

THE
U.S. ARMY
AND THE
LEWIS AND CLARK
EXPEDITION



- - - INTRODUCTION - - -

As we commemorate its bicentennial, the famous Lewis and Clark Expedition evokes pride and awe in countless Americans who reflect upon its achievements. Its dynamism and sweep carried American explorers across the breadth of a vast continent for the first time. Its scientific agenda brought back invaluable information about flora, fauna, hydrology, and geography. Its benign intent established fruitful trade relations and encouraged peaceable commerce with Native Americans encountered en route. The expedition was, all things considered, a magnificent example of our young nation's potential for progress and creative good.

While most Americans have some inkling of the importance of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, relatively few recognize that it was an Army endeavor from beginning to end, officially characterized as the "Corps of Volunteers for North Western Discovery." It is no accident that the new nation and its president, Thomas Jefferson, turned to the Army for this most important mission. Soldiers possessed the toughness, teamwork, discipline, and training appropriate to the rigors they would face. The Army had a nationwide organization even in that early era and thus the potential to provide requisite operational and logistical support. Perhaps most important, the Army was already in the habit of developing leaders of character and vision, Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and the outstanding noncommissioned officers who served with them being cases in point.

This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by David W. Hogan, Jr., and Charles E. White. We truly hope you will enjoy this brief and engaging account of a stirring and significant event in our American military heritage.

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THE U.S. ARMY AND THE -- LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION --

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and third president of the United States, did much to help create the new nation. Perhaps his greatest contribution was his vision. Even before he became president, Jefferson dreamed of a republic that spread liberty and representative government from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. As one of the leading scientific thinkers of his day, he was curious about the terrain, plant and animal life, and Indian tribes of the vast, unknown lands west of the Mississippi River. As a national leader, he was interested in the possibilities of agriculture and trade in those regions and suspicious of British, French, Spanish, and Russian designs on them.

On 18 January 1803, months before President Jefferson had acquired the region from France through the famous Louisiana Purchase, he sent a confidential letter to Congress, requesting money for an overland expedition to the Pacific Ocean. Hoping to find a “Northwest Passage” by water to the Pacific, Jefferson informed Congress that the explorers would establish friendly relations with the Indians of the Missouri River Valley, help the American fur trade expand into the area, and gather data on the region’s geography, inhabitants, flora, and fauna.

To conduct the expedition, Jefferson turned to the U.S. Army. Only the military possessed the organization and logistics, the toughness and training, and the discipline and teamwork necessary to handle the combination of rugged terrain, harsh climate, and potential hostility. The Army also embodied the American government’s authority in a way that civilians could not. Indeed, the Army provided Jefferson with a readily available, nationwide organization that could support the expedition—no small consideration in an era when few national institutions existed. Although the expedition lay outside the Army’s usual role of fighting wars, Jefferson firmly believed that in time of peace the Army’s mission went beyond defense to include building the nation. Finally, the man that Jefferson wanted to lead the expedition was an Army



Meriwether Lewis
by Charles Willson Peale, ca. 1807
(Independence National Historical
Park)

officer: his personal secretary, Capt. Meriwether Lewis.

A friend and neighbor of Jefferson, the 28-year-old Lewis had joined the Virginia militia to help quell the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 and then had served for eight years as an infantry officer and paymaster in the Regular Army. In Lewis, Jefferson believed he had an individual who combined the necessary leadership ability and woodland skills with the potential to be an observer of natural phenomena.

Before Congress approved funds for the expedition, Lewis had already begun his preparations. From Jefferson he learned how to use the sextant and other measuring instruments. Together they studied Alexander MacKenzie's account of his 1793 Canadian expedi-

tion to the Pacific coast and the maps in Jefferson's collection. The president even had a special map made for Lewis that detailed North America from the Pacific coast to the Mississippi River Valley, with emphasis on the Missouri River. While the president drafted his instructions for the expedition, the captain worked on his planning and logistical preparations. In the evenings they discussed their concepts of the operation.

Leaving Washington in March, Lewis traveled to the Army's arsenal at Harpers Ferry (at that time part of Virginia), where he obtained arms, ammunition, and other basic supplies while supervising the construction of an experimental iron boat frame he had designed. Next, Captain Lewis went to Lancaster and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where Jefferson had arranged for some of the nation's leading scientific minds to instruct Lewis in botany and natural history, medicine and anatomy, geology and fossils, and navigation by the stars. While in Philadelphia, Lewis purchased additional supplies, including a new condensed food, "portable

soup.” He also arranged for the Army to provide transportation for his nearly four tons of supplies and equipment from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. Lewis then set off for Washington for a final coordination meeting with President Jefferson.

When Lewis returned to Washington in mid-June, he was nearly two months behind his original schedule. He had hoped to be in St. Louis by 1 August; but after three intensive months of preparation, Lewis realized that the successful accomplishment of his mission would require more men and another officer. Now the president handed the captain his formal instructions. Foremost among Jefferson’s expectations was an all-water route to the Pacific. Lewis was told to

explore and map the rivers carefully, to learn all he could about trade routes and traders of the region, and to study every Indian tribe along the way. Jefferson ordered Lewis to treat the Indians with dignity and respect and to invite their chiefs to come to Washington for a visit. Last, Captain Lewis was to describe the geography of the region and to bring back samples of plant and animal life. As they discussed the expedition, Jefferson acknowledged that it would require more men and another leader.

With Jefferson’s consent, Lewis wrote to his friend and former comrade, William Clark, offering him the assignment as cocommander. Both Lewis and Clark had served in the Legion of the United States under General Anthony Wayne a decade earlier. Clark had been an infantry company commander but had resigned his lieutenantcy in 1796 to attend to the business affairs of his older brother, General George Rogers Clark. In addition to approving the choice of William Clark, Jefferson ordered the War Department to give Lewis unlimited purchasing power for the



William Clark
by Charles Willson Peale, ca. 1810
(Independence National Historical Park)

expedition. Moreover, the president authorized the captain to recruit noncommissioned officers and men from any of the western army posts. On 4 July 1803, news arrived of the Louisiana Purchase, which resolved any international problems affecting the expedition. The next day Lewis set off for Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh, as a riverboat-building center in 1803, provided a logical starting point for the expedition chartered to discover an all-water route to the west coast. While in Philadelphia in May, Lewis had placed an order for a keelboat for the mission. Arriving in Pittsburgh, Lewis found the builder had only just begun construction, which would take another six weeks. Lewis worried about his ability to get down the Ohio River, with its diminishing flows, and up the Mississippi River before winter set in.

