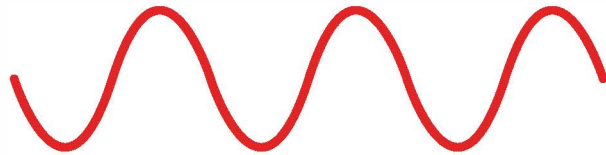


REMEMBERING  
A  
SINE WAVE



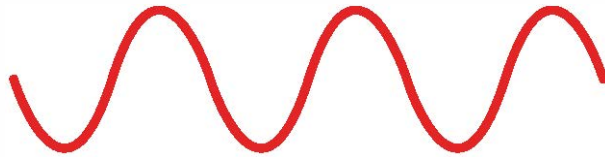
A  
HISTORY  
OF  
FEAST  
AND  
FAMINE  
FOR THE  
U.S. ARMY

BY  
GENERAL FREDERICK J. KROESEN, USA RET.





REMEMBERING  
A  
SINE WAVE



A  
HISTORY  
OF  
FEAST  
AND  
FAMINE  
FOR THE  
U.S. ARMY

BY  
GENERAL FREDERICK J. KROESEN, USA RET.

*Adapted from Frederick J. Kroesen, "Remembering a Sine Wave," ARMY, August 2013, p. 15.*

We can gain perspective on this post-war period by considering historical parallels. The Army has faced similar challenges before. In fact, after every major conflict in our history—all the way back to the Revolutionary War—pressures on the Army to decrease in size have also resulted in decreases in effectiveness. The result has been tragic defeats when the Army was not ready for the next war. The decline after World War I led to the failure at Kasserine Pass. The loss of effectiveness after World War II led to the defeat of Task Force Smith in Korea in June of 1950. Today we again find ourselves in the wake of great success on the battlefield. We are at peak effectiveness. Victories in the Cold War, Panama, and the Gulf War demonstrate that today's Army holds a warfighting edge—an effectiveness advantage—over our opponents. As in the past, we now face a changing environment and the mandate to decrease the size of the Army. This time, however, we must break the historical pattern. We must maintain our warfighting effectiveness as we reshape the future. My theme as Chief of Staff is “No More Task Force Smiths.”

General **Gordon R. Sullivan**,  
Remarks at the Eisenhower Luncheon,  
Annual Meeting of the Association of the United States Army, 15 October 1991

*Cover: The 24th Infantry Division's Task Force Smith  
arrives in Taejon, South Korea, on 2 July 1950.*

# REMEMBERING A SINE WAVE

## A HISTORY OF FEAST AND FAMINE FOR THE U.S. ARMY

### INTRODUCTION

The 20th century provided the American nation with a long history in which the resources needed to fight wars and to maintain credible fighting forces during periods of peace varied from surfeit to meagerness, from feast to famine. The impact of each of these identifiable periods on the mission effectiveness of the Army and on the lives of Soldiers and their families is both a lesson in history and, perhaps, a worrisome portent for the 21st century.

### THE EARLY YEARS

The 20th century was reminiscent of the pattern established as early as 1775 when the Continental Congress authorized the activation of 10 companies of infantry when it had no real authority to pay for them. The Congress thereafter had to rely on meager and grudgingly provided contributions from the colonies. The consequences included the barefoot Army that marched from Washington's Crossing to Trenton on Christmas Eve 1776, privation and starvation at Valley Forge and a near mutiny of the officer corps in 1783 that was thwarted only by the personal persuasion of General George Washington himself.

Victory, coupled with the abhorrence of "standing armies" and the British practices of housing and provisioning Soldiers in the homes and from the staples of the colonists resulted in the practical disappearance of a national army and navy. Washington, as President in the 1790s, is rumored to have considered taking the field as Commander-in-Chief to lead some volunteers to quell the Whiskey Rebellion.

The following century began well as the military academies were established, but the entire 19th century was a continuation of avoiding a standing army; wars were fought, with few exceptions, by volunteers and state militias. The War of 1812 was a fitful demonstration by untrained forces until the 7th Infantry “Cottonbalers” won the Battle of New Orleans after the war had ended.

