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**MOBILIZATION AND TRAINING CENTERS
THE CRITICAL LINK IN THE STRATEGIC POLICY OF
GLOBAL DEPLOYMENT**

BY

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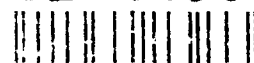
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MOBILIZATION AND TRAINING CENTERS-THE CRITICAL LINK IN THE STRATEGIC POLICY OF GLOBAL DEPLOYMENT

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas G. Bowden
United States Army

Lieutenant Colonel Martin W. Andresen
Project Advisor

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In the early days of the Second World War, prior to America's intervention, many military camps were established throughout the country in order to meet the mobilization and training requirements of a rapidly growing Army. During this period, these installations performed a unique function in preparing for and maintaining a nation at war. At the end of the conflict, many of these facilities faded into obscurity, converting once more to pastures and woodlands, never again to hear the sounds of artillery and rifle fire. Some, however, continue to operate today, with the same charter as developed 50 years ago-prepare and maintain the force for combat. This paper provides a detailed historical account of one such post, Fort Pickett, Virginia, from its early beginnings in 1941 to present. In addition, an assessment is provided of possible future roles for this viable installation, if the Army leadership stays the course and maintains training as the key to combat readiness.

INTRODUCTION

The role of mobilization and training centers has been a central one in preparing for the conduct of war during conflict, and maintaining combat effectiveness and readiness during times of peace. As the United States grew from a regional power to a world power, there were numerous instances where the resources of this nation were called upon to assist in the restoration of peace in other parts of the globe. These actions required large numbers of personnel, massive amounts of materiel, and the development of extensive mobilization and training facilities to meet these needs. The primary task was to mobilize the force (transition from civilian to soldier) and then ensure they were properly equipped and trained for whatever contingency in whatever region of the world.

As in the case of World War II, many small communities throughout the country were transformed almost overnight, into massive mobilization and training facilities to meet the overwhelming needs of the impending war. These camps became "home" to thousands of citizen soldiers whose lives would forever be changed as would those who lived and worked near the camps.

Camp Pickett, Virginia, was one such camp that played a vital role in preparing and mobilizing units for World War II and Korea. Located near the town of Blackstone, in Nottoway County, Virginia, this 46,000 acre post was named in honor of Confederate Major General George Edward Pickett, celebrated for his famous charge at Gettysburg. A

military reservation of more than 1,500 buildings. Camp Pickett trained as many as 60,000 men at one time for overseas battlefields.¹ Between 1941 and 1954, 10 combat divisions and 500 non-divisional units mobilized and trained at this location. Redesignated a fort in 1974, Fort Pickett continues to provide excellent training facilities to all services as required.

This paper will document the history of the fort, paying primary attention to the war years (1941-1954). In addition, it will explore the future role this installation may play as a major CONUS Allied Training Center and as a possible training site for units of Special Operations Forces as they prepare for the myriad of missions facing them.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CAMP PICKETT

The story of Camp Pickett is not dissimilar from that of other camps which were springing up across the country in preparation for the impending war. The camp's primary purpose was to convert those who trained there into the best instructed and best conditioned soldiers in the world.² Its mission was to prepare men for combat for a war that most Americans knew was not in the all-to-distant future.

The early history of this Army post, where half a million American men were taught the art of warfare, and more than 20,000 wounded were nursed back to health, actually began prior to 7 December 1941.³

When Japan was striking the blow at Pearl Harbor, which brought America's declaration of war, Camp Pickett already had taken form on the War Department drawing boards. The machinery already was in

motion to acquire more than 48,000 acres of the rolling countryside of southside Virginia. Plans called for an installation which would be suitable for the training of virtually every arm, service, and branch in the Army Ground Forces and the Army Service Forces (then known as the Services of Supply). The projected simultaneous development of the Blackstone Army Air Base within the reservation would render the area appropriate for use by the Army Air Forces. Situated in rolling, partly wooded country, the camp is admirably adapted to general field training and moderately large-scale maneuvers. The training received in assault landings and in mountain warfare, stood the units who trained there, in good stead, from Oran to the Po River Valley and the borders of Czechoslovakia. Soldiers could move easily and rapidly from Camp Pickett to the Atlantic coastal beaches or the rugged Appalachian Mountains of Virginia and West Virginia to hone their skills for combat.⁴

Four counties of southside Virginia and many farms contributed to the acreage of the camp, which was purchased in 1941. Forty-eight thousand acres (original acquisition later reduced to 46,000 acres through sale/lease program) in the counties of Nottoway, Lunenburg, Brunswick, and Dinwiddie were purchased by the Government at an average cost of \$25.50 per acre for a total cost of \$1.2 million dollars.⁵ There were approximately five hundred landholders, including churches, corporations and private individuals involved in the land acquisition. Tracts varied from less than an acre to more than 1,500 acres. Only three of the tracts exceeded a thousand acres.⁶

Blackstone, a quite tobacco marketing center immediately adjacent to the reservation, suddenly bulged with newcomers. Almost overnight, the peacetime population of 2,700 grew to 15,000.⁷ Residents of the town consolidated their own living quarters and opened their homes to renters. They could not, however, begin to accommodate the throng of construction workers and the hundreds of new employees of old and new business establishments moving into town. They spilled over into the surrounding communities within a radius of 25 to 30 miles. These homes and communities were themselves supplying many of the civilian employees who were constructing the camp and would later aid in its operation.⁸

CONSTRUCTION AND FACILITIES

A visit by War Department representatives to Blackstone in May, 1941, had started the ball rolling. The area was under consideration as a possible site for an Army camp as war clouds on both sides of the world grew rapidly darker and the nation's preparedness got underway.

