

“Unpreparing for War”

U.S. Army Combat Training Doctrine 1945 – 1950

By

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Introduction

For the Army leadership in the immediate postwar World War II era, the most pressing problems revolved around maintaining sufficient forces for the occupation of both Germany and Japan. Included among this were questions concerning the maintenance of an Army in sufficient strength, given the manpower and budgetary restrictions that affected both training and force modernization. Linked to these questions was the issue of training, for it is how a force is trained in peacetime is how it will fight in the next war. For Army historians, the example that is most often comes to mind of an Army unprepared for war was Task Force Smith – the under-equipped and ill-prepared regimental sized combat team sent to the Korean Peninsula during the first days of U.S. involvement in the ground war in order to stem the tide of the onrushing North Korean People’s Army while General Douglas MacArthur gathered sufficient forces back in Japan and the United States to repel the invader. The fate of Task Force Smith and its near annihilation has since become the battle cry or example of unpreparedness in the U.S. Army. As this paper will attempt to illustrate, the Army’s “unpreparedness” could have and “should have” been avoided, this only had the Army maintained its World War II-era training program in both Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training, the fate of Task Force Smith might have been different.¹

¹ See James F. Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War: Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington, D.C., Office of the Chief of Military History, Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1972), pp. 40-60. Hereafter cited as Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*; Roy E. Appleman, *United States Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong: North to the Yalu* (Washington, D.C., Office of the Chief of Military History, Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1961), pp. 59-76. Hereafter cited as Appleman, *South to the Naktong: North to the Yalu*.

The U.S. Army's Training Program, 1943-1945

By May 1943, the U.S. Army's Replacement Training Centers, armed with the lessons of the fighting in North Africa and the Southwest Pacific were, in fact, in the process of turning out a well-trained Soldier. With training focused on "branch immaterial training," that is, "limiting training to a common basic course," the Army Ground Forces, in the thirteen weeks of initial training a Soldier, were producing Soldiers that were able to quickly adjust to the realities of combat in both the (Italian) and later Northern European) theaters as well as in the Southwest Pacific. As the fighting in all three theaters grew more intense, commanders in both theaters were in fact, "demanding that a replacement be able to join a unit engaged in combat," ready to fight.²

As such, it was the opinion of the G-1 that all Replacement Training Center training be branch immaterial in order that the training centers produce "an individual fighting man capable of self-sufficient action in arms or service as a basic replacement."³

After much debate, primarily between the Army G-1, field commanders, and Army G-3, over the quality (or, in many cases, the lack thereof) of soldiers reporting to front line units, Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair, the Army G-3 (Army Ground Forces), implemented a seventeen-week basic combat training program, adding in this case, four weeks of additional field training, prior to reporting to a replacement division, or being sent, as was the case after the commencement of the Northwest European campaign on 6 June 1944, directly to a replacement unit as a "filler," or replacement to a line unit engaged in combat where the individual Soldier received what was essentially "on the

²Robert Palmer, Bell I. Wiley, and William R. Keast, *United States Army in World War II: The Army Ground Forces: Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops* (Washington, D.C., Historical Division, Department of the Army, 1948), p. 402. Hereafter cited as Palmer, et.a., *Army Ground Forces: Procurement and Training*.

³Ibid, pp. 401-2.

job” training. With the increased tempo of fighting after the invasion of Sicily and later of the Italian mainland, as well as General MacArthur’s Southwest Pacific offensive in the Solomons, however, “a unit in battle had no time to give training in teamwork to the replacements it received.”⁴ Hence, it became necessary for the Army Ground Force, which had sole responsibility for the training of replacements, to adopt a seventeen-week training program whereby a Soldier would learn not only basic individual skills but also unit or small unit training that included assaulting and reduction of field fortifications and the use of heavy and light weapons. In essence, a soldier trained over a period of seventeen-vice thirteen weeks, would now receive the basic skills that gave him a better chance of survival on the battlefield. Indeed, evidence suggests that the additional four weeks of unit and small unit training was one of the critical factors that not only turned back the German Ardennes offensive during the crucial first days of their counteroffensive, but also assisted General MacArthur’s forces in taking on the main forces of the Japanese Army on Luzon and later on Okinawa.⁵

