

LITERACY TRAINING IN THE ARMY

This paper briefly sketches the efforts of the Army to educate illiterates and functional illiterates from World War I to the present. The problem of soldiers with no or limited reading ability has been with the Army since its foundation. The increasing technical nature of military service has made this problem more visible and its solution of greater concern to the Army. Very little information on literacy teaching in World War I or the program conducted during the Korean War was available for the preparation of this study. A great deal of information, which can only be summarized here, is readily available on the evolving means with which the Army attempted to train these men during World War II. During the Vietnam War, the Defense Department launched Project 100,000 in an attempt to make use of men of low mental classification. From the literacy program started during the Vietnam era, the Advanced Individual Training Preparatory Training has evolved into the Basic Skill Education Program of today.

World War I

Approximately 25 percent of the men enrolled under the Selective Service System during World War I were illiterate. Training of these men began in development battalions attached to each of the depot brigades which had been established to furnish replacements. The training of illiterates continued after the war in Army schools with the hope that it would not only improve the recruits,

but in so doing it would stimulate sentiment in favor of better educational opportunities for society as a whole. Six booklets of Army lessons in English were used. Each lesson, while primarily a lesson in reading and writing, was at the same time a lesson in history, civics, hygiene, and other elementary knowledge considered essential in making the men useful citizens.¹

World War II

Prior to 1940, the Census Bureau determined literacy by asking the individual or an acquaintance whether the individual could read or write. In 1940, the bureau switched to defining literacy in terms of the years of school completed. A study showed that of those who had completed four years of school, only one in twenty was illiterate. Anyone with more than four years schooling was listed as literate, and those who had completed less than five years were considered functionally illiterate.²

The War Department accepted the Census Bureau definition of literacy when it developed its mobilization plans. In October 1940, provision was made to form special training battalions to train, among others, illiterates. No directive to establish these special training units was issued during 1940. Prior to 14 May 1941,

¹ Elbridge Colby, Education and the Army (Boston: The Palmer Co., 1922), pp. 11, 15 - 17.

² Gordon A. Larson, "Review of the Research and Literature on Occupationally-Related Literacy," n.d.

6,374 men were inducted who could not read and write, but there were 60,000 "so-called illiterates" in the Army when the requirement that inductees have the equivalent of a fourth grade education went into effect on the following day. Men who did not have a fourth grade education were deferred from the draft from 15 May 1941 to 1 August 1942. However, those who passed the Minimum Literacy Test prescribed by the War Department also were eligible for induction. This standard remained in effect until the following August when the Army began to accept illiterates not exceeding 10 percent of all white and black registrants accepted in any one day.

Army and mobilization regulations provided for the establishment of special training schools or units for men of poor educational background. On 28 July 1941, the War Department directed that special training units be organized at each replacement training center. From 1 August 1942 to 31 May 1943, 107,075 illiterates were inducted. No figures are available for the functional illiterates who entered the Army between May 1941 and July 1942. The number of local schools for illiterates or low-literates increased rapidly in 1942 and was over 384 by May 1943³. While some means of giving illiterates elementary courses in reading and writing was essential before assigning them to units, the operation of unit and

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Samuel Goldberg, Army Training of Illiterates in World War II (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951), pp. 8 - 13, 62, 148 - 52.

post special training units created an extra burden for commanders also conducting normal operations. Units had neither the time, the instructors, nor the teaching aids to make illiterates quickly available for regular training. During the emergency period and for the first few months of the war the problem was relatively minor. The two Quartermaster Replacement Training Centers, for example, gave special schooling to about 500 inductees by January 1942. Most of these were illiterates, non-English speaking, or Army General Classification Test (AGCT) Grade V men.

In the summer of 1942, the War Department adopted new induction standards based on intelligence rather than literacy, and the number of illiterate and non-English speaking inductees increased rapidly. Within three months, the greatly increased numbers of inductees of this type were overtaxing the training center capacity of all the technical services. The Services of Supply (later Army Service Forces) had to reduce to 3½ percent the ratio of illiterates who could be assigned to most of the technical services. Despite this limitation, enrollment in the special training units continued to increase. At the Camp Lee Quartermaster Replacement Training Center, for example, during the first half of 1943 a monthly average of 1,100 men were trained, compared to 450 during the second half of 1942.

