

SUBSISTENCE DEPARTMENT.

The history of the Subsistence Department dates back to the organization of the Continental Army,

On 16 June, 1775, Congress passed a resolution of which the following is an extract:

"That there be one Commissary General of Stores and Provisions."

On 10 June, 1777, it was resolved by Congress—

"That for supplying the army of the United States with provisions, one Commissary General and four Deputy Commissaries General of Purchases, and one Commissary General and three Deputy Commissaries General of Issues, to be appointed by Congress."

On 13 March, 1778:

"That a Commissary General of Purchases be appointed, with full powers to depute or remove any officer of the Department.

"That it shall be the duty of the Commissary General of Purchases to superintend all the officers of his department; to give the necessary orders to the Deputy Commissaries General, and see that the business in each Department is properly executed; and that full supplies of provisions for the army are seasonably procured."

On 25 November, 1779:

"That the Departments of the Quartermaster General, and of the Commissaries General of Purchases be, for the future, under the superintendency and direction of the Board of War; and that the Committee of Congress on those Departments deliver over to the Board of War, all papers in their hands respecting them, and thereupon be discharged.

On 30 November, 1780:

"That there be a Commissary General of Purchases, whose duty shall be to purchase provisions under the direction of Congress, the Commander-in-Chief, or Board of War; to call upon the principal State agents or commissioners, for such supplies as their respective Legislatures shall make provision for, and keep up a regular correspondence with them, to the end that their prospects of furnishing such supplies may be fully known: of which correspondence he shall keep a fair and correct register, as well as of every other official transaction; to direct the quantities and species of provisions to be stored in the magazines of the several States, under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, and cause the same to be forwarded to the army, as occasion may require; for which purpose he is hereby empowered to call on the Quartermaster General, and the Deputy Quartermasters, for the means of transportation; to make monthly returns to the Commander-in-Chief, and Board of War, of all persons employed by him, specifying for what time, and on what terms; and of all provisions received in each month, from whom, from what State, and the quantities delivered to the Issuing Commissaries, their names, and at what posts; also of all provisions remaining on hand, at what magazines, and in whose care; the returns to be made up to the last day of each month, and forwarded as soon as may be; to cause all his accounts with the United States to be closed annually, on the 1st day of January, and laid before the Board of Treasury for settlement by the 1st day of March ensuing."

On 28 June, 1781, Congress passed the following order:

"Ordered, That a committee of three be appointed to devise the proper mode of transferring to the Superintendent of Finance the business of the several Boards and Departments, to which the institution of his office extends, in order that the said Boards and Departments may be discontinued as soon as the situation of affairs will admit."

On 10 July, 1781, it was resolved by Congress:

"That the Superintendent of Finance be, and he is hereby authorized, either by himself, or such person or persons as he shall from time to time, appoint for that purpose, to procure on contract, all necessary supplies for the army or armies of the United States, and also for the navy artificers, or prisoners of war, and also the transportation thereof: and all contracts or agreements heretofore made, or which shall be hereafter made by him, or persons under his authority, for the purposes aforesaid, are hereby declared to be binding on the United States."

On 7 May, 1782, a resolution was passed by Congress "authorizing the Superintendent of Finance to appoint two Inspectors—one for the main, and the other for the Southern army—whose duties should be to take care that the contracts for supplying rations be duly executed by the contractors; to supervise the expenditures of public property, and report any fraud, neglect of duty, or other misconduct by which the public property was wasted, or expense unnecessarily accumulated."

The office of Superintendent of Finance was abolished by an Ordinance of Congress, passed 28 May, 1784, and its duties, including those of furnishing supplies to the army, were devolved upon a Board of three Commissioners, (styled the Board of Treasury.)

By the Ordinance entitled, "An Ordinance for ascertaining the powers and duties of the Secretary of War," passed 27 January, 1785, it was made the duty of the Secretary of War to form estimates for all military stores, equipments and supplies, requisite for the military service; and for keeping up magazines, and to report the same to the Commissioners of the Treasury of the United States, that measures might be taken in due time for procuring the same.

On 12 April, 1785, Congress passed a resolution authorizing the raising of a force of 700 men, and directed

"That the Commissioners of the Treasury contract for the supply rations at such places, and in such quantities, as the Secretary of War shall judge necessary."