By war’s end, the U.S. Army had perhaps, the finest training program it had ever had insofar as meeting the demands of theater commanders in preparing soldiers for the rigors of combat. Budget cuts, the rapid demobilization of the Army at the end of World War II, and the demands placed on the forces over the occupation of Germany and Japan contributed to the de-emphasis in training of a force that had been truly “hollowed out”

⁴ Ibid, p. 401.

⁵Some of the best examples of the improved ability of U.S. Infantry after 1943 in action see Hugh M. Cole, *United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations: The Ardennes: The Battle of the Bulge* (Washington, D.C., Center of Military History, 2000), pp. 238 – 34; Robert Ross, Smith, *United States Army in World War II: The War in the Pacific: Triumph in the Philippines* (Washington, D.C., Office of the Chief of Military History, Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1963),203-31; Roy E. Appleman, James M. Burns, Russell A. Gugeler, and John Stevens, *United States Army in World War II: The War in the Pacific, Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, d.c., Headquarters, Department of the Army, Center of Military History, 1984, pp. 273-313.

by both a budget-minded Congress and President Harry S. Truman's Secretary of Defense – Louis Johnson. More important, however, in its desire to get more troops to occupation duty overseas, the Army had cut its thirteen-week basic combat training for new enlistees to eight weeks with responsibility for further training placed on the Soldier's first unit of assignment. Had the Army maintained the training infra-structure it had built up during the last two years of World War II, and had not "contracted" to the point of near-irrelevance, the unpreparedness of both soldiers and newly-commissioned second lieutenants for the realities of combat may not have occurred in the post-World War II era. What is even more disturbing in this instance was the fact that the Army had both the doctrine and infra-structure in place during these so-called "lean years," to better train Soldiers in basic combat skills. What the Army lacked at the time was a standardized training program capable of preparing forces it had on hand for combat. Indeed, theater commanders would repeatedly cite the lack of funds and new equipment as the reasons for their unpreparedness prior to the outbreak of the Korean War. What they didn't say was their inability to implement a rigorous training program – one that did not require an excessive amount of money, with the manpower and equipment on hand, or the lack of a standardized training program. For as Task Force Smith demonstrated even an under-equipped force can make a difference if trained properly and more importantly to standards.

Army Training Doctrine 1945-1948

In retrospect, there remain questions as to how the Army's combat readiness during the post-World War II era leading up to the opening months of the Korean War deteriorated to the point that soldiers could not function on the battlefield, thus allowing

units such as Task Force Smith, as well as other units of the 24th Division to be overwhelmed and, in some cases, annihilated from the time of their introduction to the fighting in early July 1950 through the breakout on the Pusan Perimeter after the Inchon landing in September 1950. As one Army study concluded, postwar demobilization and the drastic cuts in manpower that cut deep into the Army's overall readiness were the main reasons for this unpreparedness. More important were the cuts that occurred in the Army's training base, due in large part to the drain on manpower and budget cuts that affected the two ground combat services (Army and Marine Corps). Demobilization, in fact, had a draconian effect on the Army's 13-week basic training as the latter had to be reduced to eight weeks in order to "speed up the retarded flow of personnel into technical training installations," as well as provide manpower for occupation duty in Germany and Japan. Demobilization likewise had an effect on first line divisions, such as the 1st Cavalry Division, which were essentially "robbing Peter to pay Paul," of trained manpower to keep even the basic of services within the division functioning.⁶

This situation lasted for nearly two years as Army planners set out to redress some of the major shortfalls that had occurred in its ability to maintain combat readiness despite the continuing budget cutbacks in postwar defense spending. By 1948, the downward spiral seemed to have been halted as both the signing of the Selective Service Act of 1948 and voluntary enlistments once again began to fill the Army's ranks. Along with this