Federal forces in the Mexican War were a minor element of the volunteers who captured Mexico City. The war is best remembered by the biographers of Zachary Taylor (the man who became President) and of Robert E. Lee, Winfield Scott, Ulysses S. Grant, etc. (men who became famous as leaders in the Civil War). During that war the small regular army contingent was employed to defend Washington, DC, while the great campaigns were fought by state regiments, brigades and divisions of varied training and battlefield skills. For the most part both armies lived off the land, requisitioning foodstuffs, horses and all else but weapons and ammunition, which were manufactured at various arsenals and ironworks throughout the country.

The end of the Civil War brought on another period of almost complete disinterest in military preparedness. The next 30 years were summed up by General John J. Pershing in his memoir as a period in which pacifism flourished and the absence of any foreign threat resulted in a Congress that “was penurious in its appropriations for the maintenance of the Army” and “the strength of the Army . . . so reduced that it was no larger than was needed as a national police force.” At the end of the century the Cuban people sought military help in their quest for independence, but despite three years of developing trouble, “war with Spain was not dreamed of.” As a consequence, when the battleship U.S.S. *Maine* sank in the Havana harbor, relations deteriorated and the nations exchanged declarations of war, the authorized strength of the U.S. Army was 25,000 men, most of whom were dispersed in the western territories protecting against any renewal of the Indian Wars. The President immediately increased the authorization to 62,500. Within a month he called for 125,000 volunteers to join the Army that had no plans or capability to organize and train them and no staff to plan or conduct operations in the field.

Nevertheless, in the pattern repeated all too often in our history, the Army was ordered to invade Cuba, where the Spanish Army numbered 196,000. The 1st Cavalry Division and a few hastily assembled volunteer brigades—most notably

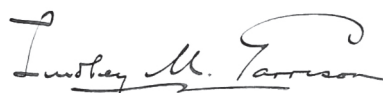
Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders—constituted a force less than 25,000 strong that was launched against a force almost eight times as large. The quick American victory was due to the ill-trained and ineptly led Spanish forces, but it contributed markedly to the belief that we were peerless on the battlefield. Fortunately the campaign did not last long enough for U.S. logistical inadequacies to influence the outcome negatively.

## THE 20TH CENTURY

The 20th century began with the Philippine insurrection, a return for the Army to the tactical operations of the Indian Wars and a forerunner for nation building and the trials of developing a foreign allied army—lessons that were important for all the years of the century to follow, both learned and too often ignored. Those early years also brought the invention of the airplane and the birth of what became a real revolution in military affairs.

---

[T]hose who are charged with responsibility on behalf of the public . . . should realize the unanswerable indictment that will lie against them if they shrink from incurring expense for what is vital to the Nation. When one has reached the conclusion that a minimum of military preparedness is essential, the question of its cost is secondary and cannot be permitted to be the determining factor. No citizen will or can properly object to the expenditure of money for vital national purposes.



Secretary of War **Lindley M. Garrison**,  
*Report of the Secretary of War to the President, 1914*  
(Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914), p.13.



---

In 1917, following reports of the German atrocities of those years and responding with fervor and patriotism, the nation went to war. Volunteer soldiers—partially trained and minimally equipped—earned respect and gratitude on the battlefields of Europe. The costs were almost ignored as the country made every effort to provide the tools and supplies that would create a modern Army. But almost immediately after the Armistice, the Army of about 3.5 million troops began a reduction that reached only 202,000 in 1920, then 132,000 in 1923. During that period the antiwar antimilitarists and those who believed in the League of Nations' ability to guarantee the peace of the world demanded minimizing, if not

eliminating, funds for the Army and Navy. Congress authorized a Regular Army of 240,000 but funded a force of between 130,000 and 150,000—always less than the service recommended—until 1939.

The result of those two decades of budget famine is addressed in the early pages of the introductory volume of *U.S. Army in World War II*, the Army's official history of that war: "That America was peace-minded for two decades is hardly worth the saying; what matters is that because of this state of mind the nation's military strength was allowed to decrease and decay to the point where it became tragically insufficient and . . . incapable of restoration save after the loss of many lives and the expenditure of other resources beyond comprehension." Pearl Harbor, the Bataan Death March, the loss of Wake Island, Kasserine Pass and other defeats stretching into 1943 and the inability to launch the decisive operations to end the war until 1944 prove the validity of those observations.

