

# Pre-Deployment Training

As the German Army burst across Poland in the late summer of 1939 with 14 mechanized divisions and 44 infantry and mountain divisions, the US Army could count exactly no armored divisions and six foot-and horse-mobile infantry divisions in its ranks -- and the regiments of those divisions were not even stationed together at the same posts. There were barely 190,000 men on active duty in the United States Army, and most of their training consisted of close order drill, dry firing exercises, often with outdated weapons, and mass athletics.

If the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and the rape of Poland had not caught the American people's attention, the invasion of France and the Low Countries in the spring of 1940 did. Within a few months of the humiliation of western Europe's largest army (the French), Congress appropriated more money for the Army than it had in the previous 22 years combined. In the autumn, the National Guard was federalized and inducted into active duty around the nation, and the first peacetime draft was initiated for young American males. By the eve of the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor, the Army had increased about 800% in size, to 1.64 million. There were 30 infantry divisions, five armored divisions, and two horse cavalry divisions on the Army rolls, of which a total of 17 divisions were rated as "combat-ready."

After the debacle at Pearl Harbor, the Army expanded to its all-time largest size, ultimately reaching 8.3 million in strength. In 1942, the United States War Department planned a ground Army of about 114 divisions of all types. Considering that the Germans possessed about 300 and the Japanese about 90 divisions, this did not seem to be an unrealistic number for a nation with as many citizens as those two principal enemy nations combined. However, several factors combined to prevent the US Army from even building 80% as many divisions as its leaders originally intended. The very different requirements for a nation isolated by two great oceans to wage war far from its shores eventually forced a much higher percentage of manpower into the Navy and Army Air Corps than in the enemy's armed forces; the losses attendant to the strategic bombing campaign were much higher than originally estimated; and the industrial skilled manpower requirements to build the aircraft and ships necessary to fight far from home also affected these plans significantly. Ultimately, the Army built only 90 divisions, of which 87 saw combat. On 15 November 1942, the 100th Infantry Division became part of the US Army's burgeoning ground combat force.

Initially, the 100th Infantry Division followed the Army Ground Forces' plan for creating combat-ready new divisions in one year. The "Mobilization Training Plan," or MTP, called for the phased creation of an officer/NCO cadre of about 1,500 who would be appropriately educated and trained in intense, abbreviated courses, at branch schools and at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The events were approximately as follows:

Early September to mid - October 1942	Officer cadre trained at branch schools and Command and General Staff School.
	Parent division (76th Infantry Division) designates enlisted cadre and promotes to proper ranks.
Mid-October to mid-November 1942	Officer and enlisted cadres arrive at Fort Jackson, South Carolina
15 November 1942	Activation at Fort Jackson.
Mid-November to late December 1942	Initial complement of about 13,500 recruits arrive at Fort Jackson.

Basic training for basic soldiers of the embryo Division was conducted by the officer and enlisted cadre throughout the winter and early spring of 1942 - 43. Military customs and courtesies were taught to orient the neophyte soldiers; close-order drill instilled discipline and cohesion; physical training toughened minds and bodies; and inspections taught "the Army way." Soon, weapons training was under way, and the men began to become familiar with the tools of the soldier's deadly craft. Long days dragged by on various Fort Jackson ranges, as the dry-fire drills gave way to live-fire practice and qualification with rifles, machineguns, pistols, and Browning Automatic Rifles. Later, grenades, mortars, and artillery live firing was added as the Division graduated from the 17-week basic training phase of the MTP into a three-month long unit training phase.



Field firing the M1 rifle, basic weapon of the American infantry in WWII.



Duty in the range pits was boring, uncomfortable, and absolutely essential to the development of marksmanship skills.



Endless inspections taught  
the right way, the wrong way,  
and the Army way.



From calisthenics to conditioning marches  
to obstacle courses, physical training  
hardened the mind and the body.

In this phase, the Division sequentially built squads, platoons, companies, and battalions through a series of field problems. The intensity of training rose with the Carolina temperature, and personnel attrition took its toll. Between activation and the end of June, 1943, the Division lost over two thousand soldiers to injuries and other problems; nearly 1,000 more volunteered for and were transferred to the Air Corps, airborne divisions, or other advanced training programs; and about 500 men were selected for and left to join the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). The latter program, designed to use especially intelligent soldiers for the more esoteric military tasks inherent to modern warfare, would later play a large role in the Division's history.

By July, 1943, the Division embarked on its third phase of training, the "Combined Arms" phase, in which regimental combat teams from across the Division's infantry, artillery, engineer, and medical units came together for the first time in the field. Leaving the Fort Jackson military reservation, the Division spread out over millions of acres of the Palmetto State, conducting maneuvers between Winnsboro and Chester. Opposition was provided by the Sixth Cavalry Regiment (Mechanized), and the oppressive summer weather added a physical aspect of heat to the organizational welding that occurred across the Carolina Piedmont from July through October, 1943.



Crew from Battery B/375th Field Artillery Battalion firing during training, October, 1943.

By late October, the Division was back at Fort Jackson, ready to take on its greatest challenge to that point -- Tennessee Maneuvers.