Other frustrating news followed. The shipment of supplies had not yet arrived from Philadelphia. The driver had decided that the weapons were too heavy for his team and had left them at Harpers Ferry, so Lewis had to hire another teamster to bring the arms to Pittsburgh. Good news came from Clark, who had accepted Lewis' invitation to join the expedition. Clark told Lewis he would be ready to go when the keelboat reached Louisville, Kentucky. In the meantime, he would recruit only quality men: The word was out, and Clark already had many young frontiersmen eager to join the expedition. Lewis was delighted with this news, knowing Clark was an excellent judge of men.

Lewis finally left Pittsburgh on 31 August. With him were seven soldiers from the Army barracks at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, three prospective recruits, the pilot of the boat Lewis had hired in Pittsburgh, and one or two additional hands. It took them six weeks to travel down the shallow Ohio River to Louisville. Along the way, Lewis had stopped for a week in Cincinnati to rest his men and take on provisions. Arriving in Louisville on 14 October, he hired a local pilot to guide the boat safely through a daunting set of rapids known as the Falls of the Ohio, then on a short way to Clarksville, Indiana Territory. Once there, Lewis set off to meet his cocaptain. Over the next two weeks, Lewis and Clark selected the first enlisted members of the expedition. They included Sgts. Charles Floyd and Nathaniel Pryor and Pvts. William Bratton, John Colter, Joseph and Reubin Field, George Gibson, George Shannon, and John Shields. (Colter and Shannon may have joined Lewis before he had reached Cincinnati.) These men became known as the Nine Young Men from Kentucky. Clark also decided to bring along his servant, York, a black man of exceptional size and strength.



Keelboat Replica at Lewis and Clark State Park, Onawa, Iowa
(© 2001, Charley Van Pelt)

The keelboat and two smaller, flat-bottom boats (called by their French name, *pirogue*) departed Clarksville on 26 October and arrived two weeks later at Fort Massac in southern Illinois Territory, about thirty-five miles upstream from the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Here, Lewis hired the respected Shawnee/French hunter, guide, and interpreter George Drouillard, and accepted from the post two privates: John Newman and Joseph Whitehouse. The seven soldiers from Carlisle Barracks who had been temporarily assigned to bring the keelboat down the Ohio River remained behind at Fort Massac. The party left Fort Massac on 13 November and reached the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers the next evening. The men camped there for a week, while Lewis and Clark measured both the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and Lewis taught Clark how to make celestial observations. The expedition then set out for St. Louis.

As they turned upstream into the powerful Mississippi River, Lewis and Clark immediately realized they needed more men. All three boats were badly undermanned, and the expedition seldom progressed more than a mile an hour moving upstream. On 28

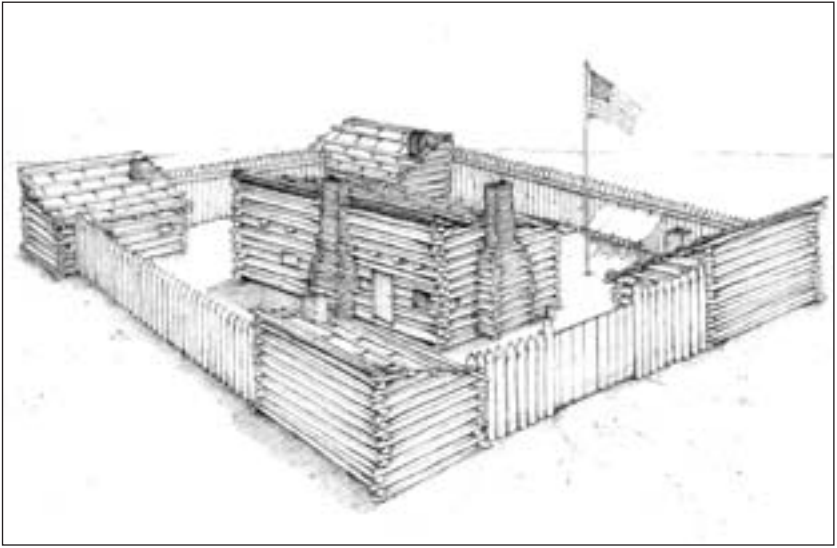
November the men reached Fort Kaskaskia, some fifty miles south of St. Louis. The next day Lewis remained behind to confer on personnel matters and to requisition supplies, while Clark took the boats to Cahokia, a few miles below St. Louis. Lewis left Fort Kaskaskia on 5 December and arrived at Cahokia the next day. Following two days of talks with Spanish authorities, the party left Cahokia and reached St. Louis early on the morning of 11 December.

Upon arriving at St. Louis, Lewis left the party to handle logistical arrangements and to gather intelligence on Upper Louisiana. Clark took the party upriver about eighteen miles to the mouth of the Wood River, a small stream that flowed into the Mississippi River directly across from the mouth of the Missouri River. There, Clark constructed Camp River Dubois, which was finished by Christmas Eve 1803.

Once the camp was established, Clark set about preparing for the arduous journey ahead. Throughout the winter months he selected and trained personnel, modified and armed the keelboat and pirogues, and assembled and packed supplies. For all his efforts, William Clark never received the captaincy Lewis had promised him. Instead, the War Department commissioned Clark a Lieutenant of Artillery. Nevertheless, Lewis called Clark Captain and recognized him as cocommander, and the men of the expedition never knew differently.

On 31 March 1804, Lewis and Clark held a ceremony to enlist the men they had selected as members of "the Detachment destined for the Expedition through the interior of the *Continent* of North America." In addition to the eleven men previously selected, Lewis and Clark chose Sgt. John Ordway, Cpl. Richard Warfington, and Pvts. Patrick Gass, John Boley, John Collins, John Dame, Robert Frazer, Silas Goodrich, Hugh Hall, Thomas Howard, Hugh McNeal, John Potts, Moses Reed, John Robertson, John Thompson, Ebenezer Tuttle, Peter Weiser, William Werner, Issac White, Alexander Willard, and Richard Windsor. In their Detachment Order of 1 April 1804, Captains Lewis and Clark divided the men into three squads led by Sergeants Pryor, Floyd, and Ordway. Another group of five soldiers led by Corporal Warfington would accompany the expedition to its winter quarters and then return to St. Louis in 1805 with communiqués and specimens collected thus far.

With their military organization established, Lewis and Clark began final preparations at Camp River Dubois and in St. Louis for



Sketch of Camp River Dubois by Richard Guthrie
(Courtesy of the Illinois Historic Preservation Commission)

their trek up the Missouri River. Clark molded the men into a team through a regimen of drill and marksmanship training, while Lewis was busy in St. Louis arranging logistical support for the camp and obtaining intelligence on the expedition's route and conditions along the way. Discipline was tough, and Clark made sure that the men were constantly alert, that they knew their tasks on both river and land, that their camps were neat and orderly, and that they cared for their weapons and equipment. He dealt firmly with any form of insubordination or misbehavior. At the same time he rewarded the winners of marksmanship contests and those who distinguished themselves on their work details. Clark's fine leadership proved effective, as the expedition recorded only five infractions during its two-and-a-half-year trek, a record unmatched by any other Army unit of the time.

