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BA Thesis

Keeping the Front Lines Full: The Experience of World War II Army Replacements

On September 16th, 1940 President Franklin Roosevelt signed into law the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940.[[1]](#footnote-2) The drafting of American men into military service thus began, in preparation for the entry of the United States in to what would become World War II. More than ten million men would join the Armed Forces between 1940 and 1945.[[2]](#footnote-3) By the end of the war in 1945, the US Army alone would have a total strength of over eight million men.[[3]](#footnote-4) War was waged in multiple theaters, across four continents. While not all enlisted men fought on the front lines, those who did experienced war at its most intense. Hundreds of thousands of men died, more were wounded, and still the front lines needed to be kept full. Millions of men, previously civilians, came directly from basic training on home soil to the theaters of war to replace those who had fallen victim to combat. These men, combat replacements, faced challenges from friends and enemies alike, yet they also provided the manpower for the United States to win the War. This paper argues that the experience of individual replacements showcases the systematic shortcomings of the replacement system and that the actions and decisions of soldiers demonstrate the tension between peacetime democratic values and the forces of total war.

Combat produced physical and emotional stresses unlike any situation in civilian life. Some men found themselves unable to cope, others managed just to survive, and yet others were able to thrive. Ultimately, the psychological stresses affected every man, causing many to discover a ‘breaking point’ where they found themselves no longer able to cope. In this environment, the brotherhood and comradeship that developed among fellow soldiers was at its most intense, often succeeding to provide the support the men needed to deal with combat. In an effort to survive, men would do almost anything to preserve themselves and those for whom they cared. Combat was an unforgiving environment, where the enemy’s bullet made no distinction between new man and veteran, between a lazy soldier and a careful one. Into this setting, replacements would join their units and attempt to do their duty and to survive.

The way adopted by the United States of keeping the front lines full during World War II was one of individual replacement. When a man was wounded, killed, missing in action, absent without leave, or unfit for duty, a replacement was to join the unit to fill the open place. In practice, a replacement’s arrival was neither immediate nor was the timing predictable. Some units continuously fought understrength as the rate of replacement never caught up to the unit’s casualty rate. The replacement system of the United States during World War II has been widely discredited in the historical literature that deals with the topic. Yet, there exist discrepancies, between this conclusion and insights gleaned from surveys and anecdotal accounts, that bring to light other possibilities and suggest value in pursuing a deeper understanding of the impact of the replacement policy on the challenges men faced, their individual attempts to overcome its deficiencies, and the tension that existed between the realities of war and the values imbued by society in the men. A careful examination of original and secondary sources allows one to reconsider how well or poorly implemented was the replacement policy, how effective or ineffective it was in achieving its goals, and how much the men suffered and adapted as a result.

The varied language used among historians to describe the American replacement policy of the World War II U.S. Army provides an indecisive, albeit negative picture. John McManus, in *The Deadly Brotherhood: The American Combat Soldier in World War II*, states, “the replacement system that the U.S. Army employed during World War II has found many detractors and few defenders.”[[4]](#footnote-5) Among the most visceral of the detractors is Stephen Ambrose who, in *Citizen Soldiers*, claims that “had the Germans been given a free hand to devise a replacement system for ETO (European Theater of Operations), one that would do the Americans the most harm and least good, they could not have done a better job.”[[5]](#footnote-6) This strident rebuke that Ambrose issues is among the strongest of many World War II historians. Lee Kennett, in *The American Soldier in World War II*, describes a more balanced view of the policy as one having “a number of advantages, but [creating] severe morale problems.”[[6]](#footnote-7) Advantages of the individual replacement system include allowing the American Army to keep all its divisions committed to fighting and holding the lines. Ambrose acknowledged that the possible benefits meant the “system seemed to hold great promise.”[[7]](#footnote-8) The top Army brass conducted evaluative surveys and made minor improvements and adjustments to the system throughout the war, but the core fundamentals of the system remained the same.

