

THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS OF THE VIETNAM WAR

THE U.S. ARMY BEFORE VIETNAM 1953-1965



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by

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United States Army
Washington, D.C., 2015

Introduction

To many Americans, the war in Vietnam was, and remains, a divisive conflict. Now almost fifty years after the beginning of major U.S. combat operations in Vietnam, the war has faded from much of America's consciousness. Over half of the U.S. population was born after the war and has no direct memory of the conflict, yet this does not lessen its importance. The massive American commitment—political, military, and diplomatic—to the independence of South Vietnam beginning in the 1950s and continuing with U.S. direct combat operations in the 1960s and early 1970s makes it important to remember those who served.

U.S. involvement in this corner of Southeast Asia began after World War II when Vietnam was fighting for independence from France. Although generally favoring Vietnamese independence, the United States supported France because the rebels—or Viet Minh—were led by Communists and in the days of the Cold War U.S. officials considered any and all Communists to be little more than the puppets of Moscow and Beijing. France's defeat in 1954, the bifurcation of Vietnam into a Communist North and non-Communist South, and America's assumption of the job of training the armed forces of the newly created non-Communist Republic of Vietnam pulled the United States deeper into the conflict. Framed primarily as a fight to defend democracy against the forces of international communism, the United States gradually committed more troops and materiel to fight Communist-led Southern guerrillas (or Viet Cong) and the regular military forces sent to South Vietnam by the politburo in Hanoi.

By the time President Lyndon B. Johnson committed major combat units in 1965, the United States had already invested thousands of men and millions of dollars in the fight to build a secure and stable South Vietnam. That commitment expanded rapidly until by 1969 the United States had over 365,000 soldiers in every military region of South Vietnam with thousands of other

servicemen and women throughout the Pacific area in direct support of operations. The war saw many technological innovations including the massive use of helicopters, wide-scale use of computers, sophisticated psychological operations, new concepts of counterinsurgency, and major advances in military medicine. Yet, as in most wars, much of the burden of battle was still borne by the foot soldiers on the ground who slogged over the hills and through the rice paddies in search of an often elusive foe. The enormous military and political effort by the United States was, however, continuously matched by the determination of North Vietnamese leaders to unify their country under communism at whatever cost. That determination, in the end, proved decisive. Negotiations accompanied by the gradual withdrawal of American forces led to the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973, effectively ending the U.S. military role. The continued existence of an independent South Vietnam, however, was of short duration. Two years after the American exit the North Vietnamese Army overran South Vietnam and sealed its victory in April 1975.

The vast majority of American men and women who served in Vietnam did so in the uniform of the United States Army. They served their country when called, many at great personal cost, against a backdrop of growing uncertainty and unrest at home. These commemorative pamphlets are dedicated to them.

RICHARD W. STEWART
Chief Historian

The U.S. Army Before Vietnam, 1953–1965

The twelve years between the end of the Korean War in the spring of 1953 and the deployment of ground combat troops to Vietnam in the spring of 1965 were stressful ones for the U.S. Army. It had to adjust to the budget and manpower cuts that typify the end of a major war while at the same time maintaining an unprecedented level of preparedness due to ongoing tensions between the United States and the two leaders of the Communist bloc—the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. Moreover, the proliferation of atomic weapons, first developed in 1945, raised existential questions about the nature of future wars and the role ground forces would play in them. The Army would spend the remaining years of the 1950s struggling with an identity crisis, trying to prove to itself and to others that it remained relevant in the nuclear age. By the end of the decade, the Army had indeed developed organizations, weapons, and doctrine to address the challenges of nuclear war. No sooner had it done so than the rules of the game changed, as the Communist powers adopted a strategy of fostering revolutions in weak and underdeveloped countries as a means of spreading their political doctrine without risking a direct confrontation with the United States that might spark a thermonuclear exchange. Once again, the Army rose to the occasion with new organizations, equipment, and doctrine. All of these challenges made the period one of the most tumultuous in the history of the peacetime Army—an Army that stood on the brink of one of its most tumultuous wars.

STRATEGIC SETTING

Almost as soon as the documents marking the surrender of Germany in World War II were signed in May 1945, the ties that bound the two major wartime allies—the Soviet Union and the United States—began to disintegrate. Contrasting political philosophies, differences over how to treat occupied Germany, and the Soviet Union’s imposition of communism over Eastern Europe created an atmosphere of mutual distrust. In March 1947, President Harry S. Truman announced a program of military and economic support for nations battling Communist expansionism. In a speech delivered the following month, financier Bernard M. Baruch characterized the emerging confrontation between the Soviet Union and the West as a “Cold War.” It would prove to be a multifaceted diplomatic, economic, and military struggle that would dominate much of the remainder of the twentieth century.

In April 1949, the United States and thirteen other nations formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO. Member nations pledged to come to each other’s aid against Soviet aggression and to contribute military forces toward a common defense. An attack by Communist North Korea against South Korea in June 1950 seemed to confirm Western fears of Communist aggression. Many Western leaders believed the invasion to be the prelude to a wider offensive by the Soviets against Western Europe. With that threat in mind, President Truman announced the reactivation of the U.S. Seventh Army in Europe in November 1950. He then directed the deployment of four U.S. Army divisions to West Germany to reinforce the division and three armored cavalry regiments already there on occupation duty.

The Korean War found the U.S. Army unprepared for combat. President Truman’s draconian budget and his refusal to allow the Army to achieve its authorized strength had reduced most units to hollow shells. Consequently, the Army committed understrength and inadequately trained divisions that suffered stinging defeats in the summer of 1950 attempting to stem the North Korean advance. By the fall, the six Army divisions in Korea had been brought up to strength by stripping personnel from the rest of the Regular Army, by recalling large numbers of men from the Organized Reserve Corps, and by assigning Korean soldiers, often untrained and not able to speak any English, to U.S. units.

The Army fought the Korean War very much as it had World War II. Little had changed over the short interval between the two conflicts. Nor did the conflict generate many new lessons. When the fighting ended in 1953, the service emerged using largely the same organization, doctrine, and equipment that it had at the start of the war.

The Korean War had a more profound effect on U.S. strategic policy. Unwilling to risk open conflict with the Soviet Union or Communist China, the United States had limited the options and resources available to its military commanders. Fearing escalation to a wider conflagration, President Truman had forbidden the United Nations commander in chief, U.S. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, to bomb bridges leading into Communist China. He likewise turned down MacArthur's request to use Nationalist Chinese forces, and refrained from employing nuclear weapons once Communist China joined the conflict. These self-imposed restraints resulted in a stalemate, and the war ended with an armistice that left the two sides largely where they had been when the conflict had begun. The absence of a clear victory led military and political leaders to question whether the conflict had been worth the financial and human cost. It also left the public averse to entering into another land war unless the stakes for the United States were immense. Nonetheless, the Army had gained much combat experience. For the next ten years, almost all of the service's senior leaders developed and implemented plans, policies, and doctrine based on their shared experiences of World War II and the Korean War.

Korea had one additional strategic impact—it led to the establishment of large garrisons on foreign soil in peacetime. The end of the “hot” war in Korea in 1953 did not relieve the tensions between East and West. Not only did the Army emerge with the obligation of maintaining a garrison in Korea to uphold the armistice, but the war between the two Koreas—one free and one Communist—and their Cold War patrons had made the threat of a similar conflict in bifurcated Germany seem even more real. The Seventh Army thus became a seemingly permanent, forward-deployed bulwark against Communist expansion in Europe—a new and demanding role in the history of the U.S. Army. Just as service on the Western frontier had defined the Army in the nineteenth century, the new mission would define the Army for decades to come.

THE ARMY EMERGES FROM THE KOREAN WAR

Whether the Army could meet its new and enlarged burdens had a lot to do with the resources it received, and these, it turned out, were in short supply. Because of the continuing Cold War, the Army did not demobilize as thoroughly or as rapidly as it had after previous major wars, but a drawdown was inevitable and, given the Army's expanded mission, difficult to accommodate. At the end of 1953, the U.S. Army maintained nineteen active-duty divisions and eight National Guard divisions assigned to federal service. Of these, eight remained in the Far East in the immediate aftermath of the Korean War. Five served in Germany as part of the new American commitment to help defend Western Europe. The remaining fourteen were assigned to the continental United States, but they were not in good shape. Manpower demands during the war had gutted stateside units. Indeed, twelve of the fourteen divisions in the United States were training or replacement divisions and were not deployable. Only the 1st Armored Division at Fort Hood, Texas, and the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, could be considered battle-ready formations. By 1960, all of the National Guard divisions had returned to state control and the Army had inactivated the training divisions. The force maintained fifteen divisions on active duty: nine infantry, three armor, two airborne, and one cavalry. Of these, two remained in Korea, five in Germany, and eight in the United States. For the first time in its history, nearly half the peacetime Army was deployed overseas. (*See Maps 1, 2, and 3.*)

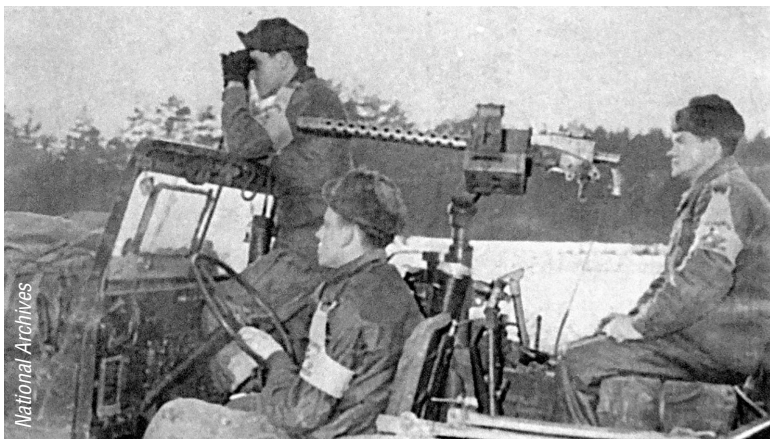
Total personnel strength for the Army likewise dropped from around 1.6 million in 1952 to slightly more than 860,000 in 1959. The mismatch of requirements versus needs was reflected in Korea, where manpower shortfalls compelled the U.S. Eighth Army to continue the wartime expediency of the KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to the United States Army) program, in which thousands of Korean nationals served their military obligation attached to U.S. Army units. The KATUSA program was highly successful, but other impacts of the manpower shortfall were negative. Administrative burdens unrelated to one's military specialty, such as KP (kitchen police) and grounds keeping were bothersome, while Congress' refusal to authorize a Regular Army officer corps large enough to lead the force meant that the Army had to rely on a vast number of non-regulars to fill officer slots. Throughout the decade over two-thirds of the Army's officers

were non-regulars. Some of these men were not of the highest quality, while many others felt slighted by a career system that favored regulars.

