and the technologies that are developed in the United States is not something that should be taken lightly, nor is it something that can be considered inexpensive. The military-industrial complex in the United States today continues to grow, and this growth is a direct result of the early years of American conflict.

## References

Chambers, John Whiteclay, and Fred Anderson. *The Oxford Companion To American Military History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

Coffman, Edward M. 'The New American Military History'. *Military Affairs* 48. 1 (1984): 1. Web.

Herbst, Judith. *The History Of Weapons*. Minneapolis, MN: Twenty-First Century Books, 2006. Print.

Lazerowitz, Evan. 'America's Second War Of Independence: The Barbary

<https://assignbuster.com/good-example-of-research-paper-on-united-states-military-history-1700-1900/>

Pirate Wars And Their Effect Upon American Geopolitical Power'. SSRN  
Journal n. pag. Web.

McPherson, James M. Battle Cry Of Freedom. New York: Oxford University  
Press, 1988. Web.

Mets, David R., and John E. Jessup. 'Encyclopedia Of The American Military. 3  
Vols.'. The Journal of Military History 58. 4 (1994): 736. Web.

Minks, Benton, and Louise Minks. Revolutionary War. New York: Facts On  
File, 2003. Print.

Ricks, Thomas E. Fiasco. New York: Penguin Press, 2006. Print.