---

Fatuous self-complacency or vanity, or shortsightedness in refusing to prepare for danger, is both foolish and wicked in such a Nation as ours; and past experience has shown that such fatuity in refusing to recognize or prepare for crises in advance is usually succeeded by a mad panic.



*Theodore Roosevelt*

Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in Secretary of War John W. Weeks, "The Development of Our Need for a Defensive Policy" *Report of the Secretary of War to the President, 1922* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), p. 5.

---

A feast period began in 1940 with the draft and a burgeoning budget that ultimately built land, naval and air forces of incomparable power and versatility. It also built an industrial giant that dominated the world economy for generations, guaranteeing the prosperity of the country for the entire century. Nevertheless, it had taken four years to build, equip and train the forces and another year to end that war successfully.

The Army shared the prosperity of that period. New equipment poured in from industry, manpower was provided as needed, supplies were profuse and money was printed or borrowed to pay for everything. The nation went deeply into debt, but it had created the industrial base that would pay for it all with the profits from its products in the world markets. The Army did not share for long, though. Upon



the surrender of Germany and Japan, the armed forces suffered immediate budget slashes as President Harry Truman and Congress eliminated or minimized funds for the services. Army strength and structure evaporated as the country once again adopted peace as the national purpose and the atomic bomb as the guarantor of our security.

---

[Representative Julius Kahn of San Francisco] was a genuine friend of the Army during the war, but after the war he stated in the press that he believed that the Army should be cut down to 100,000 men. But this was the same number that the Allies had imposed on Germany after the war to make her impotent.



General **Peyton C. March**, "Reorganizing the Army After the War,"  
*The Nation at War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1932), p. 341.



---

Once again the consequence was tragic. The Korean War was thrust upon us and the Army had to commit an unready 7th Infantry Division, then stationed in Japan, and the ill-starred Task Force Smith to a period of excessive casualties and limited effectiveness in the early weeks of that campaign. The troops were poorly trained, ill-equipped and subjected to stinging and demoralizing defeats. It took months to restore the competence required to cope with enemy forces on the battlefield, a feat made possible only by the hasty recall of World War II soldiers, especially junior leaders, and the resilience of an industrial complex capable of a quick resurgence of wartime supplies and an acceleration of modern equipment production.

---

With no hope of getting the authorized Regimental Combat Team (a reinforced infantry regiment) from Hawaii to the battle zone in time, General MacArthur had ordered a makeshift infantry battalion to be flown to Korea without delay, with orders to make contact with the enemy as far forward as possible and, by fighting a delaying action, to buy time to bring more troops across. Destined for the airport at Suwon, at the time still in friendly hands, these troops were delayed by foul weather and landed eventually at Pusan Airport. From there they moved forward, along road and rail line to meet the steadily advancing enemy.

This was Task Force Smith, named for its Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel C. B. Smith, and for several bitter days, it was the entire United States fighting force on the

ground. It numbered just 500 men—two rifle companies, two platoons of 4.2 mortars (all it had to pass for artillery), a single 75-mm. recoilless rifle crew, and six 2.36” bazooka teams. Against them were ranged more than a hundred times as many enemy troops, with T-34 tanks and artillery. Task Force Smith had no reserves, no weapon capable of knocking out the thick-skinned tanks, and nothing to match the enemy howitzers. (Task Force Smith did include Battery A of the 52nd Field Artillery Battalion but this unit was slowed in its forward movement and was absent when action opened on July 5.)

It was tragic to picture this handful of poorly equipped men, trained for occupation rather than for battle, fresh from the idleness and luxury of peacetime Japan, where they lived on delicacies, whiled time away with girlfriends, and even found servants to shine their shoes—to picture them plodding forward without question or complaint to meet death on some nameless Korean hillside, where there was neither cover nor concealment, or in some foul-smelling rice paddy where filth rose calf-deep. The action they fought may have seemed futile and without hope. All they could do, at best, was to hold their place on some rise of ground until the hostile troops had almost completely encircled them or ammunition had run out. Then it was fall back through unknown countryside where every man might be an enemy and try feverishly to regroup somewhere for another hopeless stand. There was some panic, and much confusion, when the first battle was joined.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. B. Ridgway". The signature is fluid and cursive.