On 25 June 1941, the Land Acquisition Division and Soil Conservation Commission opened offices in Blackstone under the direction of James E. Donahue, who immediately began appraising land included in the plots of the camp. Wiley and Wilson, architect engineers from Lynchburg, Virginia, made their report to the War Department on 5 December 1941, while the Japanese fleet was steaming toward Hawaii. Fourteen days later, the War Department ordered construction of a camp on the site.⁹

Preliminary work was under way early in January 1942, and by the latter part of February, hundreds of workmen were swarming over the site selected for the cantonment area. A minor miracle, part of the greater miracle of American mobilization for war, was wrought in the quiet Virginia countryside during those early months of 1942. In a period of something under five months, the verdant acres were transformed completely into an Army camp capable of housing approximately 38,500 troops complete with facilities for learning to use the weapons and tactics of modern warfare. The approximate construction cost for the project was \$44.5 million dollars. Thirteen thousand carpenters, plumbers, electricians, metal workers, steam-fitters, masons, and every other type of construction worker, were called upon as work went forward 24 hours a day. The workers put in a total of 13 million hours before the camp was ready for formal dedication.¹⁰

An impact area of some 20,000 acres, almost half the reservation, was laid off, and around its perimeter were constructed firing ranges for training soldiers in the use of every weapon up to and including the 155mm howitzer. Rifle, pistol, and carbine known distance and transition ranges were constructed, along with facilities for anti-tank fire practice. Ranges were also built for rocket, sub-machine gun, tank, and grenade practice, village fighting, and combat in woods. An infiltration course was constructed to accustom men to the sound and feel of overhead fire. So extensive were these training areas and facilities, that the 43rd Infantry Division was able to take to the field in its entirety for a three day exercise in the spring of 1943, making a simulated beach landing against defending troops of the 2nd Army and

advancing through fields and woods from the "beach" to take their objective.¹¹

Without waiting for construction to be completed, and while the reservation was still swarming with workmen, trucks, and bulldozers, Camp Pickett tackled the job of training men to fight in World War II. The first personnel arrived in January 1942, with Lieutenant Colonel Edgar F. Padgett, QMC, as senior officer in temporary command. It was the task of his men to prepare the Camp for occupancy by the time the first of the training divisions arrived in May of 1942. In March, Colonel D. John Markey, veteran of World War I and a Maryland National Guardsman, arrived to take command of Camp Pickett.¹² To Colonel Markey fell the major task of establishing a military organization capable of meeting the vast demands to be placed upon it during the war years. He did not have long to wait before those demands took definite form.¹³

By the first week in May, the 79th Infantry Division, scheduled for reactivation at Camp Pickett, had already begun to take shape as Major General Ira T. Wyche, the Commanding General, and his staff arrived with the nucleus of the division's cadre. Not long afterward came the first of the non-divisional special troops, including medical, signal, quartermaster, and engineer units.¹⁴

Arriving at Camp Pickett almost simultaneously with the 79th Division were the cadre and trainees of the Medical Replacement Training Center. The Center utilized about one-third of the cantonment

area and began immediately the training process of preparing young medical soldiers for what lay ahead.¹⁵

The Post Headquarters building was occupied on 13 June 1942, with scarcely a noticeable interruption in the work of the men who staffed it. While barracks, recreation buildings, officers quarters, warehouses, headquarters structures, and hospital wards were springing up like magic from the red earth, crews were swarming over the outlying areas, cutting roads, laying out ranges, building target pits and firing embankments. Work also was going forward rapidly on the long concrete dam on Nottoway River, six miles south of Post Headquarters. This structure was to impound seven hundred fifty million gallons of water, covering 40 acres, in order to provide a water supply, not only for Camp Pickett, but for Blackstone as well.¹⁶ On Flag Day, 14 June 1942, the permanent post colors were dedicated in the plaza in front of the Post and Division headquarters buildings.

The foregoing account does not, by any means, list all the factors which had to be considered in laying out and building of Camp Pickett. There was the post bakery, utilizing modern equipment, with a capacity of 23,000 pounds of bread a day; a dozen chapels to provide religious services for all major denominations and sects; a field house for indoor athletics and large entertainments, seating 4,000; seven motion picture theaters with a total seating capacity of 6,200; a large amphitheater, seating 8,000, for outdoor entertainment, and the list goes on. All this was in the plans to make Camp Pickett a complete installation where all needs could be met, from training, to religious, to recreational. These

accomplishments provide a glimpse of the magnitude of the task and the speed and completeness of the construction job in these early days of America's participation in World War II.¹⁷ It was here at Camp Pickett, that men and equipment would be put to the test, to temper their metal for the beckoning battlefields of Europe and the Pacific.

DEDICATION

Thus, by the summer of 1942, little more than five months after ground was broken for the first building, Camp Pickett was already deep in its task of training men for war, and was ready to be dedicated to the cause for which America was fighting the greatest war in history. The new installation had been named Camp Pickett, to honor the memory of the gallant Confederate leader, Major General George Edward Pickett, whose ill-fated charge on the bloody field of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on 3 July 1863, holds a unique place in the history of warfare. It was to be dedicated to the cause of a re-united nation in ceremonies at 1500 hours on 3 July 1942, exactly 79 years to the day and hour after the launching of the valiant charge of Pickett's division.¹⁸

The theme of the impressive ceremonies held that day was twofold -- the example of courage and determination set by the camp's namesake and his men in that long ago battle, and the heritage of the same martial qualities passed on to the men of the new 79th Division by their forerunners who won fame for that unit during World War I. The occasion itself combined the dedication of Camp Pickett with the formal re-activation of the 79th.¹⁹

A galaxy of important state and national figures, civilian and military, was on hand for the ceremony, and more than 20,000 persons including the troops of the 79th, of the 2nd Army, and of the 1318th Service Unit, filled the stands and overflowed onto the freshly turfed field. Eleven descendants of General Pickett also gathered, to see honor paid to their valiant ancestor. Among them were Lieutenant George E. Pickett III, grandson of the Confederate commander, and Miss Sophie Johnston Pickett, the only living niece of the General.²⁰