By mid-1942, the Services of Supply proposed that centrally controlled development units, patterned after World War I development battalions, be established. Civilian Conservation Corps instructors who were experienced in training illiterates could be

used to train these men. While the Army Air Forces and War Department G-1 agreed with this proposal, Army Ground Forces and G-3 did not. The administrative and overhead load added by these units and the relatively small number of men who would be trained precluded acceptance of the proposal. The War Department finally decided in the middle of 1943 to transfer the special training units of all the arms and services to the reception centers. Unteachables were then weeded out at the reception centers and only men believed to be capable of normal training were assigned to the branches.

The special training units were established at the reception stations "to relieve organizations, unit training centers and replacement training centers from expending regular training efforts" on the increased number of illiterates and low-literates authorized for each service command.⁴ About 11.5 percent of all men received from reception stations after June 1943 went to special training units. Eighty percent of these trainees were illiterate or non-English speaking with the remainder being AGCT Grade V men. From June 1943 through May 1945, over 260,000 men went through these units, of whom over 220,000 were forwarded to regular basic military training. As of 1 September 1945, 800,774 AGCT Grade V non-English speaking and illiterate personnel were procured for service.

Men assigned to special training units received three hours of academic and five hours of military training daily. A maximum of

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AR 615-28, 28 May 43.

twelve weeks training was authorized. Between November 1943 and November 1944, it was possible to keep men in special training units for as long as sixteen weeks. In FY 1945, 79 percent of the men in training completed training in sixty days or less and 44 percent required less than thirty days.⁵

By the end of the war, the training efforts in regard to illiterates were considered to be highly successful. Of those classified at the first grade level, 61.6 percent were taught to read at a fourth grade level. The success rate for individuals classified at higher grade levels was even greater. Various researchers, however, began to question just how effective the literacy training had actually been. It was found that some individuals had been certified as literate without passing the required tests. There was also evidence that many of the men quickly lost what reading and writing abilities they had learned in the special training units soon after being assigned to regular units. Only 10.7 percent of the participants in the World War II program had completed more than four years of schooling prior to

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(1) Ulysses Lee, The Employment of Negro Troops (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966), pp. 241, 257 - 58, 263 - 64. (2) Erna Risch and Chester L. Kieffer, The Quartermaster Corps: Organization, Supply, and Services (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1955), Vol. II, pp. 165 - 67. (3) Robert R. Palmer, Bell I. Wiley, and William R. Keast, The Army Ground Forces: The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops (Washington: DA Historical Division, 1948), pp. 396 - 97. (4) Goldberg, op. cit., p. 152.

induction, so that the Army was mostly educating the uneducated rather than providing remedial training for the failures of the school system.⁶ Despite the problems encountered in World War II, the same standards and training methods continued to be used during the Korean War.

STEP Program

On 29 June 1964, the Secretary of Defense outlined to the Secretary of the Army the concept for the Special Training and Enlistment Program (STEP). The Army was to develop a plan to develop a special program for certain mental or medical standards for Regular Army enlistment. The CONARC detailed plan for the conduct of this program was submitted to the Department of the Army on 7 January 1965. Apparently as a result of the outbreak of the Vietnam War, the STEP program was cancelled on 29 September 1965 without being implemented.⁷

Project 100,000

The concept was revived by the Department of Defense in FY 1967 with Project 100,000. In this program, approximately 400,000 men who had failed selective service mental examinations between 1 October 1966 and 1 October 1967 would be accepted for military

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(1) Larson, op. cit. (2) Lee, op. cit., p. 264. (3) Goldberg, op. cit., pp. 275 - 81.

