"PEOPLE" POLICIES IN COMBAT

by

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The task of maintaining the strength of a military unit once it entered combat was met with a variety of solutions by the four major powers during World War II. Maintaining unit effectiveness is crucial in a prolonged war. Short campaigns can be fought with little concern for replacements; however, long wars demand an orderly process for replacing losses and giving relief to the survivors. Germany, Britain, Russia, and the United States each used a different approach to providing replacements, returning wounded, and rehabilitating weak units. A comparison of these methods may provide some insight about their relative merits.

There are several approaches to the replacement of casualties. One is to replace the entire regiment, battalion, or company, sending all the survivors of the old unit either to the rear, to other duties, or home. The short-term enlistments of the 18th century accomplished this goal. The drawbacks are the waste of experience of the officers and noncommissioned officers, the need for a supply of trained manpower to replace the units withdrawn, and the difficulty in determining criteria for discarding units.

Another approach is to feed individual replacements into the units continually as losses are experienced. The problem here is that the replacements may not have an opportunity to learn their roles before being involved in combat, so the unit is often faced with a steady deterioration of quality. A difficult issue related to individual replacement is the return of the wounded man to his own unit. If the wounded are returned to the general replacement stream, unit loyalty is lost. If the wounded are returned directly to the unit, there is the danger of overstrength in one unit and shortage in another.

Part of the individual replacement issue is the source of the replacement. Should the replacement come from the identical geographical area as the unit, or should both unit and replacement be based on the nation at large, having men drawn from around the country for each unit and replacements coming from all areas as well? If the regional basis is adopted, how restricted should that basis be—state or province, region, county, or even town?

A compromise between the two extremes of discarding the unit when worn out or maintaining its strength through continual replacement involves rotating units out of the line after they are reduced to an appropriate level, refilling them with replacements, and returning them to the line to replace another unit that would go through the same process. This method requires extra units or courage by the commander to reduce his front-line strength. The advantages are manifold: new men have time to assimilate into their units and be trained, veterans have a needed relief from combat, and the commander has a reserve in time of severe crisis.

Forming too many units has the disadvantage that the demand for equipment

is increased. There is a temptation to create more units during a period when losses are low, but when the fighting becomes more intense, a nation may be unable to maintain them.

Maintaining combat effectiveness requires that both men and material in a command be maintained at a number reasonably close to the assigned table of organization and equipment. Otherwise the tables should be changed to reflect a more efficient or more attainable situation. The condition, both emotional and physical, of the individual combatant must also be maintained. Exhaustion resulting from prolonged combat or difficult assignments reduces both the morale and the physical condition of the individual and reduces the expectation of survival. Exposure to disease, injury, or death must be reduced to the lowest level possible. An atmosphere must be created that encourages the hope of survival.

This analysis of the World War II application of these principles will begin with a comparison of the methods of creating divisions, which had a vital effect on the techniques of maintaining them. Next the various approaches of providing replacements and returning wounded will be reviewed. Finally the methods of reconstituting worn divisions will be examined.

CREATING DIVISIONS

Immediately following World War I, the German General Staff began planning the reconstruction of the German army within the limits defined by the Treaty of Versailles. Beginning with seven divisions in 1933, the German army grew rapidly with each new division associated with a military district. The usual method of forming a new division was to take three battalions from each of two existing divisions plus other units and combine them to form a new division. The resulting gaps in all three divisions were filled with recruits. Strenuous effort was made to provide military training to the men who came of age during the period before military conscription was reinstituted in 1935.[1] Because of the light casualty rate from 1939 until June 1941, the Germans continued to mobilize units. Divisions in the German army were formed in "waves" or groups of somewhat similar units. The first wave included 39 peacetime divisions. The second included 20 divisions raised by November 1939 from men in the first reserve who had been trained since 1935. The third wave included men who had served in World War I. Succeeding waves raised the army to 148 infantry divisions by May 1940. By 22 June 1941, there were 208 German divisions, and a year later there were 233.[2]

Each division had a territorial affiliation with a *Wehrkreis*, or military district. Regiments were associated with particular towns. A maximum number of divisions were mobilized to meet the many commitments, to the point that after 1941 it became difficult to maintain them near their authorized strength.