After the thousands of troops had marched into the stadium and taken their seats, Colonel Markey opened the ceremonies at 1500 hours to the music of the 79th Division and Medical Replacement Training Center Bands. After the welcome, there was a pause, and exactly at 1515 hours, a signal gun was fired, just as, at the same hour 79 years before, a signal gun had sent Pickett's division into the jaws of death. Governor Colgate W. Darden, Jr., of Virginia, reviewed the notable career of General Pickett. Addresses were made by Major General Milton A. Reckord, commanding general of the Third Corps Area; by Major General Ira T. Wyche, commanding general of the 79th Division; by Brigadier General William R. Dear, commanding general of the Medical Replacement Training Center, and other notable individuals highlighting the significance of this occasion. Colonel Markey, in dedicating the Camp's facilities and personnel to the task of maintaining the record of its illustrious namesake, announced that four of the principal camp streets would be named for Pickett's officers: Garnett, Kemper, and Armstead, brigade commanders, and Dearing, the artillery officer. Thus, with the ceremony concluded, Camp Pickett officially became a reality.²¹

BASIC TRAINING CENTER

For many reasons, Camp Pickett proved an ideal training camp. Very little training time was lost due to adverse weather conditions; the health and comfort of troops was not affected by the presence of swamps or malarial mosquitoes; no critical areas were subject to flooding; and, the surrounding area was not thickly populated.²² This terrain provided an ideal location for the armored and infantry divisions to maneuver and train, along with the multitude of non-divisional special troops having their own peculiar requirements.

First among the fighting units to take shape at Camp Pickett was the famed 79th Infantry (Cross of Lorraine) Division. It had been re-activated during the Camp's dedication ceremonies and immediately began preparations for deployment. A cadre of several thousand formed the 313th, 314th, and 315th Infantry Regiments and the 310th, 311th, 312th, and 904th Field Artillery Battalions. The cadre began to process and train thousands of recruits and mold them into one of the finest assault outfits in the European Theater of Operations.²³

Leaving Camp Pickett in late August 1942, the 79th moved to Camp Blanding, Florida, to undergo further training prior to engaging in Second Army Maneuvers in Tennessee. Before going overseas, where it landed on the Normandy Coast six days after D-Day, the division trained in the desert at Camp Laguna, Arizona.²⁴

MEDICAL REPLACEMENT TRAINING CENTER

If one were to visit Camp Pickett during this timeframe, the amount of combat training going on would have been most apparent. However, the installation was also involved in other factors of war preparation, such as teaching soldiers how to save lives on the battlefield. It was through the Medical Replacement Training Center (MRTC) that this task was accomplished.

When the first infantry division arrived at Camp Pickett in the summer of 1942, so did several thousand instructors and trainees of the MRTC (approximately nine battalions). By marching from Fort Lee (where the school was originally located) to Camp Pickett, it was estimated that 5,000 gallons of gasoline and 300,000 tire miles were conserved. In the sixteen months that the MRTC operated, 150,000 medical soldiers were trained in the field care of wounded.²⁵

The training period for the average MRTC soldier was 13 weeks, during which he qualified as one of the following: ambulance driver, litter bearer, administrative or clerical worker, mess sergeant, cook, baker, or supply worker. The greatest number of trainees became medical field soldiers, or aides to surgeons in field or base hospital units or aid stations. Generally, fifty percent of the graduates were sent overseas, twenty five percent to units within the United States, and the remaining twenty five percent to advanced medical schools.²⁶

From the nine battalions which marched from Camp Lee to Camp Pickett, the MRTC expanded to 14 battalions by 25 March 1943, and

continued to remain at this strength until its deactivation in September 1943. However, it would be re-opened during the Korean conflict.²⁷

ADVANCED TRAINING AND STAGING AREA

The departure of the 79th Infantry Division in August 1942, marked the beginning of a new period in the history of Camp Pickett. While almost one-half of the cantonment area continued to be devoted to the basic training of medical soldiers and unit training of the Second Army Special Troops, the divisional area was to house seven divisions, six infantry and one armored. All of these units came to Pickett for their final advanced training before departing for overseas. Five of them ended up in the European Theater (78 ID, 3 ID, 3 AD, 45 ID and 28 ID), while two made combat history in the Pacific (31 ID and 77 ID).²⁸

Early in September, Camp Pickett became the headquarters of the Atlantic Fleet Amphibious Force, which ultimately played a large role in the invasion of North Africa. Five Pickett-based divisions trained in amphibious warfare on the simulated assault equipment located on the installation, and by actual sea-borne assaults on the sandy beaches of Solomons, Maryland, on the Chesapeake Bay. Preceding their boat and beach landings in the Bay, the divisions trained for a number of weeks on the towering mock-ups at Camp Pickett. This was tough, demanding training which resulted in highly skilled men who became very accustomed to climbing up and down landing nets with full packs and rifles. The 10 to 14 days the troops spent in actual amphibious landings on the Solomons coast put the finishing touches on a long and arduous

training period. They practiced first by daylight and then in darkness under complete blackout conditions.²⁹

The final training period at Camp Pickett assumed a serious air and throughout their remaining stay, the fighting men who helped to defeat the Axis forces in Africa, Europe, and the Pacific islands were intent upon learning their job and learning it well. Four of the divisions, the 45th, 28th, 31st, and the 77th, took to the Appalachian Mountains of Western Virginia and West Virginia for training in mountain warfare before departing for overseas. After their return to Pickett, and before leaving for ports of embarkation, individual records were brought up to date, the physically unfit were culled out and replacements secured. The overseas bound troops got their final immunizations and their final issue of clothing and equipment. Vehicles of the assault divisions were waterproofed and all was then in order for movement.³⁰

