

Virginia Militia

Although the Virginia militia was organized officially by Governor Thomas Dale in 1611, in reality the colonists had been organized for their mutual defense against hostile Indians and Europeans since establishing Jamestown in 1607. As the colony grew and counties were formed, the House of Burgesses refined the organization of the militia, which was under the authority of the governor. By the time the revolutionary war began, the militia had been structured along English lines, with regiments in each county commanded by a county lieutenant holding the rank of colonel.

To ensure "conformity in their exercise and evolutions, so that when the different battalions join in brigades there may be no mistake or confusion," the third revolutionary convention passed an ordinance at its session begun on July 17, 1775, establishing the Office of the Adjutant General. Both the office and the trend toward uniformity continued after the war.

On December 22, 1792, the General Assembly passed "an act for regulating the militia of this Commonwealth," which was later amended in 1793 and again in 1795, in conjunction with an act of Congress "to more effectually provide for the national defense, by establishing a uniform militia throughout the United States." This act arranged the counties into brigades and divisions, and also regiments and battalions. It called for the appointment of an adjutant general for the militia and other officers for each brigade and division. It also stipulated that the courts of the several counties and corporations recommend to the executive those field and other officers who currently hold commissions to complete the regiments and battalions by grades and seniority. It gave the governor the power to call out the militia, with advice from the Council of State, in the event of invasion or insurrection. The Civil War marked the end of the militia system of 250 years.

Following the conclusion of the Civil War, no Virginia military units were authorized until the General Assembly passed an act on March 29, 1871, providing for the reorganization of the militia and the reestablishment of the Office of the Adjutant General, which had been vacant through the Reconstruction period. It was not until March 17, 1884, however, that the General Assembly passed an act funding the new militia known as the Virginia Volunteers. On June 3, 1916, the Volunteers became the Virginia National Guard under the provisions of the National Defense Act passed by the United States Congress.

The General Assembly passed an act on April 18, 1927, that reorganized state government and created within the governor's office the Division of Military Affairs headed by the adjutant general. On March 31, 1964, the General Assembly passed an act establishing the Department of Military Affairs to assume the

responsibilities of the division, which was abolished, and the department was placed under the secretary of transportation and public safety by an act passed on April 8, 1972. The General Assembly created separate secretariats for transportation and for public safety on April 12, 1976, and placed the department under the secretary of public safety. On June 30, 1978, Governor John N. Dalton issued Executive Order No. 16, transferring the department to the secretary of transportation. Effective July 1, 1984, the secretariats of transportation and public safety again were combined.

The Department of Military Affairs continues to be responsible for the training and supervision of the National Guard, in accordance with federal guidelines. In the event of a national or state emergency, the governor as commander in chief is empowered to activate the National Guard. The agency is comprised of the Virginia National Guard, Virginia Air National Guard, and Virginia Defense Force.