Suggesting that the problem of replacement morale was the primary issue, as Kennett does, fails to recognize the myriad of other challenges a replacement needed to overcome. The trials of a replacement included enemy fire, extremely poor living conditions, lack of sleep, adjustment to a new unit and new comrades, and the morale issues Kennett does address. Constant fighting and casualties took their toll on veterans who subsequently were harsher in their behavior to replacements. John Ellis, in *On The Front* Lines, writes of one soldier who said regarding his feelings toward replacements, “it was a contempt that was certainly mixed with pity, but I think there’s always something disgusting about victims. You can’t help it… We called them poor sons of bitches, and we almost smiled when we said it.”[[8]](#footnote-9) Cases of malicious intent or ignorance are countered by George Linderman, in *The World Within War*, in which he asserts that such views “describe too harshly the situation confronting new arrivals—conscious, uniform intent of the sort depicted was a rarity—but comradely solidarity did exact a toll of others.”[[9]](#footnote-10) The replacements were the ones who suffered as a result. There is however a tension between the strong sense of brotherhood shared by many soldiers, and the deadly consequences of the actions of certain soldiers who only selectively applied the attributes of brotherhood to protect the men they knew better. Some men were unable to cope and not risk the lives of replacements while others placed the risk squarely on replacements. Many new troops were killed due to inexperience, and some died as a result of malicious actions by other soldiers, but many replacements also succeeded at integrating into their units and army life.

The literature most often considers the effects of the replacement policy on a macro level, addressing strategic military concerns, with little attention paid to how the policy affected the lives of replacements. Two among this group of historians, McManus and Ambrose, consider replacements broadly, addressing their treatment and experiences without considering how replacements were different from previously deployed troops. For the purpose of this paper, replacements are considered a separate group of soldiers, from basic training until they are integrated into a permanent unit. This paper specifically addresses what they thought, how they were treated, and how they overcame the deficiencies of the system they entered. It is a story of individual success and failure within the broader historic context of standardized procedures of the Army at the time.

In many ways, the Army’s operation during the War represented the antithesis of American democratic values. The Declaration of Independence states, as a fundamental truth, that all men are endowed with the inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The Government of the United States was instituted to secure these rights. Bernard Crick, in *A Very Short Introduction: Democracy*, argues that democracy is less about how “all government rests on the consent of the people,” and is better reflected by saying “‘no obedience with representation.”[[10]](#footnote-11) In this sense, the values of American democracy are not reflected in the formal command structure of the Army where front-line combat soldiers have no say in the generals leading them, or the orders they are given. John S. Mill, in *On Liberty*, supports Crick and claims that “the struggle between Liberty and Authority is the most conspicuous feature in… history.”[[11]](#footnote-12) American society was built upon the supreme rights of liberty and freedom, above all others. Yet in the Army, individual liberty was suppressed as the expense of maintaining authority. Other constitutionally protected values such a free speech, individual expression, and rule of law were restricted in non-combat Army situations, and further eliminated in combat. The formation of the Army through a draft proved challenging, given that a balance between protecting societal values and maintaining Army doctrines needed to be struck. A man was faced with the tension between the beliefs of liberty and the controlled environment of the Army and endeavored to cope with such restrictions. Ultimately, the individual soldier was forced to submit his values to those of the Army. The War was about fighting for ones’ values; it didn’t allow men to enjoy to the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The compromise of societal values took many forms in the combat environment. World War II, as a total war, required the unreserved concentration of any involved country’s resources for a chance at ultimate success. It was not possible to wage such a war while maintaining American peacetime values. Whereas enemy shelling was indiscriminate and enemy fire could kill randomly, American society believed that a man could control his own life. Sacrifice of another human’s life for any goal was largely unfathomable during peacetime, and illegal except in extreme cases. Yet in this war replacements were escorted to a “meat-grinder front line,” where a man’s life was insignificant.[[12]](#footnote-13) This is not to say that individual soldiers did not value the lives of others, but rather that “as Eisenhower said… in war everything is expendable… in pursuit of victory.”[[13]](#footnote-14) As the men of war attempted to survive, many endeavored to desensitize themselves to the frequent deaths of fellow soldiers. This was a way to avoid confronting the reality that the rights and freedoms that were being fought for, were compromised for soldiers, veterans and replacements alike. The replacement policy, as an impersonal and flawed system, exhibited the tension that existed between democratic values and the needs of an army waging a war during World War II. In their individual choices as replacements, or as other soldiers interfacing with replacements, some men compromised on their inherent moral values to psychologically and physically survive, while others attempted to hold on to what elements of peacetime values that they could.

