



Lesson 2: Organization of the U. S. Army in WWII

Reference: *The Officer's Guide*, 1944 edition; *FM 100-5*, 1944.

Study assignment: Lesson text, attached.

The Army in the Second World War

This writer has the perspective of an old man. I was born in 1943; my father and two uncles served. We moved from Naval base to Naval base for twenty years. I grew up in the military. My friends were Army brats and Navy juniors. Too many of my clothes were bought at the PX or BX or Navy Exchange. I went to five different high schools: in Alaska, Texas, California, South Carolina, and Indiana.

When I was young, the draft was in force and military service was a common experience. We lived it as kids. The recent war was on everyone's minds—a great experience and a lifetime adventure, in the sense that hitting yourself over the head with a hammer is fun because it feels so good when you stop. Everybody knew about the service, like it or not. We saw it portrayed in theaters and on the tube. But the years passed, poor foreign policy decisions soured America on the military, and the draft ended. No one born since 1965 would understand the jokes in “You'll Never Get Rich”, (the original name, which lasted exactly one week, of the “The Phil Silvers Show” of Sgt. Bilko fame), a popular television comedy about Army life. We are left with postmodern dramatic interpretations of WW II that wander farther and farther from the context of the time.

The problem: Most reenactors form their impressions on a shaky foundation. Emphasis is on clothes and gear. Yes, a lot of reenactors are collectors; but the uniform and toys tell a very short and incomplete story about the Army. To get a broad idea of the service and the times requires *research*. And, while there are plenty of research materials available—historians never tire of writing books on The War—there is almost too much material available. A beginner has little idea where to start.

Histories follow big stories, overall trends and theoretical trajectories, and emphasize the stories of the prime movers of victory, not the soldiers who made the victories happen. A modern reader can slog through all 15 volumes of Samuel Eliot Morrison's *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* and learn little about what it was like to be a sailor, or about how victory was influenced by how the Navy grew from an aging fleet in 1941 to a floating carpet of steel that dominated the oceans of the world.

This lesson is also written to correct misconceptions about the Army of the 1940's maintained by more recent veterans. The Army now is the same as it was in The War, but it is also different—just as America was different. Understanding those changes helps us grasp the reality

of soldiering in the 1940's, and it also helps later veterans understand where current Army practices *came from*.

Resources: A reenactor does not have to be a professional historian; but it helps to be informed in the way soldiers and junior officers were informed about Army World. This lesson provides a resource for understanding where Willie and Joe fit into a forgotten war machine—a war machine of immense power and a share of flaws and breakdowns.

One available source of information is official Army publications: Field Manuals, Technical and Training Manuals, Training Circulars, and published accounts that appeared during the war. The FM's tend to be dry and unentertaining, but they describe in detail *how things were to be done*. Reenactors tend to skirmish and fuss about details of impression in this or that unit in some theater and one time. To take this approach is to troll for red herrings, to focus on photographic exceptions instead of the generality that really drove such things. Learn what you were supposed to do and how you were supposed to do it and you will very seldom go wrong; attend to odd fragments and out of context details and you will almost never be right.

The REENACTORPRO site includes a growing collection of official publications, reformatted digitally and annotated for modern readers. Try that library first.

The Army Heritage Education Center (AHEC) at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania (also home of the US Army War College) has a very large reference library and preserved maps, documents, and other materials of use to historians. It is a public resource (and worth a visit for many reasons), and it also maintains a web site at ahec.armywarcollege.edu/ where you can find and download thousands of documents and publications.

Why go to the trouble? There will always be plenty of reenactors who will buy the uniforms and the gear and show up for a weekend to hang out with friends. Most of them do not have the time or the interest to go digging around in FM's and books to capture accuracy. But if there is a dedicated core of real living historians to do the legwork, the basics will spread to the rest of us.

Finding out about the Army of WW II is not a vast project. At the very least, though, we should try not to be half-vast.

