

by Charles H. Briscoe



COMMANDO & RANGER *Preparing America's Soldiers for War* **TRAINING**



During World War II there were two Ranger training programs in the U.S. Army. The one most familiar is the organization and training of America's 'Commando' in Great Britain during the early summer of 1942. Led by artillery Major (MAJ) William O. Darby, the 1st Ranger Battalion (Provisional) spearheaded the amphibious invasion of North Africa in November 1942. The combat successes of this European Theater of Operations (ETO) provisional force, manned 'out of hide' with volunteers from 1st Armored and 36th Infantry Divisions in England, prompted formation of two more battalions. The response to create provisional Ranger battalions was akin to the U.S. Marine Corps decision to form special elements—Raiders, Scouts, and Parachute battalions—for WWII.¹

The second effort, less well known, was the Army's Commando and Ranger programs for junior leaders and soldiers, the first being a critical component of amphibious operations. The Army Ground Forces (AGF) historical section did include the Commando training in their 1946 study on the Amphibious Training Center (ATC).² (Note: Some WWII Army vernacular will be used to give the reader a better 'feel' for attitudes and positions in those times.)

The purpose of this article is to describe the Commando training (first to special units, and then to all soldiers) provided to those infantry divisions cycled through the Army's ATC in 1942 and 1943. Commando training to provide the lead assault force for an amphibious invasion was integral to the ATC curriculum. The impetus behind forming a special unit and individual training was the British Commandos. U.S. military leaders needed a quick, simple way to build physical toughness and mental agility to deal with the problems and rigors of combat. President

Artillery COL William O. Darby, Class of '33, USMA, organized the 'American Commando,' the 1st Ranger Battalion in England.



The European Theater of Operations-approved SSI of 1st Ranger Battalion (Provisional).



From 1943-47 Marines wore unit SSI on their Service A dress uniforms. Marines never wore SSI on the right shoulder as the Army does to signify combat service.



Sixteen U.S. Army Air Corps B-25B Mitchell medium bombers flew off the aircraft carrier USS Hornet to attack Japan on 18 April 1942.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and his confidant, William J. Donovan (later Office of Strategic Services [OSS] director), and Army Chief of Staff, General (GEN) George C. Marshall, were strong advocates of the Commando concept. Their influence reached deep. The ATC program, begun in June 1942, became marginalized by the plethora of specialty training centers and 'special' units activated from March to September 1942 by the military and OSS.³

When Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) James H. Doolittle and his Army Air Corps 'Raiders' attacked Tokyo and other Japanese cities on 18 April 1942, they raised the spirits of Americans just as the Commandos had done for the British people. The sixteen twin-engine B-25B *Mitchell* medium bombers, launched from the aircraft carrier USS *Hornet*, showed the Japanese that the United States could still project combat power despite the losses suffered at Pearl Harbor. Just as Great Britain's Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill believed that any offensive actions in dark times would bolster the morale of English-speaking peoples, President Roosevelt extolled the value of 'commando-like' raiding in his radio 'fireside chats' to restore confidence in America.⁴ LTC Doolittle was 'taking the fight to the enemy.' Imbuing U.S. soldiers with the will to fight and win was a task for Army leaders.

'Shoestring' Commando training to mentally and physically harden U.S. soldiers for the realities of combat was enthusiastically embraced by Army officers scrambling against resource constraints. In June 1942, the Commando concept was taught at the newly activated ATC at Camp Edwards on Cape Cod, MA. To appreciate how crazy things were for America's 'greatest generation' and to show how unprepared the country was for war in late 1941, the accompanying sidebars provide background and context.

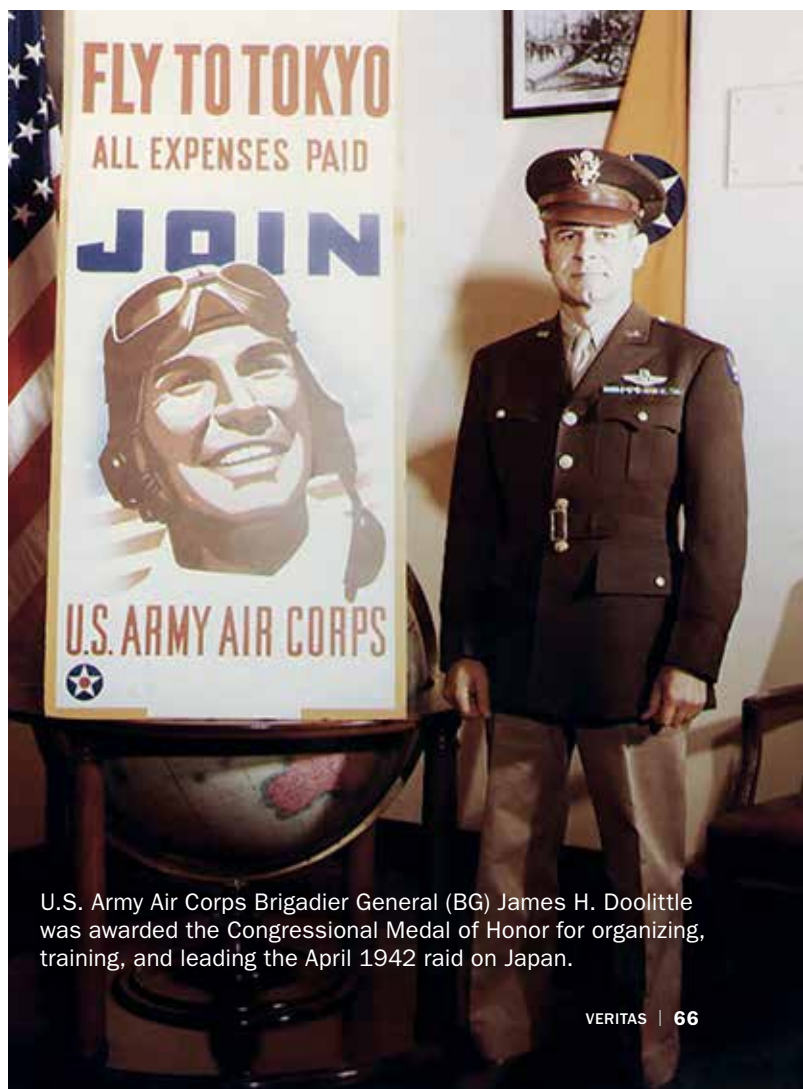
A number of salient points are emphasized in the sidebars. The American military was unprepared to defeat Axis forces in Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Far East simultaneously. In late 1941, it could barely defend the coasts and protect the Panama Canal, critical to massing our two-ocean navy. British and American leaders negotiated *quid pro quo* agreements because our military was incapable of seizing key defensive terrain in the hemisphere (European islands). Allied war materiel (Lend-Lease) for England was the initial priority for industrial mobilization, not equipping an outdated Army and Air Corps that was in the throes of rapid expansion through national conscription. Britain's Commandos were providing results that seemed worth emulating.

