

THE INFANTRY DIVISION OF 1921

At the end of the First World War, the regular army returned to an organization not unlike what it had had in 1917. The biggest changes were in the army's higher organizations. In 1917, the senior principal commands of the army were the Eastern Department (comprising the eastern seaboard to as far west as West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi plus the coast defenses of New Orleans and Galveston, the Panama Canal Zone, and Porto Rico and its adjacent islands); the Central Department (the central and midwestern states); the Southern Department (Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona); the Western Department (from Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Nevada westward plus Alaska and Yellowstone National Park); the Philippine Department; and the Hawaiian Department. Three of the first four departments each included an infantry division headquarters to provide tactical control over subordinate combat units. The Southern Department had a cavalry division headquarters and the Hawaiian Department had a brigade headquarters which performed the same tactical functions. The department headquarters, of course, provided administrative control. The general officer commanding each department was both division commander and department commander. The army of 1917 had few general officers. These comprised only ten major generals and 30 brigadiers. A major general commanded each of the first four territorial departments, the coast artillery corps, the medical corps, and the quartermaster corps; one was army chief staff; and two were on the general staff. One brigadier general each commanded the Hawaii and Philippine departments, the Quartermaster Corps, the Corps of Engineers, the Ordnance Department, the Signal Corps, and the Bureau of Insular Affairs; two each were with the general staff corps and the Ordnance Department; one each headed the adjutant general's, inspector general's, and judge advocate's departments; three commanded coast artillery districts; at least eight others commanded infantry or cavalry brigades; and the remaining six may have been assigned to special duty. This basic organization was kept intact during the First World War and seems to have performed adequately despite the great increase in the size of the army which it was called upon to administer.

The new organization had taken shape by

1921. To command an army whose combat elements were no more numerous than they were in 1917, the army found it necessary to first divide the Continental United States (or CONUS) into nine "corps areas." In other words, nine headquarters were established to do the same job that had previously been done quite adequately with four. Another example of "Parkenson's Law" in action! In 1928, all the corps areas were commanded by major generals except VI and VIII Corps which were commanded by brigadiers. I Corps had New England plus part of the coast defenses of New York. II Corps had New Jersey, Delaware, Porto Rico and the rest of New York. III Corps had Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and DC. IV Corps had the rest of the Eastern Seaboard plus Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana. V Corps had Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, and Kentucky. VI Corps had Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Missouri. VII Corps had most of Missouri, plus Kansas, Arkansas, Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. VIII Corps had Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, New Mexico, and Fort D.A. Russell Wyoming. The IX Corps had the West Coast and Alaska. The nine corps areas were further grouped into three "army areas" (I, II, III Corps being under First Army; IV, V, VI Corps under Second Army, etc.) but these were without commanders or staffs and their existence was purely nominal. Overseas, the Hawaiian and Philippine Departments still existed and a department for the Panama Canal was also organized. All three departments were now commanded by major generals. Additionally, there was a separate command for US forces in China (under a brigadier general). The nine corps areas and three overseas departments was supposed to control twelve infantry divisions (one per corps area or department) and three cavalry divisions.

The actual strength of these forces was far less than the above numbers would suggest. During the 1919-20 demobilization, the army discovered a wonderful bureaucratic "sleight of hand" known as unit inactivation. After previous wars, the army had simply disbanded surplus regiments and/or combined a lot of old regiments to create a few new ones. Inactivating a unit, rather than disbanding or combining it, discharges all of its personnel but allows it to remain on the army rolls until the next mobilization. In this way entire divisions could be (and were) built out of "thin air." Even "active" units (especially those stationed in the CONUS) were often manned at such a small

percentage of their authorized strength that they were only marginally more substantial than the inactive ones. Of the divisions in the nine corps areas, the 1st (Fort Hamilton NY), 2nd (Fort Sam Houston TX), and 3rd (Fort Lewis WA) Infantry Divisions and the 1st Cavalry Division (Fort Bliss TX) existed with only a few small elements inactivated but they were maintained at only about 30% of their war strength. They were commanded by brigadier generals. The 4th (IV Corps area), 5th (V Corps), and 6th (VI Corps) Infantry Divisions and the 2nd Cavalry Division (VII Corps) were inactive except for their infantry (or cavalry) regiments, parts of their artillery and engineers, and some smaller elements. Their headquarters were inactive so they had no commanding officers. The 7th (VII Corps), 8th (III Corps), and 9th (I Corps) Infantry Divisions and the 3rd (VII Corps) Cavalry Division were completely inactive. The three overseas departments each had a division commanded by a major general (not the same officer as the department commander). In the Canal Zone there was the 10th Infantry Division, officially known as the Panama Canal Division. It had the 19th Infantry Brigade with two infantry regiments, a field artillery battalion, and an engineer regiment. The rest of the division (including the 20th Infantry Brigade) was inactive. In the Hawaiian Department, the Hawaiian Division (or 11th Infantry Division) was fully active. Likewise, the Philippine Department's Philippine Division (or 12th Infantry Division) was active except for an artillery regiment and the division ammunition train. In addition, all but one battalion of the division's 15th Infantry was serving under the US Forces in China and only a battalion of the division's engineer regiment was active. Troops assigned to the overseas departments tended to be maintained at a higher strength than those in CONUS.