In 1942 the Germans could not provide sufficient replacements to maintain divisions at the nine-battalion level. The number of battalions was reduced to seven, rather than reduce the number of divisions. Through various expedients, the Germans managed to keep about 300 divisions active, though under strength, until 1945, despite heavy losses in the east and later in the west.[3]

In the case of Britain, the cement that binds the British army is regimental tradition, in contrast to the divisional pride of the German and American armies. A British regiment consisted of four to eight battalions recruited in a city, county, or other locality. Individual battalions might be gathered in homogeneous brigades, but most often were scattered among many divisions.

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British regimental traditions date to 1660, when Charles II returned from exile and established the first guard regiments. During the 17th century, regiments were raised for campaigns and bore the name of their colonel. During the 18th century, long periods of overseas garrison duty created the regimental spirit, as the troops were dependent on their own resources.[4]

In the 1850s, each of the 25 senior British regiments was given a second battalion which remained at home, serving to supply the battalion overseas with groups of replacements called drafts. In 1870-72 Edward Cardwell linked pairs of junior regiments to provide a similar two-battalion system. In 1881, regimental districts were formed in Great Britain; all regiments were renamed, often with geographical designations, and numbers were eliminated, e.g., the Durham Light Infantry was recruited in County Durham in northeast England. Before 1939 a regiment consisted of two line battalions, one of which was normally overseas, a depot to provide reinforcements (the British term for replacements), two militia battalions to supply additional units in the event of war, and volunteer units.[5] During World War II a regiment had two regular battalions, two or more territorial battalions, home defense battalions, and young soldier battalions.

Individual British infantry battalions were assigned to infantry brigades, which might have a geographical association. For example, the brigades of the 51st Highland Division were made up of battalions from Scotland. Divisions formed from territorial units in 1939 were more likely to be associated with regions in Great Britain.

By January 1942, the British had formed 39 divisions plus contributing units to commonwealth divisions. Some divisions proved surplus or could not be maintained and were subsequently disbanded. Nevertheless, the true affiliation was to the regiment, and though the number of battalions might be reduced, the regiment, the "home" of the soldier, remained.

While the Germans and British went to great lengths to keep men in territorially linked units, the Americans made no effort to retain such ties. The rationale was that it was inefficient because of the extra effort to sort out men from a particular area to fill a unit. Another fear was that if a unit lost a large number of men, as for example the 106th Infantry Division in December 1944, there would be a negative effect on civilian morale in that area.

Before it was mobilized, the American National Guard was territorially linked; companies were recruited in towns in one or several states. After mobilization, the fillers were drawn from around the United States. As the war progressed, the Guard divisions tended to lose some of their men to other assignments. No attempt was made to retain the identity of the divisions by providing fillers from the same state. A gap opened between the newcomers and the men who had been with a unit before mobilization. The new men complained that they were not given a fair share of the promotions and were subject to discrimination. Maintaining geographical identity would have alleviated this problem.

The American Regular Army divisions were drawn from a cross section of the nation. Even though regiments were stationed at posts for long periods before the war, recruits came from all over. The new divisions created in 1941 and 1942 may have drawn fillers from induction centers in a few states and may have accidentally acquired some geographical link, but as replacements came in, this link soon disappeared.

The 90 American divisions mobilized were barely sufficient if not inadequate. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson argued for more divisions in keeping with the plan for 200, but he gave way to General George C. Marshall's insistence on keeping the number low to insure an adequate flow of replacements.[6] A greater number of divisions would have led to shortages in the rifle companies, but more opportunity to rest divisions.

The Russians increased the size of their army rapidly between 1939 and 1941. By June 1941, they had 175 divisions. Their heaviest losses were incurred in the first four months of the war. The Red Army had about 4.4

million men on the front in June 1941, and even though millions more were mobilized in the early months, the numbers were reduced to 2.3 million by October 1941.[7] The Russians resorted to national militia divisions made up of students, workers, and professionals under Communist Party leaders, formed in neighborhoods in Leningrad and Moscow, given several days of training by a few army men, and sent out to face the Germans.[8]

To provide the massive strategic reserves that he believed necessary to cope with the Germans, Stalin in July 1941 created the GUF, the Reserve Armies Administration.[9] Under this organization, entire armies were created to replace those destroyed in combat. In October 1941, the formation of nine reserve armies was ordered.[10] These armies provided the punch for the winter offensive of 1941-42.