THE DIVISIONS

• 3rd Infantry Division

Arriving from Fort Lewis, Washington, in early September, 1942, the 3rd division was the first to go through the amphibious training. It had already completed similar instruction on the West Coast. This unit was first to use the newly built mock-up landing towers, and the first to use Pickett as its base while undergoing training in the Chesapeake Bay. It was during the 3rd Division's stay at Pickett that the post reached its peak strength of some 60,000 troops.³¹ Men of the 3rd remembered that Camp Pickett presented an almost ominous appearance. The barracks

were crowded and damp, splotchy with camouflage paint and hard to keep clean. It seemed that everyone caught cold in the damp climate. Such was life at Pickett.³²

Under the command of Major General Jonathan Anderson, the division rehearsed for its momentous landing on the North African coast at Fedala, where it comprised the center striking force of "Task Force A." The division left Camp Pickett in January, 1943, fully equipped and supplied for combat. They paused at Camp Patrick Henry on the coast, and boarded troop ships headed for the African coast.³³

• 3rd Armored Division

Following closely upon the heels of the 3rd Infantry Division, and at first slated to head for North Africa, the 3rd Armored Division arrived in Camp Pickett in October 1942, under the command of Major General Lercy M. Watson. It stayed until January 1943, and went through a general training period in which it used the reservation's range facilities and maneuver areas to give its tank crews further experience. It also took advanced training in preparation for overseas movement. However, with Field Marshal Rommel's Afrika Corps on the run, another armored division was not needed.³⁴

The division left Camp Pickett in January 1943, but remained in the United States until September of that year, and did not see combat until a year later as part of the First Army in Normandy.

• 45th Infantry Division

As the 3rd Armored Division was leaving Pickett, the famed 45th pulled into the reservation's railhead in January 1943. Coming from the freezing temperatures of Pine Camp, New York, where it had undergone a short period of physical toughening, the division was prepared for its final training. It immediately entered upon a period of arduous work under command of Major General Troy H. Middleton.³⁵

Like the 3rd Infantry Division, the 45th carried out amphibious training both at Camp Pickett and the Chesapeake Bay in preparation for its forthcoming amphibious landings. Again, like the 3rd, the 45th left Camp Pickett combat loaded for a voyage almost directly to its assault objective. The 3rd and 45th Divisions were destined to fight side by side during the Sicilian campaign, on the beaches of Anzio, and in the mountains of Southern France. It almost became that "whenever you see the 3rd, there you also find the 45th."³⁶

• 28th Infantry Division

The 28th arrived shortly after the departure of the 45th. With the Allied advance continuing in Italy, more troops were needed for an Allied offensive elsewhere against Germany. Camp Pickett had already contributed two of the most famous combat infantry outfits for assault operations against the Nazi war machine. Now it was time to train units for other theaters and later offensives.³⁷

The 28th Infantry Division arrived under the command of Major General Lloyd Brown. During its stay at Pickett, it completed the same

type of training as its predecessors. Moving overseas in October 1943, it remained in the British Isles until its landing on the Normandy Beach on 22 July 1944.³⁸

- 31st Infantry Division

One of two Pickett divisions scheduled for the Southwest Pacific, the 31st arrived in October 1943. It completed its amphibious and mountain training in a little more than four months. Commanded by Major General John C. Persons, components of the division left Camp Pickett at intervals, sailing overseas as combat teams. The division went into action as a whole on the island of Morotai in September 1944. Following its successful push on Morotai, the 31st landed on Mindanao, Philippine Islands, in April 1945.³⁹

- 77th Infantry Division

Almost before the 31st had settled into Camp Pickett, the 77th Infantry arrived directly from desert training. Under the command of Major General Andrew D. Bruce, the 77th early on showed the stuff that was to make it one of the outstanding units in the Pacific campaign. The division took amphibious and mountain training in March 1944, following four months of general training at Camp Pickett.⁴⁰

In July 1944, the 77th conducted assault actions on the beaches of Guam, where they overran entrenched Japanese forces who had taken the American island early in the war. After a brief rest, they were sent into Leyte with the mission of landing behind the Japanese lines at Ormoc. Their successful landing and drive inland contributed in large

measure, to the American victory in that first re-invasion of the Philippines. Shortly after, the 77th moved to Okinawa, where it fought in the final land campaign of the war, up to 21 May 1945, when all resistance ended.⁴¹

• 78th Infantry Division

With the departure of the 77th Infantry Division, the use of Camp Pickett as an amphibious training base ended. But the value of this big installation as a training facility was not gone. As long as fighting men were needed in the European Theater of Operations, the cantonment area of Pickett would not be empty.⁴²

Arriving in at Pickett in April 1944, the 78th was fresh from Tennessee maneuvers. Commanded by Major General Edwin P. Parker, Jr., it almost immediately sent many of its men to the European theater as replacements. To fill the depleted ranks, the division received more than 4,000 replacements from the Army Air Corps and the Army Specialized Training Program. There was an increasingly urgent need for infantrymen in the European Theater, and army troops had to be retrained to meet the demand.⁴³

After five and a half months of extensive general and combat training, the 78th departed for England and the Continent in October 1944, and went into action around 1 December. Caught in the December German offensive, the division regained its footing by the end of January 1945, and distinguished itself in a 12-day period of decisive action, helping to establish and hold the Remagen bridgehead over the Rhine.⁴⁴

NON-DIVISIONAL TROOPS

As stated earlier, along with the division combat troops and basic trainees of the MRTC, Camp Pickett served as a training area for more than 500 non-divisional units of virtually every type found in the Army Ground Forces and Army Service Forces. Consisting primarily of engineer, quartermaster, and medical units, the special troops went through both basic and advanced unit training on the ranges, bivouac and maneuver areas of Camp Pickett.