The Big Picture¹

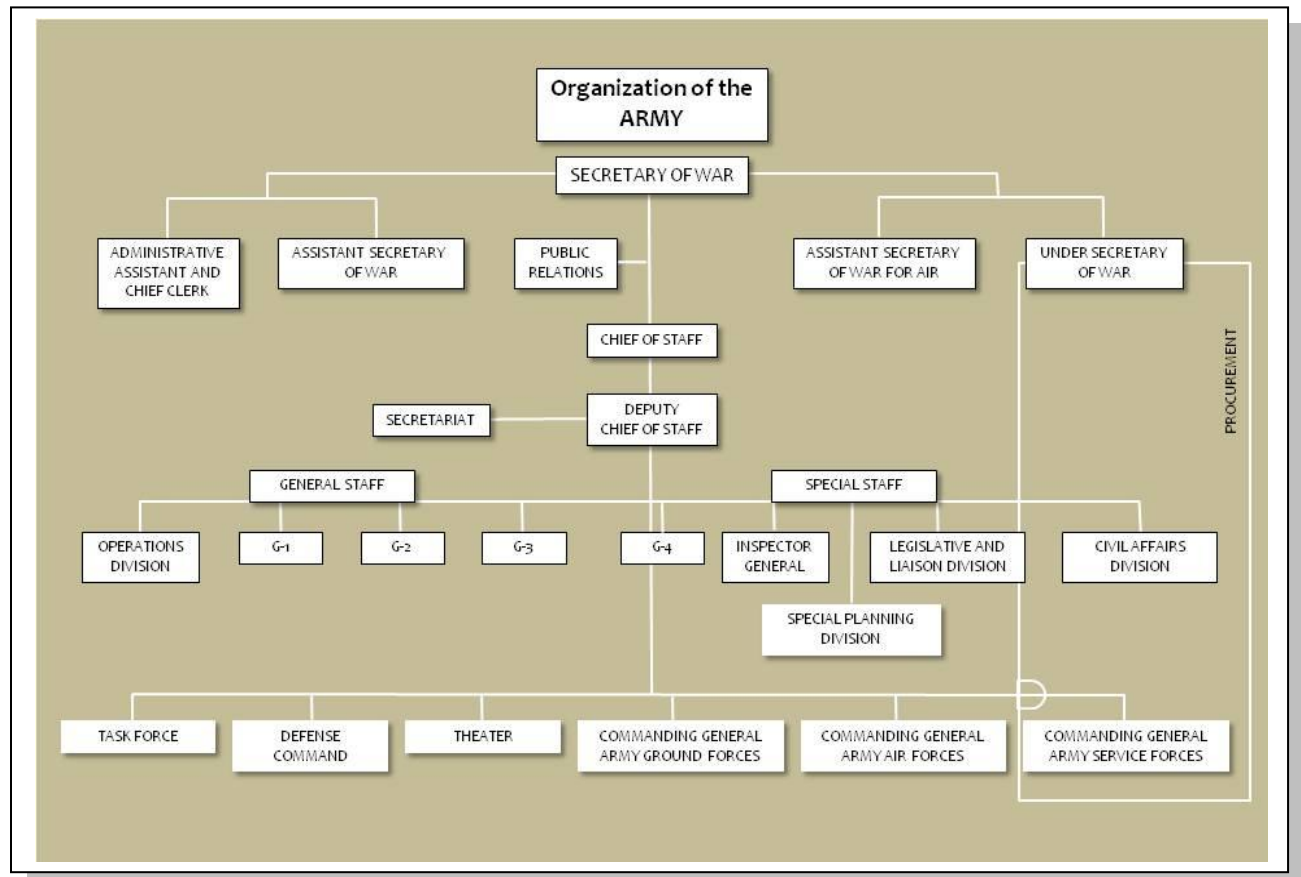
Let's just jump in head first. On second thought, this discussion won't be all that deep, so for safety let's jump in feet first.

The United States Army expanded rapidly from the 1940 baseline of institution of the peacetime draft at 263,023 to an immediate pre- Pearl Harbor strength of 1,462,315. Actually, in the run-up to the first shooting, Congress authorized the draft's renewal by *one vote*. The United States had not seen a mobilization like this since 1917, but it was just the beginning. There was controlled chaos at every level. From starvation rations in the Depression, the Army was now being force-fed huge numbers of draftees, most of them less than enthusiastic until 6 December

¹ I chose this heading because of a weekly television program in the Fifties called "The Big Picture": it was an Army-funded update on . . . the Army. Nowadays there would be riots in the streets. In the early Fifties, most of the audience was in the Army or putting it behind them. The theme music was "to the colors."