In analyzing the psychological views of army soldiers, veterans and replacements alike, a series of surveys, administered during the war throughout all theaters, offers among the clearest view. ‘*The American Soldier’* surveys were conducted by the Research Branch of the Information and Education Division of the United States Army. In total, ‘*The American Soldier’* surveysare a collection of over 230 separate surveys, administered in sum to over a half million soldiers, that target individual aspects of soldiers’ lives, thoughts and actions. The data currently available for this paper include 138 separate datasets from eighty-four studies.[[14]](#footnote-15) The surveys are of varying relevance to the paper. The quality of them as a source is high. Overall, this collection of surveys, “is a record in many ways unique. Never before had modern methods of social sciences been employed on so large a scale, by such competent technicians. Its value to the social scientist may be as great as its value to the military for whom the original research was done,” claims the foreword to an analysis of the surveys.[[15]](#footnote-16) Importantly, the sample size of the data is large enough to enable one to draw valid conclusions; the administering of the surveys was completed through a random and blind process; and various factors that could induce bias were controlled and tested for as best as possible. Inherent concerns regarding possible bias from the self-reporting nature of survey was impossible to eliminate, but our historical distance reaffirms the effectiveness of the techniques applied and the value derived, particularly given the constraints of war and the new techniques that were being used. The surveys represent a mostly reliable source of results, and a way to understand what soldiers were thinking on a macro level.

The analysis of the surveys is aided by the production of a four-volume work, entitled *The American Soldier*. Named after the original surveys, the production of this work was led by Samuel A. Stouffer. Stouffer, a professor who focused his research in the fields of social science, served as the project director for the creation and administration of the surveys during the War. As such, he is well qualified to examine the surveys and his consideration of results and bias is reliable. His qualification is accepted by other historians, such as McManus and Robert Merton, who use his data and analysis. Merton, in *Continuities In Social Research*, endorses the results of *The American Soldier* work, declaring that they represent “a body of empirical findings that push forward on several frontiers of social psychology and sociology.”[[16]](#footnote-17) In addition, he explains that there are “numerous cases in which the systematic data of *The American Soldier* help to clarify and extend social theory.”[[17]](#footnote-18) Merton’s goal is to further the initial, valuable, analysis provided in *The American Soldier* and “to examine selected hypothesis, methods and findings with an eye to their specific implications.”[[18]](#footnote-19) Just as it has been for other historians, Stouffer’s work on the original surveys and their analysis is invaluable in the study of the topics relevant to this paper.   
 Stouffer’s work is specifically relevant to this paper, as he focuses upon the psychological state of troops. While there is a specific section dedicated to the analysis of ‘The Combat Replacement’, it does not seek to evaluate the system of individual replacement. Instead, it seeks to study the psychological effects and discuss “some of these problems arising from the replacement system.”[[19]](#footnote-20) Stouffer, also has the benefit and value of being able to draw upon the complete set of individual results of surveys administered during the War, not just the data set currently available, for his analysis of replacements. As such, *The American Soldier* is able to break survey questions down into sub-groups of respondents for analysis, a technique that is unavailable to others today.

While acknowledging the value to this paper and to many historians since its publication, it is important also to recognize concerns related to the *The American Soldier*. Within the texts, “Stouffer examines the dangers and potentialities of applied social research. He underscores the theme, running throughout the symposium… that exclusive concern with the problems defined as practical by superiors plays havoc.”[[20]](#footnote-21) Limiting the scope of the surveys to issues deemed important by the Army Research Branch restricts their breath and value to social research. The surveys ultimately were developed with the purpose of helping the Army. Regardless of Stouffer’s input and his status as a leading academic within the field of social research, he could not control the full focus and breath of the surveys. The data, while of high quality, were collected for the primary purpose of improvement of the Army. *The American Soldier* is a report produced subsequently, after the war, with these constraints inherent to limiting its scope and precision to subjects that the Army had deemed worthy of study during the war.

