

to represent nonexistent modern armor; mortar crews dropped make-believe shells down stovepipes; National Guard aviators dropped five-pound sacks of flour from observation planes (Guardsmen were deemed unfit to fly real fighters like the Curtiss P-40) to simulate bombing runs.

The Brown Shoe Army passed its most severe test with flying colors, growing in four years to eight million, fighting in every corner of the globe and whipping utterly and decisively the country's worst enemies. The Old Army NCOs had done their work well. Many hundreds were commissioned, led companies, battalions, even armies (GEN Walter Krueger of the Sixth Army had been a first sergeant) in combat.

So, young soldiers, you may well thank your stars that there were such men to fight your country's wars. The Brown Shoes left us a splendid legacy and you enjoy many of the benefits of their sacrifice—the sweat and tears in the long, dry years, the blood in the fires of battle. Such things as the GI Bill, veteran's mortgages and any number of marvelous gifts of a thankful Republic are yours to use. Remember who bought them for you and never forget them.

And though you do not stand in the same brown shoes, you march in time—to the same traditions—in boots of a different color. ■

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Congress Passes Draft Law, Activates National Guard

In September 1940, Congress accomplished two things when it passed the first peacetime draft law in American history. It provided for a draft and authorized nationalization of the National Guard. The act stipulated that the draftees would serve on active duty for 12 months. Similarly, it activated the Guard for 12 months—this at a time when many people opposed preparations for war. The short active-duty time in the bill for both the draftees and the Guard reflects this hesitancy to begin mobilization.

In the following months the international situation continued to deteriorate. Within half a year it was obvious that the American preparedness movement would be seriously crippled if both the draftees and the Guardsmen went home when their year of service was up.

The fight to extend the service obligation of these soldiers during the summer of 1941 was both intense and close. The extension of the draft passed the House of Representatives by a single vote, 203-202. The National Guard got extended for the duration, but the draftees got extended for only another 18 months. Later they would receive more final word that they were in for "the duration."

To the military who lived through this period, the vote to extend the service of the draftees during the summer of 1941 was crucial. ■

The Lean, Lean Years of the **Depression Army**

By COL (Ret.) John M. Collins

As topkick Anthony Warden so trenchantly put it, "This is G Company, of which I am first sergeant. I run this company. Holmes is the C.O., but he is like the rest of the officer class: a dumb bastard that signs papers and rides horses an' wears spurs an' gets stinking drunk up at the stinking Officers' Club. I'm the guy that runs this company...Holmes would strangle on his own spit if I wasn't here to swab out his throat for him."

James Jones' crusty first sergeant in *From Here to Eternity* may not have scored a bull's-eye, but he wasn't far off the mark. More than three decades later, grizzled war dogs with hashmarks halfway to their chins still reminisce nostalgically about the "Old Army" between the world wars, when NCO Corps reigned supreme.

What was it like in the "Old Army?"

First and foremost, the Army of 1939 was professional. Every man was a regular, every man a volunteer. Rear-rank privates made up half the enlisted ranks in those days. Privates first class accounted for another quarter and, believe me, any rocket who made PFC on his first three-year hitch was viewed with suspicion by protagonists and peers alike.

Noncoms were exclusively troop leaders, whether line or staff, a hard-core elite, set apart from their fellow men. In every rifle company, artillery battery or cavalry troop, the basic fighting units, the first sergeant had three chevrons up and two rockers down framing his coveted diamond. In 1939, there were seven enlisted grades, from master sergeant to private. Since then, the system has been wrenched upside down and inside out on numerous separate occasions. Washboard-knuckled buck sergeants, the scourge of barracks and field, ruled platoons in despotic grandeur and corporals held sway over squads.

Tinkers, tinkerers and assorted wizards passing by drew pay for bizarre specialties but their sleeves were bare of stripes. Those were reserved for NCOs, the poor man's feudal barons.

Promotions were permanent and hard to come by. Rigorous examinations commonly sifted out social climbers, particularly among the top three grades (although skulduggery was fairly common). Dullards who failed to pass the test were afforded a full year to contemplate the error of their ways before they could try again. First sergeants normally were exempt from exams. Because of their hand-in-glove relationship with company commanders, they universally were elevated on the Great Man's say.

Military service was more than a profession in 1939; it was a way of life and togetherness was the theme.

It was largely monastic, within the narrow confines of the post. Intercourse with civilian communities was frequently limited to just that: the cyclical payday binge on the wrong side of the tracks, followed by a boisterous, company-sized raid on the nearest sporting house.