Included among the non-divisional units trained at Pickett were ASF evacuation and station hospitals, mobile general hospitals, combat engineer battalions, airborne engineers, antiaircraft units, field artillery battalions, signal companies, ordnance companies of all types, and bands. Unique among the units trained were a balloon barrage company and two joint assault signal companies, activated at Pickett and composed of both Army and Navy personnel for combined operational purposes. The 514th Quartermaster Trucking Company, which became the nucleus of the famed Red Ball Line, also completed its training at Camp Pickett.⁴⁵

THE HOSPITAL CENTER

Departure of the 78th Infantry in October 1944, left activity at Camp Pickett at a low ebb, the lowest since the first truckloads of workmen began to pour into the camp in 1942. And when the last Second Army Special Troops departed on January 1945, the post was virtually dead. However, this state of affairs did not continue for long. In orders dated 30 January 1945, the War Department announced plans to enlarge

hospitalization facilities. Four temporary general hospitals were to be established, one of which was to be located at Camp Pickett.⁴⁶

Immediately, Camp Pickett began the transformation from a training base to a hospital center, where combat veterans, wounded or ill in the active theaters, would be nursed back to health. Medical personnel, officer and enlisted, at the former station hospital, were called upon to convert the institution, which had been largely idle and closed with only the station compliment personnel to care for, into a full-scale General Hospital. Medical officers and nurses, enlisted men and WACs, civilian employees and borrowed help, threw themselves into the task of reopening, cleaning, and furnishing the closed wards. Over time, the bed capacity was increased from 2,012 to 2,700, by opening a dozen wards formerly occupied as barracks by hospital personnel. Repairs and improvements, including concrete sidewalks to each ward, linoleum flooring throughout, and sealing of the miles of corridors, were rushed at maximum speed to greet the soon-to-be arriving patients.⁴⁷

The first hospital train pulled into the camp railhead some ten days after the official announcement by the War Department, bearing 194 veterans of the European Theater. Once the flow of patients began, it continued without interruption with several groups arriving by train each week, and others arriving in hospital planes. A total of approximately 15,000 patients, most of them orthopedic cases, were treated at the General Hospital. To handle this work load, the hospital eventually was staffed with 60 medical officers and 200 nurses, as well as numerous medical technicians.⁴⁸

CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL

Following close on the heels of the establishment of the US Army General Hospital at Camp Pickett came an order setting up a 5,000 bed Convalescent Hospital on post. As soon as the two centers were in operation, their activities were brought under the supervision and coordination of the Hospital Center, which only consisted of a headquarters with a commander, adjutant, staff and liaison officer. More than 1.5 million dollars was spent in the program to completely renovate the old Medical Replacement Training Center area to house the Convalescent Hospital. All buildings were repainted a cheerful cream, eliminating the grim wartime camouflage paint. Barracks were remodeled inside and out to provide the best facilities possible for the recovering veterans.⁴⁹

The hospital processed almost 12,000 patients, keeping them from two to four weeks, and giving them, during that time, a course in physical reconditioning attuned to their individual needs. For the most part, patients were discharged from the service through the hospital's own disposition company at the conclusion of their stay.⁵⁰

SERVICE COMMAND FUNCTIONS

The principal job of the station compliment of Camp Pickett, organized as the 1318th Service Command unit as part of the Third Service Command, was to provide housing, food, training facilities, supplies, and certain services for the hundreds of units and hundreds of thousands of men who trained there. The equivalent of a half a division

of men and women--typists and warehouse workers, range sergeants and bakers, personnel clerks and ordnance repairmen, colonels and captains, and sergeants, privates and civilians-- participated in the overall success of the camp and, ultimately, in the overall combat successes enjoyed by the units who worked, played and trained at the camp.

In addition to providing for the US soldiers who trained at the installation, the Service Command also had the responsibility to maintain facilities for prisoners of war who began arriving on 17 January 1944. Prisoners were screened and placed in Compounds I and II (located on Camp Pickett proper), or were sent to one of the branch camps (also administered by Pickett), located in central and western Virginia.⁵¹

The screening process served the purpose of separating militant Germans loyal to the Nazi Party from those who professed little or no allegiance to the Hitler regime. Most of the latter were conscripted by the German army from occupied nations such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. Some expressed a desire to fight for their native country against the Nazis or, later, to fight with the Americans against the Japanese.⁵²

Though prison life was far from pleasant, much was done to alleviate boredom among the inmates. Theatric and symphonic productions were quite common and attendance good. Stage productions were enacted in open air theaters within the compounds and the players often traveled from one compound to another. In addition to the theater, courses were taught in beginning and advanced English, French, and German composition and grammar. Although the prisoners received magazines

printed in both English and German, they were not allowed to publish their own periodicals.⁵³

Because of the severe shortage of manpower, many Prisoners of War were recruited for work on the post as well as outside work in the surrounding counties. They worked under the supervision of area residents at such jobs as pulpwood cutting, operation of fertilizer plants, and the harvesting and canning of fruits and vegetable crops.⁵⁴

The total number of prisoners varied from month to month; on 17 June 1944, the population was 1,335, and on 28 November, it was 3,052. The most prisoners held at any time within Camp Pickett is reported to have reached a total of about 6,000 in September 1945.⁵⁵

BLACKSTONE ARMY AIR BASE

This base operated in conjunction with Camp Pickett throughout the period of World War II. Construction of the field with four concrete runways, 5,300 in length and 300 feet wide, paved taxi strips and parking areas, a hanger equipped for extensive repair and overhauling, fuel storage facilities, suitable headquarters buildings, barracks, and Civil Aeronautics Authority weather station and radio transmitter, was begun at about the same time work began on the camp itself. The field was capable of handling large transports and bombers.⁵⁶

