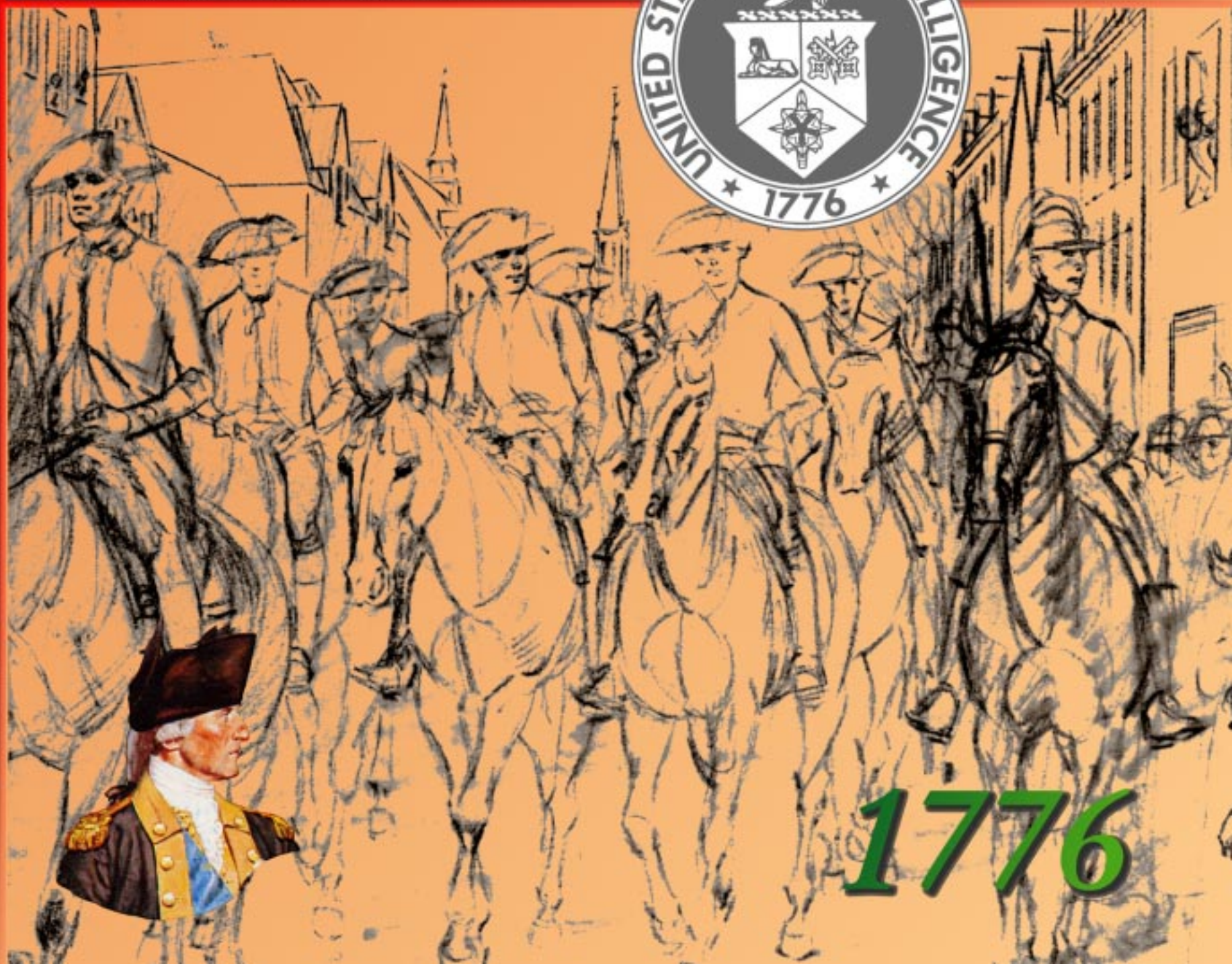