In this paper, empirical survey results, diaries, letters and memoirs are cited. These sources are treated as mostly reliable and provide primary insight into the psychological views of soldiers, even though there are some valid concerns about using the limited scope of anecdotal sources. Among concerns, a personal record represents a single man’s view of the battlefield and of army life. It is dangerous to extrapolate to a broader segment of the Army beyond that which the individual comes in contact. Second, memoirs are written after the war ended, with limited primary documentation to support passages. Third, the Army prohibited the keeping of diaries. Diaries thus represent a breach of regulation that can both vouch for the seriousness of the diary keeper and induce some bias. The only people who kept diaries were those willing to break rules, though the group of men who broke Army regulations at some point in time likely was a super-majority. Still, these materials offer a way to understand how men thought and why they acted as they did, and to reconstruct their personal beliefs regarding the war. Anecdotes can provide the personal explanation, in an open-ended manner, to provide important context to the quantitative results of surveys. When the personal information is combined with the survey results, even for different theaters of operation, accurate analysis may be conducted.

Replacement troops began their army careers in the same way as all other Army troops, but without certain benefits enjoyed by units which trained together. All men enlisted or were drafted into the Army, assigned to a training camp, and instructed to report on a certain date. Through 1943, the Army focused on training complete divisions in which men would become a unit before deployment. When new troops were needed, a full unit could join the frontline. In 1944, the focus changed to the training of individual replacements that would fill in for dead, wounded, sick or missing troops in previously deployed divisions. There evolved a significant difference in the training that these men received. As Kennett recounts, “According to the formula used in 1942, the training of a division took exactly a year: forty-four weeks of individual, unit and combined-arms training followed by eight weeks of exercises and maneuvers. Replacements, from the 1944 policy change onwards, were trained in cycles from eight to seventeen weeks.”[[21]](#footnote-22) Additionally, at this point, some men not originally classified for infantry duty were either retrained or given a lightning course and then deployed as a replacement. Not only did this mean that men were trained in a group that was broken apart as each man was deployed individually, but that the actual period of training was abbreviated. Such issues were faced by all replacements, regardless of how they were designated, assigned and deployed.

Despite the fact that World War II was fought in numerous theaters throughout the globe, training “for all the men and units to fight [was] according to a standard program.”[[22]](#footnote-23) There were suggestions to break up the training programs for specific theaters, but they were never implemented. Certain theaters, in response to high casualty rates, “reorganized this procedure and replacements were being indoctrinated by division before being committed into the line,” so as to provide further training.[[23]](#footnote-24) Yet the initial phase did not change. Basic training was the first of many standardized processes and procedures men would face in the army.

There was no glamour in the role of a replacement. No personal attention was paid to him during training. No band played at his deployment overseas as he left home soil. Pvt. Walter Gustafson, a replacement reassigned from the Air Force, wrote in his memoirs about basic training for replacements: “There is more to this being an infantryman than I realized. It seems we are to get about two months ‘Advanced Infantry Training’ –all of us, without exception. If he is at all able to physically, and regardless of his skill.”[[24]](#footnote-25) Gustafson goes on to speak his distaste for his current position saying, “I am glad I had two years and four months in the AAF (Army Air Force) first. I am resigned to this and can take it as well as the rest of them.”[[25]](#footnote-26) Gustafson speaks of no friends that he made during basic training, in comparison to long paragraphs about such friends that he had in his Air Force unit. He and many others endured a process that trained the men for combat and then shipped them out. David Rothbart, a soldier in the 22nd Infantry Regiment, recalls his stateside departure without frills, as troops “were processed through the port in a few minutes including… a quick serving of doughnuts and hot chocolate.”[[26]](#footnote-27) In the army, all men were faced with new challenges, but replacements operated without one of the primary strengths of the army: the sense of brotherhood.

**Replacement Depots**

Once transported overseas, replacements were centralized in replacement depots, known to troops in contorted slang as ‘Repple Depples’. In these, anonymity and loneliness reigned supreme. McManus, drawing upon personal testimony, describes experience in the depots as “the worst aspect of being a replacement,” where men would be “treated shabbily and were not made to feel part of any military organization. Many of them felt like refugees.”[[27]](#footnote-28) Gustafson, who was ultimately assigned to the 9th Army as a replacement after combat finished, describes that the replacement depot buildings in his care were “not heated” and were “normally houses [for] a theological seminary.”[[28]](#footnote-29) His descriptions depict a lonely place filled with uncertainty. Ambrose describes one replacement depot, the 12th in Tidworth, England, as “notorious throughout ETO (European Theater of Operations) for the sadism of its commander, its inefficiency, chickenshit ways, filth, bad food, and general conditions that were not much of a step up from an Army prison.”[[29]](#footnote-30) The conditions certainly did not help a man’s spirit.

