Historical Time Line 1775–2005

1775–1815

1775 ▶
Congress established the Continental Army with provision for a Chief Engineer (June 16). Richard Gridley named first Chief Engineer and oversaw fortification at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Col. William Prescott at the Battle of Bunker Hill, painting by Frederick C. Yohn
The Continental Insurance Company

1779
Engineer officers and companies of sappers and miners formed into a Corps of Engineers.

1781 ▶
French and American engineer officers and sappers and miners played key role in successful siege of Yorktown.

Plan of attack for Yorktown, drawn by Jean Baptiste de Gouvion, October 29, 1781
National Archives

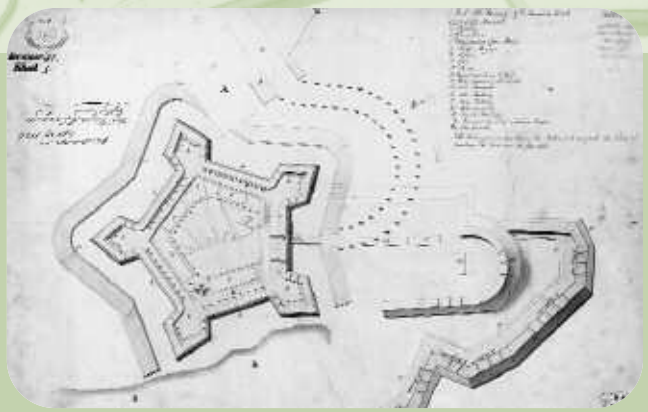
1783
Corps of Engineers mustered out of service along with most of the Continental Army.

1794
Unified Corps of Artillerists and Engineers established.

1802 ▶
Permanent reestablishment of a separate Corps of Engineers and founding of U.S. Military Academy at West Point under Corps supervision.

View of West Point, c. 1834
Library of Congress

1812–1815 ▶
War of 1812: Coastal harbors heavily fortified by engineers deterred British attacks. Engineer officers first assumed command.



Plan of Fort McHenry
National Archives

1819–1838

John C. Calhoun
U.S. Army Collection

◀ 1819
Secretary of War John C. Calhoun's report on importance of waterways for national defense and commerce identified role for Army engineers.

View of the "insulated tablelands" or buttes during Maj. Stephen Long's expedition to the Rocky Mountains, 1820
Library of Congress

◀ 1819
Stephen H. Long's expedition of the Missouri River basin pioneered Army engineer involvement in western exploration.

1824
An act to improve the navigation of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers initiated permanent civil works construction mission.

Nineteenth century survey party in the Sierra Nevada, painting by J.J. Young
National Archives

◀ 1824
General Survey Act authorized use of Army engineers to survey road and canal routes.

1825
Corps assumed responsibility for construction and repair of Cumberland Road.

Capt. Henry M. Shreve's snagboat *Heliopolis*

◀ 1829
Corps launched first steam-powered snagboat, *Heliopolis,* on the Mississippi River.

1838
Creation of separate Corps of Topographical Engineers under Col. John J. Abert.

1841–1857

1841 ▶
John C. Frémont began a series of western expeditions that ranged to the Rockies and beyond, providing vital information on lands, peoples, and resources of the West.

1846
Creation of first company of regular U.S. Army engineer troops.

1846–1848 ▶
Mexican War: Engineer regulars erected fortifications and joined in assaults while engineer officers performed key reconnaissance missions.

1853 ▶
Lt. Montgomery C. Meigs began work on a water supply system, the Washington Aqueduct, which still supplies water for the Nation's capital and is still operated by the Corps of Engineers.

1853–1858
Pacific Railroad surveys involved Topographical Engineers in exploration and documentation of the West.

1857 ▶
Lt. Gouverneur K. Warren completed his map of the northern plains, the most detailed and accurate to date.

John C. Frémont's ascent of Snow Peak depicted on a 5-cent stamp
Smithsonian Institution

Battle of Monterey, September 23, 1846

Cabin John Bridge, shown here in 1863, built to carry water from the Potomac River over Cabin John Creek to the Washington water supply system

Gouverneur K. Warren as a Major General

1861–1863

Henry L. Abbot as a general officer

◀ 1861
Humphreys-Abbot *Report Upon the Physics and Hydraulics of the Mississippi River* won the respect of engineers around the world and decidedly influenced the development of river engineering in America.

Company A, Battalion of U.S. Engineers, 1865

◀ 1861–1865
Civil War: A battalion of regular U.S. Army engineer troops, with various volunteer engineer and pioneer units, cleared obstacles, constructed roads and bridges, laid down ponton bridges, and erected field fortifications. Several engineer officers commanded combined troops, while others conducted reconnaissance and directed siege operations.