Army interest in special operations heightened after General Marshall visited British Combined Operations Headquarters (COHQ) in January 1942 and observed Commando training. In less than a month MG Lucian K. Truscott was in England establishing an American section in COHQ and organizing a U.S. Army 'Commando.'⁵ The Chief of Staff was equally concerned with developing combat-like experiences and tougher fitness regimens for mobilizing divisions. The Second U.S. Army's summer and

fall Tennessee Maneuvers revealed that junior leadership and physical condition were still major problems in late 1941.⁶

LTG McNair, the AGF commander, faced with GHQ priorities for amphibious, winter and desert warfare, and paratroop development, acquiesced on establishing specialty training centers in specific environments and which standardized doctrinal training in the Army. Not a Commando fan, he emphasized that his top priority was individual fitness for all soldiers. In the six months from March to September 1942, four Army specialty training centers were established: a Desert Training Center; an Airborne Center; an Amphibious Training Center; and a Mountain Training Center.⁷ While the Tank Destroyer Tactical and Firing Center was initially organized at Fort Meade, MD, in January 1942, it was not truly functional until it was relocated to Camp Hood, TX, in September.⁸ All Army specialty training centers incorporated physical fitness into instruction. Though the original AGF plan called for establishing three ATCs at Camp Edwards, MA, Fort Lewis, WA, and Carrabelle, FL, immediate access determined the initial site.⁹

LTG McNair tasked promotable Colonel (COL) Frank A. Keating, Chief of Staff, 2nd Infantry Division, San Antonio, TX, to evaluate the proposed sites. Shortly afterwards, the new brigadier was directed to establish an ATC at Camp Edwards, a Massachusetts National Guard facility, by 15 June 1942 and have a four-week shore-to-



U.S. Army Air Corps Brigadier General (BG) James H. Doolittle was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for organizing, training, and leading the April 1942 raid on Japan.

Ignoring the

SPREADING GLOBAL WAR

Though war hit China hard in 1937, Europe was awash in conflict by 1938. However, it was not until France collapsed in the first two weeks of May 1940 that fire alarm echoes were finally heard over the Atlantic. The German *blitzkrieg* that swept across Western Europe closed almost all friendly ports on the continent. The ten-division British Expeditionary Force (BEF) with its 500 Royal Air Force planes barely escaped envelopment. In their flight from Dunkirk, the BEF abandoned its light and heavy weapons, vehicles, and equipment. The infamous Royal Navy, sorely bereft of amphibious vessels, commandeered private pleasure yachts, coastal shipping and fishing boats, and ferries to rescue the BEF soldiers. Nazi submarines had turned the Atlantic into a shipping graveyard. After Germany suddenly invaded Russia in late 1941, violating their mutual non-aggression treaty, America's Lend-Lease materiel production had to be increased and shared. Protection of the sea lanes and air ferry routes became vital to sustain the Allied fight in Europe.

Enemy control of Danish, French, and Dutch islands in the Western Hemisphere posed threats to American continental defense, the Panama Canal, and Lend-Lease delivery. Known Axis meteorological stations in isolated northern Greenland ("weather comes from the West") radioed forecasts and alerts via long range aircraft to submarines, battleships, and *Luftwaffe* all over Europe. Danish-controlled Iceland was six flying hours from New York City and Germany had aircraft with that range.¹ European holdings in the Western Hemisphere became key terrain for the Allies.

Since Marines could be sent overseas without Congressional approval, the 6th Regiment in California was shipped to Iceland in July 1941 to form 1st Marine Brigade (Provisional). They cooperatively defended that country with Britain's 49th Territorial Army Division. When the 49th was recalled to England for home defense duty, the Marines performed the mission alone until relieved by the Army in the spring of 1942. The 1st Marine Division, while assigned occupation contingencies in the Caribbean and Atlantic, could not seize key islands without Navy transport and landing craft. Since President Roosevelt was pushing for a second European front in 1942, more emphasis was placed on amphibious operations despite landing craft shortages, doctrinal differences between the Army and Navy, and service theater priorities. Lacking a Marine-like force to spearhead an amphibious invasion, building a Commando capability was incorporated into the Amphibious Training Center curriculum along with their tough physical conditioning.²



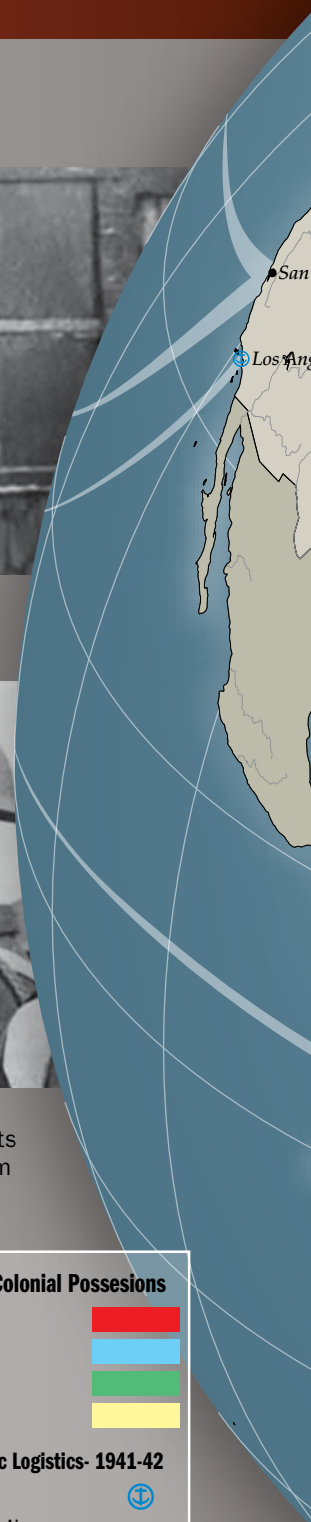
The 1st Marine Brigade wore the British 'polar bear' SSI while in Iceland.







The British 49th Territorial Army Division wore a polar bear SSI related to its ill-fated attempts to recapture the Norwegian ports of Trondheim and Narvik in April-May 1940.







British 49th Territorial Army Division SSI



European Colonial Possessions

- Great Britain 
- France 
- Denmark 
- Netherlands 

Transatlantic Logistics- 1941-42

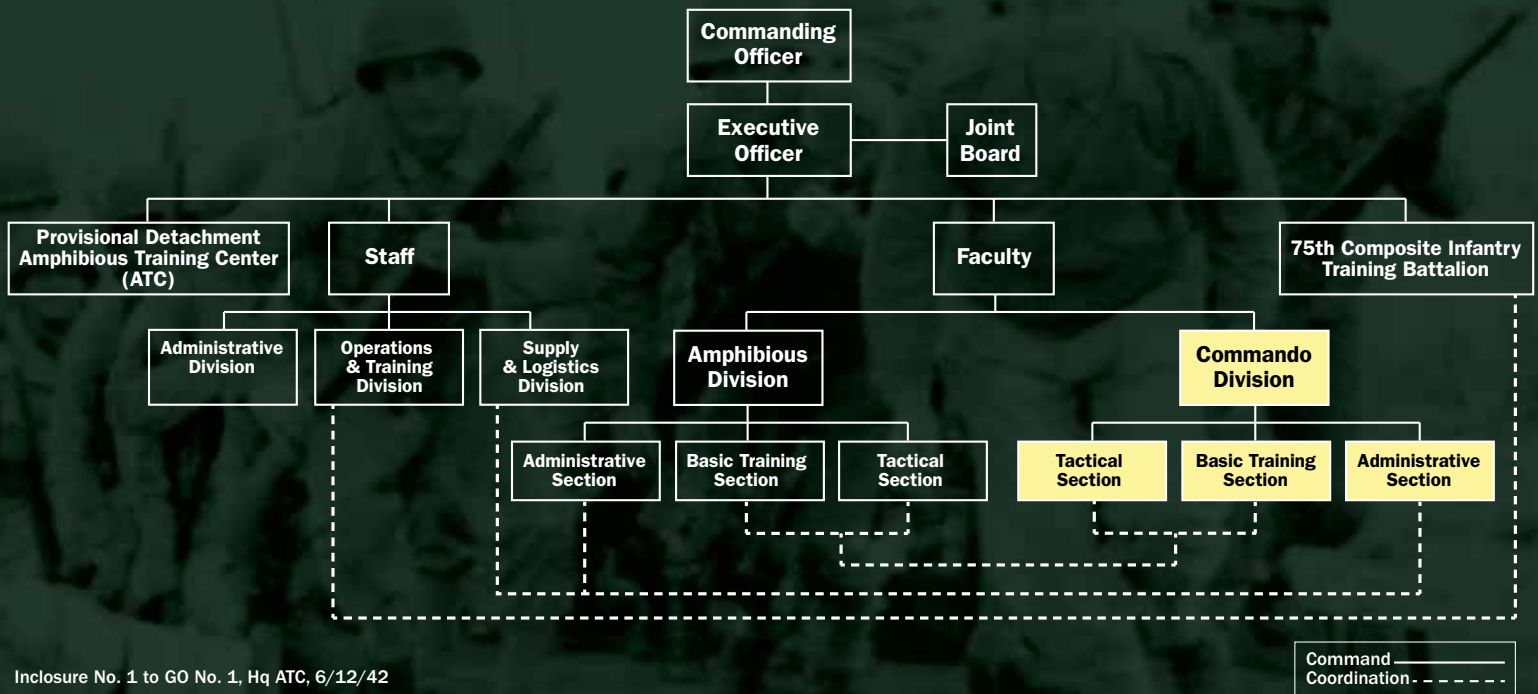
- Naval Base 
- Transatlantic Airways 
- Transatlantic Supply 
- Merchant Losses 