As troop numbers declined, so did material resources. Net expenditures for military functions—essentially the amount of money available to spend on personnel, equipment, research and development, and any other organizational expenses—fell from \$15.7 billion in 1952 to \$8.7 billion in 1956. Overall, the Army's share of the defense budget declined steadily, with the most precipitous drop coming in fiscal year (FY) 1955 when it fell from 32.1 to 25 percent. By 1958, the Army received only 22 percent of all defense dollars.

The immediate post-Korea Army was comprised largely of draftees. Almost 60 percent of its enlisted personnel had come through the draft. That percentage steadily declined through the rest of the decade, however, due to the dramatic reduction in the size of the force and the reduced requirement for replacements. Draft calls fell from a high of 472,000 in 1953 to 87,000 in 1960. By that time, the percentage of draftees that made up the Army had fallen to 20 percent. That trend would continue through the early 1960s, with a brief uptick in 1962, reflecting an increased draft call in the wake of Soviet threats over Berlin and the construction of the Berlin Wall. Perhaps the most famous of the draftees of the era was the singer Elvis A. Presley. Drafted in 1958, Presley proved

Sergeant Presley scans the horizon for enemy soldiers during Exercise WINTERSHIELD in 1960.



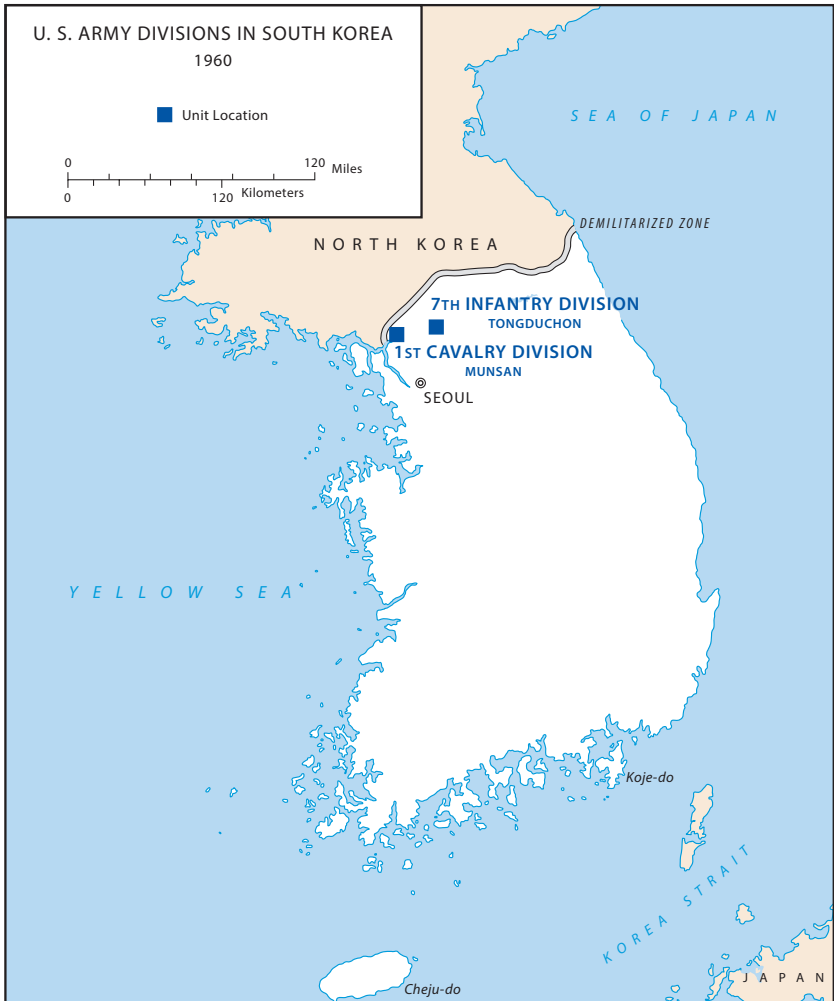


Map 1





Map 2



Map 3

a good soldier and rose to the rank of sergeant while serving in Germany with the 3d Armored Division before being honorably discharged in 1960.

The retention of the draft even as the Army shrunk dramatically in size reflected an unpleasant reality—America’s youth did not find the service an attractive career choice. Recruiting during periods of economic prosperity is always challenging, and the boom years of the 1950s were no exception. For the bright and ambitious,

the civilian sector offered a degree of opportunity with which the Army could not compete. Moreover, for those who chose to serve, the Navy and the Air Force seemed preferable. Not only did service with the Navy and Air Force avoid the prospect of having to slog through mud as an infantryman under a hail of bullets, bombs, and perhaps atomic munitions, but it appeared more relevant in the nuclear age, for it was these branches of the military that provided the bulk of America's strategic nuclear arsenal.

Military service, of course, offered many positive features beyond a chance to make a sacrifice for one's country. Thanks to the passage of the G.I. Bill of Rights in 1944 and the Veterans Adjustment Act of 1952, millions of World War II and Korean War veterans received generous post-service education, training, and other benefits. One could retire after twenty years, and during their service soldiers received free family medical care, generous post exchange and commissary privileges, and, for some, training that might be useful in civilian life. Unfortunately, in the bubbling economy of the 1950s, military pay did not keep pace with salaries in the civilian sector. Congress helped rectify the situation in 1958 when it authorized proficiency pay and increased salaries and retirement benefits, but recruiting remained an uphill battle.

The Army especially had trouble recruiting and retaining the most desirable individuals. In the enlisted ranks, these were the men who scored in the top two categories of the Armed Forces Qualification Test. Because of the shortfall, the Army tended to assign the best and brightest recruits to elite formations such as the airborne or to technical and staff assignments, leaving the rest of the force starved for talent.

A similar practice occurred within the noncommissioned and commissioned officer corps. Shortages of quality noncommissioned and junior officers led to the pernicious practice of assigning some of the weakest leaders to basic training companies, a practice that made a bad first impression on new recruits and thus further sullied the institution's public image. The negative impression recruits had of their trainers did not improve much after they left the training centers. A 1959 survey of men recently discharged from the Army found that many considered Regular Army noncommissioned officers to be "low level men who couldn't meet the competition outside the Army and who were merely marking time until their retirement."

One might have expected that the reduction of the officer corps that accompanied the downsizing of the Army—the corps was 32 percent smaller in 1960 than it had been in 1953—might have provided the Army with a vehicle for ensuring that only the best retained their positions. Shortcomings within the Army as an institution, however, diluted the officer pool. One pernicious element that arose during these years was a tendency of commanders to overcentralize authority and control, denying junior officers the opportunity to exercise independent command and judgment. This tendency not only stifled personal and professional growth but bred a high level of dissatisfaction among junior officers. In a 1954 study of company-grade regular officers, 60 percent of the respondents believed their superior officer did not sufficiently delegate authority. Three years later, 81 percent of students at the Command and General Staff College registered similar feelings.

Making matters worse was the fact that many junior officers believed that their superiors were mediocre at best when it came to demonstrating leadership. In 1963, the commander of the Eighth Army complained that the ranks of field-grade officers contained too many men who had been passed over for promotion and that this was contributing to the Army's difficulty in retaining good junior officers, for no one "wants to work for a lazy, ne'er do well, or a pompous incompetent." Careerism, rather than dynamism, seemed to be the watchword of the peacetime Army.

Several factors contributed to the situation. The career management system of the 1950s encouraged statistical measurements and ticket punching, as the Army made diversity of assignments key to advancement. The service considered command assignments, particularly of combat units, to be vital for promotion, with the result that officers shunned other important work—such as recruit training—while being rotated in and out of posts with little time to build expertise. In such a system, many officers seemed more interested in how an assignment could further their career than they were in learning the job and doing it well. Coupled with this phenomenon was a growing emphasis on officers as managers. This was somewhat unavoidable, given the complexity of managing an immense organization during a period of resource constraints, but the effects further eroded the respect junior officers had for their superiors. "Men cannot be 'managed' in the face of enemy troops. They must be 'commanded,'" warned

one officer in 1961, but the Army had difficulty differentiating between leadership and management, with the result that the former tended to suffer.