On the afternoon of Monday, 14 May 1804, Clark and his party left Camp River Dubois, crossed the Mississippi River, and headed up the Missouri. The expedition proceeded slowly toward St. Charles, because Clark wanted to ensure the boats were loaded properly for the journey. Two days later they reached St. Charles, made adjustments to the loading plan, and awaited Lewis. At St.

Charles, Clark also enlisted two additional boatmen: Pvts. Pierre Cruzatte and Francois Labiche. Both knew the tribes of the Missouri River Valley and would serve as interpreters. On 20 May Lewis arrived from St. Louis with a group of prominent St. Louis citizens who wanted to see the expedition launched. The next afternoon, a crowd lining the riverbank bade farewell to Captains Lewis and Clark and their expedition.

“The Commanding Officers” jointly issued their Detachment Orders for the expedition on 26 May. This decree established a routine while making it clear to the men that this was a military expedition into potentially hostile territory. Lewis and Clark refined the organization previously agreed upon at Camp River Dubois. The three original squads were redesignated “messes” and manned the keelboat, while Corporal Warfington’s detachment formed a fourth mess and rode in the “white” pirogue. The civilian boatmen formed the fifth mess and rode in the “red” pirogue. Because he was the better boatman, Clark usually stayed on the keelboat while Lewis walked on shore and made his scientific observations. Occasionally, they would rotate and Lewis would catalog specimens on the keelboat.

Captains Lewis and Clark now commanded through the three sergeants, who rotated duties on the keelboat. One always manned the helm, another supervised the crew amidships, and the third kept lookout at the bow. The senior sergeant was Ordway, who acted as the expedition’s first sergeant. He issued daily provisions after camp was set up in the evening. Rations were cooked and a portion kept for consumption the next day. (No cooking was permitted during the day.) Sergeant Ordway also appointed guard and other details. The guard detail consisted of one sergeant, six privates, and one or more civilians—fully one third of the entire party. The guard detail established security upon landing and maintained readiness throughout the encampment. All three sergeants maintained duty rosters for the assignment of chores to the five messes. The cooks and a few others with special skills were exempted from guard duty, pitching tents, collecting firewood, and making fires. Drouillard was the principal hunter and usually set out in the morning with one or more privates and rejoined the expedition in the evening with meat.

The expedition generally made good time up the Missouri River. Thanks largely to the total commitment of the crews, the keelboat and pirogues averaged a bit more than one mile per hour against the strong Missouri current. With a wind astern, the crews

usually doubled their speed. Along the way, the expedition conquered every navigational hazard the Missouri River offered. The men also overcame a variety of physical ills: boils, blisters, bunions, sunstroke, dysentery, fatigue, injuries, colds, fevers, snakebites, ticks, gnats, toothaches, headaches, sore throats, and mosquitoes. As the expedition traveled north, its members became the first Euro-Americans to see some remarkable species of animal life: mule deer, prairie dog, and antelope. Wildlife became more abundant as the expedition moved upriver. The likelihood of meeting traders and Indians also increased.

As the men traveled north, they encountered more than a dozen parties of traders, sometimes accompanied by Indians, coming downriver on rafts or in canoes loaded with pelts. On 26 June the expedition reached the mouth of the Kansas River. On 21 July, some six hundred miles and sixty-nine days upstream from Camp River Dubois, the expedition reached the mouth of the Platte River. On 28 July Drouillard returned from hunting with a Missouri Indian. The next day Lewis and Clark sent boatman "La Liberté" (Jo Barter) with the Indian to the Oto camp with an invitation for their chiefs to come to the river for a council.

At Council Bluff on Friday morning, 3 August 1804, the expedition held its first meeting with six chiefs of the Oto and Missouri tribes. This amicable council set the pattern for later meetings between the expedition and Native Americans. The outstanding characteristic of these councils was the mutual respect between the expedition and its native hosts. At midmorning, under an awning formed by the keelboat's main sail and flanked by the American flag and troops of the expedition, Captains Lewis and Clark awaited the Indian chiefs. The two captains wore their regimental dress uniform, as did Sergeants Ordway, Floyd, and Pryor, Corporal Warfington, and the twenty-nine privates. As the Oto and Missouri delegations approached, the soldiers came to attention, shouldered their arms, dressed right, and passed in review. Captain Lewis then stepped forward to deliver his long speech announcing American sovereignty over the Louisiana Territory, declaring that the soldiers were on the river "to clear the road, remove every obstruction, and make it a road of peace," and urging the Oto and Missouri tribes to accept the new order. According to Private Gass, the chiefs were "well pleased" with what Lewis said and promised to abide by his words. The chiefs and officers then smoked the peace pipe and Lewis distributed peace medals and other gifts to the chiefs. The council closed

with a demonstration of the expedition's air gun, designed to awe the Indians. Like a BB gun, the air gun operated by air pressure, was nearly silent, and was capable of firing a .31-caliber round forty times before recharging. Upon conclusion of the council, the expedition continued upriver.

Tragedy struck the expedition on 20 August, when Sgt. Charles Floyd died of what modern medical authorities believe was peritonitis from a perforated or ruptured appendix. Floyd had been ill for some weeks, but nothing Lewis or Clark did seemed to help. On 19 August he became violently ill and was unable to retain anything in his stomach or bowels. Lewis stayed up most of the night ministering to him, but Floyd passed away just before noon the next day. That afternoon the expedition buried Floyd with full military honors near Sioux City, Iowa, on the highest hill overlooking a river the men named in tribute to their stricken comrade. Sergeant Floyd was the only member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition to lose his life. Two days later the captains ordered the men to choose Floyd's replacement. Pvt. Patrick Gass received nineteen votes, while Pvts. William Barton and George Gibson each received five. In their orders of 26 August, Lewis and Clark appointed Patrick Gass to the rank of sergeant in "*the corps of volunteers for North Western Discovery*." This was the first time the captains used this term to describe the expedition.

