

The Army and Air Force Exchange Service

We Go Where You Go; and have for more than 112 years: A quick overview of AAFES' history and growth.



The Beginning

On Nov. 29, 1880, at Vancouver Barracks, in the Pacific Northwest, Col. Henry A. Morrow, commander of the 21st Infantry Regiment, formally opened the first canteen and modeled it after the latest English system.

The canteen proved to be a success as more and more men began to spend their off-duty time there. In 1885, Col. Morrow was transferred to Fort Sidney, Neb., where he found there was also a need for off-duty facilities for recreation, and campaigned to establish more canteens. The movement was so successful, it was copied and canteens based on the same principles were started at such posts as: Fort D.A. Russell, Wyoming, Fort Elliott, Texas, and Fort Grant, Wyoming.

On July 25, 1895 General Orders No. 46 was issued. It directed the commander at every post to establish a post exchange wherever practicable.

Today's exchanges are lineal descendants of those first post exchanges of 1895. Although the primary mission has not been changed in any substantial respect in the ensuing years, the organizational structure has developed from its austere frontier beginnings to today's highly centralized organization.

Landmark dates in AAFES history:

1880

The first canteen opened at Vancouver Barracks in the Pacific Northwest.

1892

War Department General Orders No. 11 changed the term "post canteen" to "post exchange."

1895

War Department General Orders No. 46 directed post commanders to establish a post exchange at every post where practicable.

1898

The Spanish American War officially began. Responsibility for providing the troops with necessities fell to the Army's Subsistence and Quartermaster's Departments.

1917

The American Expeditionary Forces landed in France. Exchanges were unable to meet the needs of the greatly expanded Army. Civilian welfare agencies would provide canteen services for American troops during World War I.

1918

After the war, the Secretary of War sent a committee to Europe, headed by Raymond Fosdick, to report on the morale conditions of the American Expeditionary Forces. It was the first time the morale of the Army overseas would be studied.

1919

The Fosdick Committee recommended the Army provide its own system for furnishing morale and canteen activities to the troops.

1940

A committee of businessmen surveyed the existing exchange structure and cited the lack of centralized control as the principal cause of the defects in the exchange system.

1941

The Army Exchange Service (AES) was undergoing organizational change when the U.S. officially entered WWII. Serving those who serve became the mission of the AES as military operations expanded in Europe, the Pacific and back home. "We go where you go" became a reality.

1950

Four years after the Korean Conflict began, regional offices were introduced in the U.S.

1952

Mobile exchanges began operating extensively in Korea. Converted buses were assigned to the forward areas for the 8th Army. The buses were used in "Operation Reindeer," a program that provided gift items to troops for holiday shopping.

1965

The principle of the mobile units used in the Korean conflict was developed into the Tactical Field Exchange (TFE) in Vietnam. TFEs were operated by the military in areas where there were no AAFES operation.

1969

A one-year test began on "integrated management" for CONUS exchanges at six Army posts and Strategic Air Command bases.

1970

Based on the favorable results of the one-year test, AAFES assumed operational control and responsibility for all Army and Air Force exchanges in the continental United States. This was the first step of the integrated management of exchanges worldwide under AAFES.

1983

AAFES opened its first tactical field exchange at Port Salinas Airport, Grenada, to support Operation Urgent Fury.

1989

Project Fresh Start realigned CONUS regions and reduced the number of overhead positions. An AAFES Operations Center was established to provide the common support functions.

1990

When the Iraqi army invaded Kuwait. U.S. forces were sent to the Persian Gulf during Exercise Desert Shield, in what became the largest deployment of U.S. forces since World War II. AAFES supported the troops on the ground in Saudi Arabia as well as providing around-the-clock support to deploying forces at their home bases.

1991

Mt. Pinatubo erupted in the Philippines, destroying Clark AB. AAFES provided evacuation support at U.S. points of entry and in Guam when 18,000 evacuees arrived at Andersen AFB. In Okinawa, AAFES set up tactical field exchanges in tents at the initial evacuee reception point for clearing customs and immigration. Total damages suffered by AAFES were more than \$13 million.

1992

Two days after Hurricane Andrew hit Florida, the AAFES team

moved in to provide support to the storm's victims and the 20,000 troops that were brought in to assist.

1992

AAFES provided support in Operations Restore Hope and Continued Hope in Mogadishu, Somalia.

1995

AAFES joined forces with the Navy, Coast Guard and Marines to produce American Mercantile film and single use cameras, the first joint service product. Its the first product ever sold at a PX or BX that carries the same brand name and low price at all military branches.

1996

AAFES supported U.S. troops and U.N. peacekeepers in Bosnia and then in Kosovo during the Balkans war.

The AAFES Web site was created. Through this site, authorized customers could find information about AAFES and do their shopping on the online store.

2000

AAFES began managing proprietary credit card services for AAFES, NEXCOM, the Marine Corps and Coast Guard exchange systems that became know as the Military Star Card.

2001

After Sept. 11, 2001, AAFES brought relief to rescue operations at the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. Soon after, AAFES had 32 stores serving troops engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom.

2003

By the time coalition forces crossed into Iraq, AAFES had 23 stores in the staging areas of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Even before Baghdad fell, AAFES had a PX on the ground in Iraq, supplying the war fighters with much-needed personal hygiene products, snacks, beverages and other essential items.

To date

To date, AAFES operates more than 3,100 facilities worldwide, in more than 30 countries, five U.S. territories and 49 states. AAFES operates some 147 retail stores and 2,008 fast food restaurants, such as Taco Bell, Burger King, Popeye's and Cinnabon. AAFES also provides military communities with convenience, specialty store and movie theaters on installations worldwide, including locations in Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom.