As of 1942



Schematic Diagram of Channels of Command and Coordination

Headquarters Amphibious Training Command, Camp Edwards, Mass., 12 June 42



Inclosure No. 1 to U.S. Army Amphibious Training Command, General Order No. 1, dated 12 June 1942 showed 'channels of command and coordination.' Highlighted in yellow is the Commando Division.



BG Frank A. Keating, a WWI combat infantryman, did amphibious landings in 1940-41 with the 3rd Infantry Division and 1st Marine Division on the West Coast.

shore amphibious operations training program ready for an infantry division in thirty days. Included was to be a ten-day "course of instruction in over-water 'Commando' raids."¹⁰ The post-Pearl Harbor GHQ staff panic stage that lasted until mid-March 1942 was quickly replaced

by unrealistic objectives sent down from AGF. Seasoned officers, familiar with a new command's penchant for quickly rescinded 'get it done yesterday' directives and constantly changing requirements, focused on what they could do based on available time and resources.

Leaders could always default to PT (physical training) without regard for weather or lack of equipment. Physical and mental hardening of soldiers began immediately and became integral to all training. The ATC cadre, drawn from the Regular Army 1st, 3rd, and 9th IDs, briefed 45th ID commanders and staff [National Guard (NG)] on the program before launching into amphibious training on 14 July 1942. The ATC's Commando Division briefed overwater raiding, commando operations, and tactics before organizing a separate training site for its course.¹¹

The Commando Division instructors had ten days to toughen 'Groupment F,' the ATC's provisional commando task force (CTF), and prepare it to lead the division culmination exercise, an invasion of Martha's Vineyard. The CTF had infantry command and staff and specific tactical elements; a rifle company; a section of the RCT intelligence and reconnaissance platoon; a battalion medical section; and six platoons: antitank, 81mm mortar, engineer, communications, antitank mine, and ammunition and pioneer.¹² MAJ William B. Kunzig, the 'commandant' of Commando training isolated the CTF on Washburn Island in a spartan field camp to keep them focused.¹³

Jump Starting Army Manpower

The authorized 200,000 man volunteer Regular U.S. Army, scattered in regiments across the country, had to get up to strength. Two infantry divisions (one on each coast) had been tasked to practice shore-to-shore amphibious operations—loading men, equipment, and supplies aboard ships for overseas movement, offloading the fighting force and its armament and equipment into a variety of landing craft, and then ferrying them in waves to an established beachhead. This was much different from a Navy-sponsored Marine Corps ship-to-shore amphibious assault to seize and secure beach landing sites for follow-on main attack forces coming ashore in landing craft. Since becoming an imperial power our Navy had been in charge of the Caribbean and Pacific. With Japan's military control spreading across the Pacific and endangering American coaling stations, Navy focus shifted to the west. As National Guard (NG) divisions were activated and subsequently federalized by the U.S. president, a national draft was being debated by Congress.

By the time the legislative branch passed the first peacetime draft in U.S. history (16 September 1940) well-trained Japanese, German, and Italian armies had already overrun huge parts of Asia, Europe, and Africa. Males, 18-45 years of age, selected by lottery, were to serve for twelve months, but only in the continental U.S., possessions and territories. Congress set a 'cap' on soldiers in training at 900,000. President Roosevelt could federalize NG divisions for two years of active duty. While appearing somewhat prescient in light of the 7 December 1941 Japanese attack on Oahu, Hawaii, those early numbers proved to be less than 20 percent of that required for WWII.¹

National mobilization to build a 1.6 million man Army in 1940 was simply the first preparatory step for waging war. The second, more difficult and time-consuming step, was training the 'mobilized' to be soldiers. The Louisiana Maneuvers, the largest 'war game' in American history (400,000 troops), begun in the fall of 1940, stretched into the next spring. More maneuvers followed in the Carolinas and Tennessee. Conducted ostensibly to evaluate organization (square [4 regiments] versus triangle [3 regiment] infantry divisions), doctrine, mobility, state of training, and leadership, General Headquarters (GHQ) and regional Army maneuvers highlighted the antiquated state of the U.S. Army, weak leadership, and the poor physical state of its soldiers.²

The attack on Pearl Harbor pulled America into WWII. It was March 1942 before GHQ acknowledged that it could not do everything necessary to raise, equip, and train the constantly growing Army and Air Corps (latest estimate 3.6 million) to defeat battle-hardened Axis forces. Lieutenant General (LTG) Lesley J. McNair organized Army Ground Forces (AGF) command specifically to train units, update tactics, and write doctrine while GHQ in the War Department, following 'Europe First' strategy, concentrated on war plans across the Atlantic.



LTG Lesley J. McNair, Commanding General, Army Ground Forces, March 1942 – July 1943, promoted to Brigadier General (BG) in October 1918, became the youngest general officer in the U.S. Army at age thirty-five



The Army Ground Forces SSI was adopted by U.S. Continental Army Command (CONARC) in 1955 and by U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) in 1973.



“The Commandos were tough” was the caption in the 1946 AGF study of the Amphibious Training Center.



After completing the British Commando course in 1942, First Lieutenant (1LT) Jack T. Shannon, future executive officer, 10th SFG and the first 77th SFG commander, was attached to the ATC Commando Division for several months.



MAJ William B. Kunzig, Commando Division chief, ATC, shared a ship’s cabin with MAJ William O. Darby during the 1st Infantry Division’s amphibious training off Long Island, NY, in 1940-41.