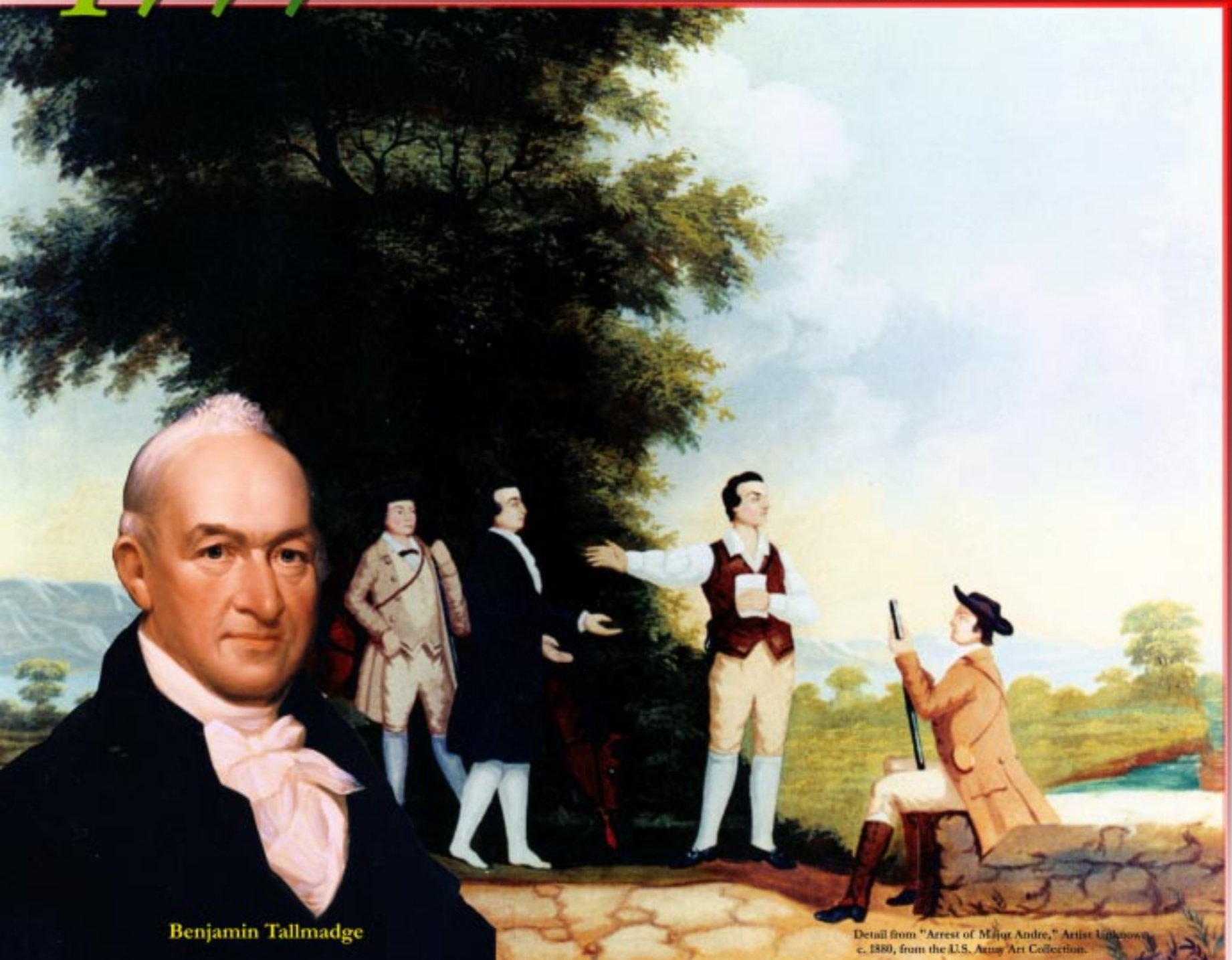
Defining Moments in MI History