Except for a handful of hoary-headed NCOs, men in the ranks were single. First-term enlistment was categorically denied those unfortunates with wives, children up to age 21 or other family members of any kind. Wedded bliss was no bar to re-enlistment for first-three-graders, and benevolent commanders infrequently might bestow that perquisite on favored sergeants in grade 4, but all others were destined to be bachelors 'til Kingdom Come.

Once in, enlisted men were rooted in concrete. Transfers required almost a dispensation from the Pope, and for NCOs the cost was dear. Regulations were very clear: "The transfer of a noncommissioned officer from one organization to another," even across the company street, "carries with it reduction to the grade of private." Rare exceptions were made in the interest of service.

Since prospects of rebounding to greater glory were treacherous and fraught with unknown peril, fortune-hunters, misfits and malcontents thought twice before leaving the frying pan for the fire. Continuity and tradition thrived in this atmosphere with all the accompanying rights and privileges.

Like it or not, most noncoms were married to their men, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health. They knew those men like the backs of their hands, their fortes and foibles, their families and friends. They were on tap around the clock, ministering to basic needs, maintaining good order and discipline, tutoring the awkward squad, cracking heads as required and generally keeping a sensitive thumb on the unit pulse—a full seven days a week. Any good corporal could spot a potential AWOL from 150 paces with the naked eye, and he could field strip a goldbrick without breaking stride.

With all this regimentation, there still was room for a surprising volume of flair and individuality not enjoyed today. Mess sergeants did their own marketing in that halcyon era before the advent of Army-wide master menus. The variation was astounding, delightful or dreary, depending on the taste buds of the chefs, who ran the range from steak-and-potato lovers to eccentrics who doted on chocolate-covered grasshoppers and monkey navels *flambeau*. Unavoidably, there were unimaginative clods who ladled out slum and beans six days a week, with cold cuts Sunday night, and connivers who served short rations and blew their savings on bathtub gin.

Enlisted men hardly ever saw an officer, unless the fat was in the fire. From the enlisted soldiers' point of view, wearers of stars and bars were around for just three things: to set policy and standards, to make command decisions and, in the broadest sense of the word, to supervise. Noncoms ran the show at troop level.

Most of the Army's ills could be traced to money—or rather, the lack of it. A U.S. public, ignorant of peacetime requirements for national defense, remained apathetic, almost inert, in the face of mounting crises abroad. Minuscule appropriations for military purposes were made grudgingly, even during the prosperous 1920s. After the stock market crashed, chronic government deficits discouraged anything beyond bare-bones maintenance of the modest military establishments so reluctantly tolerated. There simply wasn't enough cash around to entice high-caliber people consistently, or to mold the manpower on hand.

What men were on tap weren't always the best. A sizable residue of muddle-headed noncommissioned veterans had been trading water in the military manpower pool since the Great War.

The Army had also policed up at least its fair share of street sweepings and military vegetables during the black days of the Depression when millions were unemployed and one out of every six men, women and children in the United States was riding relief rolls. Fugitives from bread lines and charity soup kitchens won their spurs along with the rest in those dog-eat-dog days when a loud mouth and a sneak left hook might rate just as high as a degree from MIT and more hoodlums were wearing chevrons in 1939 than the Army's leaders would care to admit.

The "Old Army" died almost unnoticed at 2:15 on a Tuesday afternoon and was laid to rest by a host of khaki-clad amateurs. On 27 August 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, by executive decree, federalized the National Guard; its lead increments were inducted on 16 September, the same day he signed the nation's first peace-time Selective Service Act. The Army was inundated with civilians in uniform. An era had come to an end.

The "Old Army" served its purpose well. With the advent of World War II, the pot boiled over like unattended tapioca.

Between 1939 and 1945, the Army inflated 40-fold, from 187,000 to more than eight million. The accession rate crested at 3 1/2 million men during 270 incredible days in 1942-43—more than 514,000

*"It wasn't like this in the Old Armees,
in the days beyond recall,
in the rare old, fair old Army days,
No one ever worked at all.*

—Joseph F. Ware

in one month, more than triple the "Old Army" total enlisted strength.

The "Old Army," of course, provided the cadre for this awesome force. Officers like Eisenhower and Mark W. Clark who were relatively obscure, shot from field-grade ranks to four or five stars. Pre-war noncoms took their places, with remarkable success considering the circumstances. No such feat had ever been undertaken before and none has been attempted since.

The modern volunteer Army was the first direct lineal descendant of the draftless "Old Army" (discounting a brief period in 1948). It has no resemblance to the prototype. ■

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