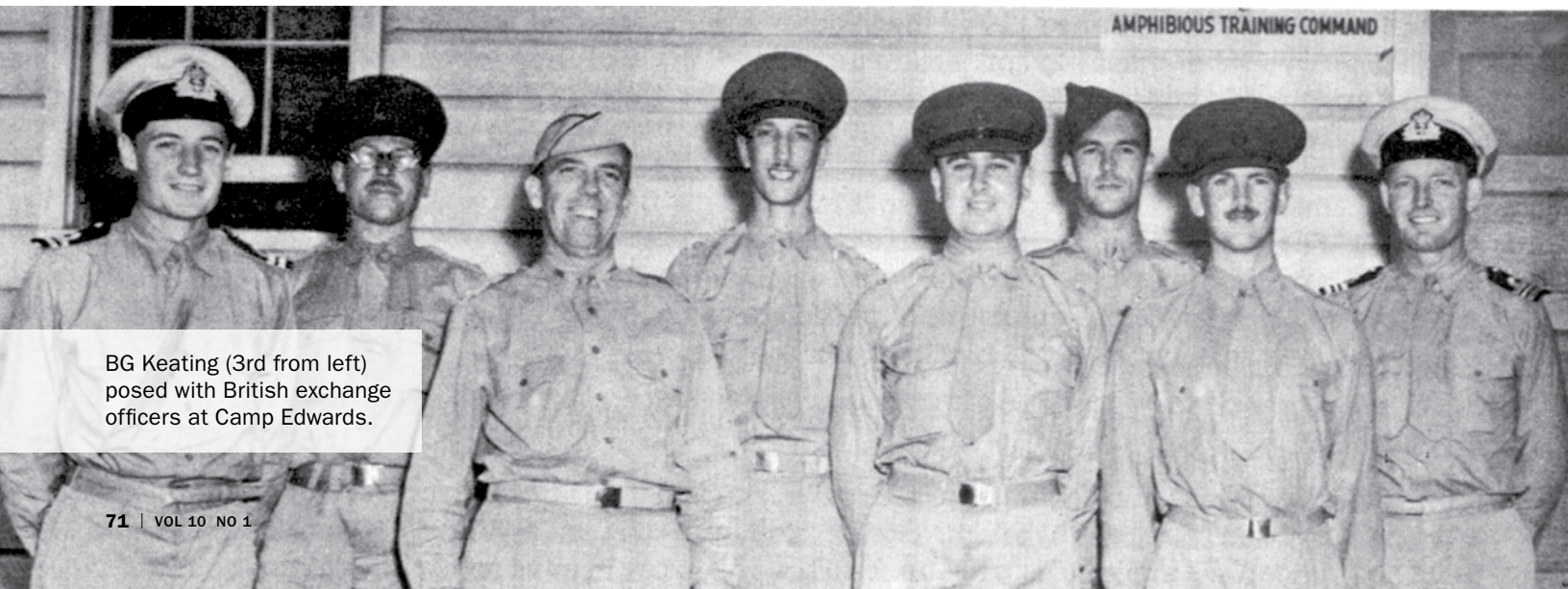
The CTF training ran continuously for ten days. Everyone trained together. Instruction was given by Commando Division cadre and British MAJ Berald E. Woodcock (a veteran of No. 1 Commando) with the assistance of CTF officers and sergeants. The training was designed to harden the students physically, perfect basic infantry squad and platoon tactics, teach techniques of hand-to-hand combat and self-defense, and practice specific commando raiding tactics.¹⁴

The subjects covered in the first class were:

1. Conditioning exercises consisting of obstacle courses; bayonet, grenade, and hand-to-hand fighting methods;
2. Use of the compass; map reading; military sketching; message writing; aerial photograph reading;
3. Mine techniques; demolitions; knots and lashings; crossing barbed wire and beach obstacles; operating and disabling motor vehicles and weapons;
4. Preparation of personnel for commando raids; reconnaissance patrol techniques; booby traps; operation of personnel at night;
5. Techniques of rubber boat operations; techniques of embarking and debarking from landing craft; boat formations;
6. Interrogation of prisoners; planning and conducting raids; and practical work in the form of night raids to secure information and destroy ‘hostile’ installations.¹⁵

All of the instruction would be tested as part of the preparation and planning for the division invasion. Amphibious landings were to be as realistic as possible within the constraints of safety and availability of troops, equipment, and boats. The beaches of Martha’s Vineyard were covered with barbed wire, obstacles, and buried explosives. Dynamite was triggered by cadre to simulate naval gunfire support, artillery, and land mines. The 75th Composite Infantry Training Battalion played the role of enemy defenders. The CTF, controlled by the 45th ID staff, would land first to assist the company of parachute infantry from Fort Benning, GA, that were ‘jumping in’ to seize the nearby airfield.¹⁶ Then, the main assault would follow.

Available landing craft could carry a full regimental combat team (RCT) and then bring in token representation from the remaining two RCTs and division rear echelon



BG Keating (3rd from left) posed with British exchange officers at Camp Edwards.



Initially activated as Engineer Amphibian Brigades in the mid-1942, they were renamed Engineer Special Brigades and wore this blue SSI. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd supported the Amphibious Training Center before ordered overseas; the 1st went to Europe for the North Africa, Sicily, and Italy landings before Normandy, while the 2nd and 3rd went to the Pacific. U.S. Navy Amphibious Scouts and Raiders wore a red background version of this SSI.

in subsequent waves. Even with boat shortages, the amphibious landings were carried out successfully on 18, 19, and 20 August 1942 amid loud explosions, billowing smoke, dropping parachutists, and the roar of landing craft motors. It was good practice for the engineer boat and shore units (initially Engineer Amphibian Brigades, then Engineer Special Brigades [ESB]) that, while supporting the ATC, were being organized, trained, and shipped overseas, minus equipment.¹⁷

The only constant among the ESBs was the 'handed off' landing craft. Maintenance was simply lackluster because newly-assigned engineer privates got on-the-job (OJT) training by the few school-trained watercraft mechanics in the newly forming brigades. This was usually done at night ('learning by doing' was the wartime style of instruction) because all operating boats were needed for amphibious training during the day.¹⁸

After the 45th ID landings, MAJ Kunzig, the Commando 'commandant,' reported that improvisation was a constant because critical equipment (like compasses) and quality aerial maps were unavailable. Unstable dynamite was regularly substituted for TNT. Films of the only amphibious training to date (1st ID in 1941) could not be shown to soldiers beforehand because only direct current (DC) electricity was available on Washburn Island. In spite of these issues, Kunzig rated CTF results as satisfactory.¹⁹

The AGF observers were impressed with the results because "General Keating was operating on a shoestring."²⁰ They neglected to report that GHQ and AGF staff bureaucrats required the general's signature on almost all requests from personnel to equipment to munitions and even housekeeping supplies.²¹ Regardless of viability, the AGF schedule, once started, was difficult to check from below.

Changes in CTF curriculum for the 36th ID (24 August through 4 October 1942) reflected more practical work at night. Night training requiring maps and compasses, explosives rigging, and mine placement, detection, and removal accomplished dual purposes and increased mental stress. Conditioning included speed marches, log exercises, and British Commando wall scaling with the 'toggle rope' (see photo).²²



(L) The 45th Infantry Division was activated in September 1940. (R) The 36th Infantry Division was federalized in November 1940.

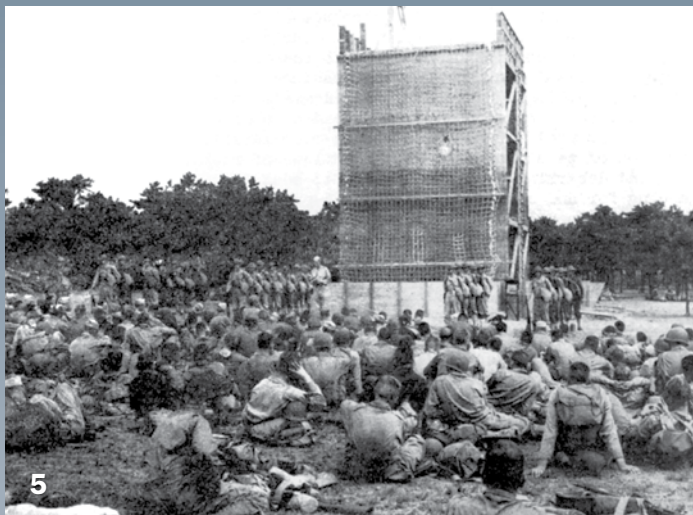
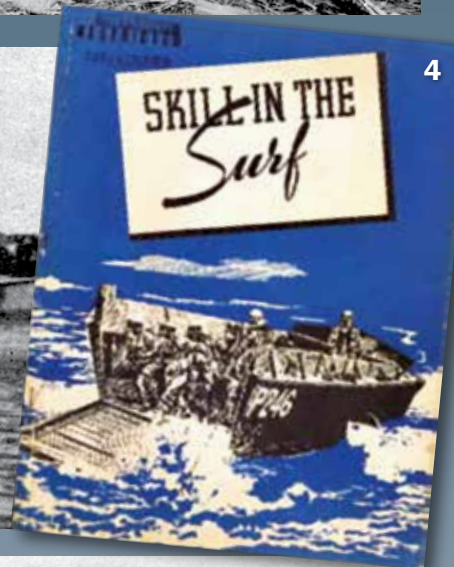


Wartime demands reduced resources and preparation for training, but ATC classes at Camp Edwards were rated successful by Army Ground Forces inspectors.