The year 1776 appears on the Army's military intelligence emblem, a reference to the formation of Knowlton's Rangers as a recon and intelligence unit during the American Revolution. Realizing how blind he was to the British movements around New York, General George Washington instructed Lt. Col. Thomas Knowlton, an experienced veteran of the French-Indian War, to handpick a company of volunteers to scout British positions and gather intelligence on their movements and intentions. It was the first organization within the American Army that was formed exclusively for the purpose of military intelligence.



1777

In 1777 Washington charged Maj. Benjamin Tallmadge with supervising a network of spies in and around Long Island. The Culper Ring was the best known. He also had a hand in counterintelligence efforts, exploiting the capture of the British operative Maj. John Andre, which led to the exposure of Benedict Arnold as a turncoat and spy. In this role Tallmadge was seen as a proto-G2, serving the commander. But Washington acted as his own intelligence officer, never relinquishing control of intelligence operations and always placing the gathering of information about the enemy uppermost in his command priorities.



Benjamin Tallmadge

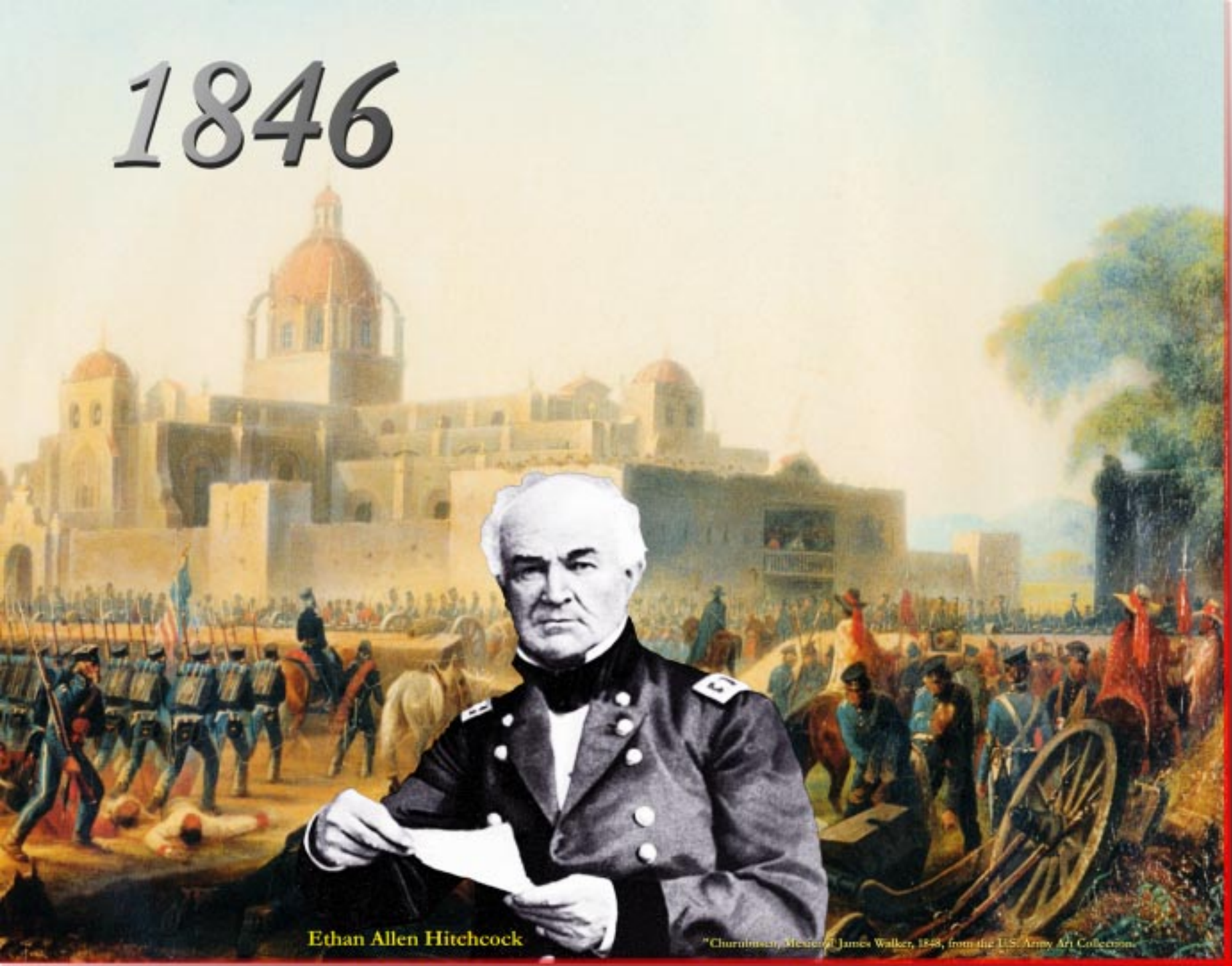
Detail from "Arrest of Major Andre," Artist Unknown, c. 1880, from the U.S. Army Art Collection.

Defining Moments in MI History

1781

George Washington's deception operations before the battle of Yorktown were the most elaborate and decisive of their kind until the D-Day invasion of Normandy. With carefully contrived dispatches, intended to be intercepted by the enemy, agents making arrangements to procure landing craft that would never be used, counterspys giving false information to the British, and diversionary troop movements, Washington convinced the enemy high command that he intended New York, rather than the Virginia peninsula, as his objective. Consequently, the British had to divide their forces to protect the threatened city and Washington was able to score a stunning encirclement of Gen. Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown and virtually end the war.

1846



Ethan Allen Hitchcock

"Churubusco, Mexico" James Walker, 1848, from the U.S. Army Art Collection

As Gen. Winfield Scott's inspector general, Col. Ethan Allen Hitchcock saw to the intelligence needs of his commander. He relied on informers and his unique Mexican Spy Company, bandits recruited from native jails. But these were not the sole tactical intelligence tools. Daring reconnaissances were made by young engineering officers like Robert E. Lee and George B. McClellan.

