

Battle Replacements

¶ WHEN THE FIGHTING DURING AND AFTER THE assault on the beach has been bitter, and the ranks of the veterans are growing thin, there soon appears a point at which fresh effort must be produced by the introduction of fresh troops to replace those who have fallen. The solution to this problem of casualties and lost momentum seems simple; just replace those casualties with men who have the same skills. Our classification system allows us to specify these skills and it but remains for G-1 to place a requisition for the new men.

If war were fought entirely by machines, such a method would be ideal. However, although the needles of the classification expert unerringly slide into the proper holes and select so many truck drivers and so many riflemen, this method does not insure that these men will fit into the team of which they must become a part. It does not mean that they know, or can work with, the leaders under whom they must serve. Nor does it provide men with the superior training and discipline which the veterans of a fine fighting unit invariably possess. It becomes evident then that there are intangibles involved in this problem of replacement in battle which complicate the solution. This study will attempt to evaluate this problem, but only from the viewpoint of the receiving end of the process.

Let us look at a solution used within one Marine division during the last war. Replacements were received in blocks known as replacement drafts during the period in which the division was training for its next operation. These replacement drafts were assigned a two-fold task: first they were required to function as the labor element of the shore party, and secondly they were to be used to replace battle casualties.

In order to function in these two roles, the replacement drafts had to receive two kinds of training, shore party and infantry. Fortunately

they joined the division some forty-five days prior to the operation so that time was available in which to give this required training. Upon joining, the drafts were assigned to the pioneer battalion of the division and comprehensive training programs and schedules were prepared. All training, both infantry and shore party, was to be given under the supervision of the pioneer battalion. This program was carried out.

¶ THE DIVISION went on campaign. Since it became a costly struggle, the day soon arrived when it became imperative that new, fresh infantrymen carry on the assault. Replacements were released from their shore party duties and reported through regiments to front line battalions. In the front line battalion of which I have personal knowledge, the assigned men were received by the S-1 well in rear of the front lines, were then catalogued, welcomed to the unit, and assigned by name to certain companies. With the first such group of men it was possible to wait until the battalion went into reserve to put these men into their squads. Under this condition a small amount of training was given them in the tactics they must soon employ, and they developed some team spirit and came to know their squad leader at least. As casualties grew, however, it became impossible to wait for a period in reserve to integrate the new men. They had to be infiltrated into the lines under fire; as a consequence they did not know the men or leaders with whom they had to fight, they lost confidence because they felt alone and because they knew they were not trained as only veterans are trained in being combat wise and "hard to kill." It was found that the introduction of replacements in this manner did not lead to increased momentum in the attack but had a vicious effect on the cycle of casualties. The lack of confidence mentioned above required

Keeping engaged units up to effective combat strength was one of the open secrets of American military success. The Marine replacement system in World War II can be improved upon by training the replacements with the troops they will replace

that in the attack these men be led and encouraged at great personal risk by the few veteran noncommissioned officers remaining. This led to increased casualties among these leaders, resulting in more casualties among the untrained (relatively speaking) replacements, and thus introducing a more desperate situation within the battalion requiring that more replacements be fed in under the same bad conditions. By the end of the operation the replacement problem was becoming acute and it seemed a better solution must be found for the future.

Why did the system break down in this case? Every effort had been made by thorough prior planning to utilize the replacements and the time in the most efficient manner. I believe that the primary reason was because courage, the well-spring which provides the forward movement of troops in a tough assault, depends—within our forces—to a great extent upon the American characteristic of teamwork, and that the described system of battle replacement worked against this principle in that these men entering combat for the first time found themselves not among friends but strangers. Their dominant emotion became one of self preservation rather than a will to advance the team. Aggressiveness was lost. In attempting to encourage aggressiveness, tried battle leaders were forced to unduly hazard themselves and thus casualties were increased among this group—casualties extremely difficult and sometimes impossible to replace for a long time.