The 100th left Fort Jackson for good in early November and convoyed to the 15,000-square-mile Tennessee Maneuver Area, in the Cumberland Mountains. From mid-November through mid-January, the division engaged in a series of large-scale maneuvers as part of a corps team, alternately paired with or opposing the 14th Armored Division, 35th Infantry Division, 87th Infantry Division, and 3d Cavalry Group. It is difficult to conceive of an arena in which there could have been much better preparation for what the Division would face in exactly twelve months, in other mountains, 3,000 miles to the north and east . . .



Tennessee Maneuvers placed Century soldiers in the realistic setting of not only forest and fields, but in the middle of farms and towns, as well.



In addition to the tactical skills learned in an extended field environment, the men also came together as teams, from squads to regimental combat teams, and finally, as a Division.

Unfortunately, the Division that convoyed to Fort Bragg, North Carolina in mid-January, 1944, was not the same Division that would go overseas later that year. Successive drafts of combat personnel -- overwhelmingly infantrymen -- combed over 3,500 men out of the Division in the spring of 1944, and sent them as replacements to units already in combat. The infantry replacement training centers were simply not able to keep up with the demand as Army infantry units were bloodied in Italy and the southwest Pacific. These highly-trained Centurymen bolstered the blows of the Fifth Army as it slugged its way up the Italian boot, and the Sixth Army, as it fought its way up the coast of New Guinea in the first half of 1944.



The Division arrived at Fort Bragg from Tennessee Maneuvers, cohesive and well-trained.



Unfortunately, not long after the Division arrived at Bragg, levies of trained soldiers were "stripped out" as replacements for units already in combat.



Division headquarters set up a receiving station to facilitate the inprocessing of the large number of officers and enlisted men who arrived in the spring of 1944 to replace those who were shipped out to units already in combat.

The 100th was thus "backfilled" with thousands of replacements from a variety of sources. Air crews and other personnel from the Air Corps filled the ranks, as did soldiers from antiaircraft units and service support outfits. Ironically, the largest single source of replacements for the men who shipped out to join other units already in combat was the ASTP, which was broken up in early 1944; the Army needed riflemen more than it needed Hungarian radio intercept operators or chemical engineers. That they were especially bright (the ASTP required a 115 general technical score for admission; Officer Candidate School required a 110!) was an added bonus in the bargain for all concerned. The challenges of the modern battlefield required using every possible advantage.

Thus, the 100th Infantry Division embarked on a "Supplemental Training Period" designed to assimilate the new arrivals, while building on the experience already gained by the vast majority of the Division's soldiers since late 1942. The chain of command instituted an especially vigorous physical regimen as well, not only to toughen the ASTP men, fresh from college campuses around America, but to help psychologically weld them together with the "veterans" who were already present. A strong intramural athletic program only added to this effect.



Training for the new arrivals from other branches emphasized the development of infantry skills. Here, new infantrymen learn how to employ rifle grenades.



Classes were usually taught in a field environment, in the bright Carolina summer sun.



Mass athletics and intramural competition also helped develop cohesion, while conditioning the soldiers and providing a diversion from the stresses of intensive training.



Tactical roadmarches toughened the new infantrymen physically and mentally, while bonding the new men with their "veteran" buddies.

Throughout the Division's tenure at Fort Bragg, rumors abounded regarding the Division's ultimate role in the war. The temporary issue of camouflage utility uniforms led some to believe that the Division was bound for the Pacific; ranger training made some believe the outfit was headed for Norway. Some hopeful few believed the emphasis placed on physical conditioning and drill -- actually a coherent attempt to build discipline and cohesion -- indicated that the 100th was really only a "show division." This latter rumor was reinforced by numerous visits by dignitaries such as the Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, and dozens of generals, senior businessmen, and the like. The participation by a select provisional battalion of the Division's smartest marchers in the Fifth War Loan Drive in New York City did little to allay this rumor of nothing but stateside soldiering in the 100th's future.



Major General Burrell escorts Secretary of War Stimson while other brass look on, Fort Bragg, March 1943.



Soldiers of the Provisional Battalion at "Parade Rest" during ceremonies in Times Square on Infantry Day, 11 June 1944.



Among the many rumors that circulated about the Division's ultimate mission was one based on the temporary issue of camouflage utility uniforms -- the Division was "definitely" bound for the Pacific!



With all of the support the Division rendered to the war effort with parades, field demonstrations, and other missions, another natural rumor was that the Division would never deploy overseas. Here, the 398th Infantry passes in review.



Nothing could have been more untrue. On 10 August 1944, the Division was alerted for deployment to the European Theater of Operations. The words of the *Story of the Century* say it best,

*To the accompaniment of martial strains from the 100th Division van, first elements of the Century, carrying full field packs and horseshoe rolls, boarded the long line of waiting Pullmans and flopped onto prearranged seats. For several moments the inspiring tunes, which had paced our steps on uncounted reviews across the drill fields of Bragg and Jackson were drowned in the cacophony of grunts and curses as we shifted duffel bags in an effort to make ourselves comfortable. Then, noses and foreheads pressed to windows, we watched Fort Bragg hide behind a curve in the railroad.*

By 30 September, the Division had closed on Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, where preparations were made for embarkation in New York. Final passes were granted, essential classes were taught, and the staff and chain of command made last-minute plans and adjustments. On 5 October, the Division loaded aboard the *George Washington*, *George Gordon*, *McAndrews*, and *Mooremac Moon*. The convoy, which also included the entire 103d Infantry Division and the advance party of the 14th Armored Division, set sail the next morning, bound for Marseilles -- and combat.

