



The Brigade: A History, Its Organization and Employment in the US Army

John J. McGrath

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This is a timely work as virtually all current Army transformation initiatives focus in on the maneuver brigade as the key element in future reorganization. New initiatives centered on the Unit of Action (UA) concept utilize variations of the basic brigade design currently fielded in the Army for revamped organizations using projected or recently fielded technology. A study illustrating from where the brigade has come to assume such an important role in Army planning and organization is, therefore, very appropriate. This volume illustrates the brigade level of command, both in organizational structure and in battlefield employment. The brigade has been a key component of American Armies since the establishment of the first brigade of colonial militia volunteers under the command of George Washington in 1758. Brigades were key combined arms organizations in the Continental Army and were basic components of both the Confederate and Union forces in the Civil War, and have been the backbone of Army forces in Vietnam, the winning of the Cold War, DESERT STORM, and in the recent War in Iraq. The force structure of the US Army has always been a target of tinkering and major readjustments since the short-lived experimentation with the Legion of the United States in 1792-1996. Nowhere is this more apparent than at the level of the brigade. For most of the history of the Army, the brigade was a temporary wartime expedient organization and the first level of command led by a general officer. In the 20th century, it was the basic tactical unit of trench warfare in World War I. However, in World War II it basically disappeared, though organizations such as the armored division's combat command, retained the spirit, if not the name of the organization. Following the late 1950s Pentomic period, the brigade returned in 1963 in a flexible structure very similar to that of the former combat command. As a mission oriented, task-organized, combat organization, the maneuver brigade has survived the many vicissitudes of Army reorganization. This work provides an organizational history of the maneuver brigade and case studies of its employment throughout the various wars. Apart from the text, the appendices at the end of the work provide a ready reference to all brigade organizations used in the Army since 1917 and the history of the brigade colors.

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