Located on the reservation, the airfield was under the Post Commander of Camp Pickett for subsistence and maintenance only. The base was constructed as an auxiliary field and was operated by the First Air Force of the Army Air Forces. They maintained two training

squadrons there until the summer of 1945, when the field was inactivated and placed on stand-by status.⁵⁷

During the greater part of 1945, the field was used by the US Navy. They made use of the extensive range facilities at Camp Pickett to give pilots practice in dive-bombing. A small Navy maintenance detachment required to service these planes also was maintained at the field.⁵⁸

INTERIM PERIOD

Following the Allied victory over Japan in 1945, activities at Camp Pickett began to slow considerably. From October 1945, to February 1946, Pickett became a training center for European replacements. It reached a peak strength of 20,525 in late January 1946. By this time, it had processed a total of about 145,000 new soldiers. A post war study was undertaken in order to determine whether or not the camp should remain an active military installation. Some talked of establishing an air force academy or Navy Airfield at the installation. However, despite the arguments in favor of continuing the camp, the Army chose to deactivate Camp Pickett, and it was placed on a caretaker status in late February 1946. A small permanent staff of military and civilian personnel was given responsibility for maintenance and security of the post and installation property.

Standby status continued until May 1948, when advance detachments of the 17th Airborne Division arrived to prepare for its re-activation in August. The division was active as a training unit for newly enlisted personnel until June 1949. Over 12,000 men received their basic

training in this organization. Decreases in Army-wide strength and post-war stabilization of the permanent military establishment necessitated the deactivation of the division in mid-1949. At this time, Camp Pickett once again reverted to a caretaker role with a small permanent staff to manage it.⁵⁹

In November 1949, the Post was alerted to prepare to furnish logistical support for the 3rd Infantry Division, scheduled to be a major unit in an upcoming exercise. With service support troops added to its normal complement, the installation staged about 10,000 troops from January to March, 1950, when the last of the division closed out. With this mission complete, preparations were immediately begun to provide facilities for the summer training of the Virginia-Maryland National Guard during July and August of 1950. Major units included the 29th Infantry Division, 176th Regimental Combat Team, and the Virginia Air Guard, totaling about 10,000 troops.⁶⁰

The long range plan under consideration at the time, visualized Camp Pickett remaining a Class 1 installation and being a permanent training site for the 29th Infantry Division. However, as war clouds began to grow in the east, the vast training areas of Fort Pickett would soon be called upon once again to begin the demanding preparations for war.⁶¹

THE KOREAN CONFLICT

The emergency came on 25 June 1950. A Presidential Proclamation, a United Nations decision and numerous high level military conferences,

plus world-wide public indignation, put Camp Pickett back into the business of preparing young Americans for war.

In August 1950, Camp Pickett was reactivated and immediately began to gear itself up for the mobilization and training requirements it would soon face relative to the war requirements. The month was spent primarily in organization, with a constant flow of new officers reporting for permanent assignment. The post headquarters and other sections were also established and staffed during this time period.

In the month of September, elements of the 43rd Infantry Division, a National Guard unit from the New England States, arrived and began refresher training in ordnance matters. Because of this great influx of new personnel various post services such as laundry, clothing sales stores, PX's, and theaters were reactivated. This caused a major increase in the civilian work force which peaked at 880 personnel in September 1950. The division completed its arrival around the middle of September. However, this marked only the beginning. Also during this period, many non-divisional units of the National Guard and Reserve were called to active service and arrived at Camp Pickett to start their initial training program.⁶²

The station hospital, which had served the needs of so many veterans during World War II as a General Hospital, was reactivated on 1 September 1950, and designated as a United States Army Hospital (authorized strength of 1,500 beds). Later in the war, it was to become a large convalescent center for wounded and injured soldiers returning from the eastern theater. Patients were airlifted from the west coast

directly to Blackstone Army Air Base and then transferred to the hospital for care and recovery.⁶³

As the military strength increased, especially from a combat perspective, supported with doctrine and requirements different from that of World War II, a need developed for new training courses designed to meet the challenges of the dramatically realistic and intensive training schedules. Among those instituted were the close-combat course, the combat-village course and a new infiltration course. These were all completed and in use by January 1951.

In December 1950, numerous distinguished visitors arrived at Camp Pickett to review the ongoing training programs and the overall improvements to the installation. Among them were General Dwight Eisenhower, General Mark Clark and General James A. Van Fleet. They were admirably impressed with both the condition of the post and the quality of training being conducted there.⁶⁴

During the first half of 1951, many units arriving at Pickett were being reorganized and redesignated to meet wartime and other duty requirements. This placed additional strains on the installation, due to the necessity to open additional facilities to meet the new demands. This, like all other requirements, was taken in stride with many improvements occurring almost over night. However, by this time, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the glory days of Pickett as a training ground for combat divisions was giving way to the service side of the military. From medical detachments, transportation companies and quartermaster battalions, the camp was slowly consumed with a new

role and somewhat different priorities from those which had been so keenly honed in World War II.

On 9 October 1951, the first increment of the 43rd Infantry Division departed Camp Pickett for transfer to EUCOM. These movements continued throughout the month with the last elements departing on 25 October.⁶⁵

In November 1951, the Medical Replacement Training Center was re-established, with an advance party consisting of approximately 300 officers and men. For the first time in the history of the post, the balance of training conducted had now shifted from combat to service support. This, however, had little impact on the workforce of the camp, for they still had a mission to complete regardless of who was there to train.⁶⁶

By the summer of 1952, the camp was completely involved with the conduct of summer training for an assortment of units. These ranged from the 79th Infantry Division (the first unit reactivated at Camp Pickett in May, 1942), to the 471st Ambulance Company. During the period of 14 to 28 June, a total of 4,458 reservists participated in the summer training cycle. General of the Army Omar N. Bradley visited Camp Pickett on 21 June, and was the reviewing officer of a parade in his honor hosted by the 79th Infantry Division.⁶⁷

Between July and August, the camp continued to utilize the training facilities at its disposal. A total of 6,100 reservists trained during this two month period, along with 1,360 ROTC Cadets from Fort Lee, Virginia.