In addition to the poor physical conditions, there were psychological challenges. Stouffer claims that, “aside from variable sources of discomfort and dissatisfaction which were subject to correction as experience, time, and facilities permitted, there were certain apparently irreducible sources of psychological disturbance which remained a fairly constant feature of the experience of replacements in depots.”[[30]](#footnote-31) At the heart of such adversity was the policy of deploying replacements, individually, making it difficult for them to develop and maintain friendships. Until a requisition arrived for a specific individual, he was stranded in this no-man’s-land. Ambrose states that, “in the Repple Depple, the soldiers were merely numbers, with no choice as to where they were going to go.”[[31]](#footnote-32) Time in a replacement depot was a worse psychological experience than was integration into a permanent unit, even one engaged in combat. Replacements thus began their careers far differently than did the men in the units they were to join later. Instead of a year together, replacements would come fresh from a demoralizing, individualistic environment to their permanent assignment that often was at the frontline.

The evaluations of the psychological behavior of soldiers and their opinions regarding their time in replacement depots are based on a series of surveys administered to soldiers late in the war. Survey S-204, administered in France in February of 1945, provides value by painting a broad picture of attitudes, though one must take care when analyzing individual results not to extrapolate too much from a limited sample.[[32]](#footnote-33) Survey S-231, administered throughout the Pacific in June of 1945, includes a larger and more varied sample, from which more concrete conclusions may be drawn.[[33]](#footnote-34) In multiple instances, general surveys conducted throughout the war, such as S-204, can be used to corroborate results from more targeted surveys, such as S-231.

Approximately 13% of the troops included in S-204 reported that they had been in the depot targeted for the survey for over two months. Similarly, 11% of a separate group of troops surveyed in Italy in April of 1945, as part of S-177, reported spending three months in a replacement depot.[[34]](#footnote-35) Among the troops in Italy, a further 30% had spent over a month in a replacement depot. By the time the troops surveyed in S-177 reached their permanent units, 40% would have experienced solitary depot life for at least one month. While in the depot system, troops were unable to assimilate into a familiar environment or routine, or make a semblance of a home. When asked, “How many [replacement] depots have you been in,” 48% reported at least two or more. This resulted in a constantly shifting lifestyle in which there was little consistency or certainty to counter the negative effects experienced.

The main complaint of troops in the replacement system was the lack of knowledge regarding their future, uncertainty that went beyond normal army practices. There was no established or known timeframe for deployment, for moving between depots, or even for receiving mail and paychecks. In France, 62% of those surveyed had not received pay within the prior four months. Tellingly, 35% of respondents to S-231 in the Pacific said they ‘haven’t any idea’ in response to the question “Do you think you’ll be assigned to the same kind of Army job for which you are *now* classified?”[[35]](#footnote-36) Such constant uncertainty is poignantly summarized by an individual comment to the survey in the Pacific by a cadreman, an officer who permanently works at a depot:

The principal hardship we all work under is *uncertainty*! It should be possible in dealing with men’s questions to be able to approach the definite answer. Inability to do this hurts the morale of these replacements and casuals and thus they lose confidence in us and everything the depot stands for. It affects their work, their cooperative spirit, and makes the job of everyone doubly hard. Surely we can be able to tell a man that he will be paid within a certain time, and how long he will be here under certain conditions. It is the *little* things that count, these men are still soldiers but they will never do much to help improve themselves if they are unable to find out the things they should know.[[36]](#footnote-37)

As showcased in the response, far more than a man’s training was called into question. The basic standards of everyday army life were not being provided, and the replacement depot, designed to stand as a transition point between training and deployment, was unable to meet these standards. Over 60% of respondents in the S-204 believed that conditions could be either a bit or a lot better than they were, in areas of food, housing, sanitation and time off.[[37]](#footnote-38) Morale was damaged, efficiency was reduced, and this cadre believed that the men would not be able to improve themselves as they prepared for combat. It was damning to the Army and the implementation of the replacement policy that soldiers, who were about to risk their lives, went through such conditions.