1941, then riotous and bloodthirsty. By war's end, the Army of the United States numbered 8,267,958.²

To accomplish this, the Army had to rethink how it was organized and how it functioned (as did the other services, but they were less manpower-intensive). Most important, at every level somebody had to have authority and responsibility to make things happen in coordination with everything above, below, front and back. Here is how it looked on paper:



Overall direction came from the Commander in Chief, **President Roosevelt**. His wishes were routinely framed by Admiral (later Fleet Admiral) **William D. Leahy**, Roosevelt's military advisor and *de facto* chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (a position that was not formally specified until the postwar National Defense Reorganization Act).

The President generally spoke through Leahy to the Secretary of War, **Henry L. Stimson**. Stimson had first been appointed War Secretary by President Taft in 1911. During WW I he served as an artillery officer in France. He later served as Secretary of State under Hoover, but returned to private life in 1933. With the outbreak of war in Europe, Roosevelt brought Stimson out of retirement—he obviously had the experience, and as a conservative Republican he provided balance in the cabinet. Though he was 73 when recalled to the job, he performed his duties in

² This is actually a smaller proportion of the eligible US population than we tend to think. Britain was bled white; Germany was bled to death. But the US had to staff a gigantic, headlong industrial mobilization at the same time it expanded the uniformed component of the war effort.

mobilizing for and prosecuting the war with uncanny energy, and was respected by the service chiefs.



Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy

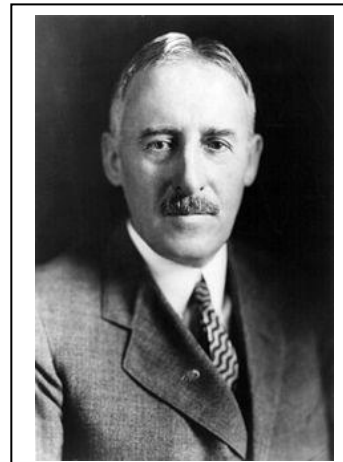
not offensive action (e. g., maritime defense of the Caribbean zone). Special large-scale missions of limited duration were given to task forces of varying sizes (strength was based on the threat). Such area-defined commands are now called Combatant Commands—for example, CENTCOM (US Central Command)—though nowadays they are joint commands, not part of the Army.



General George C. Marshall

Stimson was assisted by the Chief of Staff of the Army, General (later General of the Army) **George C. Marshall**, who had at hand a massive Army General Staff (G-1 through G-4) augmented by a special staff. We should note that this chart shows a direct line from the Secretary of War to the Chief of Staff, and thence to the theater commands and other ground forces. This is no longer the case. The chiefs of staff are now out of the chain of command at the operational level.

On the bottom row we see the operational commands of the US Army. Most critical, of course, were the theater commands, where the actual war was being fought. Some areas were manned or patrolled only for defense/security purposes,



Hon. Henry L. Stimson

The **Army Service Forces**

(roughly equivalent to the current Army Materiel Command (AMC)) provided supply and services for the Army worldwide.

The **Army Air Forces** were by 1944 evolving into a service of their own, and soon after the war would be redesignated US Air Force.