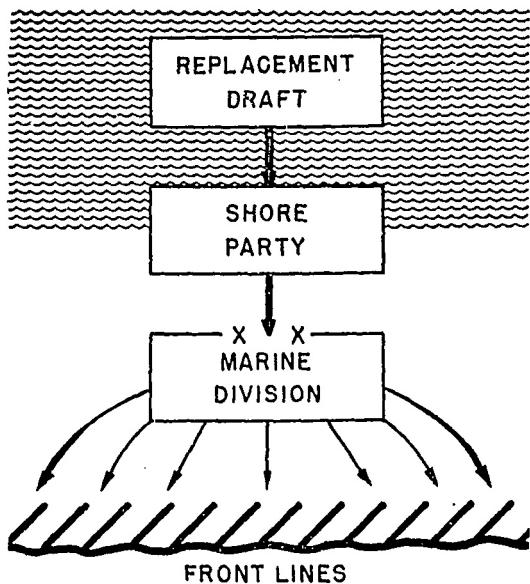
This is not a new thesis. It has been advanced by several writers. In particular it has been realized in the Marine Corps where, first, thorough inculcation of the pride of being a marine is given to every marine, and second, pride of being a member of any particular unit is ingrained in the individual. This thesis is new, however, as applied to replacements. For replacements became a serious problem only in war, in large scale battle and not in peacetime or in small wars. In the unavoidable haste of drafting men who might not otherwise volunteer to be a marine, of giving them intensive basic training, of getting them overseas into a combat unit, there simply is not time to *deeply* ingrain into

every replacement marine sufficient pride in the Corps so that a group of these new men can be thrust into combat and maintain that pride to a sufficient degree to transcend all personal fear. The remedy must lie therefore in the second alternative. The replacement must be possessed of pride in his unit in general and great pride in and camaraderie with his particular leader and squad members. This is the basic solution. But how to accomplish this is a problem in itself, and the real solution therefor lies in the technique of handling and supplying replacements—the replacement method.

• BEFORE WE ANALYZE the problem let us see if there is anything we can learn from the experience of the Army during the past war. From the tenor of articles in recent Army periodicals it would seem that there was realization that this factor of teamwork was not developed by their methods either. Generally speaking these reports indicate that the Army used a pipeline system in which there was very little chance for the formation of any kind of group embodying a strong feeling of comradeship, and in which there was no chance for good integration of replacements with their fighting team members except in rare instances when a whole division might be out of the line for a considerable period. The problem thus seems to be universal among infantry forces.

We are concerned with the replacement problem during an amphibious campaign. There are certain characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages peculiar to the replacement of casualties during this form of combat.

We first note that because of the lengthy planning period involved in an amphibious operation, and the extreme importance of the assault on the beach, a landing force will normally enter combat at full strength or better and its component divisions will normally have a varying but rather extensive period of training in between operations. This creates, in effect, a system of pulling divisions out of the line for relatively long periods of time. In relation to replacements, this is an extremely important advantage which must be utilized to the utmost.



System for most Marine operations in World War II was to use replacement drafts initially to supplement the shore party. Replacements were fed into the lines as individuals as casualties occurred.

Another advantage is that oftentimes a landing operation can be aggressively pushed to a successful conclusion in a relatively short time and before any replacements become necessary. It must be emphasized that counting upon this factor in replacement planning would be a highly dangerous procedure, since there is no guarantee the landing will go according to plan or time table.

This brings us to the corollary that when a landing is opposed and casualties occur, they are often high because of the assault nature of the operation, and the imperative need to get established ashore quickly despite all obstacles. Then is when the greatest difficulty arises regarding replacements. It is extremely important in an amphibious operation that the momentum of the attack be maintained, yet the assault on the beach may often operate to bring the attack to a standstill because of resistance encountered and casualties suffered. Then replacements will be needed quickly to restore the forward movement of the attack, but these replacements must be highly trained in a specialized form of warfare. This points up the principle disadvantage which the amphibious element gives to the replacement problem.