As to the organization of the divisions themselves, it should first be understood that in the 1919-39 period, the wartime table of organization for a division was not so much a picture of what combat units were supposed to look like as it was a mobilization planning document and a theoretical model for use in map exercises at military schools. Nevertheless, a study of their organization can be of value not only for the "what if" scenario but also as a guide to the effects that its First World War experience had on the US Army's tactics, doctrine, and mobilization planning.

The army's tables for its "postwar" division were first issued in 1920 and then modified somewhat in 1921. They were modified again and somewhat enlarged in 1927 but thereafter they remained essentially unchanged until 1939. The 1921 division was a very conservative development of the 1918 division and retained most of its essential characteristics. It had been acknowledged that the 1918 division had been large and unwieldy and in answer to this complaint the new division was smaller by some 8,000 men. This was done by eliminating the old division's 155mm howitzer regiment, which became corps artillery. The four infantry regiments (still grouped under two brigades as in the old division) were made significantly smaller but because each infantry battalion now had its own machine gun company, the three machine gun battalions of the old division became redundant and were eliminated. The division engineer regiment was sharply reduced by cutting its six engineer companies from 6 officers and 250 men each to 4 officers and 105 men each. The addition of four Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR) to each engineer company, however, gave it a combat capability which it had not previously possessed. The smaller size of the division's combat elements allowed its service support elements to be reduced. These manpower savings did allow a few new elements to be added to the division, including a squadron of observation aircraft and a company of light tanks.

a special case because its groups of four (later three) infantry battalions each were called "brigades" rather than "regiments." The fact that the Germans had switched to a triangular division long before manpower shortages would have forced them to do so does not seem to have been considered. In subsequent writings in the *Infantry Journal*, officers complained of the additional "management layer" represented by the brigade headquarters and of the difficulties of establishing adequate reserves at each command echelon without weakening the front line.

The results of the very poor quality training given to the officers required for the 1917-18 war were not only an often disappointing performance by our troops but also the eventual institutionalization of mediocre training practices. The US officer corps was not, however, blind to its shortcomings but as is often the case in many bureaucracies used organizational "fixes" in preference to true reform. The institution of executive officers in rifle companies and

(from 1921) in infantry battalions was an attempt to shore up weak commanders and was based on the theory that "two heads are better than one." Carrying the "two heads" theory even further, the 1921 division instituted full staffs to as low as the battalion level. Where a battalion commander in 1917-18 would have had only one or two officer assistants and even a regimental commander would have only three or four, the 1921 division gave them five and eight, respectively. Other staffs were similarly enlarged. The immediate effect of this was mainly theoretical as peacetime officer strengths were so low that few staff positions could be manned. Officers went back to commanding their units directly (below division level) with little direct assistance from subordinates. The staffs in the 1921 division were probably instituted because the army believed that in a future mobilization, it would again be unable to adequately train enough officers and that it would need a wartime organization adapted to the requirements of the ill trained men who would be leading America's soldiers into combat.

SOURCES: Tables of Organization for the 1921 Division (Tables 1W through 87W) are reprinted in *Tables of Organization, Infantry and Cavalry Divisions* (Fort Leavenworth, KS The General Service School Press 1921-22). See also *Army List and Directory* April 20, 1917 and July 1, 1928 (Washington DC US Government Printing Office 1917 and 1928). Contemporary discussions of the merits of the 1918 and 1921 Divi-

In defending their decision to maintain the "square" division organization of four infantry regiments, as opposed to the smaller but handier three-regiment "triangular" division, US officers claimed that every French officer they talked to strongly favored the square division and stated that only manpower shortages had forced them to switch to the triangular configuration. American officers considered the British division to be