In 1958, the commandant of the Command and General Staff College called for a major effort to revitalize the officer corps. He criticized the career management system for its tendency “to reward caution and conformity and to penalize progressive initiative,” and blamed “the failure of officers to consistently display moral courage and intellectual honesty” as a symptom of over-supervision. Whether because the Army’s senior leaders were preoccupied with the survival of the service or because they had grown complacent, the institution took few measures to address the situation effectively. The resulting disillusionment of junior officers contributed to the Army’s pressing shortage of junior officers during the period, particularly with regard to captains, as men reaching their eligibility for discharge chose not to remain on active duty.

Given its difficulty in attracting sufficient talent, the draft—even the relatively light one of the late 1950s and early 1960s—played an important role. Not only did it offer a chance for tapping into a more promising talent pool than was generally willing to enlist, but its existence spurred some desirable individuals to enlist outright in the hopes of being able to influence the choice of their assignment, something draftees did not have an opportunity to do. The draft had the further benefit of encouraging some quality individuals to join the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC), which sheltered members from the possibility of being drafted upon graduation and from which they would have an opportunity to pick a noncombat arms assignment. Consequently, the Army rejected any suggestion that the draft be eliminated.

One way the Army sought to attract candidates was to burnish its image as best it could among the American public. The military had learned about the power of film during World War II, and in the postwar years, it attempted to exploit this media to get out its message to the nation at large. It provided Hollywood with support in the making of such films as *To Hell and Back*, the 1955 movie that told the story of Audie L. Murphy, one of the most highly decorated soldiers of World War II. It also took its case directly to the people with weekly radio broadcasts of *The Army Hour* and a television series called *The Big Picture* that showed the contemporary Army in a favorable light. The Army fully exploited

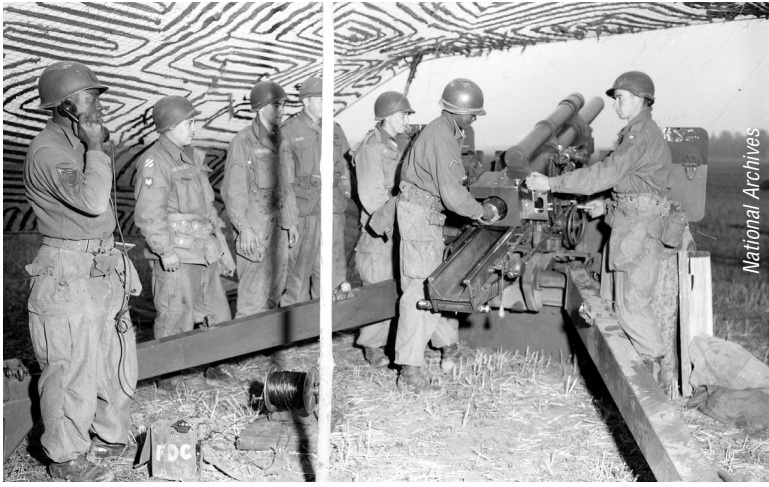
its overseas mission too, with recruiting materials promising that recruits would get to “see all the fabulous sights of Europe.” When this was not enough, the service resorted to more traditional methods of appealing to young men. During the 1950s and early 1960s, attractive actresses leant their charms to Army recruiting drives, including, ironically, Jane Fonda, who was “Miss Army Recruiting” for 1962.

Perhaps the most progressive aspect of Army life in the 1950s was the implementation of racial integration in the armed forces. President Truman had directed integration in 1948. Although some senior military leaders shared the view that segregation policies had been inefficient, serious opposition existed throughout the service, and racially segregated units still existed at the outbreak of the Korean War. Heavy combat losses, however, had forced commanders to begin assigning black replacements into most of their front-line units. The overall success of those individuals on the battlefield had helped to overcome many concerns. An investigation team sent to Korea in April 1951 reported that combat commanders almost unanimously favored integration. By May 1951, some 61 percent of the Army’s infantry companies in Korea were integrated. By the end of the war, not only were units in Korea almost completely integrated, but the process was also well advanced in Army units in the United States and Europe. The process was completed in the mid-1950s. Although the situation in the military was by no means idyllic, it became one of the lead institutions in the United States in taking concrete steps toward ending the injustice of racial discrimination. By 1962, blacks made up 12.2 percent of the Army’s total enlisted strength and 3.2 percent of its officers.

THE ARMY AND THE “NEW LOOK”

As challenging as they were in isolation, the Army’s resource and manpower problems were in large part symptoms of a much larger problem—the denigration of land power in American strategic thought. Surprisingly, this occurred at the hands of one of the nation’s most famous soldiers—retired General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower—who became president of the United States in January 1953.

Eisenhower’s experience in World War II, where he had served as the supreme commander of allied forces in Europe,



Soldiers of Battery B, 26th Field Artillery, 9th Infantry Division, prepare to fire a 105-mm. howitzer during Exercise CORDON BLEU in October 1955.

and his analysis of the stalemated fighting in Korea, led him to the conclusion that conventional ground forces were largely obsolete in the atomic age. Not only could ground forces be vaporized in an atomic flash, but the prospect of trying to match the seemingly limitless manpower that China and the Soviet Union could put into the field was daunting. Technology was America's edge, and it could be developed and applied far more cheaply than attempting to raise and maintain vast ground forces for what seemed to be an interminable conflict. This was particularly relevant because the president thought that a strong economy, and not numbers of men under arms, was the true source of national security. He therefore encouraged military leaders to develop a long-term national defense policy built on a force structure that could be maintained indefinitely—for the “long haul” as Eisenhower put it—without endangering the nation's economic stability. “Security with solvency,” was the slogan, with a balanced budget being the wellspring of a sound security policy.

The president described his approach to national security as a “New Look.” Rather than allow the Communists to sap U.S. resources through crises and conflicts around the globe, Eisenhower declared that the United States would respond to

any conventional provocation by the Soviet Union with a nuclear “massive retaliation.” His premise was that the threat of nuclear annihilation would deter the Soviets and allow the United States to maintain security at a sustainable cost. The policy emphasized the use of aircraft to deliver the atomic punch—a policy that naturally favored the two services that operated strike aircraft, the Air Force and Navy. Almost immediately after the Korean armistice, Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson predicted that the president’s approach would allow the administration to trim military spending by as much as \$1 billion. Tired of war and its sacrifices, the public supported the New Look as well as the postwar demobilization and associated defense cuts that fell disproportionately on the Army. Army Chief of Staff General Matthew B. Ridgway (1953–1955) fought a rearguard action to maintain the resource levels that he believed his service required to perform its mission. His poor relationship with Secretary Wilson, however, coupled with the latter’s enthusiastic deference to the president’s military experience, usually placed the Army in an indefensible position. As a result, the service experienced a steady decline in both resources and influence during the Eisenhower years (1953–1960). Ridgway would serve only two years as chief of staff due to his vehement opposition to the New Look.



General Ridgway

One Army mission that flourished as a result of the new paradigm was that of protecting America’s cities from high-flying, long-range Soviet aircraft carrying atomic bombs. The service soon supplemented its anti-aircraft gun batteries with the world’s first operational anti-aircraft missile, the Nike Ajax. By mid-1956, the Army had deployed these missiles around twenty-two key areas

in the United States. Two years later, the service began to replace some of the Nike Ajax systems with Nike Hercules missiles. The Hercules carried an atomic warhead capable of destroying entire squadrons of Soviet bombers with a single shot. As the Soviets began to deploy nuclear armed intercontinental ballistic missiles, the Army responded by starting work on a Nike Zeus antiballistic missile system. Providing the continental United States with ground-based antiaircraft defenses would remain an important secondary mission for the Army into the 1960s.

Another new mission that arose from retrenchment of the New Look was that of training and equipping America's allies around the world. After undertaking some limited measures in Greece and Turkey, in 1949 President Truman had signed into law the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, which authorized the Defense Department to provide weapons, equipment, and training to America's allies on a grand scale. The Mutual Defense Assistance Act was modified by the Mutual Security Act of 1951. President Eisenhower fully supported the effort as a cost-effective means of strengthening free world defenses without expanding the U.S. Army. By 1957, the Army was providing training and materiel assistance to the equivalent of 200 divisions in 35 nations.

Notwithstanding the president's conviction that most conventional ground forces were an expensive luxury with little utility in an atomic war, he still insisted on upholding America's conventional ground commitment to defend Western Europe. As a show of support to NATO, Truman had authorized the deployment of substantial military forces there. The five divisions and three armored cavalry regiments of the U.S. Seventh Army had become an important symbol of the American resolve to help defend Western Europe against potential Soviet invasion. Indeed, United States Army, Europe (USAREUR), and the soldiers of the Seventh Army came to represent the very essence of the Army during the 1950s. They were the men on the front line, ready to meet aggression at any moment. Just as the "Doughboy" and "G.I. Joe" had come to symbolize the American soldier in the first and second world wars, respectively, the men guarding the inter-German border dominated the public image of the modern American soldier.

The large troop commitment to Europe required the Army to experiment with various methods to maintain the strength of its units there. One of the more innovative initiatives began in 1955 with the first of the Operation GYROSCOPE rotations. Under



A trooper of the 2d Cavalry Regiment looks across a bridge at an East German guard tower near Hof, Germany, in January 1959.

this program, the Army exchanged entire units between the United States and Europe instead of relying on individual replacement rotations. By doing this, the service hoped to capitalize on the higher morale and increased combat effectiveness achieved through maintaining unit integrity while also saving money by consolidating all of the movement costs into one rotation. After experimenting with a few smaller unit exchanges, the first full-division rotation sent the 10th Infantry Division from Fort Riley, Kansas, to Germany in exchange for the 1st Infantry Division. Later swaps included the replacement of the 4th Infantry Division in Germany with the 3d Armored Division and the movement of the 11th Airborne Division to replace the 5th Infantry Division. Unfortunately, the three-year unit deployment did not coincide with the two-year service stint for draftees, which meant that units in the United States had to constantly train replacement packets for the forces in Europe, to the detriment of readiness. Ultimately, the Army found that the personnel turmoil involved in maintaining all participating units at full strength throughout the process surpassed any benefits in unit morale or combat effectiveness and precluded any major cost savings. The service terminated the program in 1958.

