

# A Tradition of Excellence: History of the EIB

During World War II, Army Chief of Staff GEN George C. Marshall initiated the development of an award to honor the U.S. Army Infantryman. Just as the Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB) was intended to be an award for those U.S. Soldiers whose primary mission was to close with and destroy the enemy, the Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB) was instituted to build and maintain esprit de corps within U.S. infantry units. The intent of the EIB was to provide a drawing card for a tough and thankless job on the battlefield and add prestige to an otherwise undesirable yet necessary task.

The EIB was not intended to detract from the importance of other branches of the Army, other branches of service, or the military of our allied countries. The EIB was the symbol of tradition for U.S. Infantry Soldiers who played a vital role in the defense of our nation past, present, future.

The EIB was approved by the Secretary of War on 7 October 1943 and announced in War Department Circular 269 dated 27 October 1943.

According to the original EIB standards set forth in War Department Circular 269, an Infantryman could be awarded the EIB by:

- a. Attaining the standards of proficiency established by the War Department, or
- b. By satisfactory performance of duty in action against the enemy."

In March of 1944, 100 NCOs of the 100th Infantry Division at Fort Bragg, NC, were selected to undergo three days of concentrated testing to determine who would be among the first to receive the EIB. Testing required candidates to:

- Qualify with one individual weapon and in transition firing; or
- Qualify with one crew-served weapon (for men who are

authorized to fire same for qualification) and in transition firing.

- Complete familiarization firing with one other weapon.
- Complete continuous (without falling out) foot marches, with full field equipment of 25 miles in 8 hours and 9 miles in 2 hours.
- Complete physical fitness test (which at that time included push-ups, a 300-yard run, burpees, a 75-yard pig-a-back carry at a run, and a 70-yard zigzag agility run).
- Complete the infiltration, close combat, and combat-in-cities courses.
- Qualify in the grenade course.
- Pass military subject tests evaluated by a board of officers (subjects included scouting and patrolling, first aid, field sanitation, military discipline and courtesy, etc.).

Upon completion of the testing, only 10 NCOs remained. These 10 were then interviewed to determine who would become the first "expert" Infantryman. On 29 March 1944, LTG Lesley J. McNair, commander of Army Ground Forces, presented the first EIB to Technical Sergeant Walter Bull. During the EIB ceremony, LTG McNair stated, "The Expert Infantry Badge being awarded here today has been set up by the War Department for U.S. Infantrymen who are trained and fit for battle... Infantrymen are killed and wounded in battle in far greater numbers than other branches. I am honored to be with you here. Be proud of your badges and become more expert every day."

While the actual test requirements may have varied slightly over these past 78 years, the EIB program continues to be a tool that leaders can use to measure Infantry Soldiers' level of competence in those critical individual Soldier skills that they will need to succeed in combat.



U.S. Army photo



Photo by Jamie L. Wiechert

*At left, an EIB grader evaluates a candidate on his grenade-throwing skills during an EIB test hosted by the 1st Infantry Brigade at Fort Benning, GA. This photo appeared January-February 1962 issue of Infantry.*

*Above, a 2nd Armored Division Soldier loads his M249 squad automatic weapon while attempting to qualify for the EIB on 27 June 1989 at Fort Hood, TX.*