⁶ For a definition of readiness and preparedness see Richard K. Betts, *Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, and Consequences* (Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1995), p. 47. Hereafter cited as Betts, *Military Readiness*; John C. Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization in the United States Army*, DA-PAM 20-210 (Washington, D.C., Headquarters, Department of the Army, Center of Military History, 1952), pp. 270-2; Steven L. Rearden, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Volume 1: The Formative Years: 1947-1950* (Washington, D.C. Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1984), 309-84; for the Marine Corps' readiness see T. X. Hammes, *Forgotten Warriors: The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, the Corps Ethos, and the Korean War* (Lawrence, KS, University Press of Kansas, 2010), pp. 71-86.

increase in manpower came the need for reform in the Army's training base. For the Army Ground Forces, Training Circular No. 7 or as it came to be known, "TC7," published and issued to training commands and field forces on 28 July 1948, outlined the Army's training guidance for the next two years. Included in TC 7 were the basic policies and plans necessary for training placed under the Director of Organization & Training, General Staff. In effect, Training Circular No. 7, specifically charged the Director of Organization and Training "with supervising the execution of those directives, at all levels." As with its World War II predecessor, the Army Ground Force, the role of the Office Chief of Army Field Forces or OCAFF, in these matters was the "supervision and coordination" of training within the framework of the Organization & Training directives.

For the next two years, OCAFF, which was under the leadership of General Mark Clark, had sole responsibility for troop training. More important, and in a direct response to a deterioration in basic soldier skills among what we would call first-term soldiers, officials in OCAFF felt "that the time had come to introduce many of the changes in training which were deemed necessary to procure adequately trained "individuals and units utilized in a field army."⁷

Indeed, by February 1949, OCAFF was already publishing and issuing training circulars and pamphlets on training, much of this based on the lessons of the last war. What is more important was the fact that many of the lessons of World War II were being published in issues of the *Military Review*, *Infantry Journal*, and other official and semi-official publications. One such example examples of the lessons learned during World

⁷See Chapter 6, "Troop Training," Volume 2, Tab 1, in Army Field Forces, *Annual History, Office Chief of Army Field Forces, 1 January – 31 December 1950*, Historical Division, Information Section (Washington, D.C., Department of the Army, 1950), p. 1. Hereafter cited as *Army Field Forces, Annual History for 1950*.

War II was an article published in *Military Review* (March 1947) by Lieutenant Colonel Harry L. Hillyard, an infantry officer who fought on Okinawa and who wrote that during one operation on the island, there existed a “lack of understanding and cooperation between . . . tanks and infantry.” In another example, Lieutenant Colonel D. M. Oden, a cavalry officer, wrote in the January 1948 *Military Review* on the role of the “New Armored Division,” that “Tank and infantry battalion are organized symmetrically, thus permitting balanced tank and infantry teams throughout all divisional tactical formations. The additional infantry also increases the division’s defensive and staying ability.”⁸ Colonel Oden added that “tanks remain the striking force in the division.”⁹

Furthermore, based on the closer cooperation of tanks and infantry in Korea during the fighting on the Pusan Perimeter, and using both Colonel Hillyard’s and Oden’s articles as examples of disseminating lessons learned, it can be said that OCAFF had made progress in disseminating and indoctrinating commanders of the necessity of combined arms operation and training. At least from the standpoint of doctrine, the Army did, in fact, learn from its doctrinal shortcomings and was able to correct these deficiencies albeit in a peacetime training environment. This latter point was highlighted when in the summer of 1950 OCAFF conducted a carefully “planned field test of a force of combined arms,” in direct response to the lessons filtering out of Korea. In field exercises held throughout the summer fall of 1950, under the direction of OCAFF, officers, many of the best units were “subjected to the more practical field testing of actual combat in Korea.” Indeed, during training operations SWEETBRIAR, SWARMER, and PORTEX, OCAFF officials, in

⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Harry L. Hillyard, U.S. Army, “Employment of Tanks by the Infantry Division,” *Military Review*, March 1947, pp. 50-9; Lieutenant Colonel D. M. Oden, U.S. Army, “The New Armored Division,” *Military Review*, January 1948), pp. 17-28.

