

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

A history of U.S. Army civil affairs

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January 1, 2012 7:11 AM

As we continue mobilizing here in Indiana, it's important to remember what it is we are training for, and what our goals are as civil affairs specialists.

Our mission is to support the commander's relationship with civil authorities and civilian populace, promote mission legitimacy and enhance military effectiveness. Our areas of operation include:

- Foreign humanitarian assistance
- Populace and resource control
- Support to civil administration
- Civil information management
- Nation assistance

And although it may seem a modern concept, civil affairs (CA) operations have been conducted by the U.S. Army for the last 165 years, starting with the Mexican-American war of 1846.

During that conflict, Gen. Winfield Scott, often referred to as the Father of CA, instructed his men to prevent harm from coming to civilians and their property, salute local priests and magistrates, and provide immediate payment for any requisitions the Army made.

These policies mitigated unnecessary civilian suffering caused by the conflict, and helped to evolve some of the core principals of the CA mission.

Over the next 80 years, even though an official CA unit had yet to be created, U.S. Army CA would continue to develop:

- The Army helped ex-slaves and free blacks at the conclusion of the U.S. Civil War, instituting an extensive rehabilitation program through the Freedman's Bureau.
- After the Spanish-American war, Gen. Leonard Wood helped to establish public health facilities, cleaned cities and instituted public elections in Cuba.

Civil Affairs was given its official charter during World War II, activated on March 1, 1943, under the command of Maj. Gen. John Hildring.

Charged with the task of rehabilitating the war-torn countries of Europe, CA was successful in developing government and providing civilian relief projects.

After World War II, CA continued its mission of humanitarian relief and nation assistance, as well as support to civilians in countries during armed conflict.

The Korean War, Vietnam War, Central American conflicts, including Grenada, and humanitarian relief in Indonesia and Thailand all saw the deployment of CA components and the continued development of the CA mission.

More recently, CA has assisted with humanitarian relief in Haiti and after the tsunamis of 2004 and 2011.

CA has taken on an even greater role in the Persian Gulf conflicts and the current war in Afghanistan, conducting all aspects of the CA mission with proven success and allowing the U.S. Army to "Secure the Victory"; the Civil Affairs motto.

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