

PAST TIMES



INFANTRY OCS, 1941

EDITOR'S NOTE: Forty-six years ago, on 27 September 1941, the first class graduated from the Infantry Officer Candidate School (OCS). The Infantry OCS program had gone into effect a few weeks earlier, in July, along with OCS programs for the Field Artillery and the Coast Artillery, with other branch schools to follow later. The evolution of OCS up to that point had been a long process.

Before World War I the concept known as the "Plattsburg Idea" had been formulated to provide for the training of college students, at their own expense, at military summer camps. Although a relatively small number of officers entered the Army through this program, the effort provided the Army with a cadre of officers trained in the basic military skills.

Once the United States entered the war, in April 1917, 16 Officer Training Camps based on the old Plattsburg concept were established initially for civilians and reservists. The Army drew most of its officers from other sources, however, including the officer training camps in division cantonments and later from eight consolidated officers' training schools.

Although often referred to as "90-day wonders," the officers who came out of these schools successfully provided the leadership the Army needed and far surpassed the abilities of

the average new officer in any previous war.

The idea of an Officer Candidate School for Infantry was conceived in June 1938 when a plan for an officer training program was submitted to the Chief of Infantry by Brigadier General Asa L. Singleton, Commandant of the Infantry School at Fort Benning. No action was taken, however, until July 1940 when Brigadier General Courtney Hodges, Assistant Commandant of the Infantry School, submitted a revised plan.

The man given credit for the final plans for OCS, and for establishing the format, discipline, and honor code still used today, was Brigadier General Omar Bradley. As commandant of the Infantry School, General Bradley emphasized training and efficient organization.

On 27 September 1941, the first Infantry OCS class graduated 171 second lieutenants out of the 204 men who had begun the course in July.

The following is an address prepared for delivery to these graduates by General George C. Marshall, the Army's Chief of Staff and former Assistant Commandant of the Infantry School. When General Marshall was unable to attend as planned to deliver the address, it was read to the students, and each candidate was given a copy of it.

You are about to assume the most important duty that our officers are called upon to perform—the direct command of combat units of American soldiers. To succeed requires two fundamental qualifications—thorough professional knowledge and a capacity for leadership. The schools have done all that can be done in the limited time available to equip you professionally, and your technique of weapons and tactics should rapidly improve with further study and actual practice. However, they cannot provide you with qualities of leadership—that courage and evident high purpose which command the respect and loyalty of American soldiers.

You were selected as officer candidates because you give evidence of possessing these qualifications. Whether or not you develop into truly capable leaders depends almost entirely upon you personally.

Your school work has been under ideal conditions from an instructional standpoint; but when you join your organizations, you will find many difficulties and deficiencies complicating your task. There will be shortages in equipment, for example. These are being made good as rapidly as possible, but

so long as they exist they are a challenge to your ingenuity and not an invitation to fall back on an overdose of close order drill and the other necessary but stultifying minutia which so irked the Army of 1917 that we still suffer from the repercussions.

Warfare today is a thing of swift movement—of rapid concentrations. It requires the building up of enormous fire power against successive objective with breathtaking speed. It is not a game for the unimaginative plodder. Modern battles are fought by platoon leaders. The carefully prepared plans of higher commanders can do no more than project you to the line of departure at the proper time and place, in proper formation, and start you off in the right direction. Thereafter, the responsibility for results is almost entirely yours. If you know your business of weapons and tactics, if you have inspired the complete confidence and loyalty of your men, things will go well on that section of the front.

There is a gulf between the drill ground or cantonment type of leadership and that necessary for the successful command of men when it may involve the question of sacrificing one's

life. Our Army differs from all other armies. The very characteristics which make our men potentially the best soldiers in the world can be in some respects a possible source of weakness. Racially we are not a homogeneous people, like the British for example, who can glorify a defeat by their stubborn tenacity and dogged discipline. We have no common racial group, and we have deliberately cultivated individual initiative and independence of thought and action. Our men are intelligent and resourceful to an unusual degree. These characteristics, these qualities may be, in effect, explosive or positively destructive in a military organization, especially under adverse conditions, unless the leadership is wise and determined, and unless the leader commands the complete respect of his men.

Never for an instant can you divest yourselves of the fact that you are officers. On the athletic field, at the club, in civilian clothes, or even at home on leave, the fact that you are a commissioned officer in the Army imposes a constant obligation to higher standards than might ordinarily seem normal or necessary for your personal guidance. A small dereliction becomes conspicuous, at times notorious, purely by reason of the fact that the individual concerned is a commissioned officer.

But the evil result goes much further than a mere matter of unfortunate publicity. When you are commanding, leading men under conditions where physical exhaustion and privations must be ignored; where the lives of men may be sacrificed, then, the efficiency of your leadership will depend only to a minor degree on your tactical or technical ability. It will primarily be determined by your character, your reputation, not so much for courage—which will be accepted as a matter of course—but by the previous reputation you have established for fairness, for that high-minded patriotic purpose, that quality of unswerving determination to carry through any military task assigned you.

The feeling which the men must hold for you is not to be compared to the popularity of a football coach or a leader of civic activities. Professional competence is essential to leadership, and your knowledge of arms, equipment, and tactical operations must be clearly superior to that possessed by your subordinates; at the same time, you must command their respect above and beyond those qualities.

It is difficult to make a clear picture of the obligations and requirements for an officer. Conditions of campaign and the demands of the battlefield are seldom appreciated except by

veterans of such experiences. The necessity for discipline is never fully comprehended by the soldier until he has undergone the ordeal of battle, and even then he lacks a basis of comparison—the contrast between the action of a disciplined regiment and the failure and probable disintegration of one which lacks that intangible quality. The quality of officers is tested to the limit during the long and trying periods of waiting or marching here and there without evident purpose, and during those weeks or months of service under conditions of extreme discomfort or of possible privations or isolations. The true leader surmounts all of those difficulties, maintaining the discipline of his unit and further developing its training. Where there is a deficiency of such leadership, serious results inevitably follow, and too often the criticism is directed to the conditions under which the unit labored rather than toward the individual who failed in his duty because he was found wanting in inherent ability to accept his responsibilities.

Remember that we are a people prone to be critical of everything except that for which we are personally responsible. Remember also that to a soldier a certain amount of grouching appears to be necessary. However, there is a vast difference between these usually amusing reactions and the destructive and disloyal criticism of the undisciplined soldier.

Mental alertness, initiative, vision are qualities which you must cultivate. Passive inactivity because you have not been given specific instructions to do this or to do that is a serious deficiency. Always encourage initiative on the part of your men, but initiative must, of course, be accompanied by intelligence.

Much of what I have said has been by way of repetition of one thought which I wish you gentlemen to carry with you to your new duties. You will be responsible for a unit in the Army of the United States in this great emergency. Its quality, its discipline, its training will depend upon your leadership. Whatever deficiencies there are must be charged to your failure or incapacity. Remember this: the truly great leader overcomes all difficulties, and campaigns and battles are nothing but a long series of difficulties to be overcome. The lack of equipment, the lack of food, the lack of this or that are only excuses; the real leader displays his quality in his triumphs over adversity, however great it may be.

Good luck to you. We expect great things of you. Your class is the first of which I believe will be the finest group of troop leaders in the world.