⁹ Oden, “The New Armored Division,” *Military Review*, January 1948, p. 17.

dismissing the budgetary and technical issues that might occur with such testing, instead determined that the benefits from “field testing the new T/OE&E (Tables of Organization and Equipment) not only far outweighed the possible increase in funds and manpower while at the same time stating that such exercises were (an) imperative if the operational readiness of new or reorganized units is to be assured.”¹⁰

“A Sound Basic Combat Training Program” (February – August 1949)

As for the implementation of a sound basic combat training program, Army Field Forces Memorandum No. 1, by OCAFF, published on 9 August 1949, which took into consideration the lack of manpower and funds, stated that, “efficient and timely use of manpower . . . [was] . . . a cardinal policy of all training.”¹¹ Training was to be conducted in peace as in war built on the basis that training under mobilization should be an expansion rather than a revolution, of, peacetime training,” practices. The memorandum also stated that “training requirements must be reduced to absolute essentials and training methods rid of all loss motion.”

This emphasis on individual and unit training in basic combat skills and tasks can be seen in the changes in emphasis that took place within a year of OCAFF’s monitoring and direction of basic combat training. By the terms of Training Circular No. 7 in August 1948, Paragraph 10, TC 7 stated that:

(a) Stress in training will be placed on maintaining a balanced program. Special emphasis will be placed on particular subjects only as deficiencies in those subjects appear or can be foreseen.

¹⁰ Chapter 7, Special Requirements of the Korean Operation,” in *Army Field Forces, Annual History for 1950*. P. 3.

¹¹ *Army Field Forces, Chapter 6, Annual History for 1950*, p.2

(b) The following essential elements require constant attention during all phases and types of training and operations: (1) Leadership; (2) Military discipline; (3) appearance and conduct; (4) *Maintenance and Supply discipline* [Emphasis OCAFF Training Memorandum No. 1]

One year later, on 9 August 1949, OCAFF Training Memorandum No, 1 emphasized that:

(d) All training must stress that every Soldier, regardless of assignment has as his primary duty the obligation to fight. Individual training has three purposes: first, to teach individuals how to fight, and second, to teach men how instruct others how to fight. Unit training has three purposes; first, to teach individuals how teamwork produces an effective combat unit; second, to develop cadres on which fighting units can be built, third, to produce in minimum time, smooth working units which are ready for combat.

(e) In all training phases, emphasis must be placed on *Supply Discipline* and each individual impressed with the realization that the fighting man cannot accomplish this mission without material, which this country may never have again have a surplus. Care and conservation are therefore of first consideration in attaining the training objectives. [Emphasis OCAFF Training Memorandum No. 1]

In the fall of 1949, OCAFF submitted its findings on training concepts to the Office of the Chief of Staff for comments and further guidance. In looking ahead to the possibility of another large-scale mobilization of manpower to meet a national emergency or war, General J. Lawton Collins, Army Chief of Staff, as well as other senior Army leaders, “stressed the belief that the new Training Circular (Training Circular No. 7), should place strong emphasis upon mobilization, and conform in appropriate respects to