Capitol dome under construction, 1861

◀ 1863
New Capitol dome completed under supervision of engineer officer Montgomery C. Meigs.

1863
U.S. Army engineers constructed 2,200-foot ponton bridge over the James River, one of the longest ponton bridges in the history of warfare.

Seal of the unified Corps of Engineers

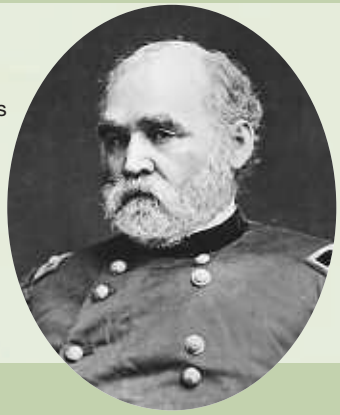
◀ 1863
Corps of Engineers and Corps of Topographical Engineers reunified.

1866–1883

1866 ▶
Engineer School of Application founded at Willets Point, N.Y. Chief of Engineers' role as Inspector of West Point ended as superintendency of the Academy opened to all branches of the U.S. Army.

Officers mess, Willets Point, N.Y.

1867 ▶
Control of District of Columbia public parks and monuments given to the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds under the Chief of Engineers until 1933.



Brig. Gen. Montgomery Meigs managed many Corps construction projects in the District of Columbia from the 1850s to the 1880s.
National Archives

1875 ▶
Captain William Ludlow's expedition to Yellowstone identified a critical need to protect and improve the park.

Captain Ludlow's map of reconnaissance from Carroll, Mont., to the site of Yellowstone National Park

1878
Three-person commission, including by law an engineer officer, replaced elected government in the District of Columbia until 1967.

1879
Mississippi River Commission created to execute a comprehensive flood control and navigation plan on the Lower Mississippi.

1882 ▶
In first authorized emergency operation, Corps used its vessels to deliver relief supplies to flood victims.

U.S. steamer *Montana* at St. Paul, Minn.

1883
Congress designated Corps to make improvements in Yellowstone Park.

Washington Monument nearing completion, early 1884
National Archives

The Library of Congress, c. 1897
National Archives

Military railroad in the Philippines

The Engineer School academic building, on present-day Ft. McNair, Washington, D.C.

1884–1902

◀ 1884
Construction of Washington Monument completed by Army engineers.

1884
First Corps reservoirs completed at Winnibigoshish, Leech Lake, and Pokegama, Minn.

1885
Davis Island Lock and Dam, just south of Pittsburgh, completed—the largest Chanoine wicket dam in the world.

1888
Chief of Engineers created five engineer divisions based on geographical regions.

◀ 1897
Library of Congress building completed.

◀ 1898
Spanish-American War: U.S. Army engineers erected landing piers, built bridges and roads, and repaired and operated railroads in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.

1899
Refuse Act gave Corps authority to regulate obstructions to navigation.

◀ 1901
Engineer School moved from Willets Point to Washington Barracks, Washington, D.C.

1902
Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors established to examine costs, benefits, and the need to improve waterways. The board was disestablished in 1993.

1911–1927

1911
Using a cofferdam, Corps raised wreck of the battleship *Maine* in Havana Harbor.

1914 ▶
Panama Canal completed under supervision of U.S. Army engineer officers. Engineer officers served as governors of the Canal Zone from 1914 to 1979.

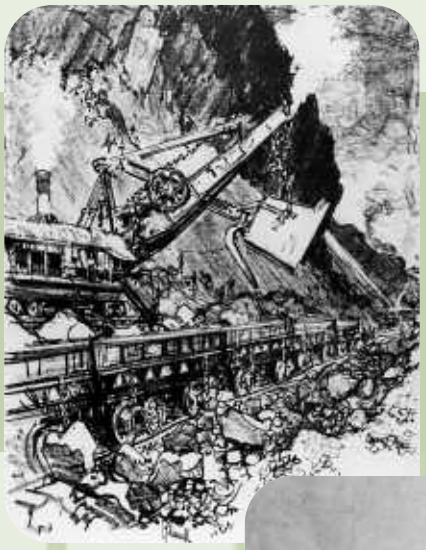
1917 ▶
Congress passed first federal Flood Control Act.

1917–1918 ▶
World War I: U.S. Army engineers served in combat; built ports, roads and railroads; organized first U.S. Army tank units; and developed chemical warfare munitions.

1919
Engineer School moved to Camp A.A. Humphreys, Va. (later renamed Fort Belvoir).

1925 ▶
Wilson Dam completed with major hydroelectric power component at Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River.

1927
Congress authorized 308 Reports to present plans for multipurpose improvement of navigable streams.



Steam shovel at work in the Culebra Cut; a lithograph in a series on the Panama Canal by Joseph Pennell, noted American artist and illustrator

USACE Museum Collection

During a 1912 flood, residents of Hickman, Ky., find refuge on levees and rooftops.