Defining Moments in MI History

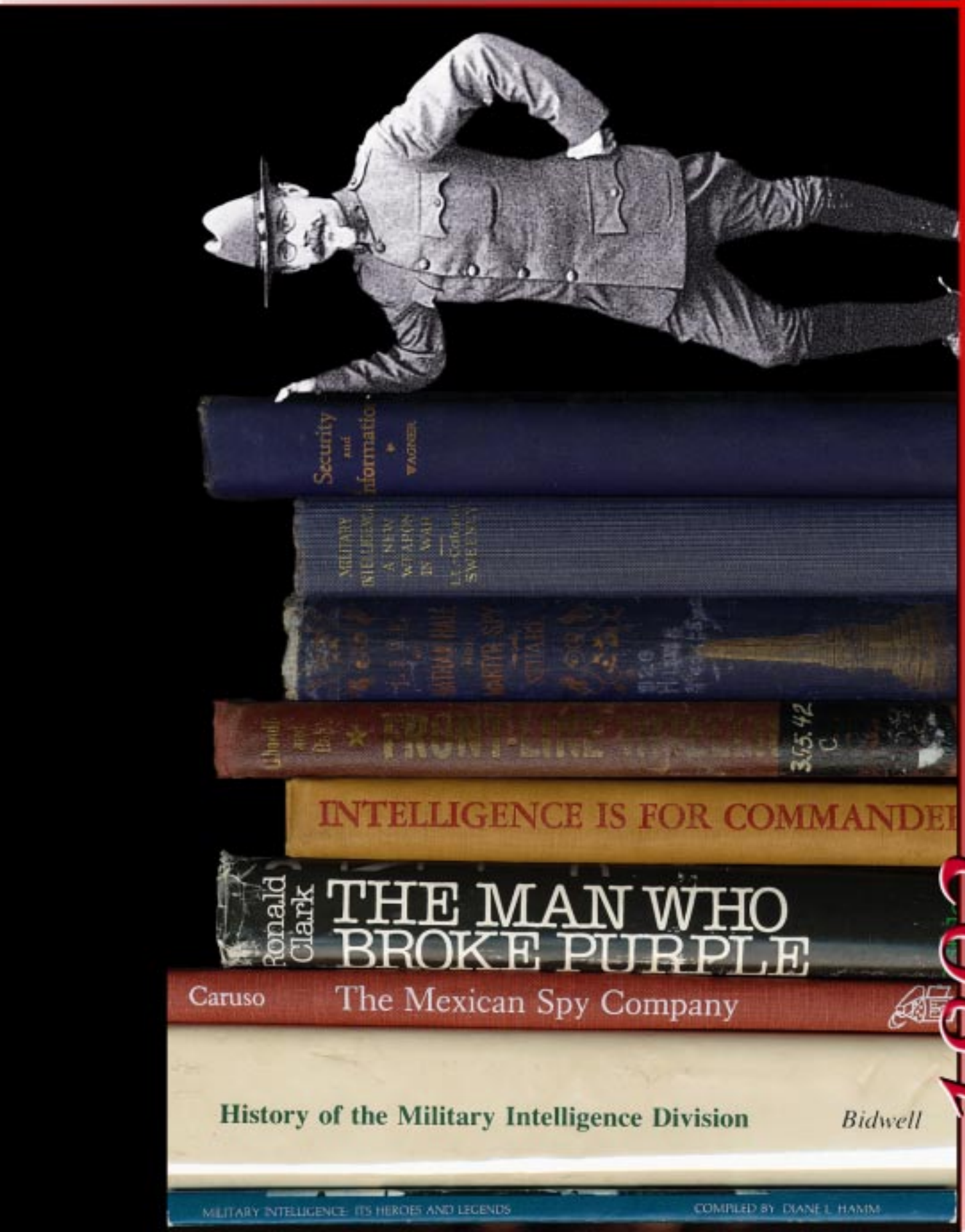
Defining Moments in MI History

William J. Volkmar

1885

The U.S. Army's first national-level MI establishment was the Division of Military Information, organized in 1885 as a subsection of the Adjutant General's Office. While this event is now considered a watershed, it certainly was not thought of as greatly important by Maj. William J. Volkmar, who together with a handful of clerks, crowded into a single room in the State, War and Navy Building. It was not until 1889 that the office was charged with assembling "military data on our own and foreign services which would be available for use by the War Department."