The Corps of Discovery entered Sioux country on 27 August near Yankton, South Dakota. As the boats passed the mouth of the James River, a young Indian boy swam out to meet one of the pirogues. When the expedition pulled to shore, two more Indian youths greeted them. The boys informed Lewis and Clark that a large Sioux village lay not far up the James River. Anxious to meet the Yankton Sioux, the captains sent Sergeant Pryor and two Frenchmen with the Indians to the Sioux village. They received a warm welcome and arranged for the chiefs to meet Captains Lewis and Clark. On the morning of 29 August, the Corps of Discovery met the Yankton Sioux with both parties dressed in full regalia. As the Sioux approached the council, the soldiers came to attention, raised the American flag, and fired the keelboat's bow swivel gun. The Yanktons also had a sense of drama. Musicians playing and singing preceded their chiefs as they made their way to the American camp. After greeting one another, Lewis gave his basic Indian speech. When he finished, the chiefs said they would need to confer with the tribal elders. Lewis was learning Indian protocol, which required of him patience and understanding. The

captains then presented the chiefs with medals, an officer's coat and hat, and the American flag. After the formalities were over, young Sioux warriors demonstrated their skill with bows and arrows. The soldiers handed out prizes of beads. In the evening the men built fires around which the Indians danced and told of their great feats in battle. The Corps of Discovery was truly impressed with the peaceful Yankton Sioux. Later, the same could not be said about the Teton Sioux.

From the time they had left St. Louis, Captains Lewis and Clark knew they would eventually have to face the aggressive Teton Sioux. Careful diplomacy would be required. On one hand, the Teton Sioux had a bad reputation for harassing and intimidating traders and demanding toll. On the other hand, of all the tribes known to Jefferson, it was the powerful Teton Sioux whom he had singled out in his instructions for special attention. Jefferson urged Lewis and Clark "to make a friendly impression" upon the Sioux. Acutely aware of the often-violent tactics the Teton Sioux used to control the Upper Missouri, the expedition, in Clark's words, "prepared all things for action in case of necessity."

On the evening of 23 September, just below the mouth of the Bad River (opposite present-day Pierre, South Dakota), three Sioux boys swam across the Missouri River to greet the Corps of Discovery. Anxious to begin talks, the captains told the boys that their chiefs were invited to a parley the following day. But the next afternoon, as the Corps of Discovery was preparing for the council, Pvt. John Colter (who had gone ashore to hunt) reported that some Teton warriors had stolen one of the expedition's horses. Suddenly, five Indians appeared on shore. As the captains tried to speak with the Indians, they realized that neither group understood the other. Later that evening, Lewis met with some of the Sioux leaders, who promised to return the horse. In his journal, Lewis reported "all well" with the Sioux.

Early on Tuesday morning, 25 September, on a sandbar in the mouth of the Bad River, the Corps of Discovery met the leaders of the Teton Sioux: Black Buffalo, the Grand Chief; the Partisan, second chief; Buffalo Medicine, third chief; and two lesser leaders. The council opened on a generous note, with soldiers and Indians offering food to eat. By ten o'clock both banks of the river were lined with Indians. At noon the formalities began. Lacking a skilled interpreter, Lewis made a much shorter speech, but one that upheld the essential elements established in his earlier talks. After the Corps of Discovery marched by the chiefs, Lewis and Clark

presented them with gifts suited to their stature. Evidently unaware of factional Sioux politics, the captains inadvertently slighted the Partisan and Buffalo Medicine. The chiefs complained that their gifts were inadequate. Indeed, they demanded that the Americans either stop their upriver progress or at least leave with them one of the pirogues loaded with gifts as tribute. Hoping to divert their attention, Lewis and Clark took the three chiefs in one of the pirogues to the keelboat, where Lewis demonstrated his air gun. Unimpressed, the chiefs repeated their demands. After some whiskey, the Partisan pretended to be drunk. Fearing a bloody melee, Clark and three men struggled to get the Indians ashore. When the pirogue landed, three young warriors seized the bow cable. The Partisan then moved toward Clark, speaking roughly and staggering into him. Determined not to be bullied, Clark drew his sword and alerted Lewis and the keelboat crew to prepare for action. Suddenly, soldiers and Indians faced each other, arms at the ready. A careless action by an individual on either side might have touched off a fight that might have destroyed the expedition. Fortunately, the members of the corps held their fire, and Lewis, Clark, and Black Buffalo calmed the situation.

Over the next two days both sides tried to ease tensions. The Sioux held an impressive ceremony at their village on the evening of 26 September. After Black Buffalo spoke, he said a prayer, lit the peace pipe, and offered it to Lewis and Clark. After the solemnities were over, the Corps of Discovery was treated to all of the Sioux delicacies, and hospitality reigned in the camp. At nightfall, a huge fire was made in the center of the village to light the way for musicians and dancers. Sergeant Ordway found the music "delightful." Shortly after midnight the chiefs ended the festivities and returned with Lewis and Clark to the keelboat, where they spent the night. The next day Lewis and Clark made separate trips to the Sioux villages and presented more gifts. On 28 September, as the Corps of Discovery made final preparations for departure, Black Buffalo and the Partisan made their now-familiar demand that the expedition remain with them. Both Lewis and Clark were weary of the constant demand for gifts and sensed trouble from the well-armed Sioux warriors lining the banks of the river. After an angry exchange of words, Lewis tossed some tobacco to the Indians. Realizing that he could not keep the expedition from leaving, Black Buffalo ended the confrontation and allowed the boats to pass.