General **Matthew B. Ridgway**, *The Korean War*  
(Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), p.13.

---

With the termination of hostilities in 1953, the Eisenhower administration returned almost immediately to a national strategy of promoting peace and relying on now even more powerful nuclear weapons and more robust long-range delivery capabilities. Once again, the Army was almost ignored as a required force, its budget pared and its strength reduced. It adopted a new, leaner, versatile pentomic structure designed to survive and succeed on a nuclear battlefield. Budget priorities went to nuclear warheads and bomber and missile delivery systems of the Navy and Air Force. A high percentage of the Army budget bought the Jupiter, the Sergeant, the WAC Corporal, the Davy Crockett and two field artillery

warheads to dominate the battlefields of the nuclear age. All other forces were hollowed out, training was minimized and combat capabilities deteriorated. The principal concern of the era was passing the nuclear surety inspections of the Army Inspector General.

By 1961, the Army had become disillusioned with the pentomic organization; President John Kennedy became a promoter of Special Forces for engaging in counterrevolutionary actions to support the government of South Vietnam; and the Berlin Wall was erected. The Army suddenly became relevant to coping with both the Vietnam insurgency and the Warsaw Pact threat in Europe. A modest increase in the Army budget provided for the reorganization of Army divisions (the ROAD concept), which restored a more conventional structure for land combat. It was not a feast period, but there was a decided improvement in Army battlefield capability and readiness. There was a growth to 960,000 soldiers in the active force, a structure of 16 divisions and a reorganization of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson committed the armed forces to the Vietnam conflict. His decision was accompanied by a denial of any mobilization of the reserve components. Instead, he authorized an increase of 133,000 troops and the addition of one division and three independent brigades to the Army. Those decisions resulted in a major increase in draft quotas and a requirement for a major reorganization of the active forces to produce units whose missions had been the responsibility of the reserve components.

Over the subsequent three years, the Army grew to 1.5 million soldiers in 19 divisions. Once again, the Army enjoyed massive budget support—not a feast, but adequate support for combat operations and a structure still sufficient for its role in the deterrence of Warsaw Pact operations in Europe and any hostile action by the North Koreans.

Unfortunately, after 1968, popular support for Vietnam ebbed rapidly. Many personnel management decisions eroded the quality and commitment of our soldiers, and the Army suffered a serious deterioration. Drastic strength and budget reductions contributed to a weakened mission capability and a disconsolate manpower contingent in the early 1970s. The situation brought an end to the draft and a commitment to an all-volunteer Army. It also brought a recognition among Army leaders of the need for a rededication to quality, along with a major effort

to develop modern equipment and redefine Army doctrine and its training and education systems.

The creation of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command and U.S. Army Forces Command began a transformation of the Army that led to the restoration of its capabilities and its competence. A new equipment program, the Big 8, was to produce a new tank, an armored personnel carrier, three new helicopters, two air defense weapons and a scout vehicle. Skills qualification tests were established for all soldiers, the Noncommissioned Officer Education System created the first ever formal education for the middle-grade leaders of the Army and the officer education system was reinvigorated. A new doctrine, ultimately termed AirLand Battle, was published and new formal training tests were developed, establishing standards and requirements for mission performance by all elements of the total structure.

Nevertheless, the Army budget, after a short burst of support for the all-volunteer Army, again began to shrink. The Big 8 lost the heavy lift helicopter, the division air defense gun and the scout vehicle. It became the Big 5 and produced the Abrams tank, the Bradley fighting vehicle, the Black Hawk and Apache helicopters and the Patriot Air Defense Missile System. Budget limitations restricted training, operation and maintenance and procurement, resulting in the report by the Army Chief of Staff that the Army was “hollow.”

That term defined a condition in which the requirements of every unit’s table of organization and equipment for soldiers and tools needed for the accomplishment of the unit’s combat missions were not being met. When the condition of barracks and other living quarters, family housing, general maintenance and other facilities were considered, the condition was not quite a famine, but the support was far from robust, and Army capabilities were suspect.