The British Commando 'toggle rope,' designed for climbing, pulling, and garroting an enemy sentry was adopted by the Americans.

AMPHIBIOUS LANDING INSTRUCTION



1 The ATC evaluated the Ford GPA Seagoing Jeep or 'Seep' as part of its amphibious equipment research and development mission.

2 The solution to landing craft shortages was to practice debarking from wooden boat mock-ups.

3 Landing craft beached on Washburn Island awaiting troops for daily amphibious training.

4 The 1945 Navy manual sketch portrays the difficulty infantrymen face debarking a craft in a surf landing.

5 'Dry' cargo net training on the Camp Edwards towers prepared soldiers to climb down from troop transports to landing craft and get back aboard the ship if weather prevented landings.

6 Soldiers held rifles at the down ramp height to teach men to jump down onto the beach from their landing craft. Note that they are carrying .30-06 M1903 Springfield rifles.

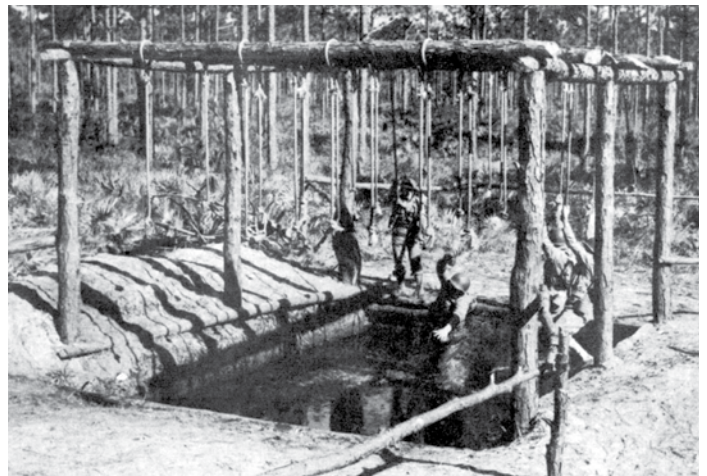
By the time the 36th ID got to Cape Cod, a Commando TF camp was set up eight hundred meters from the RCT cantonment on Washburn Island, but, on the opposite side of Waquoit Bay. Commando students slept in shelter-half 'pup' tents, messed in the open, used open-pit latrines, and bathed with salt water. While part of the physical hardening, time to construct billeting was not available.²³

Instruction was done in the field on adjacent obstacle, grenade, and bayonet courses. A Commando Efficiency Course was routed through the woods. It was a lot like Immediate Action courses today. Instructors ingeniously created and staged pop-up, swinging, and drop-down dummies with bladders of pig's blood that exploded when impaled with a bayonet. Explosive booby traps, trenches, various wire obstacles, and smoke were interspersed. Everyone competed against the clock. 'Commandos' were trained quite well 'on the cheap.'²⁴

Just as the ATC cadre got into a smooth training rhythm with the 36th ID, AGF ordered the immediate relocation of the center to the Florida Panhandle. Engineers had been working since late summer to build an ATC base (renamed Camp Gordon Johnston in February 1943). The ATC staff was to begin training the 38th ID on 23 November 1942. The 2nd ESB would accompany the ATC staff to Florida. The landing craft would 'water convoy' back to Florida, retracing the inter-coastal waterway route used in June.²⁵ Additional officers, equipment, and resources accompanied new ATC objectives set personally by LTG McNair. Most notably, the formation and training of a provisional Commando TF for each division was dropped.²⁶

General McNair, never strong on the Commando concept, favored retaining only those tough training features that would condition all U.S. troops for combat. He was not interested in making 'super killers' out of a select few. All soldiers would get live-fire battle 'inoculations' and practice street fighting tactics as part of their physical and mental hardening for combat.²⁷

Camp Johnston had space to simultaneously train a reinforced infantry division, the 2nd ESB, the ATC staff, and the 75th Composite Infantry Training Battalion. Each RCT camp had its own 'special training area' with obstacle, grenade, and bayonet courses. These locations also had sites for *jiu-jitsu*, knife and bayonet fighting, hand-to-hand



The high water table in the Florida Panhandle made water crossing obstacles simple to make.



This aerial view of the Camp Johnston infiltration course shows how soldiers were 'inoculated' to the realities of combat, crawling a hundred meters amid explosions, smoke, and machinegun fire thirty inches above the ground.

The 38th ID invasion exercise (28-30 December 1942) was considerably better supported by the newly-activated 3rd Engineer Special Brigade than the first, ten days earlier.



Before live firing the Landing Craft MCM .50 cal Browning M2 machine guns from the sea, the 38th ID infantrymen were oriented to the height and swaying motion using this Jeep mock-up.



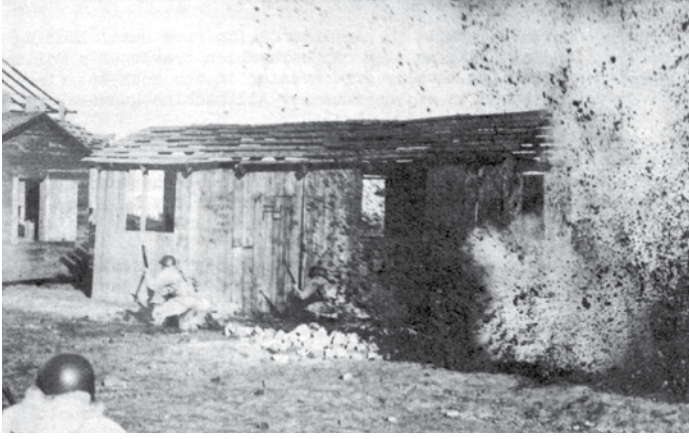
The Battle Practice course trained soldiers to engage multiple targets in succession with infantry small arms instinctively fired from the hip.

combat, and live explosives training. Swim instruction in nearby lakes and the Gulf of Mexico was tasked to each RCT. The objective for weak and non-swimmers was to survive if the landing craft sank. The better swimmers were taught rescue techniques. All RCTs rotated through the division amphibious training site as well as the live-fire training areas.²⁸

Live-fire courses were “vigorous, exciting, and full of thunder.”²⁹ The Camp Johnston obstacle courses were considered the toughest in the Army. Seventeen obstacles were spread over 550 meters. Each course could handle 125 men in 40 minute intervals. Specially designed combat lanes required crawl approaches for attacking bunkers and foxholes with live grenades. Soldiers practiced bare handed killing techniques until they were instinctive like the mantra, “Kill or be killed!” The ATC incorporated the toughest parts of Commando training.³⁰

The combat infiltration course ‘inoculated’ troops with battle noise, smoke, confusion, and physical danger. Soldiers, separated by lanes, crawled across a football-sized field littered with barbed wire obstacles, logs, stumps, shell holes, and trenches amid explosions and smoke. They hugged the ground because the interlocking trajectory fire of six machineguns was thirty inches above their heads. The Battle Practice course trained soldiers to advance instinctively firing from the hip .45 cal. pistols, M-1 Carbines, M-1 Garand rifles, the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), Thompson submachine guns, and M1919A1 light machine guns to engage pop-up targets in their lane.³¹ All this live-fire work was preparation for the final infantry evaluations.