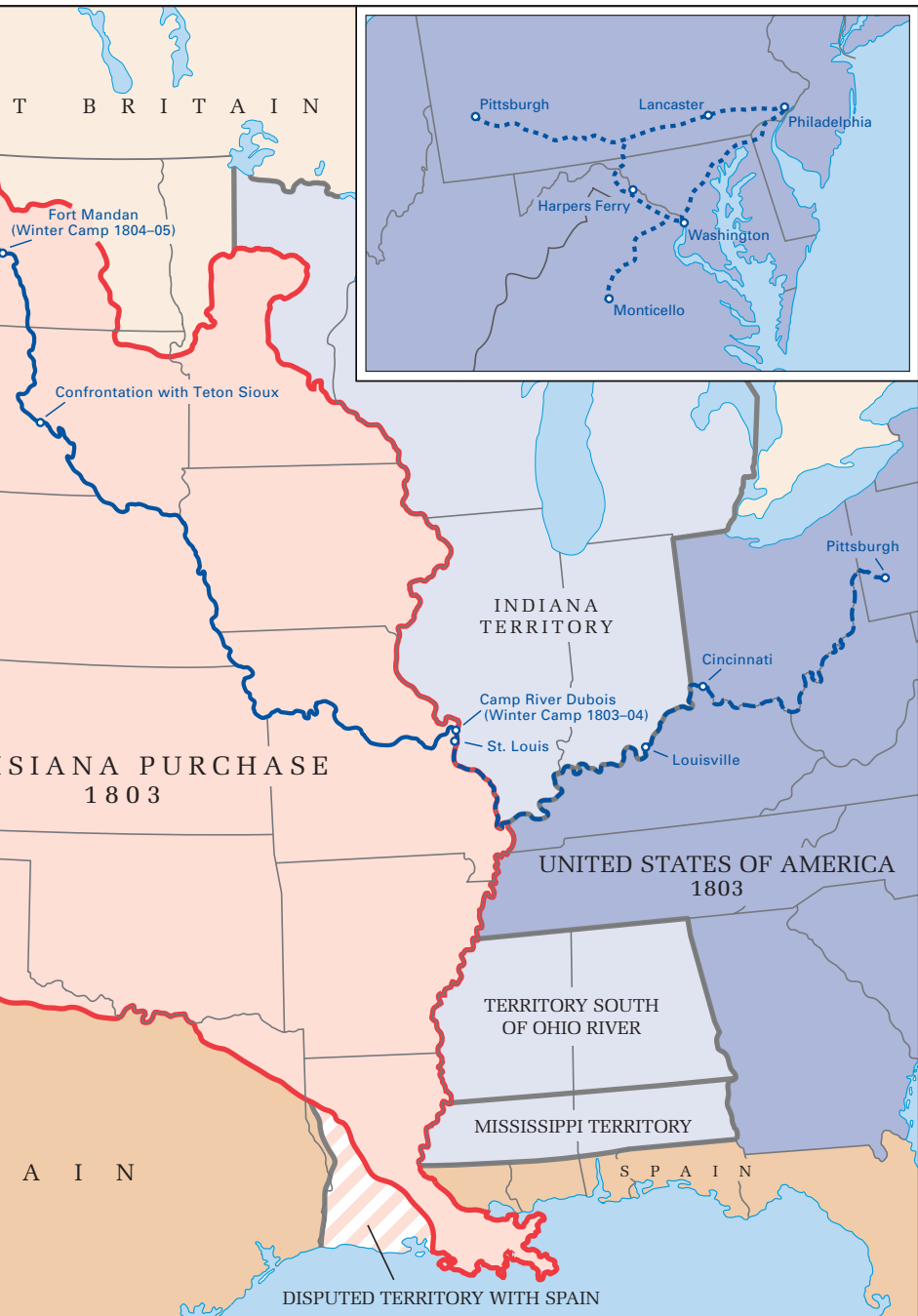
News of the expedition's confrontation with the Teton Sioux spread rapidly up and down river. Captains Lewis and Clark had

demonstrated sound leadership and bold determination, while the training, discipline, and teamwork of the men had gained them much prestige. While the success of the expedition at Bad River was due in large part to Chief Black Buffalo, who sought to avoid bloodshed, the fact that the Sioux had permitted the Americans to pass gave hope to the tribes of the Upper Missouri. Between 8 and 12 October, the Corps of Discovery visited the Arikara villages in north central South Dakota. The councils went smoothly: The Arikara chiefs were pleased with their gifts and amazed with the air gun, while the captains learned much about the surrounding country and its tribes. On 26 October, five days after the first snow fell, the expedition arrived near the junction of the Knife and Missouri Rivers, roughly sixty miles upstream from present-day Bismarck, North Dakota, and 1,600 miles from Camp River Dubois. This was the home of the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes.

Described as “the central marketplace of the Northern Plains,” the five Mandan and Hidatsa villages attracted many Europeans and Indians alike. With a population of nearly 4,400, this was the largest concentration of Indians on the Missouri River. After visiting all five villages, Lewis and Clark prepared for their important council scheduled for 28 October. This would be the largest council yet, bringing together leaders from the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes. That Sunday weather prevented Lewis and Clark from holding their meeting, so the captains spent the day entertaining the chiefs who had arrived and reconnoitering the Missouri River for a good location for their winter quarters. On 29 October, just three days after arriving, Captains Lewis and Clark held their most impressive council to date. After the usual display of American military prowess, Lewis gave a speech that not only stressed American sovereignty, but also sought harmonious relations among the tribes themselves. Next came the distribution of gifts to the chiefs. Then Lewis ended the proceedings with a display of his air gun, “which appeared to astonish the natives very much.”

With the onset of winter, the Corps of Discovery had to find a suitable place for their camp. On 2 November Captain Clark selected a site directly opposite the lowest of the five Indian villages and two miles away from it. The next day the Corps of Discovery set to work building a triangular-shaped structure that consisted of two converging rows of huts (or rooms), with storage rooms at the apex (the top of which provided a sentry post) and a palisade with gate at the base or front. The walls were about eigh-





teen feet high, and the rooms measured fourteen feet square. The men finished the fort on Christmas Day 1804 and named it Fort Mandan in honor of their neighbors. For security, the captains mounted the swivel cannon from the bow of the keelboat on the fort, kept a sentry on duty at all times, refused Indians admittance after dark, and kept the gate locked at night.

While at Fort Mandan, the Corps of Discovery continued its association with the Indians. The soldiers took part in Indian hunting parties and social events and built goodwill by providing rudimentary medical care and the services of their blacksmith, John Shields, to the tribes. They took time to speak with British and French-Canadian traders who were well established with the Indians and gained valuable intelligence. On 27 October they hired René Jessaume as an interpreter with the Mandan. A week later they recruited French-Canadian fur trader Baptiste Lepage into the permanent party to replace Private Newman, who had been “discarded” from the expedition for “repeated expressions of a highly criminal and mutinous nature.” Then they hired another French-Canadian fur trader, Toussaint Charbonneau, as an interpreter. The 44-year-old Charbonneau had been living and trading among the Hadatsa for the past five years and had been active on the Upper Missouri since at least 1793. Later, in March 1805, Lewis and Clark hired Charbonneau to accompany the expedition west and agreed that he could bring along his young Shoshone wife, Sacagawea, who had given birth a month earlier to a boy they named Jean Baptiste.

On 6 April 1805, Lewis and Clark sent the keelboat back to St. Louis. In the keelboat were Corporal Warfington; six privates (including Newman and Reed, who had been discharged from the expedition for desertion); Gravelines, the pilot and interpreter; two French-Canadian traders; and an Arikara chief returning to his village. The next day the remainder of the Corps of Discovery departed the Mandan villages in two pirogues and six dugout canoes heading north. Along the way west, the expedition continued to note abundant plant and wildlife. The scenery was stunning, and spirits were high. On 14 April Clark saw his first grizzly bear. Eleven days later the corps reached the mouth of the Yellowstone River and camped there. On 10 May the men saw their first moose. A week later Clark noted in his journal that the men were beginning to use deerskins to make moccasins and leggings, as the original uniform trousers were wearing out.