A new administration in 1981 brought another restoration—not a feast, but an adequacy that completed the purchase of new equipment and provided the support that resulted in the Army committing to resolve the crises of Just Cause in Panama and Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf—two military operations that deserve to be paradigms for future campaigns. Both war efforts were afforded adequate preparation time, and both combat campaigns were completed in a few days. Both were examples of what can be achieved when sufficient resources are made available for true readiness.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War brought on a long-awaited “peace dividend” and another reversion to our commitment to a world without war. The Army was reduced to 12 divisions and 540,000 soldiers by an outgoing administration that also decreed the abolition of all battlefield nuclear weapons, the short-range, low-yield artillery and missiles of the Army and Marine Corps. That move was meant to set an example for all nations that had or aspired to have such a capability. So far, no other nation has followed our example. The list of those that have developed—or are developing—such weapons continues to grow, providing a threat that adds a serious complication to planning our combat operations of the future.

Another administration reduced the Army again, to 10 divisions and 485,000 soldiers. Thus began a new era of an Army too small for its missions and minimally resourced through the 1990s. Again, the national strategy relied principally on air and naval long-range firepower. The magnificent Army of the Persian Gulf War atrophied.

As the 21st century began, new wars were thrust upon us. For the first time in our history, the Army was sent to war without a decision to increase its size. Budget increases were substantial, and the Army enjoyed a feast period that sustained combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and reduced a great backlog of programs that had always been pushed into future planned allocations. Family housing, new headquarters, modern barracks, child care centers and other infrastructure were built. Contracts were awarded to provide combat support activities that the Army was too small to activate. The Army deteriorated, however, because the resource shortfall this time was manpower and the funds for maintenance, repair and rebuilding of equipment did not keep pace with the damage and destruction that occurred during combat operations.

---

We have paid, and paid, and paid again in blood and sacrifice for our unpreparedness. I don't want war, but I am appalled at the human cost that we've paid because we wouldn't prepare to fight.

*Creighton W. Abrams*

General **Creighton W. Abrams, Jr.**, quoted in Brigadier General Robert H. Scales, Jr., *Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1994), p. 7.



The inadequate size of the Army resulted in the overcommitment of career soldiers, both active and reserve components, who had been deployed on multiple tours of duty in combat zones, a requirement that has played havoc with family life and job satisfaction. Too many soldiers have abandoned plans for an Army career, and too many cases of divorce, spousal abuse, sexual abuse, promiscuity, suicide and mental disorders have plagued the Army as the manpower demands continue. Too many issues have diverted attention from the goal of maintaining a capable, trained and ready Army. For those who have remained in the service, military education has been minimized and depreciated as courses have been shortened and attendance postponed. Assignments have been conditioned by the need to fill deploying units, not by the need for leader development and a balanced career experience.

Nevertheless, the Army in the second decade of a new century is still at its authorized volunteer strength, still providing capable, formidable units for its combat missions and still manned with dedicated leaders and soldiers who believe in their mission, are rightly proud of what they have accomplished and are confident of their ability to continue their prowess.

## PORTENTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The early decades of this new century bear an eerie resemblance to the last. After the challenges of war, we have again planned to embrace peace as a national strategy; a drastic reduction of military forces is already under way and not yet completely defined; AirSea Battle has been adopted as our military strategy; and sequestration threatens reductions to the inadequacies comparable to the 1920s and 1930s. Our Army's mission, sans the combat requirements scheduled through 2014, is to train other armies so they can supply any landpower forces needed, a proposition tried and found wanting more than once in the last century. We have relinquished or are relinquishing major facilities built at great cost in Europe. We have abandoned major equipment and weapons development programs, are considering reductions of our nuclear arsenal and are withdrawing forces from areas in which our principal enemies are growing stronger. We are ignoring the lessons of military power employment in the past century, the disasters invited by weakness and the exorbitant costs associated with rebuilding strength after a crisis occurs.

---

This framework would, however, prove of slight value unless the officers and noncommissioned officers are given enough training to keep them somewhat informed of their duties.