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Semiannual Hist Repts, CONARC ODCSIT, Jul - Dec 64, and Jul - Dec 65.

service. The plan included all aspects of lowering standards for admission into service, including the establishment of new standards, research into characteristics and behavior patterns of lower standard men, training employment, and follow-on study. As a result, a large number of men formerly classified 1Y would be made available for service.

Primary interest was placed on the revision of advanced individual training (AIT) courses. In October 1966, an inter-service working group used the Engineer Equipment Maintenance Course at the Engineer School to develop methods of revising the course in order to aim the course at lower mental Category IV men -- those men scoring between 10 and 30 on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. Subsequently, the CONARC Deputy Chief of Staff for Individual Training selected three training courses -- engineer equipment maintenance, wheeled vehicle mechanic, and supply clerk -- as courses for pilot study and redesign. In February 1967, redesign work was initiated on two more courses -- marine hull repair and telephone switchboard operator. Training was to be keyed to overall accession, rather than on the lowest mental category input, and would be updated and improved to enhance its effectiveness and retention by all personnel.

Each school formed a committee to develop the particular course redesign. The principal subject areas being developed in the study were: validation of the course objective, simplification of course

material, introduction of new teaching aids and techniques, literacy and vocational training in regards to MOS training, revision of tests used to evaluate student employment, and evaluation of effectiveness of course improvement. Four trial classes for each of the first three courses were conducted in early July 1967. As directed by the Department of the Army, input was to be controlled to meet course prerequisites and provide a mix of 25 percent of the Project 100,000, 25 percent other Category IV personnel, and 50 percent above Category IV personnel. Control classes were conducted and taught in the Wheeled Vehicle Mechanic Course and Supply Clerk Course at the Fort Jackson training center under the old program of instruction but with controlled input.⁸

During Phase I of Project 100,000 (1 October 1966 to 30 September 1967), the Army accepted 38,135 men under new mental and medical standards -- 7,735 in excess of the assigned quota. On 28 August 1967, the Secretary of Defense established quotas for Phase II, of which the Army had 60,800 in the mental category and 9,600 in the medical category. In general, recruits in the program tended to be slightly older, more likely to be Negro, and less likely to be a high school graduate than the average Army recruit. Among these recruits during the first two years of the program, 36 percent read beneath the fifth grade level, and a remedial reading program was established to raise their fluency at least to this

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USCONARC/USARSTRIKE Annual Historical Summary, FY 1967, pp. 183 - 84.

level. One half of the mental quota had to score 10 - 15 in the Armed Forces Qualification Test. From July through October 1967, 10,352 project men assigned to 155 courses completed their training with an overall attrition rate of 13.8 percent. The training center attrition rate was 6.0 percent, while that for schools was 37.9 percent.

CONARC in mid-October published and distributed an information letter which presented the background of the project, outlined the Department of Defense policy guidance, explained the statement of purpose of the Department of the Army, and made several conclusions about Project 100,000. Emphasis was placed on the large number of men entering the training system under the new standards, the commitment to a high degree of success in the training of these particular men, the number of problems which could be expected, and the adaptation of training to the learning needs of the mental mix of student input.

In order to evaluate the progress of these men, the headquarters published, and later revised, USCONARC Regulation 310-16 which required the reporting of additional information to support the course records of project men and the monitoring of their performance in various AIT courses. Analyzed data were used to improve the training and distribution of these men so as to ensure the best possible success of the project. As a result of information gathered from these reports, CONARC on 19 October 1967 recommended to the Department of the Army that no further input of project men be made to

fifty-four of the courses and that there be control of the mental mix of input to school courses so that no class would exceed a content of 10 percent of project men.

In the implementation of Project 100,000, all five Army schools participating in the project -- Quartermaster, Transportation, Southeast Signal, Engineer, and Ordnance -- conducted trial classes. The Manpower Management Planning Board, Department of Defense, allocated \$258,700 for work on pilot courses. Of this sum, \$150,000 went to the Ordnance School for development of home study guides and \$108,750 went to the Quartermaster School for HumRRO assistance to the study. The pilot course study conducted at these five schools was completed in May 1968, and CONARC forwarded a final report to the Department of the Army on 14 June.