Lewis and Clark faced their first major navigational test on 2 June 1805. Arriving at the junction of two large rivers, the cap-



Replica of Fort Mandan (© 2001, Charley Van Pelt)

tains needed to decide correctly which fork was the Missouri. Between 4 and 8 June Lewis and a party reconnoitered the northwest branch, which Lewis later named the Marias River, while Clark and another group explored the southwestern branch. After comparing their notes, reevaluating their intelligence, and studying the maps they had brought from St. Louis, Lewis and Clark determined that the southwestern branch was the Missouri River, even though all their men thought otherwise. Nevertheless, in a great tribute to their leaders, the men followed Lewis and Clark, although they believed the captains were wrong. Then, on 13 June, Lewis saw a majestic sight: the Great Falls of the Missouri River. The captains had been right. Here, the Corps of Discovery made camp and prepared for the great portage.

Lewis and Clark were proud of their men. The Corps of Discovery was “zealously attached to the enterprise, and anxious to proceed.” Indeed, as Lewis wrote, there was not “a whisper of discontent or murmur” among the men, who acted in unison and “with the most perfect harmony [*sic*].” That the Corps of Discovery was a tough, resourceful, and tightly knit group was due to the great leadership of the two captains, who complement-

ed each other so well and had molded their troops into a confident and cohesive force. They would need that confidence and cohesiveness during the arduous eighteen-mile portage around the Great Falls. Over the next three weeks, the Corps of Discovery struggled up steep slopes, over prickly pear cactus thorns and jagged ridges, around gullies and ravines, in the scorching summer heat to complete their passage of the falls. The expedition rested for two days and continued the journey on 14 July.

On 12 August the Corps of Discovery reached the source of the Missouri River. The next day an advance party of Lewis, Drouillard, and two privates encountered the Shoshones. Using friendly hand signals and gifts, the soldiers managed to win the trust of the Indians. Four days later Clark and the rest of the Corps of Discovery joined Lewis and established Camp Fortunate. At the council that evening, Sacagawea was there to interpret. But before the meeting began, she recognized the Shoshone chief Cameahwait as her brother. She immediately embraced him. Lewis wrote that the reunion was "really affecting." More gifts, promises of future trading, and the good fortune that the chief of the Shoshones was the brother of Sacagawea enabled the party to secure horses and guides for the journey along the Continental Divide and over the rugged Bitterroots to the country of the Nez Perce Indians. The hard, forced march across the Rockies along the Lolo Trail, where the freezing cold and lack of food pushed the Corps of Discovery to the limits of its endurance, ended in late September, when the advance party under Clark met the Nez Perce.

On 23 September Lewis and Clark held a council with Twisted Hair and some lesser chiefs of the Nez Perce. Anxious to get to the Pacific (and aware of the fact that they were no longer in U.S. territory), the captains dispensed with the usual displays of American military might and instead passed out medals and gifts, explained their mission to Twisted Hair, and requested his assistance in building canoes for the expedition. Indeed, the soldiers were so weak from crossing the Rockies that they could hardly move and spent nearly a week recovering. The Nez Perce could have easily destroyed the expedition, but thanks largely to their generosity and kindness, the canoes were finished by 6 October and the Corps of Discovery was ready for its final leg to the Pacific.

On 7 October the expedition began its journey down the Clearwater, Snake, and Columbia Rivers to the ocean. In dealing with the tribes they encountered along the way, Lewis and Clark

followed their usual practice of expressing joy at meeting the Indians, urging them to make peace with their neighbors, handing out gifts, and promising more trade goods from future American traders. To impress the tribes, the Corps of Discovery occasionally paraded in formation or showed off a magnifying glass, the air gun, or another device. Friendly talk and displays of the expedition's military prowess usually impressed the Indians and guaranteed safe passage, although the soldiers were less successful in halting the intertribal warfare.

In the distance lay the Pacific Ocean. On 7 November the soldiers spotted an inlet from the Pacific near the mouth of the Columbia River. "Great joy in camp," Clark wrote in his journal, "we are in view of the Ocian [*sic*] . . . this great Pacific Ocean [*sic*] which we been so long anxious to See [*sic*]." As soon as they arrived at the ocean, Lewis and Clark began reconnoitering for a site to make their winter camp. After exploring the region along the northern shore of the Columbia near the ocean, the Corps of Discovery crossed the Columbia to its southern side, where it was more sheltered from the heavy winds and rough seas. There, the soldiers built Fort Clatsop close to the present location of Astoria, Oregon.

The men of the Corps of Discovery named their winter quarters after the local tribe, as they had the previous winter. Fort Clatsop was about fifty feet square, with two structures that faced each other. One structure was divided into three rooms that housed the three enlisted messes. The other structure was divided into four rooms, one of which served as quarters for the captains and another the Charbonneau family. The third was the orderly room, the fourth a smokehouse. Palisade walls joined these two structures. At one end was the main gate, at the other a smaller, "water gate" (fresh spring water was about thirty yards away). In the middle of the fort was a parade ground. On 30 December the expedition completed Fort Clatsop as its winter quarters, establishing tight security to safeguard its equipment and to avoid any trouble. Clark wrote that "the Sight [*sic*] of our Sentinal [*sic*]" brought a sense of peace and security to the Corps of Discovery.

Life at Fort Clatsop was depressing. Of the 112 (some say 102) days the expedition was there, it rained every day except twelve, and only half of those were clear days. Most of the men suffered from being constantly wet and cold, and their clothing was rotting off their backs. Making salt was a vital diversion, but boiling ocean water was a slow and tedious process. After two months the oper-



Relica of Fort Clatsop (© 2001, Charley Van Pelt)

ation produced only one bushel of salt. Without salt, preserving food in the wet and humid weather was a serious problem. To make matters worse, hunting parties had a difficult time finding enough palatable food for the expedition. Despite these challenges, Lewis and Clark kept everyone busy, including themselves. Lewis spent much of his time writing in his journal on botanical, ethnological, meteorological, and zoological topics, while Clark completed the first map ever made of the land between North Dakota and the Pacific coast. Together they discussed what they had seen and learned from the Indians.