As U.S. military policy became more atomic-centered, the Army sought to maintain its relevance by acquiring its own

nuclear capability. Its first success was the development of the M65 280-mm. atomic cannon. The service developed the artillery pieces in 1952 and tested them in the Nevada desert on 25 May 1953 with the successful firing and detonation of an atomic projectile. Weighing eighty-eight tons, each enormous weapon required two heavy tractor trucks to move it, one to its front and the other to its rear. The section had a top speed on the highway of thirty-five miles per hour. Although relatively slow and ungainly, the pieces could be emplaced and put into action in about the same amount of time that conventional heavy artillery required. The guns lacked the range and flexibility of aircraft delivered munitions, but they provided a far greater measure of accuracy and reliability. Most important, unlike the Air Force, they could provide atomic fire support to ground units at night and in any kind of weather.

Over the next few years, the Army unveiled other atomic-capable systems. The M31 Honest John, fielded in 1954, was a truck-mounted, surface-to-surface artillery rocket. It was unguided and had a maximum range of about fifteen miles. The rocket was considerably more mobile and could be prepared to fire in less time than the 280-mm. cannon. Corporal guided missile battalions followed shortly thereafter in February 1955. The Corporals were liquid-fueled, surface-to-surface guided missiles with an approximate range of seventy-five miles. Although these weapons were capable of firing both conventional and atomic warheads, their inaccuracy when compared with conventional heavy artillery made them poorly suited for nonnuclear use. They did, however, provide the Army with new options for atomic fire support.

Later developments pushed the Army's search for nuclear fire-power to more questionable limits. The Redstone ballistic missile gave the Army a range out to more than 200 miles. This put the service into conflict with the Air Force, which claimed jurisdiction of the battlefield beyond the immediate ground combat area. The Redstone also proved too slow and cumbersome to prepare for launch and was eventually replaced by the more mobile and efficient Pershing missile beginning in 1964. The Redstone did prove its worth in other areas, however, as a modified version of the missile carried astronaut Alan B. Shepard on his first sub-orbital flight in 1961.

At the opposite end of the spectrum was the Davy Crockett. Either mounted on small trucks, armored personnel carriers, or set up on ground tripods, the weapon looked like a short recoilless



The men of the 1st Gun Section, Battery B, 59th Field Artillery Battalion, prepare to fire a 280-mm. gun in May 1956.

rifle with a large bulb attached at the end. The “bulb” was a low-yield atomic warhead that the operator could launch from either of two tubes: the 4-inch (120-mm.) with a range of a little over one mile, or the 6.1-inch (155-mm.) with a range of slightly less than three miles. First deployed to the active force in 1961, the Davy Crockett embraced the concept of tactical atomic war, placing atomic firepower in the hands of infantry battalion commanders. The weapons showed poor accuracy during testing, a particularly worrisome feature given their very short range that left crews exposed to both blast and radiation effects. Moreover, the idea of small units, led by lieutenants and sergeants, running around the battlefield with portable atomic weapons troubled some politicians and soldiers. Like all atomic weapons in its inventory, the Army could use Davy Crocketts only on direct authorization from the president. Because of these reservations, deployment of this weapon was limited and the service eventually replaced it by developing atomic ammunition for 8-inch and 155-mm. howitzers.

While the new weapons were still in their early stages of development, the Army had also begun to redesign its force structure to demonstrate its atomic mindedness. Under pressure from the Department of Defense to reduce the size of the Army’s units and therefore its overall manpower needs, in 1954 General Ridgway directed Army Field Forces to study the problem with

several objectives in mind. These included increasing the ratio between combat and support units, achieving greater flexibility and mobility in combat units, maximizing the effects of technological advancements, and improving the force's capability to sustain itself for extended periods in combat. By the fall, Army Field Forces had produced the outline for a new division structure that it labeled the Atomic Field Army (ATFA).



A three-man crew prepares to fire the Davy Crockett at Aberdeen Proving Ground in December 1959.

The ATFA studies produced mixed results. The experimental organization consolidated many of the division's service and support elements, reduced the size of the division artillery, and cut the number of infantry battalions in the infantry division from nine to seven. Instead of the previous organization built around three regiments, the divisions were to create situation-driven task forces under the direction of smaller combat command headquarters. The reorganization cut nearly 4,000 personnel positions from the infantry division and almost 2,700 from the armored division. Tests in 1955 indicated that although the concepts held some promise, they required a great deal of new equipment, especially radios and personnel carriers, before the Army could implement a complete reorganization. Just as important, many officers throughout the service were reluctant to discard traditional organizations and familiar doctrines.

Nonetheless, the ATFA studies served as a point of departure for further efforts to streamline the Army for atomic warfare. In addition to making the Army more atomic capable, the next chief of staff, General Maxwell D. Taylor (1955–1959), also looked for ways to maintain the service’s combat strength in the face of the budget and personnel reductions imposed by the Eisenhower administration. His experience during the Korean War had already caused him to consider potential changes in the Army’s combat structure. He initiated another round of studies to produce a new divisional organization that would significantly reduce manpower requirements while taking advantage of new technologies and weapons.

The result of this effort was the “pentomic” division. Instead of the three-regiment “triangular” division used since World War II, General Taylor envisioned a division composed of five self-contained formations called battle groups. Smaller than a regiment but larger than a battalion, each of these groups would consist of four rifle companies, a 4.2-inch (107-mm.) mortar battery, and a company containing headquarters and service support elements. The new pentomic division would consolidate the division artillery into two battalions. One would be a 105-mm. howitzer battalion with five batteries, the other a mixed battalion fielding two 155-mm. howitzer batteries, an 8-inch howitzer battery, and an Honest John rocket battery. The latter two were nuclear systems that would give the division its primary offensive punch. The restructuring significantly reduced the size of the division by eliminating all nonessential combat elements and by removing much of the support base, including transportation, supply, and aviation, to corps and higher echelons. The new organization would shrink the infantry division from 18,804 to 13,748 men and the airborne division from 17,490 to 11,486. Because Army leaders



General Taylor

believed that the capabilities of the armored divisions already met the requirements of the atomic battlefield, the strength and organization of those units would change little.

Taylor saw the pentomic organization as ideally suited for fighting an atomic war. The five subordinate battle groups in each of its divisions enabled the force to disperse in greater width and depth than was possible with a three-regiment organization. Companies within the battle groups could also spread out, so that no single element presented a lucrative target for an atomic attack. Taylor believed that improved communications equipment would allow division commanders to exert more direct control over their separated units than in the past. He also contended that new armored personnel carriers that would soon join the force would afford the mobility to enable the formations to converge rapidly and to exploit opportunities provided by atomic fire support.

Although some senior officers in the Army questioned whether the new equipment could deliver what Taylor expected, the general pushed on with his plans. The first division to undergo reorganization under the pentomic concept, the newly reactivated 101st Airborne Division, began its training in the fall of 1956 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. After a series of tests and exercises in the United States, Taylor announced in May 1957 that all infantry and airborne divisions would complete a conversion to the pentomic model by the middle of 1958. Once again, many officers were reluctant to embrace the new organization and the changes in doctrine it entailed. Taylor and his staff actively engaged in a campaign to convince them, arguing that the new divisions could meet the challenges of both general nuclear and smaller, nonnuclear conflicts. Just as important, Taylor believed the new organization would demonstrate that the Army was a modern, forward-thinking force, worthy of a meaningful place in New Look defense policy.

General Taylor's enthusiasm for the pentomic reorganization notwithstanding, early evaluations revealed flaws in the concept even before the divisions began to convert. One controversial aspect of the pentomic concept was the elimination of traditional regimental affiliations. Soldiers of all ranks were uncomfortable giving up unit identities that had contributed to morale, discipline, and cohesion throughout the Army's history. Even more damaging was the fact that the service had not yet issued many of the new technologies necessary for the division to operate as intended. Of

particular concern were shortages in improved armored personnel carriers and radios with increased range, absolute requirements for a doctrine that relied on dispersion and mobility for its battlefield survival. Platoon leaders and company commanders were left to ask if they were expected to defend their positions based solely on the promise of new weapons and equipment. Small-unit leaders likewise expressed concerns over the extended frontage that pentomic doctrine expected them to defend. Should atomic fire support not be available, ground units appeared to be seriously undergunned. Some senior leaders also questioned the ability of higher headquarters to logistically sustain the new divisions. The pentomic reorganization had stripped much of those capabilities from the division without a corresponding increase in the capabilities of corps-level support units. All in all, many in the Army suspected that the new organization had marginally improved the division's ability to operate on an atomic battlefield, but had seriously degraded its conventional capabilities.

Although the pentomic reorganizations were to be implemented service-wide, no command in the Army was in a better position to test the new concept than U.S. Army, Europe. Its five combat divisions, three armored cavalry regiments, and heavy support structure made it the largest assemblage of fighting power in the service. Moreover, the pentomic structure and its accompanying atomic doctrine were specifically designed to counter the Soviet Army. Once the reorganizations were complete, U.S. Army, Europe, instructed the Seventh Army to evaluate the new pentomic infantry division.