This training we have been unable to give thus far, because of shortage of funds and of Regular officers who could handle the instruction. The actual organization of the units was, however, begun early in the fiscal year. Forty-two groups of Regular officers and non-commissioned officers were sent out to commence the organization of the divisions and the nondivisional units. The work has been very slow because of the shortage of suitable personnel, funds, and facilities. Here again it appears that the tendency to cut our activities for economical reasons is a tendency that should be guarded. . . . Any further cuts would force us to lose what we have gained, and would accordingly be inexcusable. It has taken time and money to build what we have. It has taken blood and money to prove that we have not, even now, what we need.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John W. Weeks".

Secretary of War **John W. Weeks**, "The Organized Reserves,"  
*Report of the Secretary of War to the President, 1922*  
(Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), p.18.

---

Rather than emphasizing mission first requirements—that is, the capability to deal with any and all threats to our national security—we have instead had our leaders focus on subordinate tasks. There will be no restoration of the Army education system, little to no use of brigade training areas built in Romania and Bulgaria and no major exercises or maneuvers that provide divisions and corps with the experience of managing major campaigns. The routine training of battalions and brigades at the national training centers will be curtailed, perhaps available only for units scheduled for deployment.

The Army must now reconsider a requirement for deliberate hollowness. Should we reduce the number of combat forces or should we maintain the structure but man the units with cadre strength? Should we maintain the headquarters of three corps and 10 divisions and the command and control system that can plan and manage a rapid mobilization in the active force? Reductions of that nature mean relying on time to reorganize and train units as well as energize an industrial capability to furnish supplies and other support for rapid expansion. More important, perhaps, is recognition that the time required for effective, war-winning operations will be extended, most likely at costs that will again be monumental. Overall, such a concept is always attractive, always advocated by budget advisors whose

priorities always move the requirement to “provide for the common defense” to a lower rung on the funding ladder than many other governmental programs and interests. But military advisors should be clarifying that it is the worst way for a military option to meet unanticipated crises.

Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel has promised, “Our men and women and their families must never doubt that their leaders’ first priority is them.” The purge of career officers, NCOs and civil servants before they qualify for retirement benefits has already begun, and, for those who remain in service, a paucity or long postponement of promotions may raise some doubt as to their priority.

Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno has promised that we will “shape the Army’s force [and] support the requirements of our combatant commanders to prevent conflict and shape a future consistent with U.S. interests. By retaining our most capable soldiers, we have an opportunity to further develop the versatility, agility and innovative spirit . . . to deter conflict and . . . win decisively.” Observing that we today have the best Army in the world, he also promises that “10 years from now, we’ll be the best Army in the world.”

---

My conclusions are not entirely welcome at this time, when people have been hoping that nations had learned to avoid conflicts of force. My conclusions are, nevertheless, that we should continue to prepare for such conflicts. If it is unwelcome, it is no less true that Americans, like all other peoples, are subject to the law which punishes those nations who fail to prepare for defense, as well as those who fail to strive for peace. It was our first President who said that “To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.”



  
Secretary of War **John W. Weeks**,

*Report of the Secretary of War to the President, 1922*  
(Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), p. 2.

---

No one doubts the Chief’s program or his determination, but the resources essential for the fulfillment of his intent require a cognizant, comprehensive and achievable national strategy, force structure adequate to the task and a Congress willing and able to provide our common defense with the authorizations and appropriations required.



A final observation from General Pershing is as pertinent today as it was 100 years ago: “Our people have never been able to learn that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

.....

**General Frederick J. Kroesen**, USA Ret., served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Cold War in a distinguished career that spanned more than 40 years and included command at every level from platoon to army. Staff assignments included Director of Manpower and Forces in the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Force Development (1969–71) and Vice Chief of Staff, Army (1978–79). His final assignment was Commander in Chief, U.S. Army Europe & Seventh Army and Central Army Group (NATO). General Kroesen, a senior fellow with AUSA’s Institute of Land Warfare, is also a contributing editor with ARMY magazine.







Association of the United States Army  
Institute of Land Warfare

.....  
[www.ausa.org](http://www.ausa.org)