Despite the concern of the cadreman previously quoted, there was overall a real lack of personal interest from those stationed in the depots. Responses to the open ended sections of the surveys in both Europe and the Pacific directly address such issues. Men replied saying “they (the cadre) could of taken their time. They tried to get through with us too fast so they would have a chance to [sit] on their ass,” and “those cadres are nor more experienced than we are… the cadres would be lost without that whistle… cadre treats us like dirt under their feet,” and “let’s have better treatment of the casuals (replacements) by the cadre. The general tendency is to figure that they can be run through like so many cattle.”[[38]](#footnote-39) These issues were known to the high command. General Bradley, part of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force which was in charge of all military forces in the European theater, wrote in his memoirs, the problem “could be eased by the assignment of better officers to those replacement depots. ‘The remedy for improving morale among the replacements… [lies] in taking every possible step to see that they are properly taken care of and that they get the feeling that someone is interested in their welfare.”[[39]](#footnote-40) Despite this, the concerns were never seriously addressed. Replacements, clearly frustrated and demoralized, gave the depot system harsh reviews. One man went so far as to say “when this war is over… I’m going to attend the war crimes trial of the men responsible for this system. I want to watch them shoot the bastards!”[[40]](#footnote-41)

The question remains: did the poor experiences of soldiers in replacement depots affect combat performance? Presenting one perspective, a soldier in France responded to the open-ended question at the end of a survey, “After so long [in a Repple Depple] a man doesn’t know whether he’s coming or going; he’s unsettled and anxious and finally just doesn’t give a goddam.”[[41]](#footnote-42) Yet, this negative perception is not borne out in survey responses. Evaluating a group in Italy (S-177), with exterior factors such as education and time in combat controlled for, no empirical lasting effects of prolonged stays in replacement depots were evidenced.[[42]](#footnote-43) It is important to acknowledge the possibility of selection bias here and acknowledge concerns about the reliability of information as a result of the six months time delay between deployment and the survey. To understand this, first it is important to acknowledge that surveys deal with a focused and limited scope in breadth and depth. It could be such that the men adjusted their results to self-report what they perceived to the true situation or the situation that they believed the Army wanted to hear, thus sometimes thus given false or incorrect data. In regard to survey bias, troops who suffered heavily from their time in the depot, who subsequently may have functioned poorly, could have been disproportionately casualties of combat, either physical wounded or psychological unfit for duty, prior to responding to the survey and thus not included (casualty bias). It is impossible however to either quantify or frame the scope of casualty bias due to a lack of details from personnel in the unit and accurate casualty figures. Given that, overall, soldiers were killed indiscriminately of their combat readiness or experience, this bias is likely to be small. Inexperience or incompetence is not the cause of casualty bias, but could increase it.

Psychologically, it may be more likely that the adverse effects of the Repple Depples were deemed less significant, six months later, when compared to adversity of combat.

Once such concerns about bias is acknowledged as possibly being present in unknown quantity, the remaining results showcase that most men reported that they accepted and worked to improve themselves in their new situation, after leaving the depots. After weeks or months suffering from the anxiety of not knowing when or what their mission was to be in a replacement depot, a clear assignment would have been a welcomed end to the uncertainty, even as it brought new challenges that couldn’t be anticipated. If the testaments of soldiers in the depots are to be believed, having a purpose to their position was always going to be an improvement over not knowing. The men already knew that they were destined for the dangers of fighting, but not knowing when to prepare themselves compounded such concerns. Combat brought its own and different stresses, but these were dealt with as they arose at the front, without further uncertainty. While the system may have failed a man during his ‘Repple Depple’ time, he adapted and overcame the challenges. The individual was able to overcome the system and lasting psychological effects of time in a depot appear to have been minimal.

**Deployment and Integration**

The welcoming situation that replacement troops faced upon joining a combat outfit helps to explain the minimal lasting negative effects of the replacement depots. As McManus reports, “replacements were the lifeblood of the U.S. combat army in World War II.”[[43]](#footnote-44) Each replacement was filling a hole in the unit, “new men were always needed to help lighten the load.”[[44]](#footnote-45) Rothbart recounts a day “when 600 replacements joined us… our regiment was at a very low ebb in personnel… our rifle companies were fighting with a strength each of only 50 to 90 men.”[[45]](#footnote-46) A normal rifle company was comprised of 80-250 men. Each new man would take some of the responsibility of achieving an objective for the unit. The assignment of individual replacements to frontline units was a strategic necessity because there were no reserve divisions. New troops were needed for everything from frontal attacks to the mundane sharing of nightly patrol duties, to allow more rest for all the men in the unit. Upon deployment, replacements faced a separate set of people and challenges that would test their mental and physical strengths just as the Repple Depples had done.