Seventh Army put the new divisional structure to the test beginning on 10 February 1958. Exercise SABRE HAWK fielded more than 125,000 soldiers for the largest maneuver yet conducted in the history of U.S. Army, Europe. The maneuver included a series of attack, defend, delay, and withdraw scenarios, while controllers accompanying each unit evaluated training and assisted commanders in keeping up with movements and actions scheduled in the event's master plan. The maneuvers tested atomic weapons employment, target acquisition, resupply, and aerial troop movement while emphasizing individual and small-unit training under cold-weather conditions. As the initial defending force, the V Corps also experimented with stay-behind patrols, trained for long-range reconnaissance and equipped to identify potential targets for the corps' long-range atomic weapons.

The Seventh Army's operations and planning staff identified several deficiencies in the new organization. Divisional transportation and support units, for example, lacked sufficient personnel, vehicles, and equipment to ensure timely delivery of atomic weapons to forward artillery units. The Seventh Army found that it had to divert troops from combat units to provide emergency reinforcements to defend atomic weapons support and delivery installations against guerrilla or direct attack. Exercise controllers also admitted that they were unable to comply with guidance that each corps should plan to evacuate 2,000 casualties per day. Incorporating that level of loss into the exercise scenario, they contended, would have forced commanders to devote major resources to mass casualty evacuation and treatment to the detriment of tactical training objectives.

Seventh Army commander Lt. Gen. Bruce C. Clarke voiced his own concerns. He believed that the exercise showed that the division artillery was not strong enough to provide adequate conventional or atomic firepower. Nor did the 4.2-inch mortar provide sufficient firepower as a direct-support weapon for the battle group. Most important, the new organization lacked any centralized command and control over the artillery at the division level. He believed that it was important for the division to be able to mass the fires of all its assigned artillery, a concept that ran counter to the pentomic philosophy of dispersed, semi-independent operation of battle groups.

In March 1958, Seventh Army units down to division level participated in Command Post Exercise LION BLEU, which tested atomic response capabilities throughout NATO. The exercise identified conflicting priorities between the Army and the Air Force. Air commanders favored the early employment of most of their atomic weapons, leaving very little for subsequent support of ground units. The services also differed on what approach to targeting best supported ground offensives. Air Force leaders favored an interdiction campaign that would impede the enemy's movement by hitting rail lines, bridges, and other related targets. Ground commanders preferred to destroy enemy troop and vehicle formations first. They believed that the destruction of the transportation network would only impede their own movement when they moved to counterattack. LION BLEU also demonstrated that ground units needed to spread out to a far greater degree than originally planned to avoid presenting tempting targets for

the enemy's atomic weapons. At the same time, units had to retain sufficient mobility to concentrate for quick counterattacks when presented the opportunity.

With the experience of the two major exercises still fresh, Seventh Army headquarters requested that its subordinate commanders comment on the new force structure and doctrine. Initial comments reflected uncertainty about tactics and techniques that were best suited to the new formations. The most urgent need, officers noted, was for more specific guidance on the degree of control that lower-level commanders would have over the division's "on-call" atomic firepower. Combat unit commanders in particular expressed concern that much of their equipment did not adequately support the new concept. For example, the maximum range of the 4.2-inch mortar, the only indirect-fire weapon assigned specifically to the battle group, was only about 4,000 meters, too short to support units as widely dispersed as planners envisioned. Divisions lacked any credible means of defending themselves against air attack, while at the battle group level, communications equipment was unreliable, heavy, and lacked sufficient range to connect headquarters with their scattered subordinate companies and platoons. Finally, unit leaders pointed out that battle groups lacked any self-contained capability for rapid, cross-country movement. While the division headquarters had armored personnel carriers consolidated in its transportation battalion, it had only enough to move one battle group at a time. Such shortfalls were particularly troubling for an organization whose battlefield survival depended on the ability to disperse widely when on the defense and rapidly concentrate to attack.

The surrealism of atomic warfare was sinking in throughout the Army. The final big command post exercise in Europe in 1958, BOUNCE BACK, depicted an initial aggressor strike employing forty-nine atomic warheads with yields ranging from 5 to 100 kilotons against NATO military installations. Observers noted that after the strike it was difficult to generate a sense of realism for the exercise's participants. What had started in the early 1950s as an honest attempt to understand the realities of atomic warfare had, by 1958, come to resemble the plot of a Hollywood science fiction thriller. As the exercise demonstrated, the idea of a doctrine based on atomic weapons had grown increasingly abstract because much of the effort seemed to involve mathematical calculations

of how much of the force would remain after the initial strikes. Evaluators noted in their reports that personnel no longer seemed to take the training seriously. The Army appeared trapped in an unwinnable paradigm.

THE ARMY AND FLEXIBLE RESPONSE

The Army's struggles to adjust to the challenges of nuclear warfare on a limited budget made little impression on President Eisenhower. He remained true to his conviction that a strong economy was the nation's most potent form of defense. He likewise held firm to the notion that any conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union would be a total war decided by an exchange of atomic firepower. He had little use for arguments that called for increasing expenditures on conventional forces capable of fighting small, limited wars. In 1957, his new secretary of defense, Neil H. McElroy, echoed the president's sentiments when he said that if the two major opponents were involved in a conflict, they could hardly avoid an all-out military struggle.

Even President Eisenhower, however, occasionally found reason to call on the Army's conventional forces. In September 1957, in response to rioting in Little Rock, Arkansas, over the admission of nine African American students to the city's Central High School, Eisenhower federalized the Arkansas National Guard and dispatched a battle group of the 101st Airborne Division to restore order. The troops dispersed a mob that had gathered at the school and remained in place until the situation had stabilized. It was one of the few times in American history that a chief executive had used the Regular Army or National Guard forces despite the opposition of the state's governor.

In July 1958, events in Lebanon prompted the president to launch a military intervention. Resentment over Western intervention in Egypt during the 1956 Suez crisis and discontent with Lebanon's pro-Western president, Camille Nimr Chamoun, had created a volatile brew in that religiously mixed nation. Lebanese Muslims pushed the government to join the newly created, anti-Western United Arab Republic (UAR) of Egypt and Syria. Chamoun, a Christian, accused the UAR of supporting rebels looking to overthrow him. United Nations inspectors failed to find evidence of significant intervention from the UAR, but after rebels overthrew a pro-Western government in Iraq in July, Chamoun called for U.S. assistance. Eisenhower responded by sending about 10,000 U.S.

soldiers and marines to Lebanon to maintain order and stability until free elections could determine Chamoun's fate. The Army contingent consisted of an airborne battle group from Europe, with Maj. Gen. Paul D. Adams commanding the entire force. The troops secured the Beirut International Airport, the city's port facilities, and approaches leading to the city. Although they rehearsed for action against the rebels, they ultimately left the task of dealing with the insurgents to the Lebanese Army. The force maintained stability around the capital city, facilitating a peaceful election and the establishment of a neutralist government not aligned to the UAR. The last American troops departed Lebanon in October.

Limited operations like the one in Lebanon reinforced the Army's claim that conventional forces remained relevant and boosted its call for increased funding. In tones more measured and less provocative than those of his predecessor, Taylor pressed many of the same points Ridgway had made in challenging the president's military views. Repeated cutbacks in manpower, he said, had sapped the Army's ability to meet the requirements of all of its assigned missions. He also complained about the insufficient number of transport aircraft to deliver combat units to overseas trouble spots. Failing to achieve his goals, he continued his crusade against Eisenhower's defense policies after he retired by publishing *The Uncertain Trumpet* in 1960.

Members of the 1st Airborne Battle Group, 187th Infantry, patrol through Chiah, a suburb of Beirut, in 1958.



Taylor was preceded into retirement by the Army's chief of research and development, Lt. Gen. James M. Gavin. In 1958, Gavin abruptly announced that he was leaving the service because under the New Look the U.S. Army was deteriorating while that of the Soviet Union was growing. Under those conditions, he felt he could not go to Capitol Hill and defend a budget in which he did not believe. He told reporters that he believed he could contribute more to national defense from outside the government than from within. Soon after retiring, he too published a book critical of the president's strategy.

The most basic of Eisenhower's assumptions—U.S. nuclear superiority—had already taken a serious blow in October and November 1957 when the Soviet Union successfully placed two Sputnik satellites into Earth orbit. The same ballistic missiles that had launched the satellites could be fitted with nuclear warheads targeted on the United States. Americans who had counted themselves as safe from a technologically inferior Soviet bomber force now faced the threat of seemingly unstoppable intercontinental ballistic missiles with atomic warheads.

Although the president continued to express his doubts that mutual nuclear deterrence would create conditions under which a conventional conflict might be waged in Europe without escalating to general atomic war, he acknowledged that the matter required further study. In late 1957, the Security Resources Panel of the president's Science Advisory Committee delivered a report suggesting that U.S. and allied forces required greater strength and mobility for conducting limited operations. The Gaither Report, named for the panel chairman, Horace Rowan Gaither, a cofounder of the Rand Corporation, concluded that America's armed forces needed the ability to deter or suppress small wars before they became big ones. Eisenhower responded to the advice, as well as the precedent recently set in Lebanon, by authorizing the Army to form a Strategic Army Corps of four divisions based in the United States—the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions and the 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions. These units were to be maintained at a higher level of readiness than the rest of the divisions in the continental United States, and were trained for a variety of contingency missions short of nuclear war.