Defining Moments in MI History

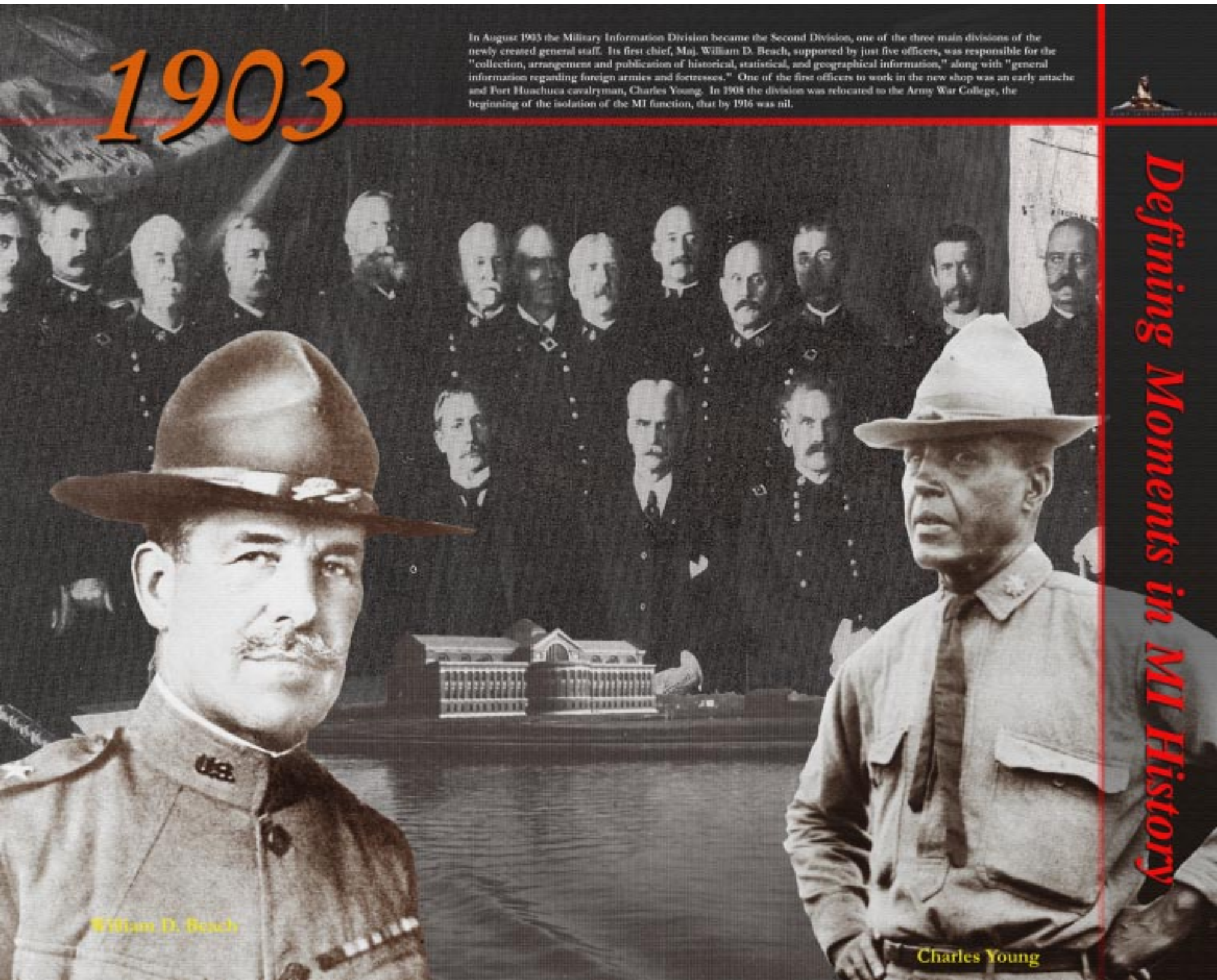


1893

Arthur L. Wagner is remembered as an advocate of Army educational reform and professionalism, and a writer of considerable influence on military organization and tactics. Gen. George C. Marshall would comment that Wagner was "the first of our military men to write anything readable on tactics." In 1893 he published "The Service of Security and Information," the first book on military intelligence in the American military experience. In that book he put his finger on the twofold nature of intelligence—the need not only to gather information, but to properly analyze it.

1903

In August 1903 the Military Information Division became the Second Division, one of the three main divisions of the newly created general staff. Its first chief, Maj. William D. Beach, supported by just five officers, was responsible for the "collection, arrangement and publication of historical, statistical, and geographical information," along with "general information regarding foreign armies and fortresses." One of the first officers to work in the new shop was an early attache and Fort Huachuca cavalryman, Charles Young. In 1908 the division was relocated to the Army War College, the beginning of the isolation of the MI function, that by 1916 was nil.



William D. Beach

Charles Young

Defining Moments in MI History

1916

The use of the newly developed military asset, the airplane, for reconnaissance missions was first undertaken during Pershing's 1916 Punitive Expedition into Mexico in pursuit of the bandit-turned-revolutionary Pancho Villa. The First Aero Squadron was deployed to support Pershing with aerial reconnaissance. Their purpose was thwarted however, when the planes were unable to reach the altitudes necessary in the mountains of northern Chihuahua. Instead the aviators were relegated to a role of flying dispatches. Commanded by Maj. Benjamin D. Foulois, the First Aero Squadron lost all eight of its underpowered Curtiss JN-2 "Jenny" biplanes in the first two months of the campaign to crashes or mechanical failure.

Defining Moments in MI History

Defining Moments in MI History

1917

The comanose Military Information Division was revived and funded to meet the challenges of 20th century warfare. Ralph Van Deman, a major serving in the War College Division, became concerned about the total lack of any coordinated intelligence work being accomplished within the Army and undertook a campaign to convince his leaders of the need for an intelligence organization. A month after the U.S. entered the war, a Military Intelligence Branch, later a Division, was formed with Van Deman at its head. By war's end, the section had grown to 282 officers and 1,159 civilians, most of them specialists called from civilian life. These early efforts to group and organize MI within the Army command structure became the model for future development and earned Van Deman the distinction of being remembered as the "Father of American MI."