Throughout the summer cycle (June to August), a grand total of 10,560 reservists participated in some form of training to meet mission standards and requirements. As the Korean war continued, such training would become an invaluable asset to those units ultimately seeing action there.⁶⁸

Camp Pickett continued to train soldiers at a high level through the signing of the Truce on 27 July 1953, which ended the Korean War. At the conclusion of the conflict, the camp began a slow decline in activity. This was followed closely by gradual demobilization, similar to that which occurred at the conclusion of World War II. With training demands at a low ebb, the Army chose once again to inactivate the facility. In June 1954, the camp was placed in an inactive status, and was to operate as a subactivity of Fort Lee, Virginia. At this time, the hospital, laundry, cold storage plants, and other shops were mothballed for long term standby status. A small detachment of personnel, both military and civilian, were left for maintenance and security. However, the facility and its training areas (to include the air base) continued to be used by active and reserve forces to maintain combat readiness and proficiency.

TRANSITION PERIOD

The metamorphoses of change, which had been so much a part of life at Camp Pickett during the war years, continued to have an impact on daily activities of the installation. Located in the then Second US Army area, the camp, as a subactivity of Fort Lee, was discontinued on 16 November 1956. Camp Pickett was reorganized as a Class 1 Activity

under the jurisdiction of the Commanding General, Second US Army. It was attached to Fort Lee for all purposes, with a mission to maintain the Camp on a stand-by basis.⁶⁹

On 1 May 1957, the small caretaking detachment, providing oversight for the installation was reorganized as a US Army Garrison, with continued attachment to Fort Lee for support.⁷⁰ Active duty units from Lee and reserve units from the surrounding areas continued to use the excellent training facilities located on the installation. The air field was also being used regularly by the Airborne Department of the Quartermaster School located at Fort Lee. However, even with these activities ongoing, it was a far cry from the levels of training conducted during World War II and the Korean conflict. Many wondered if this slow trend would continue, or if the Camp would be closed down altogether.

By the end of 1960, the Army, it seemed, was determined to activate the Camp, although not fully. The Commanding Officer of Pickett was also designated as the Commander of Camp A.P. Hill (a similar training installation located close by). His mission was to command activities and units assigned or attached to Camp Pickett; provide administrative and logistical support as directed; provide the planning, supply, maintenance and other support as required, to operate a maneuver and training area for units of the active Army and Reserve Components; and to coordinate training in the Pickett-Hill Training Facility (GO 139, Second US Army, 28 December 1960).⁷¹

This situation continued until September of 1963, when yet another change occurred which impacted Camp operations. By GO 132, dated 27 September 1963, the garrison activity was discontinued at Camp Pickett. The mission to provide administrative and logistical support in the training of active Army and Reserve Component forces reverted to Fort Lee. Even though the facilities at Pickett would continue to be utilized, control would rest elsewhere. Several years passed under this arrangement, and it was not until 6 September 1972, when a garrison was once again organized at Pickett.⁷²

Less than a year later TRADOC was organized effective 1 July 1973. Its mission, in broad terms, was to develop and manage training programs, and command installations assigned by HQDA. Camp Pickett was listed under Fort Lee and its designation was changed from an inactive (stand-by status) to a semiactive installation.⁷³

The history of Camp Pickett, however, was about to take a notable turn. From its early beginnings in 1941, the Camp had dedicated itself to training soldiers, with little concern for the numerous changes which took place around it. This would change on 16 September 1974. Under the provisions of GO 45, HQDA, effective 30 September, Camp Pickett was redesignated Fort Pickett, a semi-active installation under the jurisdiction of the Commander, US Training and Doctrine Command.⁷⁴ Its mission would remain that of training; to continue to prepare soldiers and units for combat for a future war that all Americans, and especially those at Fort Pickett, hoped would never come.

A PERIOD OF QUINTESSENCE

Fort Pickett had now reached a plateau in its history, one in which continuous change would no longer pose a serious problem to the mission. Throughout the remainder of the 1970s, and the next decade, garrison personnel dedicated all of their energies to the production of quality training and the maintenance of exceptional training facilities.

Initially, the predominate usage of the Fort came from reserve and national guard units located in the local area and along the eastern seaboard. They came to Pickett during their Annual Training period each year, from April to September. This bolstered the post population by about 20,000 personnel, which greatly assisted the local community in making ends meet.

However, in 1983, units of the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines, both active and reserve components, began to utilize Fort Pickett as a major training area. This increased dramatically the number of units which rotated through the post, with a concurrent increase in personnel (from 23,000 in 1982 to 101,000 in 1983).⁷⁵

This level of training tempo continued throughout the remainder of the 1980s. Each year, new challenges were presented to maintain a facility where all services could have their needs met. As new doctrine and techniques developed, Fort Pickett had to change and work hard to keep ranges and other devices current with the requirements. An example was the construction of a 16-building mock combat city, which was a collective training facility for Military Operations in Urban Terrain

(MOUT). This complex, with the live fire MOUT assault course, was the first design of its type to be completed by the Army in 1984.

The last major organizational change to occur at Fort Pickett took place on 1 October 1986 (Permanent Orders 70-15, dated 24 April 1986), at which time the post was removed from the jurisdiction of the Commander, TRADOC, and assigned to the United States Army Forces Command and attached to Headquarters, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as a sub-installation where it remains to this day.⁷⁶

In all, from the time Fort Pickett was redesignated a fort (1974), to the present (1992), over 1,000,000 active and reserve component soldiers have called Fort Pickett home. Through four wars (World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Desert Storm) citizen soldiers have trained and maintained, using the facilities at Fort Pickett. Its history is as varied and distinguished as that of the units who rotated through. For in the end, the successes enjoyed by these organizations, is a direct reflection of what they learned at Pickett.