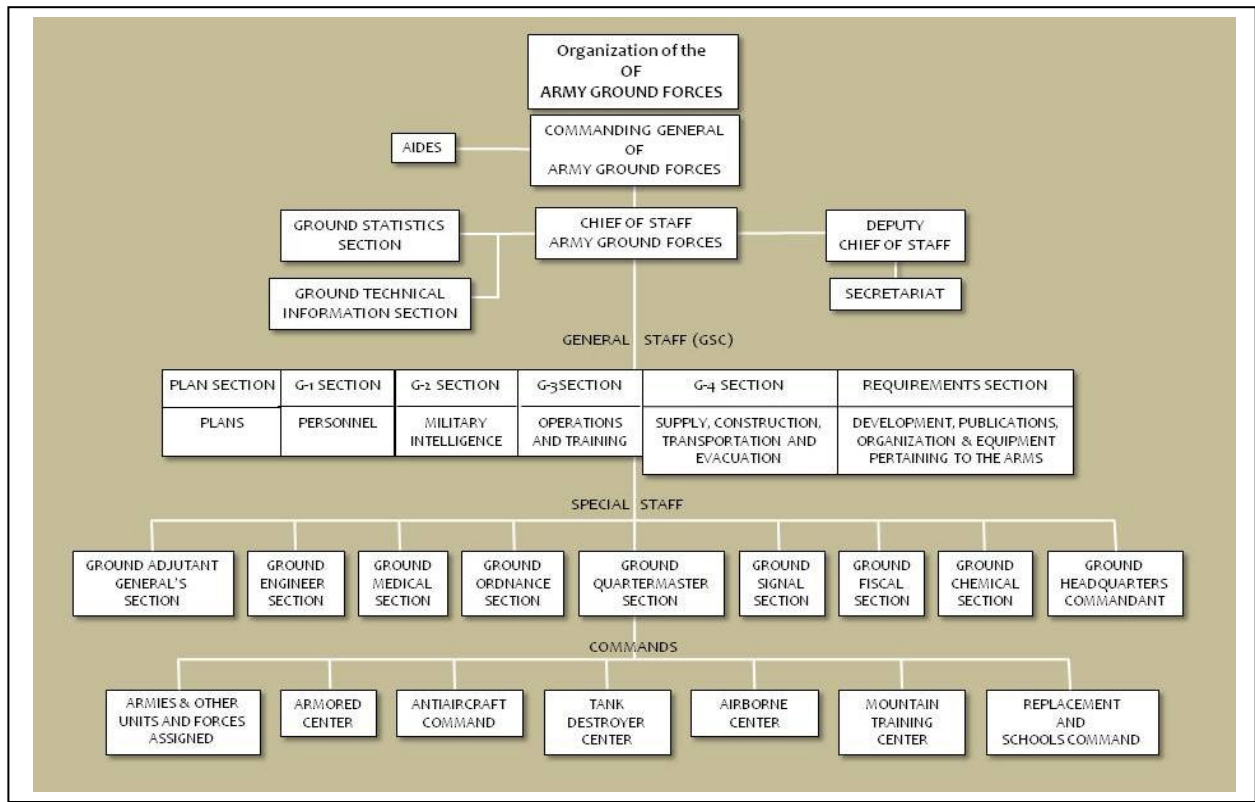
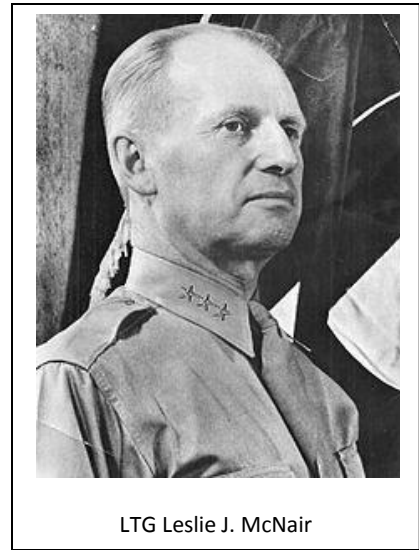
They were a kingdom all their own, and influenced all the tools the theater commands used to win.

The **Army Ground Forces** comprised all Army units not deployed to the theaters of war or assigned or attached to other stateside commands. AGF was roughly equivalent to the more modern **US Army Forces Command** (FORSCOM), but it included elements of what are now assigned to **US Army Training and Doctrine Command** (TRADOC), most especially the schools. It also included the massive stateside training structure.

But AGF was not just a storage bin; it also shaped the organization, equipment, and doctrine that formed the armies in theater. It was concerned in addition with advanced officer education, training innovations, equipment development, and the doctrine for ground combat.

Within AGF were also the combat and support units not assigned overseas, including those destined for the theaters of war but not yet deployed (on the chart below, “armies and other units and forces assigned”). These were organized into two broad organizations, the Second and Fourth Armies, headquartered at Memphis and San Antonio.

Commanding General US Army Ground Forces was a four-star billet, and filled for most of the war by **LTG General Leslie McNair** (who was promoted to General posthumously)—a position of some power and a major force in shaping the tools to be used in war. McNair was an experienced Field Artillery officer and innovator whose positions ranged from ground-breaking to controversial. He was killed by friendly fire in 1944 while observing the pre-attack air bombardment for Operation COBRA.