Formation of the Strategic Army Corps did not quiet criticism of the New Look. To begin with, the corps seemed less potent than it appeared. Indeed, rather than expand its overburdened

training establishment, Army leaders soon weakened the Strategic Army Corps by removing the 1st Infantry Division and giving it the mission of conducting initial recruit training. Moreover, a growing number of politicians and policymakers were coming to believe that Eisenhower's policies were no longer valid given the Soviet Union's increasing ability to nullify America's nuclear arsenal with its own. In August 1959, Senator John J. Sparkman of Alabama accused the administration of putting the United States in a box, where it would have no option other than a massive nuclear attack to respond to limited Soviet aggression. Scholars and analysts joined congressional Democrats in questioning the New Look. Two seminal works on the subject appeared in 1957 to add depth to the discussion. Robert E. Osgood's *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy* and Henry Kissinger's *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* both challenged assumptions made by the Eisenhower administration and argued for a greater flexibility in U.S. military options. Finally, in the 1960 presidential election, Democratic candidate Senator John F. Kennedy made questions over America's ability to deter or to defeat Soviet aggression one of the themes of his election campaign. Once elected, he immediately addressed those concerns.

On 30 January 1961, ten days after his inauguration, Kennedy announced that he would undertake a reappraisal of the country's entire defense strategy, including the modernization of its limited war and nonnuclear capabilities. Two months later, in a Special Message to Congress on the Defense Budget, Kennedy outlined his defense policies. He argued that America's military posture needed to be sufficiently flexible to respond to challenges across a wide spectrum of threats. Although he expressed support for the continued development of the country's nuclear arsenal, he noted that since 1945, nonnuclear and guerrilla wars had constituted the most active threat to free world security. With that in mind, he asked Congress to strengthen the military's capacity to engage in such conflicts and to expand research and funding for nonnuclear weapons.

Just as had occurred during the Eisenhower administration, events once again demonstrated the need for conventional forces for tasks unrelated to nuclear warfare, both abroad and at home. In Europe, the Soviets tested the new president's resolve when, in August 1961, they began construction of a high wall surrounding the Western sectors of Berlin to block the defection of East German

refugees to the West. In response, Kennedy ordered increases in the U.S. armed forces and called a number of reservists and reserve units to active duty. He deployed additional units to Germany and directed the reinforcement of U.S. Army units serving in West Berlin. By October, the Army's regular troop strength had grown by more than 80,000 and almost 120,000 troops, including two National Guard divisions had returned to active duty.

The following year, the Soviets provoked the United States again by deploying bombers and missiles to Communist Cuba, where they directly threatened the United States. Kennedy moved 30,000 troops to Florida with orders to prepare to invade Cuba. Fortunately, a negotiated settlement resulted in the removal of the Soviet weapons, and the administration canceled plans for an invasion.

Meanwhile, back home continued unrest related to the civil rights movement and the progressive integration of blacks into the nation's political and social fabric meant that the government sometimes needed the military's assistance in enforcing the law and maintaining domestic peace. In 1962, President Kennedy sent 20,000 regulars and 10,000 federalized national guardsmen to Mississippi to uphold an African American's right to enroll in the state university. In 1963, anti-black violence and resistance to the public school desegregation in Alabama led him to federalize that

Checkpoint Charlie, located on Friedrichstrasse, was the Allied entry point to East Berlin, October 1961.



National Archives

state's National Guard. Kennedy's successor as president, Lyndon B. Johnson, likewise called on regulars and guardsmen in 1965 to protect Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights advocates as they marched from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

The Army dutifully performed all its domestic duties to good effect, but what really excited Army leaders was the president's shift in focus away from the New Look toward a more balanced national security policy—one in which the Army would play a greater role. They particularly noted the similarity between the president's ideas and proposals previously presented by General Taylor as part of his concept of "flexible response." As if to reinforce this connection, the president appointed Taylor to a position as Special Assistant to the President for Military Affairs in 1961. In October 1962, Kennedy made Taylor the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a position from which the former critic could have a significant impact on defense policy.

With a new administration clearly more sympathetic to Taylor's point of view, the Army was poised to come in from the cold. But more was needed than simply more money and a new strategy. Many believed that the Army also needed a blueprint on which to reorganize its forces. As it turned out, the groundwork had already been done. Well aware of the pentomic division's shortcomings, Army Vice Chief of Staff General Clyde D. Eddleman had directed the commander of Continental Army Command, General Herbert B. Powell, to propose a new divisional organization in 1960. In less than three months, Powell and his staff submitted a study entitled *Reorganization Objective Army Divisions (ROAD) 1961–1965*, to the new Army chief of staff, General George H. Decker. The study offered reinterpretations of three standard divisions—infantry, armored, and mechanized infantry. It called for all three to have a common base to which commanders could assign a varying number of combat battalions. Whichever type of battalion—infantry, mechanized infantry, or tank—made up the bulk of the division determined its designation. The common base for every division consisted of a headquarters element; three brigade headquarters; a military police company; a reconnaissance squadron with an air troop and three ground troops; division artillery; a support command; and aviation, engineer, and signal battalions. The division artillery included three 105-mm. howitzer battalions, an Honest John battalion, and a composite battalion containing one 8-inch

and three 155-mm. howitzer batteries. The support command consisted of a headquarters and headquarters company; an administration company; a band; and medical, maintenance, and supply and transport battalions.

Although the exact makeup of the division depended on the types of maneuver battalions added, an infantry division usually consisted of eight infantry and two tank battalions. A mechanized division normally had seven mechanized infantry and three tank battalions, and an armored division had six tank and six mechanized infantry battalions. The new division structures also included three brigade headquarters, each capable of controlling from two to five combat battalions. Brigade commanders could create combined-arms task forces by exchanging tank and infantry companies between different battalions. With the ability to tailor the organization of a division, brigade, or battalion, the Army would possess the most flexible organizational structure in its history. With its roots in the triangular divisions of World War II, most observers agreed that the concept was returning to a structure that had stood the test of combat.

The proposed division structure was not without its detractors. General Adams complained that the proposed division contained far too much extraneous equipment. He simply could not be convinced, he said, that it took 3,318 radios—an average of one per 4.77 persons—to run a division. General Taylor—who at the time was retired and without official standing within the Army—did not think it was appropriate to introduce a new organization so soon after the pentomic conversion. He believed the Army could alleviate the pentomic division's shortcomings by reinforcing it rather than by throwing out the entire concept. Most senior Army leaders, however, probably shared the sentiments of General Paul L. Freeman who told an interviewer that the only thing he could say about the pentomic division was “Thank God we never had to go to war with it.”

Ultimately, the supporters of the new organization triumphed. On 4 April 1961, Continental Army Command staff briefed Army Chief of Staff Decker on the plan for the ROAD divisions. Decker formally approved the reorganization a week later, and, on 25 May 1961, President Kennedy announced his approval in a special message to Congress. In recognition of his desire for a strategy that provided a wider range of military options—dubbed “flexible response”—the president announced that he had directed the

secretary of defense to undertake the reorganization and modernization of the Army's divisional structure. Such a change was necessary, he said, to increase the force's nonnuclear firepower, to improve its tactical mobility in any environment, to ensure its flexibility to meet any direct or indirect threat, and to facilitate its coordination with the nation's major allies.

The Army initially planned to begin its transition to the ROAD model early in 1962 and to finish the conversion by the end of 1963. As it happened, the Army delayed completion of the effort for a number of reasons. After two units, the 5th Infantry Division at Fort Carson, Colorado, and the 1st Armored Division at Fort Hood, Texas, completed their changeovers in the spring of 1962, planners decided to postpone further reorganizations until they could test the concept in the field. In addition, much of the equipment necessary to outfit the new divisions was not available in the quantities required. Conversion to ROAD was completed in May 1964. Unfortunately, the Defense Department refused to authorize the additional manpower to fully man the new division structure, and the Army could only bring divisions in Europe up to full strength.

The Army had intended the divisions in Germany to be among the last to reorganize, but those units got a head start in August 1961 when increasing tensions in Europe led Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to approve the transfer of 3,000 soldiers and almost 1,500 new M113 armored personnel carriers to the Seventh Army to complete the mechanization of its three infantry divisions. The Army had begun development of the M113 in 1956 to help meet the demands of the nuclear battlefield. It had the ability to keep pace with the tank during cross-country movement and could carry a squad of ten soldiers into combat with some protection from small-arms fire and artillery fragments. Only half the weight of the older M59 that it replaced, the M113 was both air transportable and amphibious. Ironically, the new carriers gave the divisions the kind of mobility the pentomic concept had envisioned, but not in time to prevent the pending reorganization.

Troops in Europe may have been some of the first to receive the M113, but the vehicle first saw combat in South Vietnam in 1962 as part of America's effort to replace that nation's older, World War II-era equipment. It immediately proved invaluable to Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) troops navigating Vietnam's rice paddies and canals and soon was conducting missions normally

performed by tanks against the lightly armed guerrillas. The U.S. Army, however, had envisioned the carrier as primarily a transport rather than a fighting platform, and the vehicle's machine gun could be fired only if the carrier's commander exposed his torso. The defects of this arrangement quickly became evident at the Battle of Ap Bac in January 1963 when Communist guerrillas neutralized a South Vietnamese M113 troop by killing the unprotected gunners. The Vietnamese government quickly improvised by fabricating gun shields for the M113, and soon the United States followed suit, adding gun shields and at times an armored cupola. Meanwhile, another new armored personnel carrier, the M114 command and reconnaissance vehicle, also received its first trial by combat in Vietnam. It was much less successful and was soon withdrawn from South Vietnamese service and replaced by more M113s.