World War I Army engineers building a corduroy road

The power generators at Wilson Dam, Tenn., under construction, 1926

1927–1939

Sandbagging a levee during flooding of the Mississippi River

◀ 1927
Flood devastated Mississippi River Valley and demonstrated insufficiency of "levees only" policy.

Maj. Gen. Edgar Jadwin, Chief of Engineers, 1926–1929

◀ 1928
Jadwin Plan becomes basis for landmark Flood Control Act that adopts a comprehensive plan for flood control on the Lower Mississippi River. Plan includes the use of floodways and spillways in addition to levees.

Dashields Locks and Dam on the Ohio River near Glenwillard, Pa., opened for navigation August 1929.

◀ 1929
Nine-foot channel completed on the Ohio River.

President Roosevelt visited Ft. Peck during the New Deal Era.

◀ 1933
During the Roosevelt administration, Corps' New Deal public works program included Fort Peck, Bonneville, Conchas, and Tygart dams.

1936
Flood Control Act made flood control a federal policy and officially recognized the Corps as the major federal flood control agency.

1939
Nine-foot navigation channel completed on the Upper Mississippi.

1940–1945

1940 ▶
Corps took over airfield construction from the Quartermaster Corps' Construction Division.

1941
Congress transferred Army construction and real estate programs to the Corps of Engineers.

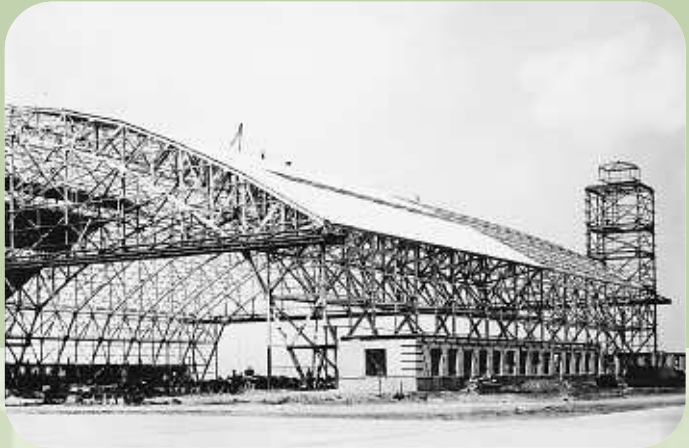
1942
Manhattan Engineer District established to oversee construction of production facilities for the atomic bomb.

1942 ▶
Engineers completed a 1,500-mile pioneer road, called the Alaska or ALCAN Highway, between Dawson Creek, British Columbia, and Fairbanks, Alaska.

1943 ▶
Construction of the Pentagon completed fifteen months after groundbreaking.

1944
Flood Control Act authorized Corps to develop recreational facilities on Corps' projects and to develop water projects in the Missouri River Valley in accordance with the Pick-Sloan Plan.

1945 ▶
Construction, begun in late 1942, completed on Ledo Road, stretching through some of the world's most difficult terrain from India to the old Burma Road near the Chinese border.



Hangar at Lowry Field, Colo., 1940

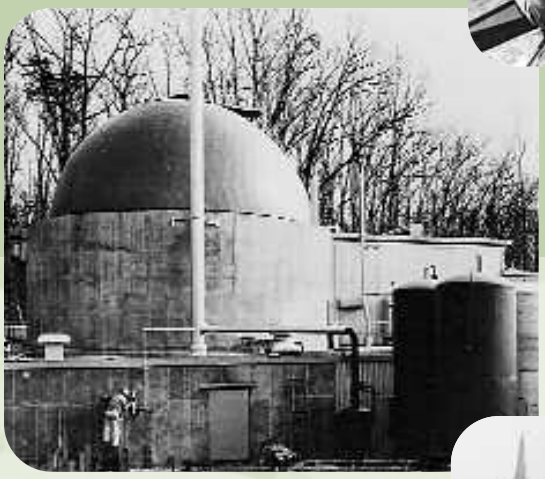
Meeting of bulldozers at Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory, along the ALCAN Highway in 1942

An aerial view of the completed Pentagon

Maj. Gen. Lewis A. Pick in the first convoy on the Ledo Road, May 20, 1945

The dredge *Poseidon* clearing the Corinth Canal in Greece, 1947

Engineers prepare a bridge for demolition in Korea
National Archives



Nuclear power plant at Ft. Belvoir, Va.

Nike Ajax missile battery

1946–1958

1946
Corps began hospital construction program for the Veterans Administration.

◀ 1946–1949
Corps' Grecian District supervised postwar reconstruction to restore damaged Greek transportation and communication network to check communist expansion.