The huge Replacement and Schools Command met the requirements for trained replacements in all the branches. Some of the branches were new and still getting their feet on the ground in

1941-42: the Armored Force (including tank destroyers). Centers were identified (like Fort Knox, Kentucky for the tankers and Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland for Ordnance, and notably Gadsden, Alabama for Chemical; and lest we forget, Fort Benning, Georgia for Infantry). But the requirement for some branches was so heavy that training was distributed across several posts. Infantry, for example, trained at Camp Croft³, South Carolina, Camp Roberts, California, Camp Wheeler, Georgia, and Camp Wolters, Texas.

Older established special service schools were for the Field Artillery (Fort Sill, Oklahoma—reportedly because it was unlikely that any artillery round accidentally fired from there would hit anything of importance); the Coast Artillery School at Fort Monroe, Virginia; the Cavalry School at Fort Riley, Kansas.

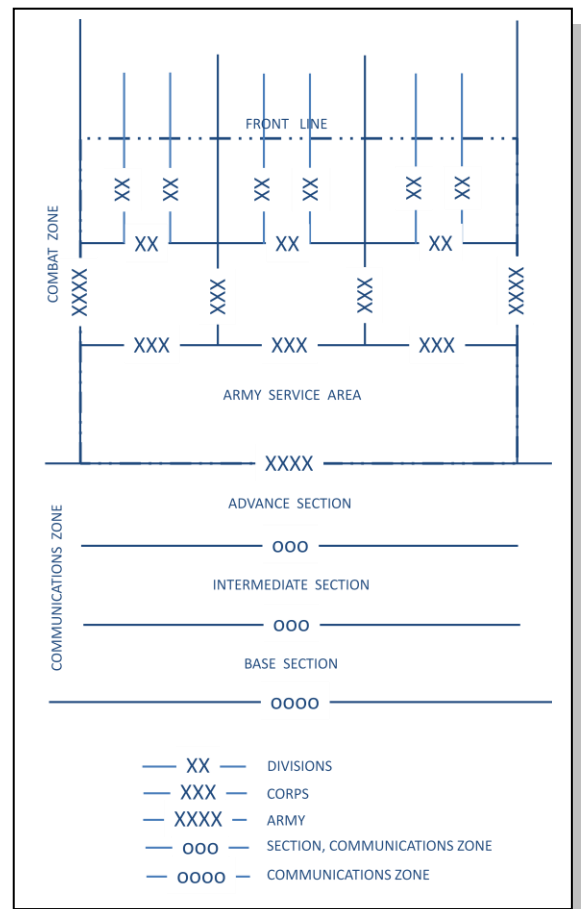
Fort Benning was originally the Infantry School, and tank training was combined with infantry for several years (as it is now, part of the Maneuver Center of Excellence). But with the move of the Armored Force to Fort Knox, the emphasis at Fort Benning shifted to special schools: the Battalion Commanders and Staff officers course, Officer Communication, Rifle and Heavy Weapons Company Officers course (essentially what is now the Infantry Officer Basic Course), the Officers Motor Maintenance course, and an active program of refresher training for infantry officers bound for units.

Overseas

Most of the US Army by 1943 was deployed overseas in the various theaters of operation, e.g., ETO, Mediterranean and Middle East, PTO. Note that each theater of operations is geographically defined, and includes all services with assigned resources (Army, Navy/Marine/AAF). These are the major forces actually engaged with the enemy.

(Right) A representative organization of a theater of operations. In this case, there are nine or more divisions, organized into corps of three each, forming a field army assigned to the *combat zone*. To the rear of the combat zone is the Communications Zone (COMZ), which provides service support for the combat zone: supply, evacuation, transportation, and administration.

Shortly after the publication of the 1944 *Officer's Guide*, circumstances dictated the formation of the first operational Army Group (12th), in Northern France. More would follow. This formation consisted of three armies—First,



³ A “Fort” was a permanent installation; during mobilization, the Army was obliged to set up numerous temporary installations called “camps”, designed to be dismantled and turned into toothpicks after the war. The “temporary” wooden barracks (many still around) were scattered across the country. Some just persisted for decades after 1945, and eventually the Army gave up and designated them Forts. Among these are Camp Pickett and Camp A. P. Hill, Virginia, and Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, Pennsylvania.

Third, and Ninth, and soon after the creation of the rank of General of the Army, though this grade was not specified for army groups, being generally restricted to theater commanders.