By the first section of the Act of the first Congress, entitled "An Act to establish an Executive Department, to be denominated the Department of War," approved 7 August, 1789, it was provided that there should be "an Executive Department, to be denominated the Department of War," and there should be a principal officer therein, who should be called the "Secretary of War," who should "perform and execute such duties as shall from time to time, be enjoined on, or entrusted to him, by the President of the United States agreeably to the Constitution, relative to * * * warlike stores of the United States, or to such other matters respecting military or naval affairs as the President of the United States shall assign to said Department."

Although this Act empowered the President to entrust to the Secretary of War the duty of furnishing the army with "warlike stores," which of course included subsistence supplies, a contract was nevertheless made by the Secretary of the Treasury, "for the supplies for the army on the route from Fort Pitt," as late as 28 October, 1790. A few months later however, the discretionary power given to the President, to entrust to the Secretary of War the very appropriate duty of procuring "warlike stores," seems to have been exercised; for on 26 April, 1791, the Secretary of War entered into a contract with William Duer, for supplying the troops with provisions until their arrival at Fort Pitt."

By section 5 of the Act of 8 May, 1792, making alterations in the Treasury and War Departments, the duty of making "all purchases and contracts for supplying the army with provisions, clothing, supplies in the Quartermaster's Department, military stores, Indian goods, and all other supplies or articles for the use of the Department of War," was again devolved upon the Treasury Department.

On 23 February, 1795, an Act was passed creating "in the Department of the Treasury, an officer to be denominated 'Purveyor of Public Supplies,' whose duty should be, under the direction and supervision of the Secretary of the Treasury, to conduct the procuring and providing of all arms, military and naval stores, *provisions*, clothing, Indian goods, and generally all articles of supply requisite for the United States."

By section 3 of the Act of 16 July, 1798, the procurement of its own supplies was restored to the War Department. Sections 3 and 4 of this Act were as follows:

"SEC. 3. *And be it further enacted*, That all purchases and contracts for supplies or services, for the military and naval service of the United States, shall be made by, or

under the direction of, the chief officers of the Departments of War and Navy, respectively, and all agents or contractors for supplies or services, as aforesaid, shall render their accounts for settlement to the accountant of the proper Department for which such supplies or services are required, subject, nevertheless, to the inspection and revision of the officers of the Treasury, in the manner heretofore prescribed.

"SEC. 4. *And be it further enacted,* That it shall be the duty of the Purveyor of Public Supplies, to execute all such orders as he may from time to time, receive from the Secretary of War, or Secretary of the Navy, relative to the procuring and providing of all kinds of stores and supplies; and shall render his accounts relative thereto, to the accountants of the proper Departments, which accounts shall be subject to the inspection and revision of the officers of the Treasury, as aforesaid."

By section 3 of the Act approved 16 March, 1802, entitled "An Act fixing the Military Peace Establishment of the United States," it was provided that there should be "three Military Agents, and such number of Assistant Military Agents, as the President of the United States shall deem expedient, not exceeding one to each military post; which Assistants shall be taken from the line." The duties of these Military Agents were defined by section 17 of the same Act, as follows:

"That it shall be the duty of the Military Agents designated by this Act, to purchase, receive and forward to their proper destination, all military stores and other articles for the troops in their respective departments, and all goods and annuities for the Indians, which they may be directed to purchase, or which shall be ordered into their care by the Department of War. They shall account with the Department of War annually, for all the public property which may pass through their hands, and all the moneys which they may expend in discharge of the duties of their offices, respectively; previous to their entering on the duties of their offices, they shall give bonds, with sufficient sureties, in such sums as the President of the United States shall direct, for the faithful discharge of the trust reposed in them, and shall take an oath faithfully to perform the duties of their respective offices."

On 28 March, 1812, the Quartermaster's Department was re-established, a Purchasing Department was created; the office of Purveyor of Public Supplies was abolished; and provision made for the ultimate discontinuance of the Military Agency system.

The sections establishing the Purchasing Department were as follows:

"SEC. 4. That there shall be a Commissary General of Purchases, and as many Deputy Commissaries as, in the opinion of the President of the United States, the public service may require, to be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.

"SEC. 5. That it shall be the duty of the Commissary General of Purchases, under the direction and supervision of the Secretary of War, to conduct the procuring and providing of all arms, military stores, clothing, and generally all articles of supply requisite for the military service of the United States; and it shall be the duty of the Deputy Commissaries, when directed thereto, either by the Secretary of War, the Commissary General of Purchases, or, in case of necessity, by the Commanding General, Quartermaster General, or Deputy Quartermasters, to purchase all such of the aforesaid articles as may be requisite for military service of the United States."