Army Mobilization Plan -1 and any future mobilization plan.”¹² In a letter dated 30 December 1949, General Clark wrote Lieutenant General Manton Eddy, Commanding General of the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, KS., that insofar as OCAFF was concerned, it was clear that the Chief of Staff had placed emphasis on mobilization in the training program, and that the message from General Collins and other senior officials was that “Every able bodied man should be able to fight as a foot Soldier in addition to becoming a specialist.” In essence, General Clark informed General Eddy that from a doctrinal point of view, the Chief of Staff made it clear that henceforth, every Soldier had to be able to fight as an infantryman regardless of military occupational specialty.(MOS).¹³ Thus, published as Department of the Army Training Circular 1, on 27 February 1950), less than four months before the outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950, Paragraph 6, *Emphasis on Training*, stated, “All Able-bodied soldiers will be trained in the fundamentals of basic infantry combat to include squad tactics.”¹⁴

With the signing of the Selective Service Act by President Truman in 1948, and the influx of inductees into the Army, OCAFF instituted an eight-week (8-week) basic training program that same summer and had, that same year with the belief that as the budgetary and manpower situation improved, it would be able to lengthen the training cycle by five weeks, for a total of 13 weeks. In citing the deficiencies noted by field commanders that were sent back to OCAFF, General Clark submitted the request for lengthening basic combat training based on the facts that: (1) The 8-week program provided only a brief period in which trainees could learn at maximum efficiency. During

¹² Ibid, p. 3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

the first two or three weeks, impact of this transition from civilian to military life prevented their retaining any considerable portion of the instructional material covered; (2) The program provided insufficient time for repletion of subject material – an important element in the learning process; (3) Graduates of the 8-week cycle who went overseas usually had to be given further basic training before being assigned to fill vacancies in operating units. Establishment of training centers for this purpose by overseas commanders constituted wasteful duplication of training personnel and facilities; and (4) Proper implementation of Department of the Army Circular 202, 1948 (Career Guidance of Warrant Officer and Enlisted Personnel), was impossible in eight weeks, since the trainees could not be taught sufficient knowledge and skills to qualify them for promotion from recruit to private.¹⁵

A Fourteen-Week Training Program (February 1949)

In order to correct the deficiencies of both the eight-week and thirteen-week basic training programs, in February 1949, a fourteenth week had been added to provide soldiers, within the time limits of the cycle itself, a period of administrative measures such as processing in and out and personnel classification. The 14-week training program remained in effect through 1949. Designed for progressive individual training in basic subjects common to all branches, it did not, however, provide for branch training. Furthermore, the lengthened training program was not designed to qualify an individual under a particular MOS other than that in individual basic combat skills. In short, the fourteen-week program, while providing a new enlistee (or draftee with basic individual skills, failed to provide the soldier with sufficient training in a specific branch or MOS. The opinion among Army field commanders was that “under mobilization conditions,

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

training of most of the Army's newly-inducted enlisted men would have to be branch material [that is, in a certain MOS or skill], and that the pattern of peacetime training, should be one readily capable of expansion in time of mobilization needs." It was not until fifteen months later, in the summer of 1950, at the start of the Army's commitment to the fighting in Korea that branch material training in the basic training cycle was authorized by the Department of the Army.¹⁶

One last point insofar as the fourteen-week training program was concerned centered on the fact that "commanders were permitted to modify the program in order to make optimum use of existing facilities, and to conform to climatic and other conditions of the training situation." Finally, in an attempt to standardize training throughout the Army, commanders could not omit or add subjects to the training package.

Preventing a Degradation of Skills

Throughout the revision of the Army's basic combat training by OCAFF, the Chief of Staff, General Collins, sought to prevent any degradation of a soldier's training as he moved inside the replacement pipeline to his first unit of assignment, whether that be in the United States or overseas. In a report sent back to the Army Chief of Staff, General MacArthur's Far East command (FEC) reported that troops reporting to the command from basic combat training "had lost much of the benefit of basic training before arriving in the Far East Command."¹⁷ Keeping this last fact in mind, this is one possible explanation for the performance of Task Force Smith and the other units of the 24th Division sent to the Korean peninsula during the first weeks of the North Korean invasion. In short, the problem was not due to a failure of basic or advanced individual

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 7.