Naming conventions: During the war, divisions were numbered as follows:

—Divisions 1-25, inclusive, Regular Army

—Divisions 26-75, Army National Guard

—Divisions 75 and higher, Army Reserve

Obviously there were exceptions for armored divisions, which were numbered in the RA from 1-20; the airborne divisions (11th, 17th, 82nd and 101st) were obviously not in the Army Reserve.

Divisions are written with Arabic numerals: 9th Infantry Division.

Corps were written with Roman Numerals: VII Corps. (The word “corps,” from French and originally Latin *corpus* (literally a body [of men]) is singular; First Army had more than one corps (not corp!); plural was also corps, pronounced the same as corps singular: “core.”)⁴

Armies were written with the number spelled (Third Army).

There were not enough army groups to justify an argument about style, so they were generally identified by Arabic numeral (12th Army Group).

Divisions activated: During WW II, the United States fielded a variety of division types.

Infantry divisions: Army, 77 (including 5 airborne divisions and a mountain division); Marine Corps: 6 divisions.

Armored divisions: 16

Cavalry: 2 (one fought as infantry, the other never saw combat)

Forming divisions

New divisions were constantly being formed within Army Ground Forces, almost all destined for deployment to the operational theaters. Unlike current practice, recruits were sent to the training areas and trained as companies, battalions, and regiments, then deployed as fighting units that had trained together.

To do this required a skeleton of experienced leaders to form the teams—in the language of the day, a *cadre*. Once training was complete, it shipped out—minus the most experienced officers and NCOs, who were often sent to form more cadres for more divisions. For ambitious soldiers, assignment to one cadre after another was a fate worse than death. It also crippled the new division, suddenly finding itself without its familiar leaders and getting used to new ones just when they and starting to feel the shipping-out jitters.

It is a well known principle of deployment that units who have formed and trained together tend to do better initially in combat. The lines of trust have already been established in training, and soldiers have problems when surrounded by strangers. It’s just one of those things.

⁴ This raises another reenactor misconception: the expression “hard core.” While it has an implied everyday meaning, it is generally used in studies of the Viet Nam war. Early in the American involvement, MAAG planners in Saigon identified two components of the Communist insurgency: the part-time guerrillas and the “hard core” of the insurgency, full-time Viet Cong fighters. Reenactors sometimes use the expression “hard corps”, but this is a misunderstanding.

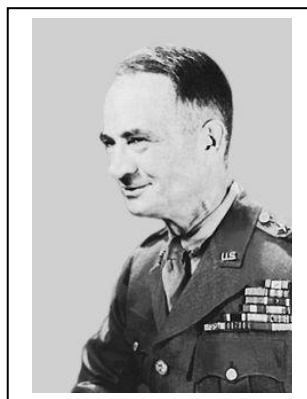
By 1944, however, fewer newly-minted divisions were being added to the force. Instead, the individual replacement system was in force. Hundreds of thousands of newly trained moving targets were dumped into theater replacement depots (“repple-depples”) and parceled out based on the needs of divisions. In the best case, replacements arrived at a regiment while it was in reserve, briefly resting and refitting. This allowed at least a quick lesson in Stupid Things Not to Do. Replacements to a regiment on the line didn’t even have that grace period.

One of the last deployed divisions was the 104th Infantry, the Timberwolves. This division had the rare fortune of being commanded by an experienced combat veteran, Terry Allen, whose leadership of the 1st Infantry Division in North Africa and Sicily was legendary. But he was an



abrasive personality, and rubbed Bradley and others the wrong way; he was relieved and shipped out after HUSKY (the invasion of Sicily). By ‘44 he had worked his way back, commanding the 104th from the time of its formation.

The Timberwolves trained and deployed together. They were unique in starting out with a seasoned commander, and had trained in CONUS (the continental United States) with an emphasis in night operations; this was because Allen, though he could be a pain in the ass, was a very sharp tactician, and realized as early as Kasserine that US units were deficient in night fighting skills—something much better learned in training than acquired under fire. For this reason, the 104th Division from the Reserve component enjoyed a sterling and deserved reputation for their special skills.



The Army Officer Educational System

Acquisition: Commissioned officers enter the service from a variety of sources; of these, only direct commission (for our purposes, battlefield promotion, though others entered the officer ranks by direct paths, and for special purposes) is not education-based. Most Army officers were college graduates.