In 1942, the Red Army was reorganized. The division was reduced to an authorized strength of only 10,000 and the corps organization was eliminated, with the number of divisions in a field army reduced to about six.[11] In the spring of 1942, Stalin ordered the formation of ten more armies. This group of reserve armies, numbered 1st through 10th Reserve, averaged six rifle divisions each with 7000 men per division. Beginning in June 1942, Stalin released them to the Southern Front.[12]

The German offensive of 1942 ground the Red Army down again. In July 1942, of the 38 divisions on the Stalingrad Front, only half had 6000 to 8000 men. The others had fewer, some as few as 1000 men.[13] The Germans were stopped at Stalingrad and thrown back during the winter of 1942-43. New divisions were formed in 1943, bringing the total to 513.[14]

Russian divisions often had not only a territorial affiliation but also a racial consistency. There were over 100 nationalities with significant numbers in the Red Army. Of the 11,000 winners of the Hero of the Soviet Union award, 75 percent were Russians, 18 percent Ukrainians, and a substantial number of the remainder were Byelorussians, Tartars, Jews, Kazakhs, Armenians, Georgians, Uzbecks, Mordavinians, Chuvashes, Azerbaijanians, Bashkirs, and Ossetians.[15]

In the 1930s, the Soviets formed units with one nationality as well as units with mixed nationalities, termed the "All Union" composition. In 1938 the Red Army turned entirely to mixed units because of the difficulty in training nationality units to fight in a variety of climates. Because all of the manuals were in Russian, nationality units had required training in two languages.[16] Although mixed nationalities was the theory, the size of the Soviet Union and the poor communications made impossible the transition to all mixed units.[17] Little attempt was made to retain the racial identity of a division through replacements.

Of the four powers, only the United States divorced the unit from a geographical subdivision in both theory and practice. The Germans and British maintained the geographical tie in their replacement policy, while the Russians apparently ignored the relationship when replacing losses.

PROVIDING REPLACEMENTS

The methods of providing replacements varied sharply in their concern for the individual soldier in his training and his delivery to a unit in which he could quickly find a role. The German replacement was trained in an *ersatz* battalion located in the town in Germany where the regiment it supported had been formed. All of the men in a regiment therefore theoretically came from the same town, and, for the most part, this was the case until the last months of the war. The *ersatz* battalion received the recruits when they were drafted; issued them weapons, uniforms, and papers; provided basic training; and sent them to the combat divisions. The *ersatz* battalions also held men recovering from wounds or sickness.[18]

Each *ersatz* battalion consisted of three or more companies. The average strength was a thousand men. The headquarters company, with 100 to 200 men, consisted of a cadre who administered the battalion and trained the

recruits. There were one or more companies of recruits in training, plus one or more companies of convalescents. Ideally, recruits were given two months' training in the battalion and sent on for an additional two months' training in a school, in a reserve battalion, or in a field training division.[19] Originally a replacement battalion supplied men for a regiment, but as the number of divisions multiplied, one battalion provided for an entire combat division or two occupation divisions.[20]

A battalion could turn out about 200 recruits per month and readied about 200 wounded to return to duty. The wounded were sent forward in convalescent companies. The men who were returned from schools or reserve battalions after advanced training were formed into "march battalions" and sent to their parent divisions.[21]

In 1942 the Germans formed five field training divisions in Russia to provide additional training for recruits and to fight partisans. After a period in the field training units, the recruits went on to their divisions. Once in the division, the recruit was assigned to the battle school teaching group or the field replacement battalion. Recruits were kept there until considered ready for combat, even though the rifle companies might have been short. The German consideration of the combat value of the rifle company was based on its 18 light machine guns. Despite the shortage of riflemen, the German divisions were not weak in combat value.[22]

The British replacement system was also geographically oriented. Recruits received their basic training either in infantry training centers or in primary training centers located in the region providing recruits for a number of regiments. In the system created in November 1921, there were ten Grouped Regimental Areas, each serving five to eight regiments.[23]

In August 1941, 25 infantry training centers were created. In November 1942, an additional 11 primary training centers were added.[24] The infantry training center was composed of a headquarters, a training company, a holding company, and a regimental company for each of the regiments it served.