Replacements either would enter a unit that was not on the frontline, or one that was stationed on active duty thus providing minimal time to integrate. Those not on the front lines likely were training, resting, rotating position, or being held back in reserve. It was preferable for soldiers within a unit to have a chance to get to know one another before fighting but, often, this was not feasible. Stouffer explains that, “since the need for replacements was heaviest during prolonged and costly action, many men first joined their units during heavy combat in spite of official attempts to avoid this procedure as much as possible.”[[46]](#footnote-47) Out of all the men surveyed in Italy (S-177), just under half saw combat within three days of joining their unit.[[47]](#footnote-48) Among those who saw combat within three days, most of them likely saw it immediately. Numerous replacements joined their units at the line, during fighting. Throughout the sphere of fighting, 65% of all new men were with their new units less than a week before starting fighting, providing minimal time for the majority of units to regroup.

Replacements joined divisions that initially had been formed of soldiers who had gone through the full year’s worth of basic training together. The bonds of brotherhood created during this initial period and strengthened through combat were not extended immediately to replacements. The difficulty that a replacement faced was to integrate with a far shorter period of acclimatization. The training of replacements, while certainly valuable, did not provide them with friendships and was no substitute for combat. There existed dual, urgent challenges: veterans and new troops needed to learn how to work together, and the new troops needed to learn precisely how to survive combat. The strategic military concerns, of having divisions, companies or platoons fighting understrength, dictated the need for replacements to join units engaged in combat, a policy which continued to create these issues.

The military preparedness of replacements was an issue of concern at both the micro level–the unit being assigned replacements– and the macro level–those tasked with running the Army. Regardless of how well troops were integrated socially, if the rookie troops could not fight, any positive work the Army or individuals put in would be for naught. When veteran troops were asked if there was any additional type of training that new troops should receive before being sent in as reinforcements, 61.7% said yes.[[48]](#footnote-49)When asked if “there was any type of training you think new troops get too much of because it does not help in battle,” a similar percentage replied, “no, they need all that they can get.”[[49]](#footnote-50) As a comparison, when veteran troops were asked whether they felt they had received enough training prior to when they first entered combat, 59.9% responded positively.[[50]](#footnote-51) The gap between the perceived preparedness of new troops and that of veterans points to the effect of a briefer training period, which left replacements short of the standard of training that the veterans felt they had received. The military tried to address such issues by focusing on quality versus quantity, tailoring the training of new replacements to better reflect the needs of the front. However, personal accounts of soldiers reveal troubles with the standard of training. Later mistakes often were due to insufficient mastery of basic standards of safety, such as the situation recounted by Charles Miller in the 75th Infantry Division. He described a new man on patrol who accidentally fired a shot because he had let his gun catch one of his uniform buttons.[[51]](#footnote-52) This and other related errors not only risked the lives of the replacements, but of the veterans around them.

The ways in which established units responded to replacements played a crucial part in the integration of replacements. Considerations included veteran attitudes, how quickly a unit was deemed cohesive, and how replacement troops learned how to operate on the front lines. While each of these impacted the extent and speed of integration of replacements, the effect of veteran attitudes sparks the greatest debate. Survey results from S-234BE[[52]](#footnote-53) show 79% of respondents concurring that when a replacement came into an outfit during combat, the veterans usually tried to help him out all they could.[[53]](#footnote-54) This position is supported by McManus who, in a summary analysis drawing upon anecdotes and survey data, asserts that “in spite of popular notions to the contrary, American combat replacements were not loathed and mistreated by combat men as dangerous, foolhardy ‘greenhorns’… In most cases veterans treated replacements well and did all they could to help them in combat.”[[54]](#footnote-55) McManus also gathered personal accounts such as those of Marvin Reickman, a replacement in the 24th Infantry Division in the Philippines, who recalled that “the older men were helpful in teaching us how to stay alive and be effective.”[[55]](#footnote-56) Harry Arnold of the 99th Infantry Division commented that “we older men always felt sorry for the new replacements coming in, and did what we could to point them in the right direction to improve their survival chances.”[[56]](#footnote-57) These points of view are backed up by further survey results, in one case where 88% of respondents stated that veterans had done as much as they could to be helpful to newer men.[[57]](#footnote-58) To collectively survive, being able to count upon a replacement and trust him was important.