—The *United States Military Academy* at West Point, New York has historically provided officers of the Regular Army through a four-year academic program. For much of its history (it was established in 1802), West Point was an engineering school, and its academic goals were only widened decades after WW II.⁵ Engineering curriculum or not, most graduates were assigned to their branches by lottery based on general order of merit in their class, and most entered the Infantry, putting calculus and mechanics behind them.

—The *essential military colleges*, originally Norwich University in Vermont, the Virginia Military Institute, and The Citadel, in Charleston, South Carolina were eventually incorporated into the range of sources for commissioned officers (George Marshall was a VMI graduate).

—The *Reserve Officer Training Corps* (ROTC) originated conceptually with the Morrill Act of 1862, which provided land grants for settlers in western states, and provided funding for edu-

⁵ Hard as it may be to believe, *West Point did not offer a course in military leadership until 1947*, and then only by order of the new Army Chief of Staff, D. D. Eisenhower.

cation. This created the “Land Grant College”, with funding provided by the Federal Government—contingent, among other provisions, upon providing instruction in military tactics.

A significant percentage of officers in the Army of the United States at the beginning of the war came from the ROTC programs. However, this source dried up by 1943 because large numbers of men left college to enlist, and the ROTC choice was unattractive because it required four years to complete. By 1943-44, it was replaced in colleges by the Army Specialized Training Program (an approach also used by the Navy called the “V-7 Program”) which allowed students to gain commissions on-campus with the cooperation of the schools. This in effect replaced the ROTC program during the period of high demand, and ROTC would return after the postwar demobilization.

Higher education: Higher education for officers was housed at the Command and General Staff School (now “College”) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Since the post also hosts the federal maximum security prison, the C&GSS was and is referred to as “the short course.” Beyond Leavenworth is the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. *Note that these schools do not influence our impressions, since normal classes were suspended in 1940-41 because of a sudden shortage of qualified field grade officers to manage the mobilization. The program at Leavenworth was reduced to two months.*

Summary:

The United States Army expanded from a small and impoverished peacetime force into a modern army of millions in record. This was possible because of the large manpower resources of the country and the growth of a massive industrial base. But it could not have happened without an intellectual cadre of senior officers, all veterans of WW I, who planned for the inevitable during the two decades between the wars, with scant support from the successive isolationist interwar administrations, a low public esteem for career soldiers, starvation material and financial support, and an entire nation’s stubborn will not to believe as a relentless overseas threat grew.

Thanks to years of thinking and planning by the Regular Army’s quiet brain trust, the United States was able to field a massive, technologically advanced force manned by the energy of an aroused population. The question facing us now is whether our country could ever again match that feat.



LESSON SUMMARY

1. While most living historians understand useful facts about the United States Army in WW II, there is a general ignorance of the “big picture”—how the Army was organized and built. enlisted volunteers and draftees would have a narrow view of the machine they served; officers were much more likely to have the broader view.
2. From the low point of manning levels in the late Depression, the army expanded by a factor of more than 30 by 1945.

3. By late 1942 the Army consisted of a general and a special staff, geographical defense commands, operational theaters of war overseas, the Army Ground Forces at home, the Army Air Forces, and the Army Service Forces.
4. Chain of command emanated from the Commander in Chief (the President) through his military advisor Admiral Leahy to the Secretary of War Henry Stimson; to the Chief of Staff, General Marshall; thence to the various forces and commands.
5. Constructing and training the Army was the job of the Army Ground Forces, which also developed combat and technical doctrine.
6. In the theaters of war, ground forces were commanded through army headquarters (after June 1944 army group structure prevailed), to corps, division, and regiment; plus service and support organizations in the communications zones.
7. The US Army comprised at its peak 95 divisions of various types.
8. Divisions were formed and trained by Army Ground Forces before departure to theaters of war.
9. Army officers were drawn from West Point, ROTC, direct commissions and OCS. Beyond commissioning, army officers normally looked forward to advanced education at the Command and General Staff School and the Army War College, though these opportunities could not be supported for most of the war due to other priorities.

Take the self-assessment quiz for Lesson 2.

Lesson 3 covers the uniforms and equipment of an Army officer.