The only question remaining concerns possible future roles for Fort Pickett, now that the Army is downsizing. It is apparent, if the last 50 years are any indication, that the installation will survive, and will continue to provide expertise and facilities to National Guard, Reserve, and active component units from all services. Of course the level of activity will depend on many factors, with the greatest being appropriate funding to maintain the installation. But, will it be possible, in a time of diminishing resources, coupled with base closures, to actually increase the utilization of the post? The answer may be yes,

given the determination of the garrison personnel and the local community.

THE FUTURE

In the years ahead, the United States will face unprecedented challenges, risks and opportunities in a volatile, unpredictable world. The challenge for the Army, in this era of change, will be to prepare for the future without losing sight of present opportunities and inherent risks of evolving security challenges around the world.

The Army then, must address and resolve two primary issues if it is to succeed in its current and future mission:

- First, the Army must be able to maintain a trained and ready force to meet ongoing worldwide commitments for rapid action in unforeseeable contingencies. This will require the Army to shape the force during a period of downsizing, with greatly reduced financial resources. Training then, becomes the operative word and is the ultimate key to maintaining the decisive edge.⁷⁷ Training facilities must be maintained and made available to the total force (active, reserve, and national guard) to meet the diverse and specialized requirements.

- Second, the Army must make the most of every opportunity to train with allies. As the proportion of the Army deployed overseas decreases, and the emphasis shifts to contingency operations; it becomes more important than ever that the ability to fight alongside our international friends is improved.⁷⁸ The primary question then becomes, where does the training take place? With the loss of training areas in Germany,

coupled with the political and financial unacceptability of most other alternatives in other parts of the globe, the solution must be developed in the United States.

From the facility side of the issue, Fort Pickett, as proven in the past four wars, was and is uniquely qualified, equipped, and manned to meet this requirement across the spectrum. In time of war, Pickett is one of the largest mobilization stations on the east coast. It has responsibility for mobilizing over 60 units and 28,000 personnel. To meet its training mission, the installation offers 46,000 acres of maneuver and training area, 20 direct fire ranges, over 60 indirect firing areas, and several engineer training areas.

Today, the post is hard at work unloading, refurbishing, and bringing up to standard many pieces of equipment returning from Desert Shield/Desert Storm. All must be fully mission capable prior to the arrival of reserve component units for their Annual Training cycle. This is the procedure now, and will be in the future, should the United States go to war again. Mobilization and training centers such as Fort Pickett are needed now and in the future, if the Army Chief of Staff truly means to support the imperatives and vectors of the Army.

Fort Pickett continues to look forward and is now beginning to meet the specialized needs of organizations such as the Special Operation Forces. This installation is ideally suited for almost every aspect of their training. The active air field, multiple drop zones, a large exercise area (to include the MOUT facility) and assault strip, provides unique capabilities unequalled outside major military installations on the east

coast. Additionally, due to its location, seclusion provides an asset which is needed to ensure maximum mission accomplishment and flexibility. Even though remote, it is centrally located in southeastern Virginia and is only one to four hours from Fort Bragg, Fort Eustis, Quantico, Camp Lajeune, A.P. Hill, Fort Meade, and Fort Lee. This adds not only to accessibility, but facilitates rapid movement from one location to another, especially in the Special Operations arena.

There are some who would say that there are already enough training centers. However, as CONUS based units continue to increase, and dependency on the reserve components continues to be an important part of the readiness and training effort of the total force, the demand on extant training centers also will increase. This, coupled with the ever expanding areas that must be environmentally protected, may mean less area and time for units to train. Fort Pickett is an the ideal wedge; it can provide a perfect environment for all training requirements, for all services, and for all contingencies.

As DOD strategy moves from forward deployed forces to rapid response tailored forces, it is important that the United States not only maintain an installation infrastructure that will allow for rapid mobilization and deployment, but also maintain credibility with all allies. By planning, coordinating, and training with them, both in their country (where applicable) and in the United States, this credibility will be enhanced. It is not too visionary to begin planning for a CONUS Allied Training Center which will allow company through brigade/regiment sized allied units to train side by side with US active and reserve units.

The exercise would be similar to Reforger and would have the added benefit of being more economical for the defense budget. It would also bring foreign dollars into the United States, thus helping to reduce the trade imbalance. Because of Fort Pickett's location, the ease with which the installation could expand to absorb such a mission, the availability of rail, air and land access, and the existing facilities, all make this post an ideal spot for just such a facility.

It is not too far reaching to see that in the not too distant future, an allied exercise will occur that has several countries staging out of their own areas of operation and deploying to forward staging areas at A.P. Hill, Eustis, Lee, or Fort Bragg. They would then move to Fort Pickett to relieve the 82d Airborne, 101st Air Assault and Special Operations Forces, carrying the battle to the "enemy". From this point, they would pursue to Fort Bragg and/or Fort Stewart to conclude the campaign, and then redeploy back to their homeland. This scenario would provide excellent training benefits, from developing interoperability with our allies, to accessing current and future doctrine. All of this could be accomplished with a reduced cost to DOD.

Fort Pickett has been and will continue to be an important part of the US military's strategic planning as it prepares for actions that cover the entire operational continuum. As identified above, Fort Pickett's role in that strategy will be a function of the amount of vision the Army Leadership has in conjunction with identifying the types and numbers of facilities required to train the force and how far the body politic will allow them to interface and train with our allies. Fort Pickett will be

ready, just like it always has.

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