¹⁷Schnabel, *Policy and Direction*, p. 56.

training, but in the training program instituted by Far Eastern Command or those in Germany to maintain these skills once a Soldier was in theater.

The Balance Sheet: A Summary

In a visit to General MacArthur's Far East command in the fall of 1949, General Collins noted in his report to Secretary of the Army Kenneth C. Royall, that insofar as the training program then in progress was concerned, he was "generally well satisfied" with what he saw in Japan and Hawaii and what he had been told in conference by General MacArthur. The Army Chief of Staff, in fact, informed Secretary Royall that "it was important to note that taking into consideration the fact that our troops were primarily engaged in occupation missions . . . the troops of the Eighth Army are not now in fighting condition . . . [however] . . . they have been recently been brought back up to strength . . . [and are] . . . making excellent progress with realistic field training and are planning exercises with close fighter-bombers support by the early spring of 1950. Given another six months the division I inspected should be in excellent shape."¹⁸ Unfortunately, as events on the Korean peninsula unfolded that late spring - early summer of 1950, , MacArthur's Far East Command did not have the luxury of an "additional six months" of training."

It is important to note that the Army's official history of the first few months prior to and during the opening phase of the Korean War noted, "All units of the Eighth Army had completed the battalion phase of their training by the target date of 15 May 1950 . . . Reports on the Eighth Army's divisions [of which the 24th Division was one such division] which were sent to the Department of the Army in May 1950 showed, estimates ranging from 84 percent to 65 percent of full combat efficiency, for the four divisions in

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 56-7.

Japan.”¹⁹ In short, given the standard that anything below a unit readiness standard of 50% was considered to be “unprepared for combat,” the units sent to Korea, including the 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry or “Task Force Smith,” as it came to be known, at least on paper, and in accordance with Army training and operational doctrine at the time were, in fact, considered by Army planners to be “combat ready,” and thus able to perform battalion-level operations in a combat environment.

Furthermore, given the accepted definition of military readiness, “The ability of forces, units, weapons systems, or equipment to deliver the outputs for which they were designed . . . to deploy and employ without unacceptable delays, “as well as the “force’s ability to perform one’s mission when directed to do . . .with little or no warning,” by all accounts, Task Force Smith, contrary to the accepted opinion that it had failed in its mission in stopping the NKPA, is simply not true.²⁰

Additionally, given the fact that historians have based Task Force Smith’s readiness on definitions established in the 1970s and 1980s, questions as to the unit’s readiness are disingenuous at best. In short, and in conclusion, given the revisions in Army basic and field training in 1948 and 1949, as well as Army operational and tactical doctrine of the era, Task Force Smith and the other units of the Army’s 24th Division, by all accounts fought well and fought hard those first weeks in July 1950 on the Korean peninsula. It is important to keep in mind that training and the implementation of that doctrine into the training of soldiers and units are key indicators of how well units will ultimately perform in combat. By all accounts, the Soldiers and officers of Task Force Smith were, in fact, familiar and trained in tank-infantry operations, anti-tank doctrine, and other individual

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 58-59; Appleman, *South to the Naktong: North to the Yalu*, pp. 60-82; Betts, *Military Readiness*, p. 25.

²⁰Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, p. 80-2

combat skills. Furthermore given the draconian budget and manpower cuts forced on the Army by the Truman Administration, there is little wonder why the Army performance was mediocre at best during the first weeks of war in Korea. Also, the problems that existed within not only Task Force Smith but other units in the Army worldwide at the time were not, in fact, with the Army's training doctrine or methodology, for both doctrine and methodology were sound. Problems existed, however, in both the implementation and execution of that training doctrine by commanders within the Far Eastern Command and Army field forces in Germany. In short, the Army staff had long forgotten the maxim offered by Marshal Mikhail Suvorov, the 18th Century Russian General who perhaps summed it best and perhaps laid out the best philosophy in training an Army for combat: "Hard in Peace . . . Easy in War."