After completing basic training, a British recruit was sent to a "young soldier" battalion in his regiment for further training. The young soldier battalions were made up of a small cadre with limited-service men plus young men who had completed basic training, similar to the German reserve battalions. They usually had five or six companies with a strength of 850 to 1500 men, most of whom were under 20 years old.[25]

From time to time, "drafts" of 50 or more men would be formed from the young soldier battalions or the holding companies of the training centers to be shipped overseas to battalions in combat. As manpower became more and more difficult to obtain, some drafts were taken from active battalions assigned to divisions in England. To halt the draining of divisions for replacements, in July 1942 nine infantry divisions were reorganized as lower establishment divisions, with about 11,500 men and with battalions designated as holding battalions. Young soldiers were held in these divisions until old enough for overseas duty.[26]

The British buildup in North Africa in 1942 required increasing numbers of replacements. The monthly requirement was 30,000, while only 25,000 new men were being inducted. The plan of 22 October 1942 called for creating four reserve divisions to be used to give advanced training to recruits and send drafts to overseas units. It was hoped that the practice of taking drafts from the Home Army in England could therefore be ended.[27] However, by January 1943 the shortage of replacements in the Middle East resulted in breaking up divisions. After the landing in France in June 1944, the situation became critical and more units were disbanded.

The British system was not equal to the task of providing replacements for divisions engaged even in moderate combat. Because of the heavy demands for the navy and air force, there were not enough men to fill the number of divisions formed.[28] The British

were obliged to create many divisions in 1940 and 1941 because of the military situation. Few of the divisions had to endure continual combat comparable to the German divisions. As long as most of the British army remained in England with only a few divisions in the Middle East and Burma, the large number of units could be sustained; but as early as September 1942, with the number of engaged divisions increasing, the system could not cope and the dissolution of divisions began.

Of all the major powers, the American replacement system seemed to work best, perhaps because the need was less. The only theater that called for lengthy exposure of divisions to combat was Italy, and fewer than a dozen divisions were involved. The campaign in France and Germany was over in less than ten months, and the Pacific campaigns were usually of short duration involving few divisions. The small number of divisions formed made the situation less critical. On the other hand, if a larger number of divisions had been formed, it would have been possible to rotate divisions in the line. Once a division was committed to combat in either France or Italy, the infantry was seldom out of combat for any appreciable length of time.

The American philosophy regarding replacements was based on the experiences of World War I and the Civil War. During the Civil War, the lack of replacements resulted in the gradual withering away of regiments, while new regiments came in without training or experience. During World War I, the replacement system had proved inadequate; new divisions were stripped of riflemen when they reached France to provide replacements for other divisions.[29]

Recruits were trained by the newly formed American divisions in 1941 and 1942. Men were sent directly from induction centers to the division and basic training began. In some instances, a division lost so many men (to schools, cadres for other divisions, airborne training, etc.) that it had to go through the basic training cycle a second time with new fillers.

By 1943, most of the divisions were formed and training was done in the Army Ground Forces Replacement Training Command. About 35,000 new soldiers were processed monthly. After receiving a physical and being sworn in at the local induction center, the new draftee would be sent to a reception center located in his service command, where he would receive a uniform, inoculations, and papers within a seven-day period. His next stop was the replacement training company, usually located in the south where the climate offered more training days. Infantrymen received 17 weeks of basic training, followed by specialist schools and then assignment to a unit still in the United States or to an overseas replacement depot. On arrival in Europe, he went to a reception center where he received a rifle, field equipment, and pay. His records were checked, and he was then sent to an army replacement depot, a corps replacement battalion, and finally to a unit.[30] During the period from induction to assignment, there was no chance that he would stay with even one other man throughout the process. In contrast, in the German system most men in a march battalion joining a division would have gone through every stage together.

In 1945 the American War Department proposed that replacements be formed in platoons destined for a specified division to create some form of cohesive body for the new men. The idea was rejected, but an effort was made to retain the integrity of four-man groups throughout the system from arrival in Europe to assignment.