After three months of constant rain, dietary problems, fleas, and boredom, the Corps of Discovery left Fort Clatsop on 23 March 1806. Concerned with the security of the expedition, the two captains wanted “to lose as little time as possible” getting to the Nez Perce. They decided to return along the same path they had come, satisfied that it was the best possible route. Even though security was rigid, at various points on the way up the Columbia, Lewis and Clark had to use the threat of violence to preclude trouble with the Indians. In early May they finally reached their old friends, the Nez Perce. Once again, the Nez Perce demonstrated their hospitality by feeding and taking care of the Corps of Discovery. During a two-month stay with the Nez



*Replica of the "Captains Quarters" Occupied by Lewis and Clark
at Fort Clatsop (© 2001, Charley Van Pelt)*

Perce, Lewis and Clark held councils with the tribal elders, while their men participated in horse races and other games with young Indian warriors. Clark also used his limited medical skills to create more goodwill. These activities built great relations with the Indians. Indeed, Lewis wrote that the Nez Perce considered Clark their "favorite physician."

On 10 June, over the objections of the Nez Perce, the Corps of Discovery set out toward the Lolo Trail. The Indians had warned Lewis and Clark that the snow was still too deep to attempt a recrossing of the Rockies. Eager to get home, the captains ignored this sound advice and proceeded on without Indian guides. In a week the expedition found itself enveloped in snow twelve to fifteen feet deep. Admitting that the going was "difficult and dangerous," Lewis and Clark decided to turn back. "This was the first time since we have been on this long tour," Lewis wrote, "that we have ever been compelled to retreat or make a retrograde march." Sergeant Gass agreed, and noted that most of the men were "melancholy and disappointed." Two weeks later, the Corps of Discovery set out once again, this time with Indian guides.

Averaging nearly twenty-six miles a day, the expedition took just six days to reach the eastern side of the Rockies. On 30 June Lewis and Clark set up camp at Travelers Rest. There, the Corps of Discovery rested for three days before implementing the final portion of its exploration.

According to the plan Lewis and Clark had formulated at Fort Clatsop, they split their command into four groups. Captain Lewis, Sergeant Gass, Drouillard, and seven privates would head northeast to explore the Marias River and hopefully meet with the Blackfeet to establish good relations with them. At the portage camp near the Great Falls, Lewis would leave Gass and two men to recover the cache left there. Captain Clark would take the remainder of the expedition southeast across the Continental Divide to the Three Forks of the Missouri. There, he would send Sergeant Ordway, nine privates, and the cache recovered from Camp Fortunate down the Missouri to link up with Lewis and Gass at the mouth of the Marias River. Clark, five privates, the Charbonneau family, and York would then descend the Yellowstone River to its juncture with the Missouri River. Meanwhile, Sergeant Pryor and three privates would take the horses overland to the Mandan villages and deliver a letter to the British North West Company, seeking to bring it into an American trading system Lewis sought to establish. Lewis and Clark would unite at the juncture of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers in August.

The willingness of Lewis and Clark to divide their command in such rugged, uncertain, and potentially dangerous country shows the high degree of confidence they had in themselves, their non-commissioned officers, and their troops. In addition to the physical challenges the expedition would certainly meet, war parties of Crow, Blackfeet, Hidatsa, and other tribes regularly roamed the countryside and threatened to destroy the expedition piecemeal. By dividing their command in the face of uncertainty, Lewis and Clark took a bold but acceptable risk to accomplish their mission.

Separated for forty days, the Corps of Discovery proceeded to accomplish nearly all its objectives. Lewis and his team successfully explored the Marias but narrowly escaped a deadly confrontation with the Blackfeet in which two Indians died. What had begun as a friendly meeting turned into a tragedy. On the afternoon of 26 July Lewis came upon several Blackfeet, greeted them, handed out a medal, a flag, and a handkerchief, and invited them to camp with his party. They agreed. Lewis was thrilled, but at the

same time somewhat apprehensive, for the Nez Perce, the Shoshoni, and other Plains tribes had warned Lewis to avoid their traditional enemy. At council that evening, Lewis discussed the purpose of his mission, asked the Blackfeet about their tribe and its trading habits, and urged them to join an American-led trade alliance. During the discussion, Lewis noticed that the Indians possessed only two guns; the rest were armed with bows, arrows, and tomahawks. The meeting concluded with smoking the pipe. Nevertheless, after standing first watch, Lewis woke Reubin Field and ordered him to observe the movements of the Blackfeet and awaken him and the others if any Indian left the camp.

At daybreak Joseph Field was standing watch without his rifle. As the Blackfeet crowded around the fire to warm themselves, Field realized he had carelessly left his rifle unattended beside his sleeping brother Reubin. Suddenly, Drouillard's shouts awakened Lewis, who noticed Drouillard scuffling with an Indian over a rifle. Lewis reached for his rifle, but it was gone. He drew his pistol, looked up, and saw an Indian running away with his rifle. At the same time, another Indian had stealthily slipped behind Joseph Field and grabbed both his and Reubin's rifles. The men chased the Indians, and Lewis and Drouillard managed to recover their rifles without incident. But when the Field brothers caught the Indian with their rifles, a fight ensued and the Blackfoot died of a knife wound to his heart. After recovering the weapons, the soldiers saw the Blackfeet attempting to take their horses. Lewis ordered the men to shoot if necessary. Running after two Blackfeet, Lewis warned them to release the horses or he would fire. One jumped behind a rock while the other raised his British musket toward Lewis. Instinctively, Lewis fired, hitting the Indian in the abdomen. The Blackfoot fell to his knees but returned fire. "Being bearheaded [*sic*]," Lewis wrote, "I felt the wind of his bullet very distinctly." Fearing for their lives, Lewis, Drouillard, and the Field brothers began a frantic ride southeastward to reunite with Sergeants Gass and Ordway at the mouth of the Marias. This they accomplished on 28 July, after riding nearly 120 miles in slightly more than twenty-four hours.

As Lewis and his party made their way from the site where they had encountered the Blackfeet, Sergeant Ordway's group had recovered the cache at Camp Fortunate, proceeded down the Missouri River, and linked up with Sergeant Gass without incident. Gass' team had already recovered the cache at the portage camp at the Great Falls and was awaiting Lewis and Ordway. Meanwhile,



Pompey's Pillar (© 2001, Charley Van Pelt)

while Clark and his party were exploring the Yellowstone River, Pryor could not complete his mission. On the second night out, a Crow raiding party stole all the soldiers' horses. Demonstrating their ingenuity, Pryor and his men remained calm, walked to Pompey's Pillar (named in honor of Sacagawea's infant son, whom Clark nicknamed Pomp), killed a buffalo for food and its hide, made two circular Mandan-type bullboats, and floated downriver to link up with Clark on the morning of 8 August. Four days later, Lewis and his group found Clark along the banks of the Missouri River.