Defining Moments in MI History

1917

The Corps of Intelligence Police (CIP) was the brainchild of Col. Dennis Nolan, the Army's first G2 and a man who exhibited an unprecedented grasp of the intelligence requirements of modern warfare. Nolan saw the need for a counterintelligence force within the American Expeditionary Force. He asked Col. Ralph Van Deman back in Washington to provide him with 50 noncommissioned officers familiar with European languages and methods of investigation. This was the birth of the CIP which would later evolve into the Counter Intelligence Corps. It was the only all-NCO unit to be organized in American history and the first to be charged with pure counterintelligence duties.

1917

Organizing his American Expeditionary force along British and French lines, Gen. John J. Pershing selected Dennis Nolan to organize and head his G2 section. Nolan, who had experience with the Military Information Division in 1905, had the widest span of intelligence responsibilities that had ever been seen in the American Army until that time. With an intelligence section in every battalion and higher command, he had responsibility for the newly realized disciplines of ACOUSTINT, COMSEC, PHOTOINT, SIGINT and CI.

Detail from "Storming Machine Gun," George Harding, Pastel, U.S. Army Art Collection

Defining Moments in MI History

Defining Moments in MI History

1940

When the American Black Chamber closed down, the Army decided to enlarge its cryptology operations and appointed William Friedman as Chief Cryptanalyst of the U.S. Army Signal Corps. In 1930 the Signal Intelligence Service was created, staffed by Friedman, three junior cryptanalysts and two clerks. In 1940 they cracked the Japanese PURPLE machine cipher and the deciphered messages were called MAGIC and restricted to only a handful of men in the government. Asked what effect signal intelligence had on World War II, an admiral exclaimed, "It won the war."

Defining Moments in MI History

Detail from "Interrogation," Edward R. Laning, 1943, Oil, U.S. Army Art Collection.

1942

In the Southwest Pacific, Gen. Douglas MacArthur formed his own intelligence organization, the Allied Intelligence Bureau, in July 1942 under his G2, Col. Charles A. Willoughby. Its mission was to work behind enemy lines, making use of native operatives, to collect military information and carry out often daring sabotage missions. Related functions were the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section formed in September 1942 and the Allied Geographical Section. The first used Nisei soldiers in interrogator, translator and psychological warfare roles, while the second published terrain handbooks and maps.

Defining Moments in MI History

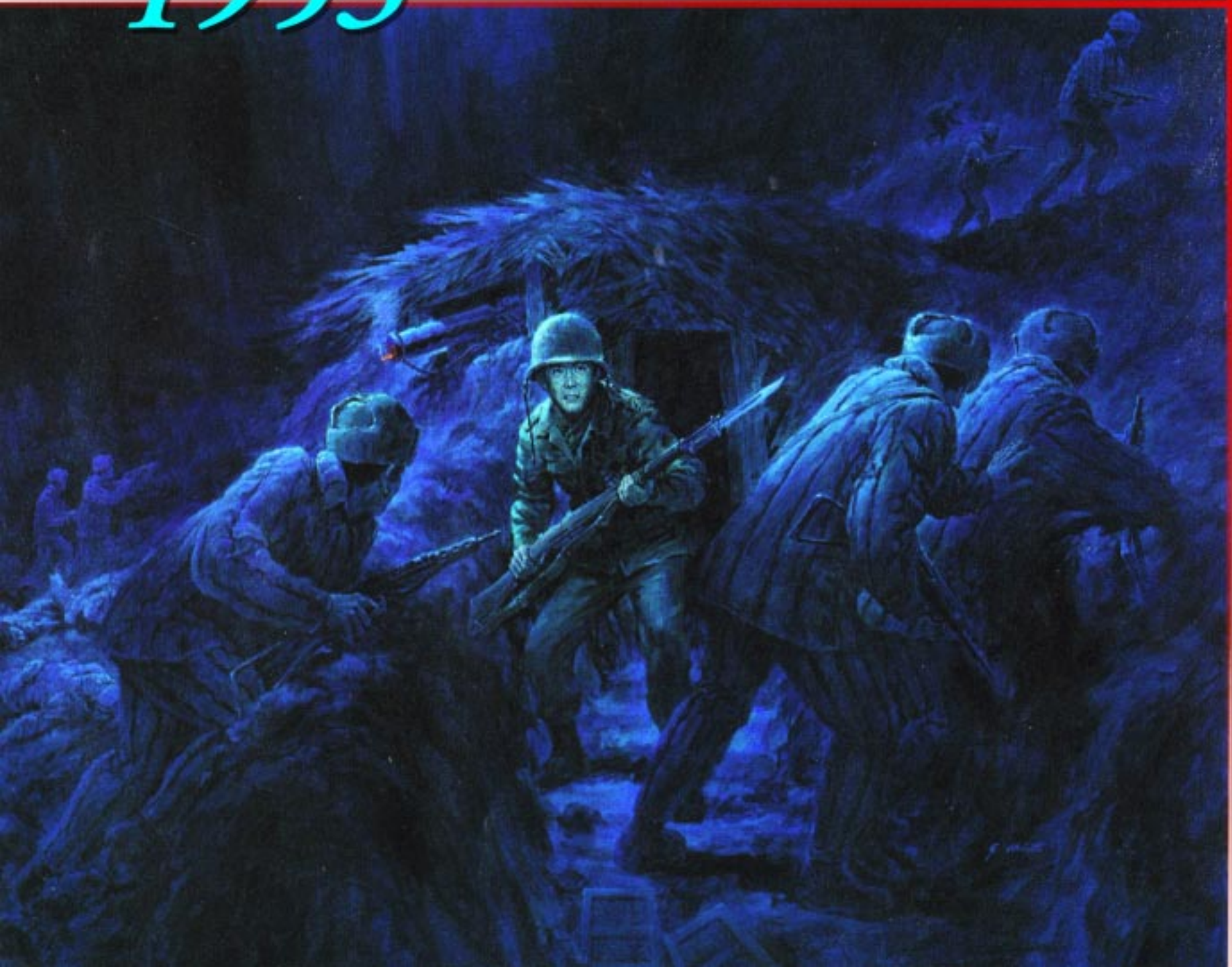
World War II was an "intelligence war." In the U.S. Army alone, thousands of men and women became engaged in intelligence-related work over a wide spectrum of disciplines in separate theaters around the globe, and at levels from strategic headquarters down to tactical companies. As a result, the war gave rise to many stories of individual achievement and innovation that would have a lasting effect on how intelligence would be thought about and conducted in future American wars.