Ground combat training for the infantry battalions culminated with two days of live-fire street fighting in a reconstructed logging village called ‘Harbeson City.’ Every



All infantry platoons of the 28th Infantry Division were given a live fire evaluation of their ability to fight in streets and clear buildings in 'Harbeson City' at Camp Gordon Johnston.

rifle platoon had to 'solve' a tactical live-fire problem in the village. Fire teams and squads scaled walls, climbed into buildings with and without 'toggle ropes,' fought in stairways and from rooftops, employed small arms and hand grenades most effective in houses, located and eliminated explosive booby traps, searched and cleared buildings while firing and maneuvering in the streets. Unfortunately, 'Harbeson City' was not finished in time for the 38th Infantry Division to benefit from it.³²

A newly activated 3rd ESB turned the 38th ID invasion exercise (17-19 December 1942) into a major debacle by landing units as much as twenty-five miles away from objectives. Radio communications broke down and control was lost at all levels. The same mistakes cited for the poorly executed 'assault' landings on Guadalcanal (August 1942) and North Africa (November 1942) were prevalent: cavalier attitudes covered widespread ignorance among staff officers; a lack of detailed planning; poor organization; weak executions; and scant appreciation for the difficulty of amphibious invasions. The problems showed that American and British military leaders were neophytes in this type of warfare. The 3rd ESB was in bad shape.³³

The ATC staff suffered 'up close and personal' embarrassment. BG Keating ordered the invasion exercise repeated 28-30 December. The 3rd ESB, now subordinate to the ATC, began a crash training program personally directed by Keating. While the second invasion was deemed satisfactory, significant changes had to be made before the next division, the 28th ID, arrived at Camp Johnston.³⁴

As the Marines had learned from Guadalcanal, infantry and supporting units needed amphibious scout training. This ATC oversight was glaringly revealed during the 38th ID invasions. Officers from the Marine Amphibious Reconnaissance Company training on the Atlantic side of Florida at Fort Pierce agreed to teach the course at the ATC.³⁵ Thirty selected personnel from the 28th ID and the 3rd ESB attended from 11-24 February 1943. 'Amphibious Scouts' were taught: tactical handling of rubber boats and small landing craft in smooth and rough water; to land



The U.S. Navy Amphibious Scouts and Raider School at Fort Pierce on Florida's Atlantic coast emphasized small rubber boat handling in all weather.

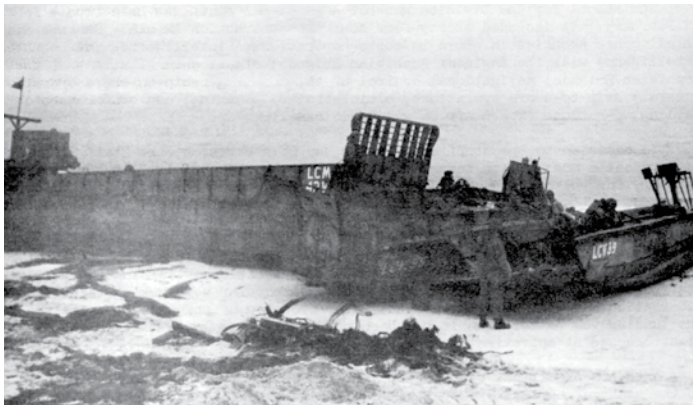


The Navy at Fort Pierce practiced 'wet' cargo net embarkation into and debarkation from landing craft.

silently, without detection on different types of shores in daylight and at night; to collect onshore intelligence before invasions; and to guide landing craft into assigned beaches.³⁶ Shore intelligence collection and landing craft routes had to be addressed.

Critical information for invasion planning purposes included nearby road nets, natural and artificial obstacles (land and underwater), and key beach data (physical layout, currents and tides, obstacles and limitations, natural approach channels, and their impact on landing personnel and heavy equipment). Enemy dispositions had to be scouted immediately preceding assaults and during the invasion for tactical reasons. A system of visual (code flags in daytime and flares for night) and radio signals were developed to maintain contact with the invasion force offshore and to channel landing craft to designated invasion beaches.³⁷ Despite their successes with shore-to-shore basic amphibious training and realistic combat hardening of the soldiers, the ATC Special Training personnel were scrambling.

Amphibious scout students underwent a tough regimen, more akin to British Commando individual and unit



Damaged landing craft were strewn along beaches for twenty miles after a freak electrical storm (7 March 1943) turned the 28th ID invasion into a nightmare.