Clark was astonished to see Lewis lying in the white pirogue recovering from a gunshot wound in the posterior, but he was relieved to learn it was not serious. While hunting on 11 August, Private Cruzatte apparently had mistaken Lewis for an elk. On 14 August the expedition reached the Mandan villages. After a three-day visit with the Mandans, the Corps of Discovery bade farewell to the Charbonneau family and Private Colter (who had requested an early release so he could accompany two trappers up the Yellowstone River) and proceeded down the Missouri River. On 1 September Lewis and Clark held a council with some friendly Yankton Sioux. Three days later the Corps of Discovery stopped to visit the grave of Sergeant Floyd. On the morning of 23

September 1806, the Corps of Discovery arrived at St. Louis to the cheers of crowds lining the riverfront.

Over the past two hundred years, the Lewis and Clark Expedition has become famous as an epic of human achievement, covering nearly eight thousand miles in two years, four months, and ten days. Although the Corps of Discovery did not locate an uninterrupted, direct route to the Pacific Ocean as Jefferson had hoped, the expedition strengthened the nation's claim to the Pacific Northwest and paved the way for future Army expeditions, which helped to open the American West to commerce and settlement. The two captains and some of their men kept detailed journals and brought back invaluable geographic and scientific data, including 178 new plants and 122 previously unknown species and subspecies of animals. They also made friends with several Indian tribes and gave the nation a foothold in the region's fur trade.

The U.S. Army had made a singular contribution to the success of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The Army furnished the organization and much of the manpower, equipment, and supplies. Military discipline and training proved crucial, both to winning over potentially hostile tribes and to overcoming the huge natural obstacles to crossing the continent. The journey of the Corps of Discovery demonstrated, as today's force continues to, that the U.S. Army has many roles and helps the nation in many ways.

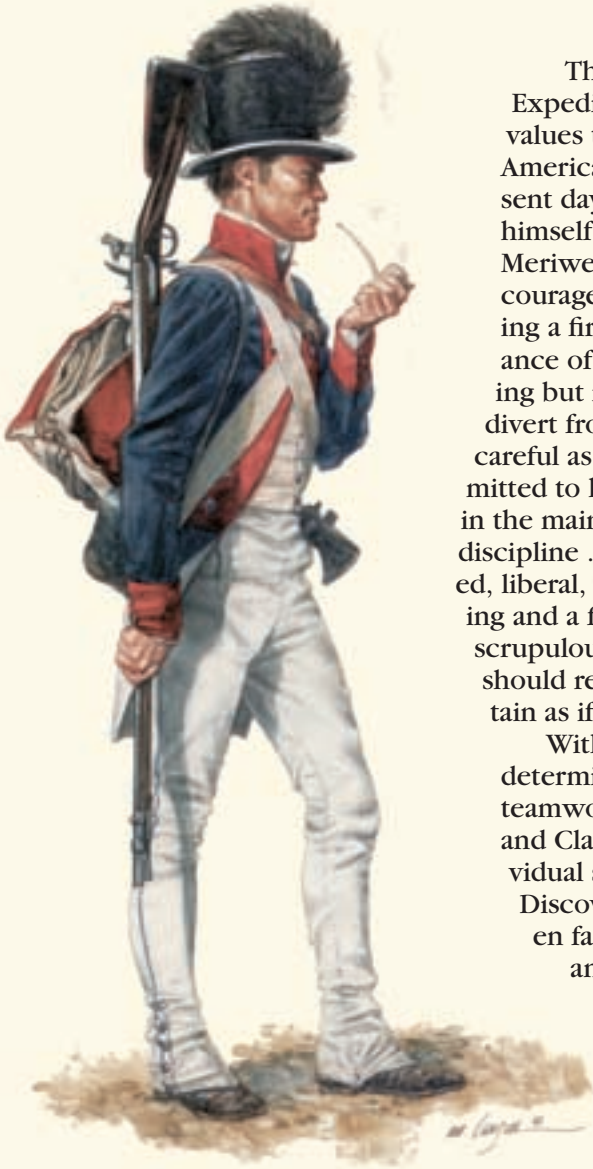
- -- FURTHER READINGS -- -

Several excellent books on the Lewis and Clark Expedition should be available at a library or bookstore near you. Donald Jackson, *Thomas Jefferson and the Stony Mountains: Exploring the West from Monticello* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), is a magnificent study that places the Lewis and Clark Expedition in the context of American history. James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), is key to understanding the expedition's encounters with the Indians. Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns, *Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery* (New York: Knopf, 1997), a well-illustrated work, accompanies the Public Broadcasting System's program on the expedition. Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), is the latest and most extensive edition of the journals kept by the two captains and some of their men. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), is by a noted historian who has spent many summers on the Lewis and Clark Trail. Other works include Robert B. Betts, *In Search of York: The Slave Who Went to the Pacific with Lewis and Clark* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1985); David J. Peck, *Or Perish in the Attempt: Wilderness Medicine in the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Helena, Mont.: Farcountry Press, 2002); Eldon G. Chuinard, *Only One Man Died: The Medical Aspects of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1979); Jerome O. Steffen, *William Clark: Jeffersonian Man on the Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977). Those interested in following the Lewis and Clark Trail may like Thomas Schmidt, *National Geographic's Guide to the Lewis & Clark Trail* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1998), or Roy E. Appleman, *Lewis and Clark: Historic Places Associated with their Transcontinental Exploration, 1804-1806* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1975). On the U.S. Army of this era, see Theodore J. Crackel, *Mr. Jefferson's Army: Political and Social Reform of the Military Establishment, 1801-1809* (New York:

New York University Press, 1987). William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1863* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), describes various explorations undertaken by the Army after the Lewis and Clark Expedition. On Jefferson, see Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

Cover: *Detail from Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole*
by Charles M. Russell, 1912 (Montana Historical Society)

ARMY VALUES AND THE



The Lewis and Clark Expedition exemplified the values that have guided the American soldier to the present day. Thomas Jefferson himself described Meriwether Lewis: “Of courage undaunted, possessing a firmness & perseverance of purpose which nothing but impossibilities could divert from it’s [*sic*] direction, careful as a father of those committed to his charge, yet steady in the maintenance of order & discipline . . . honest, disinterested, liberal, of sound understanding and a fidelity to truth so scrupulous that whatever he should report would be as certain as if seen by ourselves.”

Without the courage, determination, skill, and teamwork, not only of Lewis and Clark, but of each individual soldier, the Corps of Discovery would have fallen far short of its objective and may well have encountered disaster. The spirit of the corps lives on in the soldiers and values of today’s Army.

1st U.S. Infantry—Full Dress
by Michael Haynes
(Michael Haynes Historic Art)

LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

LOYALTY

DUTY

RESPECT

SELFLESS
SERVICE

HONOR

INTEGRITY

PERSONAL
COURAGE



Capt. Meriwether Lewis—Full Dress
by Michael Haynes
(Michael Haynes Historic Art)