The result of the highly impersonal American method of providing replacements was that the individual arrived at a unit knowing nothing about the men with whom he would fight, sometimes on the next day. The rest of the company would know nothing about him, his faults, or his qualities. Because the turnover was so high, the infantrymen who had survived three months of combat shunned the newcomers and avoided any ties other than those absolutely required because of the pain of seeing friends wounded or killed. The new man was forced to turn to other replacements for advice and information on how to survive, in other words, to men who knew as little as he did about

becoming an effective member of the team while surviving combat. The first three days were by far the most dangerous for the replacement. The ultimate result of an impersonal system was waste of manpower, as the new men were often killed, wounded, or captured before anyone knew their names.[31]

The Russian need for replacements was greater than the other three nations because of their tactic of massed frontal attacks. They outnumbered the Germans two to one, and to win the Russians had to replace losses at double the rate of the Germans. Although the Soviet strategic planning became more sophisticated as the war progressed, the Soviets did not abandon the massed infantry attacks that were so wasteful of manpower.[32]

Tactics were influenced by the quality of the Soviet soldier, which is difficult to assess. If well led or stiffened by the presence of NKVD (forerunner of the KGB) at the rear, the Russians would desperately defend an area. On the other hand, during the first two years of the war, units would disintegrate and flee under slight pressure. Lack of training and poor leadership may have been the key factors.[33]

Although the Soviets relied more on improvised sources for replacements, they did have a formal structure. Training battalions for divisions were located in their home stations. The training battalion for the 95th Guards Rifle Division was located near Staszow. It consisted of two rifle companies, a heavy machine gun company, a light machine gun company, and a rocket launcher company; but it had a total of only 250 men, and training lasted only three weeks.[34]

Each division also had a school battalion. In November 1944, the 271st Rifle Division had a school battalion with three rifle companies and a machine gun company with up to 130 men in each company. The 30th Rifle Division had a similar battalion.[35] The school battalion was also used to hold sick and wounded. In February 1944, the 55th Rifle Division had about 200 recovering wounded, sick, and stragglers in its school battalion.[36] The unit was also used to train noncommissioned officers, who were given three or four months' training, and also to provide additional training for recruits who received six to eight weeks' training.[37]

Replacements also came directly from the army replacement rifle regiment, which served as a processing unit for returning wounded, conscripted civilians, and stragglers. The army regiment could provide over a hundred replacements to rifle regiments still in the line.[38]

Because the revolution had eliminated the upper class and reduced the middle class, there were few educated men available for the army in 1941. Less than 12 percent of the Soviet soldiers had a high school education, and more than 60 percent had completed only elementary school. In the United States in 1940, the average male between 25 and 34 had completed nearly ten years of school, and 50 percent of the younger men entering the Army were high school graduates. The lack of an educated group in Russia made officer supply difficult.[39]

As the war progressed, the quality of the individual Russian soldier declined. In June 1942, Timoshenko complained that the replacements scarcely knew the rudiments of military life. They were peasants, office workers, shopkeepers, and school boys, and none of them had been trained to fire an antitank rifle or even a light mortar.[40] Yeremenko complained in August 1942 that the new reserve armies provided to defend Stalingrad were poorly equipped and manned by old reservists who were poorly trained and hastily formed into divisions.[41] In the end the Soviets were forced to use women to replace men whenever possible, especially in communications positions and as drivers. Over two million women were conscripted to serve in the Red Army. They were even found in the rifle companies performing service duties in 1945.[42]

Individual replacements came forward in companies to reinforce divisions in combat. In addition, men with little or no training were rounded up and used as fillers.[43] The men were sent to the divisions by night (an American practice) and faced combat the next day, never having seen the faces of their fellow soldiers. When really under pressure, the Red Army resorted to unusual methods.