FLEXIBLE RESPONSE PROMPTS CONVENTIONAL REARMAMENT

The two new armored carriers were just some of the weapons systems that would flourish under the new administration. In one of his first moves after taking office, President Kennedy added almost 12 percent to Eisenhower's proposed \$41.8 billion defense budget for 1962. Although the Air Force's Minuteman and the Navy's Polaris missile programs continued to receive their share of funds, the budget included sizable increases for modernization of the Army's conventional forces. As a result, the service was able to begin procuring large numbers of weapons, vehicles, and equipment that it had been forced to defer under the previous administration.

Soldiers had already begun receiving the initial issue of a new family of small arms in 1960. One of the first of those was the M14 rifle. The new weapon fired 7.62-mm. ammunition, which the NATO alliance had adopted as its standard small-arms ammunition in 1954. The M14 replaced four weapons that fired different types of ammunition—the .30-caliber M1 rifle, the .30-caliber M2 carbine, the .45-caliber M3 submachine gun, and the .30-caliber Browning automatic rifle. The Army began issuing the new weapon in 1960, but production was slow and troubled.

A new medium machine gun, the M60, also began replacing older models. It too fired NATO's 7.62-mm. round and replaced three models of Browning .30-caliber machine guns. The substitution of two new weapons—the M14 and the M60—firing common ammunition for seven weapons each with its own special require-

ments, eased maintenance, supply, and ammunition problems. It also supported one of the NATO alliance's earliest efforts to bring some order to the diversity of its member armed forces.

Not all of the new firearms used the 7.62-mm. round. Indeed, no sooner had the Army adopted the M14 than it developed another rifle, the M16, which was lighter than the M14 and fired a 5.56-mm. round. In 1963, the Defense Department adopted the M16 as its standard weapon for jungle warfare, where volume of fire rather than range would determine success. Like the M14, production was slow. When U.S. infantry units began deploying to Vietnam two years later, many still carried the M14. By 1967, nearly all soldiers in Vietnam used the M16, which finally became the standard U.S. infantry weapon worldwide in 1970.

Meanwhile, in the late summer of 1962, the Army began to receive shipments of an additional weapon for its rifle squads, the new M79 grenade launcher. The aluminum-barreled 40-mm. weapon resembled a large-bore, break-action, sawed-off shotgun. With a maximum range of 400 meters, it filled a gap in range between hand grenades and mortars. Special rounds that left the muzzle as buckshot made the weapon particularly useful for the kind of close-quarters fighting typically found in jungle and guerilla warfare.

The Kennedy administration's focus on conventional forces increased the pace of modernization for larger weapons and vehicles too. In 1960, the Army began production of a new main battle tank, the M60. The M60 was not a completely new design, but rather an improvement on the older M48 Patton. The new tank fired a high-velocity 105-mm. main gun, while the M48 mounted a 90-mm. gun. To further enhance the capabilities of its armored force, in the fall of 1961, Army units also began receiving the new M88 Armored Recovery Vehicle, which could retrieve disabled tanks on the battlefield or winch them back to stable ground when they became hopelessly stuck in heavy mud. The Army further enhanced its mobility by developing new, self-propelled carriages for its 105-mm., 155-mm., 175-mm., and 8-inch artillery pieces.

The 1960s also saw rapid expansion of the Army's use of rotary-wing aircraft, or helicopters, in a wide range of roles. Funding constraints and clashes with the Air Force, which resented virtually any encroachment into the aviation mission, meant that the Army entered the Kennedy administration still flying aging Korean War-era CH-21 Shawnee helicopters as well as slightly newer

CH-34 Choctaws. In December 1961 the U.S. Army deployed two companies equipped with CH-21s to Vietnam, where they did yeoman service under trying conditions transporting South Vietnamese troops into battle against Communist guerrillas. The following year, the Army began sending its newest and more versatile helicopter to Vietnam, the Bell UH-1 Iroquois, which soldiers affectionately dubbed the "Huey." As the Army deployed an ever-growing number of aviation units to support the South Vietnamese war effort, that conflict became an invaluable test bed for U.S. Army helicopter equipment, tactics, and doctrine. The threat that enemy fire posed to both the transport helicopters and friendly troops once they had debarked quickly led to another turf war when the Army began arming Hueys as aerial gunships and air-to-ground rocket platforms. The Air Force claimed the Army was encroaching into its air escort and ground support missions, but the Defense Department backed the Army and allowed these developments to occur.

Meanwhile, in 1962 Secretary of Defense McNamara convened a special board chaired by Lt. Gen. Hamilton H. Howze, to study Army aviation requirements. After its deliberations, the board recommended that the number of helicopters assigned to existing units be increased. It also identified a need for new aviation-specific units to be created, including medical evacuation battalions and airmobile or air assault divisions. Based on the board's recommendations, the Army reactivated the 11th Airborne Division in February 1963 and redesignated it as the 11th Air Assault Division (Test). For the next two years, the division developed and refined airmobile and air assault tactics and the equipment required to operate in that role. Elements of the division tested helicopters during various exercises, ranging from command and control maneuvers to scouting, screening, and aerial resupply. At the conclusion of the testing, the Army inactivated the division in 1965 and merged its personnel and equipment with those of the 2d Infantry Division to form the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). Convinced that helicopters offered a unique and effective way to fight elusive guerrillas operating in difficult terrain, the Army chose the 1st Cavalry to be the first full combat division deployed to Vietnam.

The renewed emphasis on conventional forces and equipment notwithstanding, the Army also received a series of new rockets and missiles to replace weapons systems it had employed since the early

1950s. In September 1960, the Army announced that the Sergeant medium-range guided missile would replace the older, less mobile Corporal system. A prototype of another solid-fuel ballistic missile, the Pershing, began testing at almost the same time. The Army featured the Pershing in demonstrations with the intent of replacing older liquid-fueled Redstone missiles in the near future. To improve protection of key installations and airfields from Soviet air attack, Army forces in Europe received six battalions of the new HAWK (for Homing All the Way Killer) antiaircraft missile designed to counter low-flying aircraft. A guided surface-to-surface missile, the Shillelagh, held great promise as a weapon for use against Soviet tanks. The Redeye, a shoulder-fired, ground-to-air missile would offer infantry units their own defense against low-flying jet and conventional aircraft. Finally, the Army developed a 6-inch atomic shell for the existing 155-mm. howitzer, thereby making the ponderous 280-mm. cannon and the Davy Crockett obsolete.

In another development that assisted the Army, the Kennedy administration greatly expanded the Air Force's fleet of transport aircraft, thereby enhancing the Army's strategic mobility. It also created U.S. Strike Command, a unified combatant command that linked the Army's Strategic Army Corps with Air Force assets to rapidly project power overseas in emergency situations. The fruits

Soldiers of the 504th Assault Group, 11th Airborne Division, board an H-34 helicopter during Exercise SABRE HAWK in February 1958.



of the new emphasis on strategic mobility were on display in October 1963 in Exercise BIG LIFT when the two services tested emergency plans by flying the entire 2d Armored Division to Europe, where it linked up with pre-positioned equipment. The exercise exposed some flaws, but confirmed the nation's ability to deploy troops overseas quickly.

The infusion of hardware and the reestablishment of conventional land combat as a legitimate element of America's national strategy did much to pull the Army out of the doldrums of the Eisenhower years, but that was not the limit to the renaissance the Army experienced in the early 1960s. The president expanded the active Army from 858,000, its lowest strength since 1950, to over 970,000, adding two new divisions in the process. By July 1965, the Army claimed 45 divisions (16 Regular Army, 23 National Guard, and 6 Reserve) and 17 separate brigades (6 Regular Army, 7 National Guard, and 4 Reserve). Determined to ensure that the nation got its money's worth, Secretary of Defense McNamara imposed modern business and budgetary practices on the armed forces. A major reorganization occurred in 1962, and although senior officers often resented the secretary's forceful tactics, the quality of staff work improved. McNamara also streamlined and rationalized the nation's somewhat chaotic and archaic reserve system, albeit not without controversy and pushback from localities that wanted to preserve access to the federal dollars that Guard units generated. The Army began improving its Reserve Officers' Training Corps program, and last but not least, took some significant steps toward improving troop training as well. When an audit revealed serious discrepancies between reported and actual readiness levels, the service in 1963 created a new unit status reporting system. Thanks to an initiative begun by Secretary of the Army Cyrus R. Vance (1962–1964) and his under secretary and successor, Stephen Ailes (1964–1965), the Army began to redress some of the flaws in its recruit training system. It removed inexperienced and unsuitable individuals from recruiting centers and created the drill sergeant program, in which talented NCOs received special training to become the new bedrock of the recruit training process.

THE ARMY EMBRACES COUNTERINSURGENCY

In addition to new weapons, equipment, and management practices, the strategic concept of flexible response also demanded

adjustments to the Army's operational doctrine and the manner in which it trained its soldiers. Perhaps the most significant shift involved a growing awareness of the threat posed by Communist-inspired guerrilla warfare, and particularly the conflict in South Vietnam, where the U.S. Army had been providing trainers, advisers, and equipment since 1955.

If the demands of conventional and nuclear warfare had necessarily taken center stage in Army thinking after 1941, Army planners knew that the Soviet Union had employed partisans against Nazi Germany in World War II, and that they might do so again in any future war with the West. Consequently, in 1951 the Army published Field Manual (FM) 31-20, *Operations Against Guerrilla Forces*. One year later, the service began incorporating issues related to counterinsurgency warfare into its primary operations manual, FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations, Operations*, thus ensuring that doctrine related to the subject would receive the widest possible dissemination.