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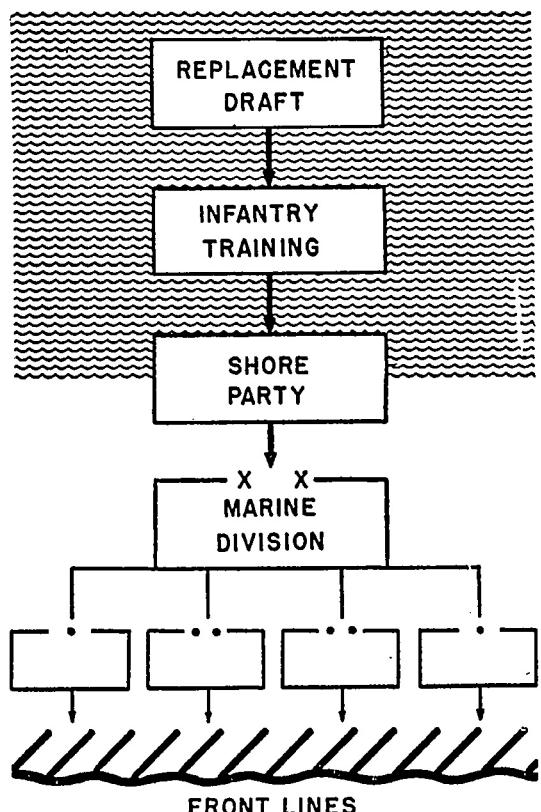
is often possible to give each Marine division its replacements well in advance of the next battle, as pointed out above, still there are limitations in shipping which must be considered. This may mean that the replacements originally assigned the division are all that can be brought to the objective area for a long time. It also means that additional personnel cannot be transported in the assault shipping for shore party work, if replacements are also to be taken. Therefore these replacements will almost always have to perform shore party duties in the initial stages of the assault before they are required to replace battle casualties.

An analysis of all of the above considerations shows, I believe, that an amphibious operation presents a greater opportunity for the satisfactory solution of the replacement problem than does normal land warfare, principally because in such an operation we will have had our replacements with us for a considerable period of time and will have been able to integrate them into the team—if we have adopted the proper method.

It is evident that the solution lies in the proper training and handling of these replacements during the period between reception in the division and entry into combat—a golden period of opportunity presented to us by the peculiarities of the amphibious campaign. *Training is the key.*

There are several methods which have been used or might be used. The first of these is to train the replacements as a group under the infantry, loaning them out for the necessary periods during which shore party training must be given. Under this system, it is contemplated that a leavening of combat veteran noncommissioned officers would be provided the group and that in this way small units (squads and platoons) could be set up within the replacement draft and kept intact. Battle replacement would be accomplished by sending into the line an entire squad or platoon, completely withdrawing the remnants of the unit which they relieve.

THE ADVANTAGES of this method are that training is received under the supervision of the infantry in what may be considered the most important of the two jobs the replacement must accomplish, and that replacements in battle are made by the substitution of entire, fresh units of the size of a squad or platoon, thus relieving a tired, shot-up unit of the same size. The disadvantages of this method are several in number.



A modification of the World War II system was to give the replacement drafts additional infantry training prior to employment as shore party, use them as units to replace shot up squads and platoons.

First, it may be difficult to obtain the required leavening of combat hardened noncommissioned officer mentioned earlier without which the training and discipline of the replacement draft will not come up to standard. Officers in some number would be needed also and might be hard to get. In short, the replacement group assigned to a regiment under this system would tend to become a bob-tailed orphan group rather than an integrated part of the regiment, any battalion, or company. This consideration alone is enough to disqualify this method. In addition are the facts that shore party training would suffer to some extent, and that replacement by squad is not always practicable nor is one squad always shot up so much more than its neighbors that such relief could be accomplished by other than drawing lots.

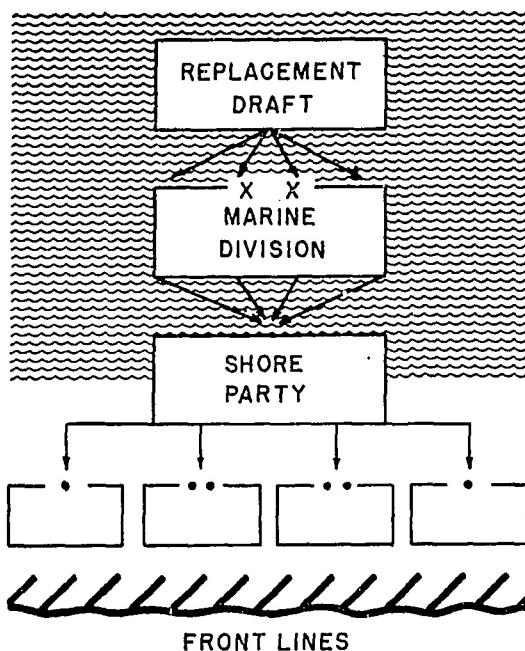
THE SECOND METHOD which might be analyzed is that of training the replacements in a

division school or in a group assigned to the pioneers. This has the obvious advantage of uniform schooling and development of division spirit. But the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages when considering this method. First, the infantry training will never be up to the standard of that received day in and day out with an infantry unit; and second, there is no feeling of integration whatsoever with the infantry as a whole or with any specific infantry unit, nor do the men ever get to know, even by name, any of the men with whom they will later work.