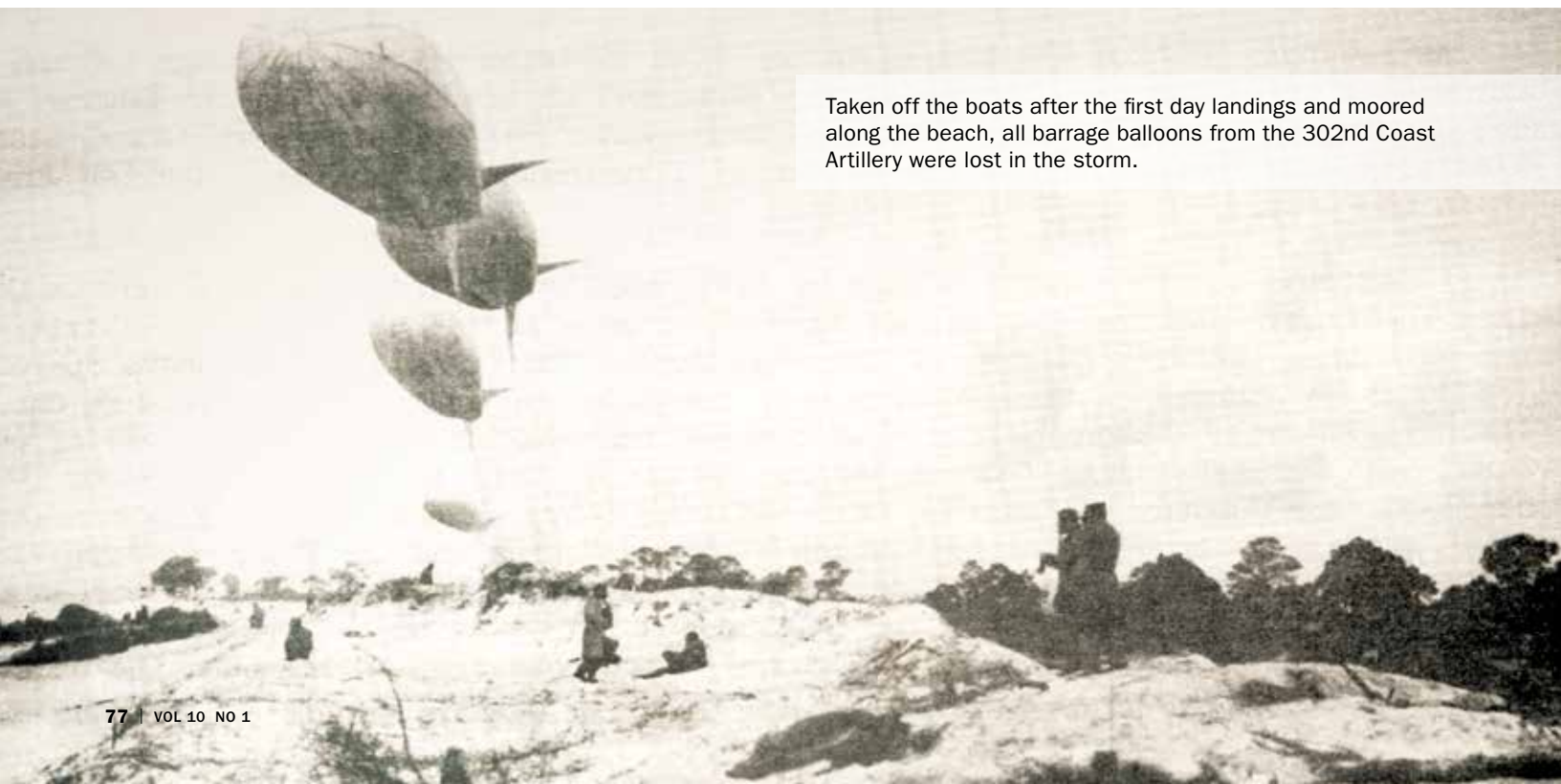


Ironically, the U.S. Assault Training Center, established in June 1943 at Woolacombe Beach in Devon, England, faced shortages of landing craft just like the ATC did a year earlier.

training. They learned day and night scouting and patrolling using compasses and maps. The men learned to operate and navigate rubber boats, landing craft, and small patrol vessels using navigation charts. Long ocean swims, daily multiple workouts on the obstacle and combat infiltration courses, and constant day and night reconnaissance exercises geared 'scouts' for their special roles.³⁸ The efforts of BG Keating and the Marine Amphibious Reconnaissance Company paid big dividends.

The 28th ID got 'all the bells and whistles' in attachments for their invasion landings. The 79th Smoke Generator Company used 4.2 inch mortars mounted inside landing craft to cover the beaches with smoke. Barrage balloons kept aircraft clear of the 'invasion fleet' and landing sites until a freak natural disaster occurred during the second night (7 March 1943). A severe electrical storm from the Gulf hammered the coast relentlessly all night. Radio contact with the landing craft was broken and control was lost. All of the 302nd Coast Artillery balloons, moored along the beaches, were torn loose and destroyed. Fourteen soldiers drowned when their landing craft swamped. Damaged vessels were strewn twenty miles along the coast. Despite the calamity, amphibious operations using scouts was doctrinally validated.³⁹ However, unbeknownst to most ATC cadre, drastic change was coming.

A week after the 28th ID departed, Army Ground Forces announced that the ATC was to be disbanded. After a year of service infighting over proponent responsibilities, the Navy accepted the shore-to-shore amphibious training mission as well as ship-to-shore. A U.S. Assault Training Center, established in England in June 1943, was given the ATC mission of preparing troops for amphibious operations.⁴⁰ After ten intense, stress-filled months, during which the 45th, 36th, 38th, and 28th IDs received amphibious and Commando training, the U.S. Army's stateside program came to an abrupt end.



Taken off the boats after the first day landings and moored along the beach, all barrage balloons from the 302nd Coast Artillery were lost in the storm.

In 1946, AGF historians summed up the amphibious training effort succinctly:

“The story was the same from the start to finish of the Amphibious Training Center: bickering and indecision in higher Headquarters [Navy and Army]; expansion of the training mission and objectives without corresponding expansion of facilities [instructor personnel, construction, and equipment resources]; and attempts on the part of the Center [ATC] to accomplish its mission with what was available. Improvisation and plain Yankee ingenuity frequently saved the day.”⁴¹

The emphases on the physical hardening of soldiers and realistic conditioning for combat, begun as Commando training at Camp Edwards and given to all soldiers at Camp Johnston, was continued as Ranger training in the Second Army infantry division camps well into 1944 (see “Second U. S. Army Ranger Program” in the next issue). The four units trained at the Army’s Amphibious Training Center were National Guard units federalized before the U.S. declared war: the 45th ID was activated September 1940; the 36th ID in November 1940; the 38th ID in January 1941; and the 28th ID in February 1941.⁴² As some of the earliest federalized by President Roosevelt, all had completed basic individual and unit tactical training phases and had been evaluated in a large maneuver.⁴³ Training at the ATC further hardened the troops for combat.

The provisional CTF training at Camp Edwards proved the value of the Commando TF as an assault force for amphibious operations. Their organization, tactics, and skills training as well as individual mental conditioning and physical hardening was validated during the 45th and 36th ID invasion exercises. The CTF proficiency and smaller beaches at Martha’s Vineyard (several miles versus twenty miles along Florida’s Panhandle) masked the poor level of training in the rapidly-fielded ESBs. Though Commando combat skills and physical conditioning was provided to all soldiers at Camp Johnston, the absence of a specially-prepared assault force to precede the division landings in Florida revealed how poorly trained the 3rd ESB personnel were. Adding the Marine’s ‘Amphibious Scout’ course filled the CTF void in the 28th ID and got the attention of the 3rd ESB focused. The next article, “Second U. S. Army Ranger Program” will explain how junior leader training and realistic combat conditioning, integral to the ATC Commando training in 1942 and 1943, was carried forward. ▲

Special thanks goes to CPT Marshall O. Baker, AGF Historical Section, for including the Commando training in his 1946 study on the short-lived CONUS Amphibious Training Center, Ms. Nancy L. Kutulas, Librarian, Special Warfare Medical Group for locating his work, and to retired MG John C. Raaen, Jr., the HHC Commander, 5th Ranger Battalion, WWII, for reviewing this article.

CHARLES H. BRISCOE, PhD

Charles H. Briscoe has been the USASOC Command Historian since 2000. A graduate of The Citadel, this retired Army special operations officer earned his PhD from the University of South Carolina. Current research interests include Army special operations Latin-America, POW Recovery, and the Lodge Act.