1944

Detail from "Silencing Tanks Protesting Screams of German Prisoners," Odgen Pleissner, 1944, Oil, U.S. Army Art Collection.

1953

For military intelligence, the Korean War was fought in World War II terms. Little had changed in the intelligence arena in either technology or organization. But the war would provoke postwar appraisals and result in some important changes in intelligence organization and professionalism. Adopted in 1958, the new tactical intelligence organization known as Military Intelligence Organization tailored the support to Army theaters of operation by assigning MI personnel to an MI battalion, rather than sending them individually to tactical units.



Defining Moments in MI History

Detail from "Last Stand," Philip R. Yates, [illegible], U.S. Army Art Collection.

1962

It was during the Vietnam War that military intelligence reached a potential unparalleled in history. Using the latest electronic gear to detect the enemy, both from the air and the ground, hostile concentrations were pinpointed and enemy traps were avoided or surprised. Ground surveillance radars were employed, side-looking airborne radar was deployed, and a variety of night observation devices were used which took advantage of infrared and image-intensification. The combat intelligence battalion was assigned to a division. The first six OV-1 Mohawks, the Army's new surveillance plane, were deployed in September 1962. During the war the MI branch grew to 7,000 officers and became the fifth largest branch by 1972.

Defining Moments in MI History

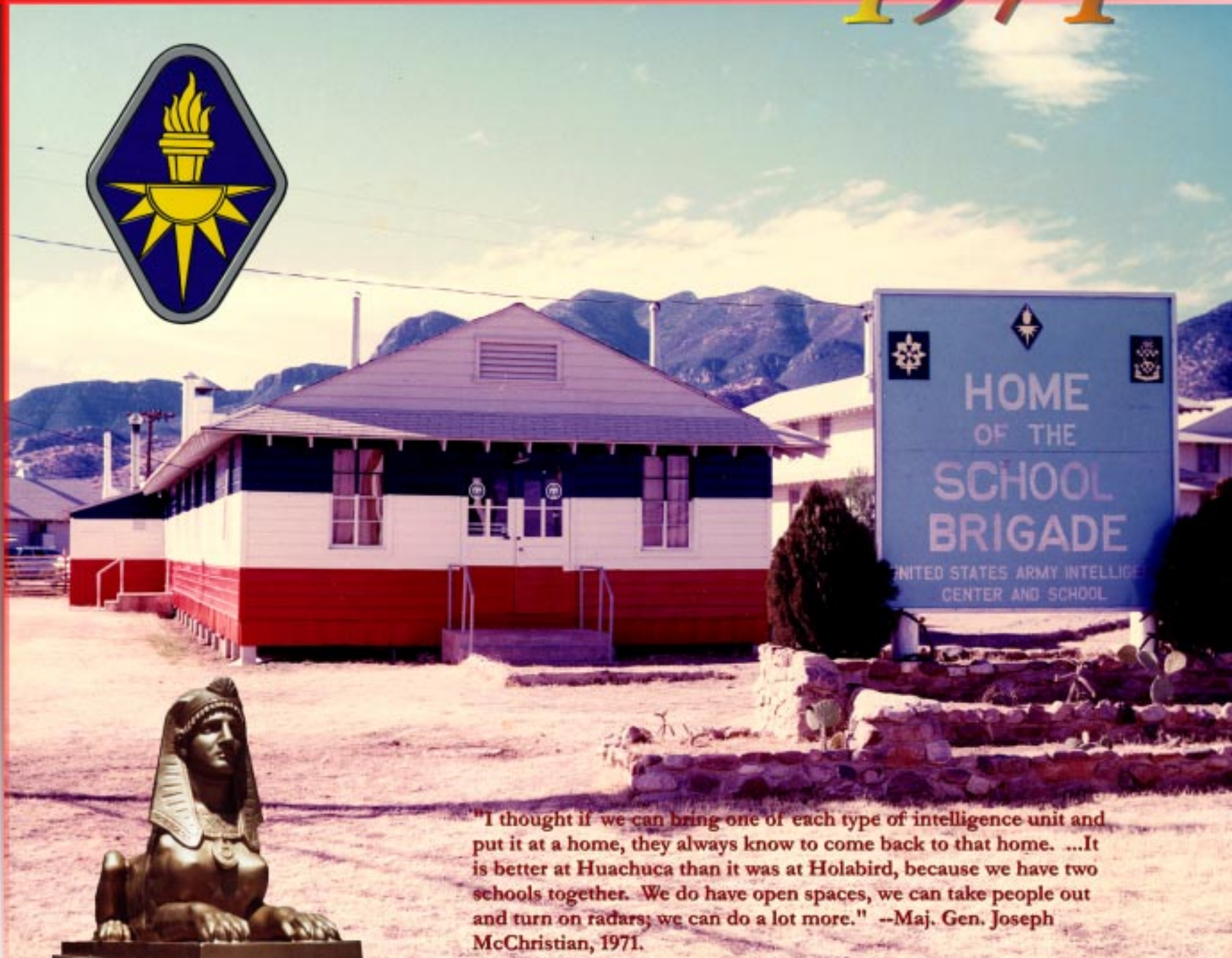
The order creating the Army Intelligence and Security Branch is signed by Army Chief of Staff Gen. George H. Decker on 1 July 1962. The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Maj. Gen. Alva Fitch, is at the far left.

1962

The Military Intelligence and Security Branch was created to meet the need for a career field for the increasing number of officers performing intelligence missions. It was made up of strategic and combat intelligence officers from both the Intelligence Corps and the Army Security Agency. In 1967, it was redesignated the Military Intelligence Branch and the mission changed from one of combat service support to combat support.

