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Documents

1-258 Editorial Note on Infantry School Teaching, 1927-1932

1927-1932

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Summary

Editorial Note on Infantry School Teaching

1927-32

When Marshall became assistant commandant of the Infantry School on November 10, 1927, the school was only nine years old. In 1918 three institutions—the Small Arms Firing School at Camp Perry, Ohio; the Machine Gun School at Augusta, Georgia; and the Infantry School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma—were combined and transferred to Camp Benning near Columbus, Georgia. In 1927, the reservation covered over one hundred fifty square miles. The post, where the Infantry School was located, occupied about one percent of the reservation and was about nine miles from the Columbus business district.

According to Army Regulation 350-200 (December 30, 1926), “The objects of the Infantry School are—a. to teach in detail the tactics and technique of Infantry and to give a working familiarity with the tactics and technique of associated arms in order to provide competent leaders for all Infantry units and to qualify instructors for the Regular Army, the National Guard, the Organized Reserves, the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps, and the Citizens’ Military Training Camps; b. to train selected enlisted men as technicians and instructors in the duties of enlisted specialists in the Infantry of the Regular Army, the National Guard, and Organized Reserves; c. to serve as an agency of the Chief of Infantry in the development and perfection of Infantry tactics and technique.”

The commandant at Fort Benning when Marshall arrived was Brigadier General Edgar T. Collins; after May 4, 1929, Marshall’s old friend Campbell King held the post. Subordinate to the commandant were the nearly six thousand troops stationed at the post (the Twenty-ninth Infantry, which was used primarily for demonstrations and tests; the Twenty-fourth Infantry, a Negro unit which was used primarily for labor and construction; and numerous special units), the small Department of Experiment, and the Academic Department. Assistant Commandant Marshall directed the Academic Department with a relatively unrestricted hand between November, 1927, and June, 1932.

By the time Marshall took over, the Fort Benning school year was underway. Both the Advanced Course (which usually enrolled between fifty and eighty senior captains and majors) and the Company Officers’ Course (which enrolled between one hundred and one hundred fifty lieutenants and captains) began in September and ran through early June. The school also offered short refresher courses for colonels and brigadier generals and instruction for National Guard and Reserve officers, for enlisted specialists, and for horseshoers.

To teach the Academic Department’s three to five hundred students, Marshall had a staff of sixty to eighty instructors. In November, 1927, these included one of his former V.M.I. roommates, Lieutenant Colonel Philip B. Peyton, as well as Major James A. Van Fleet, Captain Edward M. Almond, Captain J. Lawton Collins, and Captain Charles L. Bolte. In subsequent years, instructors included men such as Lieutenant Colonel Joseph W. Stilwell, Major Edwin F. Harding, Major Omar N. Bradley, and Major Harold R. Bull. Numerous other men who would eventually attain high army commands were students during the Marshall years at Fort Benning. There were occasional foreign students. One of these—Captain Adolf von Schell, a 1931 Advanced Course graduate—later occupied important posts in Nazi Germany.

One of Marshall’s command techniques was to recruit a superior staff, give them their assignments, and leave them alone. If they hesitated, Marshall tried to help; if they failed, he relieved them. Major Omar N. Bradley remarked later: “During the two years I served him as chief of the weapons section in the Infantry School, he sent for me only once to discuss the work of my section. And during that same two-year period he visited me in my office but twice.” (Omar N. Bradley, **A Soldier’s Story** [New York: Henry Holt, 1951], pp. 19-20.)

Joseph D. Patch, an instructor during Marshall's first year, later wrote: "In my opinion Col. Marshall did more for The Infantry School than anyone who ever served there. We were in a 'slump' and he pulled us out and ran the instruction on a realistic and practical basis. **His tactical problems were based on real occurrences.**" (Major General Patch to Forrest C. Pogue, November 4, 1960, GCMRL/Research File [Benning].)

A student in the 1931-32 Company Officers' Course recalled Marshall's teaching technique. "Marshall would make frequent visits to classes in the field and we would, as a group, have an opportunity to hear him explain his views on the problems of the day. I remember occasions when he would outline a tactical situation to a group of students, then select a student and have him give a field order subject to critique by the other students and finally his observations. On one occasion we rode horses cross country over a 17-mile course and at the end, without previous warning, were told to draw a sketch map of the area covered." The purpose was to force students "to think on their feet." (General George H. Decker to Forrest C. Pogue, November 5, 1964, *ibid.*)

Marshall took the lead in sponsoring social and recreational activities— particularly those involving horsemanship. Terry de la M. Allen, who as a major attended the 1931-32 Advanced Course, subsequently wrote that Marshall was "greatly interested in the athletic schedules there, including the Officers' Polo Tournaments and the Enlisted Men's Baseball Schedules. When I reported to him, . . . he wanted to know if I came there to work or to play polo. I told him that I hoped to do both." (Major General Allen to Forrest C. Pogue, November 5, 1964, *ibid.*)

The office files of the Academic Department have apparently been destroyed, as numerous attempts to find them have failed. Documentation for this period depends upon private papers and various files in the National Archives.

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