The Transportation School had 913 students from Project 100,000 between 9 January and 20 June 1967. The range in formal education extended from the fifth grade through the third year of college, with a mean of 9.9 years of education. The functional educational skills in the areas of word knowledge, reading ability, and arithmetic computations ranged from illiteracy through the ninth grade level. The level of formal education was frequently a misleading bit of information. The contrast between the average number of years of schooling (9.9) and the actual grade level at which the student functioned was illustrative of this. The practice of "social promotion" in public schools and the emergence of vocational high schools made the level of formal education an unreliable

indicator of the level at which the individual could function with the learning tools of vocabulary, reading skill, and arithmetic. For example, although 29 percent of the students had high school diplomas and an additional 5 percent had been enrolled in college, not a single one of them could function above the ninth grade level.⁹

Attrition rates for project men in basic combat training (BCT) continued at the relatively low rate of 3 percent during the first six months of FY 1969. Accession rates during the first half of this fiscal year continued at 11.1 percent. The Special Training Company and recycling system appeared adequate for special training requirements. From July to December 1968, project men were assigned to approximately 170 courses for AIT. The attrition rate for these men averaged 9.4 percent -- 19.3 percent for school courses and 6.9 percent at the training centers.

On 8 October 1968, CONARC recommended to the Department of the Army that project men not be assigned to fifty-six military occupational specialties (MOS) for training, a decision based upon attrition experience, an analysis of course complexity, and the numbers of men involved. In these 56 courses, 506 men (55 percent) were losses, a figure representing 18 percent of the attrition for all of Project 100,000. The consistently high loss rate in complex

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(1) USCONARC/USARSTRIKE Annual Historical Summary, FY 1968, pp. 272 - 73. (2) Department of Defense Annual Report, FY 1968, pp. 184 - 85. (3) Office of the Educational Advisor Research Memo No. 20-68, The Performance and Potential of the Project One Hundred Thousand Students, Transportation School, 9 Feb 68.

electronic repair or maintenance courses experienced by project men warranted their exclusion. Of the 56 courses recommended for exclusion, 23 were in the electronic repair field, 6 were in the electronic maintenance field, and 17 were in the mechanical repair field. The remaining ten courses were in other career fields which involved a high degree of verbalization or reasoning ability.

The Department of Defense in mid-September 1968 established new goals for Phase III of Project 100,000 which covered the period 1 October 1968 to 30 June 1969. This 9-month Phase III transition period synchronized the program with the normal fiscal year programming and budget cycle. The Army under the program continued to accept 24 percent of its non-prior service enlisted accessions as Category IV. One half of these, or 12 percent of the total accessions, would be those New Standards Mental Men who had scored between 16 and 20 on the test. Another 6 percent of the total accessions would be those who scored between 10 and 15 plus the administrative acceptees -- those men who failed the test but who were inducted following examination by a psychologist. The total input of Phase III of Project 100,000 was 90,278 -- 27.7 percent of the total Army accessions for the period of 326,223.

During Phase III, CONARC assigned project personnel to approximately 110 courses for AIT. The attrition rate for training center courses was 9.1 percent, as compared to an average of 8.7 percent for all trainees. The attrition rate for school courses was 21.4 percent, compared to the overall average of 10.9 percent.

Generally speaking, experience with the project continued to be satisfactory. During FY 1969, the average schooling of the project men was 10.6 years. Reading ability was low -- the average reading level was 6.2 years, with 14.5 percent of the project men reading below fourth grade level. The project established that men enlisted and inducted at lower standards could be trained to meet entry level MOS qualifications. A total of 97 percent completed BCT, 94.7 percent received a supervisory rating of excellent in efficiency, and 58.9 percent reached a grade E4 level within ten to twenty-one months service.¹⁰