On 13 March, 1813, an Act was approved providing that there should be an officer in the War Department, styled Superintendent General of Military Supplies, whose duty should be, under the direction of the Secretary of War, to keep proper accounts of all the military stores and supplies of every description purchased for or distributed to the army of the United States, and the volunteers and militia in the United States service; to prescribe the forms of all the returns and accounts of such stores and supplies purchased, on hand, distributed, used, or sold, to be rendered by the Commissary of Ordnance and officers in his Department, by the Commissary General of Purchases and his deputies, by the several officers in the Quartermaster's Department, by the Regimental Quartermasters, by the Hospital Surgeons and other officers belonging to the Hospital and Medical Departments, and by all other officers, agents, or persons who should receive, distribute, or be entrusted with, such stores and supplies; to call to account all such persons; to audit and settle all such accounts, and, in case of delinquency, to transmit the account, and to state the value of the articles unaccounted for by such delinquency, to the accounting officers of the Treasury, for final settlement and recovery of such value; to transmit all such orders, and, generally, to perform all such other duties respecting the general superintendence of the purchase, transportation,

safe-keeping, and accountability of military supplies and stores, as should be prescribed by the Secretary of War.

By section 8 of the Act creating the office of Superintendent General of Military Supplies, it was provided—

“That the President of the United States be, and he is hereby empowered, as he may deem it expedient, either to appoint, for the time being, a special Commissary or Commissaries, for the purpose of supplying by purchase or contract, and of issuing, or to authorize any officer or officers in the Quartermaster General’s Department to supply and issue, as aforesaid, the whole or any part of the subsistence of the army, in all cases where, either from want of contractors, or from any deficiency on their part, or from any contingency, such measure may be proper and necessary in order to insure the subsistence of the army, or of any part thereof; and such special Commissaries shall each, whilst employed, be entitled to the pay and emoluments of a Deputy Quartermaster General.”

On 11 April, 1818, the President approved an Act to regulate the staff of the army, which contained the following sections relating to subsisting the army:

“SEC. 6. *And be it further enacted*, That after the first day of June, one thousand eight hundred and nineteen, the present system of supplying the army with rations be abolished, and that in lieu thereof there shall be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, one Commissary General, with the rank, pay, and emoluments of Colonel of ordnance, who shall, before entering on the duties of his office, give bond and security, in such sum as the President may direct, and as many assistants, to be taken from the subalterns of the line, as the service may require, who shall receive twenty dollars per month, in addition to their pay in line, and who shall, before entering on the duties of their office, give bond and security, in such sums as the President may direct. The Commissary General and his assistants shall perform such duties, in purchasing and issuing rations to the army of the United States, as the President may direct.

“SEC. 7. *And be it further enacted*, That supplies for the army, unless in particular and urgent cases the Secretary of War should otherwise direct, shall be purchased by contract, to be made by the Commissary General, on public notice, to be delivered on inspection, in the bulk, and at such places as shall be stipulated; which contract shall be made under such regulations as the Secretary of War may direct.”

This legislation, which virtually carried us back to where we were previous to the passage of the resolution of 10 July, 1781, abolishing the Commissariat and transferring its duties to the Treasury Department, laid the foundation of the present Subsistence Department; and the system then adopted of providing subsistence for the army has been continued without change to the present time, and with entirely satisfactory results both in peace and war.

The War of the Rebellion closed in the spring of 1865. The magnitude of the operations of the Subsistence Department is indicated by the following statement showing the amount of its disbursements for each of the four years of the war, and the total amount for the entire period:

From 1 July, 1861, to 30 June, 1862.....	\$48,799,521 14
From 1 July, 1862, to 30 June, 1863.....	69,537,582 78
From 1 July, 1863, to 30 June, 1864.....	98,666,918 50
From 1 July, 1864, to 30 June, 1865.....	144,782,969 41
Total amount.....	\$361,786,991 83

On 30 April, 1865, there were in service in the Subsistence Department the 29 officers of the permanent establishment and 535 Commissaries of Volunteers, making a total of 564 officers.

In referring to the operations of the Subsistence Department, in his annual report for 1865, the Secretary of War, Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, who had served continuously in that office since 13 January, 1862, said:

“During the war this branch of the service never failed. It answers to the demand, and is ever ready to meet the national call.”

No higher tribute could possibly have been paid to the efficiency of the Subsistence Department and its utility as a branch of the Military Establishment.