Belov with the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps was surrounded near Vyasma in February 1942. He inducted former Red Army men from partisan units and other civilians up to the age of 45. In one month, he recruited 2436 men for his corps.[44]

In 1943 the Soviets turned their attention from forming new armies to more concern for individual training. After Stalingrad, the Russians did not lose entire armies to German encirclement; the problem became one of replacing the heavy losses in the divisions created by the head-on battles of attrition with the entrenched Germans. Rifle brigades were reorganized into divisions. Thousands of men were sent to schools and given additional training. These men returned to their units and reinforced others to create a powerful force that defeated the Germans at Kursk.[45]

Despite all the expedients, the Russians could not keep their divisions at a reasonable strength at the end of the war, when the average rifle division had only 4000 men. Divisions became the equivalent of regiments in their rifle strength, but were backed by the full divisional artillery. The Russian system resulted in far greater artillery support for the individual rifleman, not a bad situation.[46]

RETURNING WOUNDED TO UNITS

The major source of highly trained replacements for all nations was wounded men returning to action. In France in 1944, 56 percent of American wounded were able to return to at least limited service. In fewer than four months, 46 percent of the wounded were back on duty.[47] After being wounded, many soldiers desired to return to their units. However, rather than returning a soldier to his unit where he had an established place, the American policy called for returning wounded to be placed into the replacement pool and be assigned to the first unit requiring his military specialty. A soldier could return to his unit if a requisition was on hand, and he could not be used for other units unless no other replacements were available. The returning wounded had a choice of sitting in the replacement pool with nothing to do or going absent without leave and rejoining his unit illegally. Many took the latter option.[48]

The policy toward the wounded, with the lack of concern for returning a man to his own unit, was another aspect of the American disregard for interpersonal relationships. In contrast, the German convalescents were placed in *ersatz* battalions along with new recruits until fit for duty. Afterward they would be formed into companies and returned to their own divisions. In the British army, a wounded soldier was usually returned to his own regiment, although perhaps to a different battalion. Returning Russian wounded were not officially permitted to rejoin their units and were placed in a general pool. However, men deserted from the pool to rejoin their units, and some commanders created a reserve regiment behind their front to receive wounded if they could make it. In practice, the soldier's desire to return to his unit overcame official theory in all four armies.

RESTORING DIVISIONS

Frequently, combat losses in all armies were incurred so rapidly that a division could not be restored at the front. At that time, the division had to be withdrawn and rehabilitated.

The Germans did not discard worn-down divisions with their valuable cadre of headquarters, service, and artillery personnel. With a steady flow of returning sick and wounded, and new recruits from the hometown, the division could be rebuilt within three to four months. When a German division lost about 75 percent of its infantry, it was stripped of all equipment, and several infantry battalions were created from the remaining men. These battalions were given to another division, and the residue was sent to France for gradual rebuilding from the replacement battalion, or from men transferred from other services or combed from the rear. The division number was retained by the rebuilt unit in France.

In 1943 the remnants of the division remaining in Russia were designated as

division groups and retained the division number. The part sent to France received a new divisional number, but was rebuilt in the same way. The division groups remaining in Russia were formed in *Korps Abteilung*, which were division-sized units, using the headquarters, service, and artillery of one of the divisions. As a result, two divisions were pulled out of the line for rebuilding. The third, reinforced with infantry from the other two, continued to fight under the new designation.

In late 1944 and 1945, when divisions were being mauled in both east and west, worn-down divisions continued to fight as combat groups under one of the regimental commanders, while the remainder of the service elements, artillery, and headquarters were returned to Germany to form a *Volksgrenadier* division. Fillers came from the *Luftwaffe* and the navy.[49]

Minor refitting of divisions took place behind the front, especially in the case of panzer divisions where the major need was equipment, not men. Before the battle of Kursk, many panzer divisions were re-equipped and filled with replacements in Russia. With a large number of divisions, the Germans could afford rotation and rebuilding, giving the survivors a period of relief.

The Russians used rotation more frequently than the Germans. To restore a division after it was exhausted, the Russians pulled it out, filled it with new men, and returned it to battle, sometimes within a few weeks. Some divisions went through the process repeatedly within a year, often reappearing with a new designation.[50]

The British would withdraw a division from combat and replace one or more of the infantry brigades (or more often one or more of the infantry battalions in each brigade) and then return the division to battle. The depleted battalions were either reduced to cadre or rebuilt slowly with drafts from the replacement system in England. After a period to absorb the drafts, the rebuilt battalion would be assigned to another brigade. In this way, a battalion might serve in half a dozen different brigades in as many different divisions. The battalions reduced to cadre were occasionally rebuilt at a later date, but more often disbanded, and the remaining men were used as replacements or returned to England.

