

## NEWTON D. BAKER

Newton Diehl Baker (December 3, 1871- December 25, 1937) Secretary of War 1916-1921  
Photo: Newton D. Baker. The Woodrow Wilson House.

Baker was a native of Martinsburg, West Virginia. He graduated from Johns Hopkins in 1892. Two years later he earned a law degree at Washington and Lee. Baker moved to Cleveland and became active in local politics. Baker was city solicitor from 1901 to 1909. Having become known as a municipal reform advocate he was as Cleveland's mayor in 1911. In 1912 Wilson offered him the position as Secretary of the Interior, but Baker refused, noting that he owed it to the voters to fulfill his term of office as mayor.

In late February 1916 Wilson again offered Baker a cabinet position, this time as Secretary of War to replace Lindley Garrison. Baker accepted. He was sworn in just days before Pancho Villa's raid on Columbus New Mexico and so one of Baker's first actions as Secretary of War was to organize the Punitive Expedition into Mexico under General John Pershing. As Secretary of War, Baker is most remembered for presiding over the American Army during the First World War (1917-18), including the a successful nationwide military draft.

As head of the War Department Baker believed in letting the professionals in the military decide how best militarily to prosecute the war, and that the role of the Secretary of War was to take any political heat for their decisions. One example of this was the desire of former President Theodore Roosevelt in 1917 to be given command of a US Army division. The British and French did not approve as they felt Roosevelt would be a distraction and the professional officers under Baker believed that Roosevelt was an amateur and so would be a hindrance on the battlefield. Baker and Wilson agreed with these opinions and so refused Roosevelt's request, drawing political fire from Roosevelt's friends themselves.

Baker served until the Wilson administration ended in March 1921. He then returned to his law practice. Although he was mentioned as a possible candidate for the Democratic nomination for President in 1924, 1928, and 1932, he never again in a public office. Instead he worked against American isolationism following World War I. and championed American participation in the League of Nations and the World Court. In 1928 President Calvin Coolidge appointed Baker to the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague. Baker died in 1937 and is buried in Cleveland.