◀ 1950–1953
Korean Conflict: Engineers destroyed bridges and mined roads to obstruct the enemy, and built bridges and roads to assist advance of American forces. Engineers frequently fought as infantry.

1950s
Corps built early warning facilities and air bases in Greenland, Morocco, and Libya.

◀ 1952
Corps assigned responsibility for the Army Nuclear Power Program.

◀ 1954
Construction of first Nike Ajax missile battery completed.

1958
Corps completed work on the American portion of the St. Lawrence Seaway.

1960–1976

1960 ▶
Corps of Engineers Ballistic Missile Construction Office established to build launch sites and related facilities for intercontinental ballistic missiles.

1961
Foreign Assistance Act initiated Corps involvement in reimbursable programs through the State Department's Agency for International Development.

1961 ▶
Corps began construction for National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), including the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, Texas, and John F. Kennedy Space Center in Fla.

1962
In U.S. Army reorganization, Corps lost control of Engineer School and engineer troops but retained responsibility for engineering, construction, and real estate services required by the Army, Air Force, and NASA.

1963–1973
War in Vietnam: Forty thousand Army Engineers support combat operations in Southeast Asia.

1967 ▶
Rome plow introduced to enhance engineer jungle-clearing operations during Vietnam War.

1970
National Environmental Policy Act, signed on January 1, established requirement for environmental impact statements.

1971–1976
Corps constructed bulk-mail handling centers for the U.S. Postal Service.

Titan I ICBM in firing position

Vehicle Assembly Building at Cape Kennedy

Depiction of a Rome Plow clearing jungle

Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) Victor V. Veysey

The Corps' Distinctive Unit Insignia

Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, Miss.

1972–1985

1972
Clean Water Act of 1972 Amendments authorized Corps to regulate dredging and dumping activities in U.S. wetlands.

◀ 1975
First Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works named to position originally created in 1970 legislation.

1975
Corps redesignated as a combat arms branch.

1976
Middle East Division established in Riyadh as Saudi Arabia construction program expanded. Division disestablished in 1986.

◀ 1979
Corps of Engineers became an Army Major Command (MACOM).

1982
Design and construction effort begun in support of Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund cleanup program.

1982
Israeli air bases completed in program initiated in 1979 by Camp David Accords.

1983
Defense Environmental Restoration Program enlarged the Corps' environmental work relating to military installations.

◀ 1985
Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, largest navigation project in Corps' history, completed 13 years after construction began in 1972.

1986–1999

1986 ▶
The Water Resources Development Act of 1986 brought major change in financing by requiring nonfederal contributions toward most federal water resources projects.

1988
The Engineer School relocated to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

1990–1991
Desert Shield/Desert Storm: Corps provided construction and real estate support.

1991
Recovery effort in Kuwait initiated through the Kuwait Emergency Recovery Office.

1991
Beginning of successive rounds of base closures under a presidentially appointed realignment commission.

1992 ▶
Corps undertook major disaster recovery in wake of hurricanes Andrew and Iniki.

1993
Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management created on the Department of the Army staff. The new office absorbed many of the functions of the Assistant Chief of Engineers.

1996
Groundbreaking ceremony for the Olmsted Lock, the last major lock modernization project on the Ohio River in a program begun in the 1950s.

1997
Formerly Used Sites Remedial Action Program transferred from Department of Energy to the Corps of Engineers.

1999 ▶
Dedication of the Seven Oaks Dam of the Santa Ana River Mainstem Flood Control Project—potentially the Corps' last big dam project.

President Reagan signs the Water Resources Development Act, 1986.

Installing temporary roofs following Hurricane Andrew

Seven Oaks Dam, Ca.
Photo by Dave Schumaker

Ruins of the World Trade Center, New York City, September 2001

Personnel of the Gulf Region Division in Baghdad, Iraq

Personnel from the Gulf Region Division discuss construction with Iraqi contractors in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq

Chinook helicopter prepares to lift 5,000-pound sandbags to repair damaged flood walls.

2000–2005

2000
Congress approved the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan with the Corps designated as the lead agency.

2001
The Upper Mississippi River/Illinois Waterway Navigation Study and its recommendation for the construction of new and larger locks generated substantial controversy and opposition.

◀ 2001
9/11: Corps of Engineers responded to terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

2001
Missouri River Master Water Control Manual became increasingly controversial because of environmental issues and competing interests in the river basin.

2002
After the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the Corps of Engineers began a program to construct facilities for the Afghan National Army.

◀ 2003
Soon after coalition forces entered Iraq, the Corps began to restore the Iraqi oil and electrical infrastructure.

◀ 2004
The Gulf Region Division established in Baghdad to manage the reconstruction program.

◀ 2005
Hurricanes Katrina and Rita ravaged the Gulf Coast and subsequent storm surges overwhelmed the protective levees around New Orleans, flooding the city.