

March, Peyton Conway

By [Jared M. Tracy](#)



Peyton Conway March (1864-1955)

General, and Chief of Staff of the United States Army, Peyton Conway March seated at his desk in 1918.

Harris & Ewing: MARCH, PEYTON C., MAJ. GEN., U.S.A., CHIEF OF STAFF. AT DESK, black-and-white photograph, 1918; source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-hec-10481, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/hec2008007416/>.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

March, *Peyton Conway*

American general, U.S. Army Chief of Staff

Born 27 December 1864 in Easton, USA

Died 13 April 1955 in Washington, D.C., USA

Summary

General Peyton C. March developed the role and prominence of the relatively new position of U.S. Army Chief of Staff. March rivaled General of the Armies John J. Pershing in importance and influence during World War I.

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Pre-War

Born on 27 December 1864 in Easton, Pennsylvania, Peyton Conway March (1864-1955) attended Lafayette College in Easton from 1880 to 1884 prior to graduating from the United States Military Academy in 1888. He received his lieutenancy and assignment to the 3rd [Artillery](#) Regiment in June 1888. In the course of inconsequential stateside duty for the next eight years, March earned promotion to first lieutenant and was assigned to the 5th Artillery in 1894. In 1898, he completed two years of artillery school at Fort Monroe, Virginia and was subsequently deployed to the Philippines as a captain in command of the seventy-nine man Astor Battery.

March served as an aide to Major General (Volunteers) [Arthur MacArthur \(1845-1912\)](#) in 1899. That year, he earned promotion to major in the 33rd [Infantry](#), U.S. Volunteers, which in November proved essential to the defeat of a 1,200-man Filipino force in the Battle of San Jacinto. As a temporary lieutenant colonel, March became a provincial governor. In 1901, he reverted to captain in the U.S. Army and commanded the 19th Battery at Fort Riley, Kansas until 1903. While serving a four-year stint on the War Department General Staff until 1907, March worked as an observer of the [Russo-Japanese War](#) in 1904. Promoted to the permanent rank of major three years later, he then commanded the 1/6th Field Artillery until 1911. For the next five years, the combat commander served as an adjutant at the divisional, post and departmental levels.

Chief of Staff

March's term as the U.S. Army Chief of Staff followed from a cascade of command assignments that began with the new 8th Field Artillery in 1916 on the Mexican border. Two months after the U.S. intervened in the First World War, March earned his first star as Commander of 1st Artillery Brigade, 1st Division, [American Expeditionary Forces](#) (AEF). Promoted to major general in the National Army in August 1917 and in the U.S. Army a month later, he commanded First U.S. Army's artillery units as well as separate artillery units in [France](#).

In late 1917, Secretary of War [Newton D. Baker \(1871-1937\)](#) informed General [John J.](#)

[Pershing \(1860-1948\)](#) that the current U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General [Tasker H. Bliss \(1853-1930\)](#), was retiring and that he was considering March for that job. March insisted on remaining in France when Pershing told him of this, so the Commanding General, AEF instead suggested Major General Tasker H. Bliss, which Baker accepted. As acting Chief of Staff, Biddle faced many of the same bureaucratic challenges that Bliss had in that position. In early 1918, Baker again cabled Pershing and told him more emphatically that he needed March. Serving as acting U.S. Army Chief of Staff from March to May 1918, Major General March was then promoted to temporary general as he officially took the reins of U.S. Army Chief of Staff.

Serving as Chief of Staff during the massive buildup of American forces in Europe in 1918, General March set a high standard for his position. He shook things up in the War Department, unapologetically firing and shuffling around many officers as a means of ensuring the various bureaus' proper role and importance. He helped streamline the army logistical system. He established the Air Service, Tank Corps and Chemical Warfare Service. He facilitated the redesign of the War Department General Staff, which included the establishment of an independent Military Intelligence Division. And after the Armistice, he supervised the [demobilization](#) of U.S. forces.

Although Pershing had had a high opinion of March, he grew increasingly irritated by him throughout 1918. March did not accept the traditional dynamic whereby the senior combatant commander had *carte blanche* during wartime. He instead asserted the primacy of Chief of Staff over all other officers, stateside or deployed. For example, March refused to rubber stamp all of Pershing's recommendations for senior officer promotions and placements within the AEF, instead offering some of his own. Pershing, commanding the largest combat formation in the war, believed that he should make all of the major operational, logistical and administrative decisions involving the AEF. In contrast, March held a more holistic view of the nation's armed forces: to him, it was America's war, not the AEF's. The feud between March and Pershing bled into the post-war era.

Post-war

At the end of his term as U.S. Army Chief of Staff in 1921 March retired as a major general, though he earned a promotion to general in 1930 while retired. March published *The Nation at War* in 1932 as an answer to Pershing's criticisms of the War Department (a veiled indictment of March) in his memoir *My Experiences in the World War*. Later, former Secretary of War Baker published his own book, straddling the line between Pershing's and March's respective views of the war and essentially ending the feud. March passed away on 13 April 1955 in Washington, D.C.

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- [Coffman, Edward M.: *The hilt of the sword. The career of Peyton C. March*, Madison, 1966: University of Wisconsin Press.](#)
- [March, Peyton Conway: *The nation at war*, Garden City, 1932: Doubleday, Doran & Co.](#)

Citation

Jared M. Tracy: March, Peyton Conway, in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer D. Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2015-04-23. DOI: [10.15463/ie1418.10625](https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10625)

External Links

- [Battle of San Jacinto \(U.S. Army\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Final report of Gen. John J. Pershing, Washington, D.C. 1920 \(Internet Archive\) \(Book\)](#)
- [Pershing, John Joseph: General Pershing's Story of the American army in France, New York 1919 \(Internet Archive\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Peyton Conway March \(Arlington National Cemetery\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Peyton Conway March \(U.S. Army Center of Military History\) \(Article\)](#)

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Author Keywords

War Department; General Staff; U.S. Army Chief of Staff

GND Subject Headings

[March, Peyton C.](#)

LC Subject Headings

[March, Peyton Conway, 1864-1955](#)

Key Person(s)

[Arthur MacArthur, Jr.](#); [Bliss, Tasker H.](#); [Pershing, John J.](#); [Baker, Newton D.](#)

Key Location(s)

[Easton](#); [Fort Monroe, Virginia](#); [Fort Riley, Kansas](#); [San Jacinto](#); [Washington, D.C.](#)

Title

March, Peyton Conway

Author(s)

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Article Type

Encyclopedic Entry

Classification Group

Persons