Fort Huachuca became the "Home for Military Intelligence" when the Intelligence Center and School was officially created. The Intelligence School was formerly located at Fort Holabird, Maryland, but overcrowding during the Vietnam War necessitated a move which would allow the school to expand to meet its increasing training mission. The relocation made possible the long-range goal of consolidating all Army intelligence training at a single location.

1971



"I thought if we can bring one of each type of intelligence unit and put it at a home, they always know to come back to that home. ...It is better at Huachuca than it was at Holabird, because we have two schools together. We do have open spaces, we can take people out and turn on radars; we can do a lot more." --Maj. Gen. Joseph McChristian, 1971.

1987

The Military Intelligence Corps was activated on 1 July at Fort Huachuca as a part of the U.S. Army's regimental system, a move that was approved by the Chief of Staff of the Army in December 1985. The commandant of the U.S. Army Intelligence Center and School also became the Chief of Military Intelligence concurrent with the activation of the corps. The MI Corps became the first branch to include civilians.

"[The establishment of the Military Intelligence Corps is] a recognition and celebration of our evolution from a plethora of diverse and separate intelligence agencies into the cohesive military intelligence community we enjoy today." --Maj. Gen. Julius Parker, Chief, Military Intelligence, upon the activation of the MI Corps, 1987.

Detail from "Brigade in the Attack," Mario Acevedo, 1991, Watercolor, from the U.S. Army Art Collection.

1991

The U.S. Army was going on 215 years of age in February 1991 when it overwhelmed the formations of Saddam Hussein south of the Euphrates River. MI had been around for the Army's entire lifetime, often no more than an afterthought in its youth, but increasingly critical to its successes as it matured. It was in Vietnam that the discipline of intelligence learned its lessons and emerged in the U.S. Army as a well organized body of expertise designed to respond to the needs of the combat commander, a doctrinal awakening championed by Lt. Gen. Phillip Davidson and others. The MI Corps, established in 1987, was vetted in the operations in Grenada, Panama, and finally, in the Persian Gulf.