The Army input of Project 100,000 for FY 1970 averaged 735 men per month. No revisions were made to change the acceptance standards for Phases IV and V of the program. By the end of the year, nearly 187,000 men had been accepted into the Army under the program. Thirty percent of the men had a reading ability below the fifth grade level. In 1968, the Army had initiated a remedial reading program for Project 100,000 which was designed to bring the men to a fifth grade level. The name of the program was changed in September 1968 from the Basic Reading Program to Army Preparatory Training, and the student was given this training during a period of from three to six weeks before BCT. A total of 8,907 men participated in the program during FY 1970. The men of the project were trained and assigned in about 145 MOSs, about 125 of which were related to civilian-type skills and trades. At the end of FY 1970, 41 percent were assigned to combat skills and 59

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CONARC/ARSTRIKE Annual Historical Summary, FY 1969, pp. 188 - 89.

percent in support skills. Over 95 percent of the men accepted under this program performed adequately in their jobs.¹¹

FLIT Program

With the redeployment from Vietnam and the move to an all volunteer Army, Project 100,000 was terminated on 1 January 1972 and new entry standards were instituted. Entrance requirements were basically returned to pre-Vietnam entry standards. Accessions in the future would possess minimum qualifying aptitudes for initial entry training and for retraining in at least one other occupational area. They would also possess adequate mental ability to cope with the day-to-day demands of Army life.

During FY 1973, Fort Ord conducted a test of the Functional Literacy (FLIT) program. FLIT was designed to replace Army Preparatory Training, which identified soldiers who could not read at the fifth grade level and provided reading training prior to BCT. The FLIT program allowed the soldier to complete BCT and taught him to read to the seventh grade level, using words and phrases peculiar to his MOS that he would be studying in AIT. This was accomplished within the same six-week time constraints as for Army Preparatory Training. CONARC approved the FLIT concept and on 9 March 1973

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(1) CONARC/ARSTRIKE Annual Historical Summary, FY 1970, pp. 270 - 71. (2) Department of the Army Historical Summary, FY 1970, p. 57.

submitted an implementation plan for the program to training centers conducting Army Preparatory Training.¹²

AITPT Program

The name of this program, which had been developed by HumRRO Division No. 3 using Army Preparatory Training resources located at Fort Ord, was subsequently changed to Advanced Individual Training Preparatory Training (AITPT). This reading program was moved to post-BCT rather than pre-BCT, which allowed the reading training to be job related. Job reading materials were developed in six areas: mechanical, clerical, communications, combat, medical, and cook. It was felt that this approach to eliminating literacy deficiency was more meaningful in enabling the individual to successfully complete the more demanding training programs.

Many of the trainees requiring remedial reading had joined the Army to escape the educational environment only to find themselves participating discontentedly in a pre-BCT reading program. Instead of the hands-on training they expected, they were back in school. A post-BCT literacy program ensured that the individual had made the transition to military life. This, in turn, would result in less disciplinary problems during reading training and a more positive contribution to the Army.

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CONARC/ARRED Annual Historical Summary, FY 1972, pp. 339 - 40, and FY 1973, pp. 324 - 25.

TRADOC conceptually approved this functional literacy program for implementation at all training centers conducting Army Preparatory Training in May 1974, and all training centers began conducting AITPT training. The Army Research Institute conducted an evaluation of AITPT concerning its effectiveness with Army Preparatory Training as well as its effectiveness in improving MOS performance.¹³

In the following years, the training centers continued to study and evaluate AITPT. A Fort Leonard Wood study presented to the Committee of Six on initial entry training in late 1974 questioned the training value of AITPT. Fort Dix also conducted a lengthy study of the program, reporting the results to General Starry in December 1977. The study findings suggested that attendance at AITPT did not significantly increase trainability in AIT and that "reading grade level" as measured by standardized reading tests was an invalid predictor of training performance in non-cognitive hands-on training courses. This was in direct contradiction of a General Accounting Office study published earlier that year.¹⁴ Fort Dix recommended that AITPT be eliminated as cost ineffective and that literacy evaluation and training be integrated into AIT and other individual training courses on a diagnostic-prescriptive basis.