The Americans seldom had the luxury of pulling divisions for complete rehabilitation. The 106th Division was reconstituted after its losses in the Battle of the Bulge, but the American replacement stream seldom allowed a division to be reduced to the level requiring complete reconstruction.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

If one considers only the percentage strength of the rifle companies, the American system worked best. Nearly all of the divisions were near the table of organization strength most of the time. The American Army believed that the rifle squad should be kept at full strength because of the reliance on the individual rifleman to provide firepower. In fact, in the American Army, as in all others, firepower in World War II came from machine guns and artillery. In practice, only 25 to 30 percent of Americans fired their rifles even once in battle throughout the war. In most regiments, only 15 percent of the riflemen ever fired a single shot at the enemy.[51]

Even with a full complement of riflemen, an American squad produced very little fire, compared to the two light machine guns in the German group. With more reliance, in theory, on crew-served weapons, the Americans would have been less concerned with allowing units to fall understrength, as long as there were enough men to serve the heavy weapons. More attention could have been paid to the training of the riflemen and their orientation to battle. More divisions should have been formed to allow rotation out of the line and a more hopeful life for the infantry. Rested men fought better and suffered fewer casualties. In the long run, the Americans relied on artillery to replace the lack of firepower in the rifle companies, making the waste of manpower created by the replacement system even more tragic.

The philosophies of the British and Germans were similar; the power of the rifle

company came from crew-served weapons. Both were actively concerned that the individual soldier, right from the time of his induction, be made to feel that his unit was his home. Both suffered fewer needless losses among newly arrived replacements.

The Russians made little attempt to maintain the rifle company at authorized strength. They relied heavily on artillery and tanks to provide firepower. The infantry was provided with lavish amounts of submachine guns and light machine guns, making marksmanship training pointless. As long as there were sufficient men to man the light machine guns and some of the mortars, the rifle companies fought on. The rigid discipline and the presence of the NKVD lessened the requirement for good morale.

The use of tactics that cost heavily in Russian lives required a system that provided large numbers of relatively untrained replacements and organizations that could continue to function when most of the manpower had been lost. Therefore, divisions were continually refilled with whatever men were available and withdrawn for refitting when their number dwindled to fewer than 2000. Considering the material available, it was probably the only system that would work.

The American system could be compared to a football team that drew replacements for injured players from a league pool available to any team that needed them. The new players would be told which team they would play for on Saturday night. Only a few hours were available to learn the team's playbook before the game. True, the new players would know the rules of football and have some idea of the plays, but the particular way that the team played would be new. With this system, every team would have a full quota for offense, defense, and special teams.

In contrast, the German and British method would often result in teams short of players. Each team trained its players, teaching the playbook along with the fundamentals. Before a man played, he would know his fellow players. He would be part of the team.

An army makes a choice between making the replacement a part of the unit from the time he starts training and taking the risk of running short in a particular unit, or waiting until the last moment to assign replacements to units, making certain that none was short. If men are considered as interchangeable parts, like nuts and bolts, then the American system works best. On the other hand, if the individual soldier is considered as a complex mechanism whose motivation comes from emotional as well as physical conditioning, then that conditioning should begin as early in the training cycle as possible. The ultimate application of the American system was in Vietnam, with tours of duty creating units in a constant flux, with men coming and going almost at random. Few would consider Vietnam as the ultimate answer to the problem of maintaining combat effectiveness.

People tend to function best in familiar surroundings and among people they know. Even though immigrants to America were cut off from their roots, either by choice or by force, they immediately established new roots, families, neighbors, and associations. Does it not seem advisable to maintain an association that makes it possible for a person to perform at his best when placing an individual in combat? Most men will be happier and fight better when surrounded by their friends. In all armies, the struggles of the wounded to return to their units in combat, even in preference to additional days behind the lines, were strong evidence of the value of close relationships. Based on the assumption that friends fight better together, the whole system of creating and maintaining combat units should be geographically oriented.

Men are not machines. A nation should mobilize enough units to provide rotation from combat with periods of up to three months per year to absorb replacements, acquire new equipment, and train as a unit. At least the infantry regiment should be rotated to give the survivors some relief. Even machines need periodic maintenance to operate at top efficiency. Should we do less for men?

NOTES

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