Most soldiers had little reason to study this doctrine during the 1950s, but they were certainly aware of the many revolutions taking place in the wake of World War II, as former colonies, occupied states, or otherwise weak and underdeveloped nations around the world sought to gain their independence from weakened European regimes and to create new sociopolitical orders. They could hardly miss the Chinese Revolution, in which Mao Zedong succeeded in imposing communism over nearly 40 percent of the world's population. But only a relative handful of U.S. soldiers were immersed in the issue, most notably those detailed to advise foreign governments in waging successful counterinsurgencies against Communist movements in Korea, Greece, and the Philippines.

The stakes suddenly became higher in January 1961, when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev declared his nation's support of "wars of national liberation." His words indicated a deliberate strategy to undermine Western institutions where they were weakest, in the emerging nations of the third world, gradually isolating the United States and Europe from most of the world's resources and population. In direct response, President Kennedy announced in his 20 January inaugural address that the United States would "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty."

Kennedy believed that Khrushchev's wars of liberation and the kind of revolutionary warfare espoused by Mao required a holistic response. He based his approach in part on a book published by academic Walt W. Rostow in 1960 titled *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Rostow hypothesized that all human societies evolved through certain identifiable stages of economic development. Of these, the transition to modernity was the most turbulent, as the peoples of the third world eagerly thirsted for the bounty enjoyed by the industrialized world. If this "revolution of rising expectations" was not met, Rostow warned, the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America would turn to communism via revolution and insurgency. U.S. military aid could help beleaguered third world governments beat back Communist guerrillas, but the true solution was financial, economic, and technical assistance to inoculate the transitional societies from the siren song of communism while building new nations along the lines of Western democratic and capitalistic principles. America's political and intellectual elite readily absorbed Rostow's theories, and Kennedy gave him a high post in his administration as he sought to mobilize the government for yet another permutation of the Cold War. Given the danger third world insurgencies posed to the West and their peculiarly sociopolitical nature, Kennedy believed it was imperative that the Army quickly transform itself into a politically astute, socially conscious force—one that could not only fight guerrillas, but that could also participate in the broader social engineering and nation-building effort that lay at the heart of America's response.

With some misgivings, Army leaders responded positively to Kennedy's challenge. They readily accepted Rostow's theory and the new counterinsurgency doctrines meant to implement it. They also supported many of the president's aims in developing counter guerrilla capabilities. Indeed, the challenge fit nicely into the Army's own creed that it needed to be able to respond to threats across the entire spectrum of conflict. Yet, many also felt that the president was pressing his point a bit too far. Army Chief of Staff George H. Decker questioned the wisdom in overhauling the Army's entire structure in light of its heavy responsibilities in Europe. He also challenged the president's assertion that conventional soldiers were incapable of defeating irregulars. Finally, many soldiers as well as civilians believed that the political and social engineering aspects of counterinsurgency lay more properly with

the nation's diplomats and civilian technicians than with soldiers. Nonetheless, Decker addressed the issue in a forthright manner.

The Army published its first response to the counterinsurgency threat—FM 31-15, *Operations Against Irregular Forces*—just four months after Kennedy assumed office. The new manual identified four primary tasks that commanders had to achieve to defeat guerrillas and to prevent their resurgence. First came an effective intelligence system to identify both the overt guerrillas and the covert network of political operatives that sustained them by harnessing the local population in support of the insurgency. The next step was to separate the irregulars from the civilian population, both physically and psychologically, through a combination of military, police, population security, resources control, and political measures. Third, the Army had to destroy the guerrillas as a military force. Finally, the government would have to reeducate the dissidents, rebuild damaged institutions, and redress the political, social, and economic causes of discontent. All of this was to be done as part of a broad, coordinated politico-military effort in which political, rather than the military, action was considered the decisive element.

Additional manuals followed, as did an increasing amount of classroom instruction and training exercises in counterinsurgency warfare. Soon soldiers were practicing counterambush drills and house-to-house search techniques in mock Vietnamese villages. West Point cadets were reading Mao Zedong's "little red book," while senior officers studied nation-building theory in a five-week course integrated into the curriculum at the Army War College. Throughout, the Army preached the idea of civic action, in which soldiers undertook humanitarian actions to alleviate suffering and win the favor of a population torn by civil strife. All of these endeavors paid off. By 1965, a special panel created by President Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, concluded that the U.S. Army was the only government agency that had developed a cogent, written doctrine for counterinsurgency, and that only it and the Marine Corps had developed comprehensive training programs to disseminate that doctrine to all ranks.

Insurgencies in Southeast Asia and Latin America during the early 1960s gave the United States a chance to move beyond instruction and to put its theories to the test. U.S. soldiers trained local troops in counterinsurgency tactics, recommended counterinsurgency strategies to foreign officers, and helped attack those social

conditions that supposedly contributed to instability by building schools, digging wells, and providing medical aid. Nowhere was this truer than in South Vietnam, where presidents Kennedy and Johnson sent a steadily increasing number of military advisers, technicians, and combat support units. By January 1965, over 23,000 U.S. military personnel were serving in Vietnam, nearly 15,000 of whom were U.S. Army. As they became more plentiful with the passage of time, the Army brought back veterans from South Vietnam to its classrooms to balance theory with the lessons of experience.

Perhaps the element of the Army that flourished the most as part of the turn toward counterinsurgency was Special Forces. The Army had first created Special Forces units in 1952. The mission of this elite force was to infiltrate behind enemy lines and organize partisans to conduct guerrilla actions. Special Forces' initial focus was Europe, where plans called for it to raise partisans in Eastern Europe during a war with the Soviet Union. The service naturally turned to these experts in guerrilla warfare to play a major role in formulating plans, doctrine, and capability to counter guerrillas. Aware of the growing danger posed by insurgencies, President Eisenhower began adding Special Forces personnel to the many military assistance advisory groups the United States maintained around the world to help friendly nations raise, train, and equip armies, with the first Special Forces soldiers deploying to South Vietnam in 1957. President Kennedy was enamored with Special Forces, remarking that the green beret worn by its soldiers was "a symbol of excellence, a badge of courage, a mark of distinction in the fight for freedom." In 1961, he deployed Special Forces soldiers to Laos to help organize resistance against Communist forces in that nation, in Operation WHITE STAR, and he set in motion a

Col. Aaron Bank was the first commander of the Army's first Special Forces unit, the 10th Special Forces Group.



major expansion of Special Forces in which its numbers grew from 2,000 men in 1961 to 8,000 by 1963.

Although Special Forces specialized in guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare, everyone in the Army received some exposure to counter-guerrilla tactics and counterinsurgency theory during the early 1960s. Such training received greater urgency after 1963 due to the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam. But the institution had not transformed itself into an exclusively insurgency-oriented force. It could not do so given the high-priority mission the nation assigned to it to protect Western Europe from Soviet attack, the heavy demands of organizing and training for conventional and nuclear warfare, and its preoccupation with the ongoing reorganization of its division structure. Nevertheless, everything the Army had done in the realm of counterinsurgency education and training helped prepare it for the war that was to come.

ANALYSIS

By 1965, the Army had come full circle from the force that had fought the Korean War. The strategic policy of massive retaliation and the Army's flirtation with tactical nuclear war had yielded to the more pragmatic doctrine of flexible response and a recognition that counterinsurgency was an important concern. After the service had experimented with the pentomic division in the 1950s, it returned by the early 1960s to a more traditional structure. The ROAD division offered the Army the flexibility to deal with a wider spectrum of conflict and placed less reliance on the firepower of tactical nuclear weapons. Both the ROAD structure and the cutting-edge airmobile division would soon be tested in combat in Vietnam. So too would the host of new weapons issued after 1960.

At the beginning of the buildup in Vietnam in 1965, the U.S. Army possessed a force of improving caliber. The constant challenges of the Cold War had given training an immediacy and sense of urgency that helped to keep the force focused on training. The Army's struggle to fit into the strategic policies of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations had also prompted serious reflection and innovation on the part of its leaders. Books by Matthew Ridgway, James Gavin, and Maxwell Taylor reflected the thoughtfulness and intellect of a force attempting to deal with the changing nature of military preparedness and warfare in the modern world.

This is not to say that everything was rosy. Reform of management at the Headquarters of the Department of the Army remained a work in progress, as did the reformation of the recruit training program, which had only just begun. Manpower shortages continued even after President Kennedy had increased the size of the force, leaving certain military occupational specialties in especially tight supply. Particularly important was the shortage of captains created by the lure of a robust economy and disillusionment born of inadequate benefits, oversupervision, and uninspiring leadership by their superiors. The shortage of captains and the tendency to centralize the existing talent at higher staffs left many companies in the hands of relatively inexperienced lieutenants, as the cadre of battle-tested veterans in the noncommissioned officer corps naturally receded due to the passage of time. Of course the Army could do nothing about the retirement of aging veterans, but it had not taken effective measures to control those aspects of the problem that were within its grasp. The unhealthy culture that fostered careerism, ticket punching, and managerial over battle leadership skills during the 1950s continued unchecked, leading the recently retired Lt. Gen. Garrison H. Davidson to lament in 1964 that the service had not expended the “same intense care and attention” on developing the next generation of officers as it had on the next generation of weapons.

All of these shortcomings in the peacetime Army would have ramifications as the service entered the stress of war. Nevertheless, the Army that deployed to Vietnam was certainly better trained and equipped than the one the nation had sent into harm’s way fifteen years earlier in Korea. As Army leaders prepared to deploy the service to Asia once again for a very different kind of war, they expressed confidence that their soldiers were prepared for the task.

The Author

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