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TRADOC Annual Report of Major Activities, FY 1974, p. 64, and FY 1975, pp. 63 - 64.

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A Need to Address Illiteracy Problems in the Military Services (Washington: General Accounting Office, 31 March 1977), pp. i - iii.

Fort Dix found during the study that the methods for evaluating "functional literacy" skills of trainees were generally inadequate. Standardized reading tests, which measured in terms of reading grade levels, were norm-referenced and tended to evaluate sophisticated reading skills unrelated to MOS training. It was observed during the course of the study that many trainees lacked specific literacy skills related to job performance such as following written instructions, extracting information from an index, and reading charts and graphs. These skills were, to a great extent, independent of those skills measured by standardized reading tests.¹⁵

BSEP Program

In late FY 1977, the Department of the Army, at Congressional direction, began to develop plans to revise the Army high school completion program. The department told TRADOC to establish a Basic Skill Education Program (BSEP) for the provision of on-duty classes designed for remedial or skill training. During FY 1978, the high school completion program was to be separated into two programs -- on-duty BSEP and an off-duty Army high school completion program.¹⁶

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Ltr ATZDGA-PP, MG William A. Patch, Cdr USATC and Ft Dix, to General Donn A. Starry, Cdr TRADOC, 9 Dec 77, w/1 incl.

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TRADOC Annual Historical Review, FY 1977, pp. 286 - 87.

BSEP I was a literacy program replacing AITPT conducted before the completion of AIT/OSUT and designed to raise reading levels to at least the fifth grade level as measured by the Adult Basic Learning Examination Level II. BSEP II was a foundation program conducted after AIT/OSUT to raise general competency levels to a ninth grade level. BSEP III, a functional program also conducted after AIT/OSUT, was directly related to a service member's MOS and was designed to impart academic competencies related to job performance and career growth.

Originally, BSEP was to have tested only Category III and new Category IV new enlistees on the SelectABLE test at the seven TRADOC reception stations. Later, the concept was changed to include all mental categories at AIT/OSUT/TST Phase II sites during processing, thus ensuring the testing of all new accessions and providing for a track on the enlistees from the beginning of the training cycle to the award of an MOS. As a consequence, the pilot study of BSEP I at Fort Gordon, which was to have compared the success in OSUT of trainees completing literacy training during OSUT with those needing, but not receiving, literacy training before completion of OSUT, had to be canceled. BSEP II was implemented Army-wide on 1 July 1978, including all TRADOC installations, three of which reported completion of the instructional portion by participants.¹⁷

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TRADOC Annual Historical Review (Draft), FY 1978, pp. 315 - 16.

Conclusion

Since World War I, differing standards have been used at various times in determining eligibility for enlistment or induction. No matter what the standard, the Army has always had a significant number of men with serious reading problems. All of the remedial programs used during this period have been considered to be reasonably effective. There are, however, several recurring findings regarding literacy training in the Army that should be considered in developing future programs.

Both during World II and the Vietnam War, it was found that graduates of the literacy programs were only marginally effective in the more technical training courses. Short, intensive reading courses cannot provide the competency needed to master highly technical written material, such as required by many electronics MOSs.

Although short, intensive literacy courses may be able to bring an individual to a prescribed reading grade level, experience has consistently shown that these skills will be lost unless constantly reinforced. What has been demonstrated about tank gunnery training is equally true of reading skills. Without constant reinforcement there will be an erosion of ability.

Finally, the problem facing the Army today in contrast to the two World Wars is basically one of salvaging the failures of the school system rather than of educating the uneducated. Success of any program developed by the Army will be made difficult by the

fact that the trainee often enlisted to get away from a school environment with which he could not cope and is immediately placed back in a school situation.

The experience of the Army in dealing with the literacy problem during this century indicate some courses of action, but it also illuminates some pitfalls. The problem of low literacy ability of many recruits will probably continue to be a major concern for some time to come in efforts to create a combat ready Army.

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