• A THIRD METHOD presents itself for handling of replacements. The draft could be broken up and assigned to infantry regiments as overstrength personnel with explicit orders that they be reassigned down to squads. This order would prevent their being formed into special working parties, etc., which would defeat the purpose of assignment as overstrength *infantry*. These men would thus become integrated immediately into a particular squad. Day in and day out they would receive that tough grinding work in the field; and this is the only way in which infantrymen can ever learn the many specialties which they must master. Special schools, or the training of new men in one group, can never impart to them the tricks of the trade of taking pill-boxes, assaulting behind close supporting fires, employing teamed aggressiveness and fire and maneuver to advance the small unit, or, finally, just keeping alive on the battlefield. Such instruction can only be obtained by living with men who have done these things and survived, and training with those men as a part of a team.

True this system may require squads of up to fifteen men during the training period. However, this does not seem to be any disadvantage. It should be as easy to train four BAR men within a squad as three. Two of them would simply function together—the old-timer showing and teaching the new-comer as the squad went through field training and maneuvers.

At intervals, or for a stated period of time, each regiment would have to furnish to division for schooling by the pioneers, a group of stated size which would be the augmentation for the shore party. In the main these men would be those same replacements which we have been discussing, but there is no reason that they should have to be. One of those men might well have proven himself to be the best bazooka man or



The author suggests that replacements be trained prior to the operation as part of the unit they will eventually join. Then as casualties occur the replacements are to be assigned to the units with which they trained. In effect, each squad and platoon would maintain its own replacement reserve.

demolition man in Company A. There is no valid reason why his services should be lost to the company during its assault on the beach in the coming operation. Hence another man is sent from that company in his place—a man who does not possess a skill so essential to the critical leading attack.

There may be some who claim that shore party training will suffer and that this phase of the amphibious operation is too important to slight in that manner. The answer is this: While shore party training received in this manner may not have quite the degree of excellence as that which would be received were the replacements permanently under the supervision of the pioneer battalion, there is little doubt that the training which would be received by sending them to a pioneer school at intervals would be of sufficiently high standard so that the performance of the shore party would not be perceptibly affected. Furthermore the purpose of logistical support is to further the attack of the infantry and therefore any provisions made to keep this

attack moving should receive precedence over other considerations.

After surveying the advantages and disadvantages of the various methods discussed, I believe that the last one given—that of integrating the replacements as individuals with the squads of the infantry—gives the best prospect of successful solution of the problem. When replacement of casualties was required, those men would report back to the squads with which they trained. Naturally casualties would not occur in such a neat pattern that each would be filled by a man who had trained for that exact job in that exact squad. But a great number would, and the supplying of total strangers to a small unit would be kept to a *minimum*, and that is the most important factor in maintaining the impulse of the attack in any group of men. Those men who could not step into the exact job they had held during the training period would in all probability go to the same platoon, at least. A few might have to be assigned only to the same company. However, the over-all effect should be beneficial and a distinct improvement over present methods.

Lest it be thought that this is written as an answer to a problem of the past war only, let it be remembered that all forecasts of the nature of future war are quite in agreement on at least two points: First, that there will be high casualties resulting from the use of weapons already perfected (such as the proximity fuse, the rocket barrage, and the atom bomb) and from those either not yet perfected or which are secret and not known to the average military man; and Second, that to avoid complete casualties from these horrible weapons of the future the greatest possible dispersion will be necessary in all military formations, and that this will increase the awful feeling of loneliness on the battlefield and the fighting man's powerful inner need of being a member of a team of comrades whose every capability and limitation is well known to all members.

Both of these conclusions simply emphasize the problem of battle replacement. Replacements will be even more necessary in the next war, and they must be integrated with their future fighting fellows even more closely than in the past so that the dispersed independent action of small units may be maintained in spite of casualties and the aggressive will to win of the Marine Corps will never be impaired.

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