Endnotes

- 1 In the summer of 1941, a contingent of American Marines led by General Julian C. Smith toured Britain and observed Commando training. They were provided detailed information on the Commando unit organization and equipment as well as their specialized training. Subsequently, forty USMC officers and NCOs were attached to No. 3 Commando for two months of training. A second group arrived in April 1942. When the Marine Raiders left for the Pacific in August 1942, direct contact with the Commandos ended. LTC T. Ely, Office of the DCO, to MAJ Daniell, War Office, 31 July 1941, WO 193/405 cited in Andrew L. Hargreaves, *Special Operations in World War II: British and American Irregular Warfare* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 112-113. The Army disbanded the Ranger Battalions after WWII as the Marines did to the Raider, Parachute, and Amphibious Scout units.
- 2 The Army Ground Forces. CPT Marshall O. Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center: Study No. 22* (Washington, DC: Army Ground Forces Historical Center, 1946).
- 3 In the six months from March to September 1942, AGF established four specialty training centers: desert, mountain, airborne, and amphibious. The ‘special units’ created were: 1st Ranger Battalion (ETO) Provisional) followed by the 3rd and 4th Ranger Battalions, the Canadian-American First Special Service Force, Marine Raider Battalions, Amphibious Scouts, and a Parachute Battalion as well as the Army parachute and glider battalions. Kent Roberts Greenfield, Robert R. Palmer and Bell I. Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops. The Army Ground Forces. United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: Department of Army, Army Ground Forces Historical Section, 1947), 340; Christopher R. Gabel, *The U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1991), 175-176; David W. Hogan, Jr., *Raiders or Elite Infantry: The Changing Role of the U.S. Army Rangers from Dieppe to Grenada* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 18, 22.
- 4 Michael E. Haskew, *Encyclopedia of Elite Forces in the Second World War* (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2007), 47.
- 5 Hargreaves, *Special Operations in World War II*, 113.
- 6 The Army Ground Forces. MAJ Bell I. Wiley and CPT William P. Govan. *History of the Second Army: Study No. 16* (Washington, DC: Army Ground Forces Historical Section, 1946), 33.
- 7 Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, 340.
- 8 “Camp Hood, Texas” at http://www.tankdestroyer.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=391&Itemid=391 accessed 2/24/2014.
- 9 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 5.
- 10 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 6, 7.
- 11 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 10, 30, 36, 49-52, 56.
- 12 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 10, 14, 34, 36, 49-50; Robert R. Palmer, Bell I. Wiley and William R. Keast, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops. The Army Ground Forces. United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1948), 489-490.
- 13 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 10, 30, 36, 49, 50, 56. Interestingly, MAJ William B. Kunzig, USMA Class of 32, shared a wardroom with CPT William O. Darby aboard ship during the 1st ID regimental ‘amphibious’ landing training. They did this off Long Island, NY, in 1940. Retired MG John C. Raaen, Jr., who spent his West Point First Class summer with the 3rd Amphibious Brigade at Waquoit Bay, provided an unpolished assessment of CTF training: “The Commando Task Force was confined (to prevent AWOLs) as well as isolated on Washburn Island. It was a dreadful place. Morale was below water. Instead of going AWOL, soldiers deserted. Leadership was dreadful and cruel.” Briscoe email from MG John C. Raaen, Jr., Subject: Comments on Draft Commando/Ranger Article dated 5/2/2014, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 14 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 50-51, 52. ATC instructors were augmented by officers from Engineer Amphibian Command, and British officers: MAJ Berald E. Woodcock (No. 1 Commando), MAJ Phillip R. Drew (Suffolk Regiment), MAJ Fleming (Royal Armoured Corps), LT P.R.G. Worth (Royal Navy), and MAJ E.T. Thompson (Royal Corps of Signals). Most returned to England when ATC moved to Florida. CPT Jack T. Shannon, executive officer, 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) and first commander, 77th SFG, who had completed Commando training in England, served in the ATC Commando Division until assigned to the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment in mid-September 1942. From there Shannon volunteered for the OSS U.S. Army Amphibious Training Command, Camp Edwards, Massachusetts, letter, SUBJECT: Transfer, 2 September 1942. USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 15 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 49-52.
- 16 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 53-54. The CTF, instead of assisting the paratroops seize the airfield, reached that target before the airborne assault commenced.
- 17 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 53-54, 22-23. The First Amphibian Brigade formed at Camp Edwards in late May 1942. About halfway through the amphibious training of the 45th ID, it was shipped overseas. The renamed Second Engineer Special Brigade which had been activated in June 1942 was tasked to support the ATC.
- 18 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 53-54, 22-23.
- 19 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 35.
- 20 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 36, 46, 48.
- 21 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 36, 46, 48.
- 22 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 54-55.
- 23 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 56.

- 24 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 56.
- 25 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 12, 57. Three hundred Army amphibious engineers ferried thirty-eight landing craft from Florida's West coast to quiet Waquoit Bay surrounding Cotuit and Washburn Islands. For thirty-eight days landing craft chugged through inland waterways, across bays, and navigated high seas to reach Cape Cod, Massachusetts. "Camp Edwards" at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_Edwards accessed 1/6/2014.
- 26 COL Gordon Johnston, the son of Confederate General Robert Daniel Johnston, graduated from Princeton University in 1896. He was the highly decorated Spanish-American War enlisted 'Rough Rider,' Philippine Insurrection (Medal of Honor), Cuban Occupation, Mexican IncurSION, and WWI (Distinguished Service Cross, three Silver Stars, and Purple Heart) veteran. "Colonel Gordon Johnston, U.S. Army" at <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/gjohnstn.htm> accessed 3/21/2014; Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 48, 58; When the Commando TF training was dropped in a mid-November 1942 prior to the ATC relocating to Florida, MAJ William B. Kunzig, the original Commando Division Chief, turned over his personnel and equipment to MAJ Hoskot, director of the Special Training Division. Kunzig was promoted to LTC and sent to the Naval War College before assignment to the U.S. Assault Training Center at Woolacomb, England. There he conducted battalion and regimental landing exercises for units force-listed for the Normandy invasion. "Memorial: William B. Kinzig 1932" at <http://apps.westpointaog.org/Memorials/Article/9496/> accessed 2/5/2014; Michael Taylor, "Gen. William Kunzig dies - Presidio last post," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 May 2008 at <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Gen-William-Kunzig-dies-Presidio-last-post-328545> accessed 2/4/2014.
- 27 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 59-60.
- 28 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 59-60.
- 29 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 60.
- 30 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 60.
- 31 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 60-61.
- 32 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 63, 65.
- 33 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 63, 65.
- 34 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 63, 65.
- 35 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 66-67; 1LT Leo B. Shinn, "Amphibious Reconnaissance," *Marine Corps Gazette* (April 1945), 51.
- 36 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 66-67; Shinn, "Amphibious Reconnaissance," 51.
- 37 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 66-67; R.C. Williams, Jr., "Amphibious Scouts and Raiders," *Military Affairs* (Fall 1949) Vol. XIII: No. 3, 150.
- 38 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 66.
- 39 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 17, 66-67. Instruction on shore-to-shore amphibious operations was provided to two groups of War Department General Staff officers (7-13 February and 17-23 February 1943) to prepare them for overseas assignments. That speaks well for the ATC reputation.
- 40 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 17, 66-67, 69. Ironically, the 38th ID, slated for the Pacific, went through the Navy's amphibious training a second time in Hawaii. "38th Infantry Division" at www.history.army.mil/html/forcestruc/ccccccbtchron/cc/038id.htm accessed 3/11/2014.
- 41 Baker, *The Amphibious Training Center*, 48.
- 42 Palmer, Wiley, and Keast, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, 489-490.
- 43 Palmer, Wiley, and Keast, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, 489-490.

Ignoring the Spreading Global War Sidebar

- 1 U.S. Department of State. Proposed Letter of Agreement. Secretary Cordell Hull to Minister of Denmark Henrik de Kauffmann, dated 7 April 1941, in Appendix A of *The Coast Guard at War: Greenland Patrol II* (Washington, DC: U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, Public Information Division, Historical Section, 1945), 206, 10.
- 2 *The Coast Guard at War: Greenland Patrol II*, 2-3, 10, 206; COL James A. Donovan, U.S. M.C. (Ret), *Outpost in the North Atlantic: Marines in the Defense of Iceland. Marines in World War II Commemorative Series*, 1991, at http://www.nps.gov/history/online_books/npswapa/extcontent/usmc/pcn-190-003118/secl.htm accessed 2/18/ 2014.

Jump Starting Army Manpower Sidebar

- 1 By January 1942, the Army's manpower objective had risen to 3.6 million men with 69 divisions to be activated that year. Nine new armored, 27 infantry, and 2 airborne divisions were activated, far short of the target. But, three years later, the Army had 8 million men and 89 combat divisions. Gabel, *The U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941*, 185. The War Department had ordered the 1st Infantry Division (ID) on the East coast and the 3rd ID on the West coast to conduct landing operations as directed by GHQ on 26 June 1940. The Navy's lack of sufficient amphibious landing craft meant that the infantry battalions of a regiment were rotated though training. These limitations meant amphibious training for artillery, armor, and service support units was impossible. Ironically, GHQ transferred the amphibious mission from the trained 1st ID to the untrained 9th ID in February 1942. Greenfield, Palmer and Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, 87, 89, 90, 91; Hogan, *Raiders or Elite Infantry*, 13.
- 2 Hogan, *Raiders or Elite Infantry*, 13.