While persuasive and positive, these survey results and anecdotal accounts differ starkly from those gathered by John Ellis and others. Ellis states that officers and veterans were “tempted to use [replacements] almost as cannon fodder.”[[58]](#footnote-59) Ellis further recounts that “another American was even more blunt, recalling a sense of contempt for the… hapless rookies, ‘a contempt with which even the gentlest of us viewed these unqualified victims of tactical necessity’.”[[59]](#footnote-60) To these men, the method of survival involved placing the replacements in the greatest dangers to avoid it themselves. Gerald Lindermann further described this negative view of the situation saying, “the Sergeants don’t even bother to learn your name. They don’t want to know anything about you.”[[60]](#footnote-61) Similarly, Ambrose recounts in *Band of Brothers* that the men in Easy Company “took care not to learn their (replacements’) names, as they expected them to be gone shortly.”[[61]](#footnote-62) This behavior may have been an attempt to keep a personal emotional distance from men who might soon be killed or wounded, but it also showcased a lessened sense of brotherhood. When the stakes and dangers were high, veteran troops may have been more willing to risk the lives of men they knew less well than those of their closer friends. Keeping an emotional distance seemed to create fewer moral issues regarding the treatment of replacements.

For each personal account of soldiers responding favorably towards replacements, there is one of less positive treatment. Yet the overwhelming majority of responses in Survey S-165 indicated that as men reflected back on the war, after it was over in 1945, they felt that veterans had done a good job. It is possible, then, that the survey respondents acknowledged the challenges of battle that everyone had encountered, and felt that veterans and replacements had done their best, given the circumstances. When faced with the stress of combat, the poor living conditions, and the possibility of imminent death, individuals acted as they viewed necessary in order to survive. These conclusions do not discount the tales of malice nor suggest that all troops had this positive experience or reflection but, rather, advocate that there was not a catastrophic breakdown in unit cohesion between veterans and replacements.

There were many ways that replacements offered veterans a mental break from active duty. Corporal Sy Kahn, of the 244th Port Company, recounted how when stationed in New Guinea and new replacements arrived “one of these rookies asked… where the nearest town was; another wanted to know about the women and liquor situation.”[[62]](#footnote-63) Later, when replacements joined while Kahn was stationed out of combat, replacements “asked a million questions about everything from beer to women… [and how] tomorrow they will undoubtedly hear about Gloucester and Biak.”[[63]](#footnote-64) Courtney recounts that when he got four new replacements in his squad, “we were eager to learn from them what was happening back in the States since they had recently come over.”[[64]](#footnote-65) It was in many ways a social exercise the men engaged in. New troops had information about which baseball team had won the World Series, or gossip about popular actors and actresses. Such social interaction and lightheartedness was a way to maintain some normalcy in spite of the horrors of war.

Replacements who went through the process reported favorably on the speed of their integration, a key element in assimilating into the protective brotherhood of soldiers. When surveyed, 65% of soldiers said that it took about one day to one week to truly belong in a unit.[[65]](#footnote-66) Progress, from being viewed as a rookie to feeling part of the unit, was imperative, confirmed by a soldier who considered “comradeship ‘the best life insurance’.”[[66]](#footnote-67) Without someone to trust, there existed a little bit of edginess that wore on soldiers for both replacements and veterans. Sgt. Don Malarky, a member of the famed ‘Band of Brothers’ in Easy Company, tells that he “worried as much about having rookies to the left and right of me as I did about the enemy.”[[67]](#footnote-68) There is a further reason that troops sought to assimilate quickly. Replacements in combat would either quickly develop the instinctive caution that helped veterans survive, or they would be hit.[[68]](#footnote-69) It was the development of skills and attitudes that was best able to smooth over differences between people. If a replacement quickly learned how to respond in combat such that the veterans could rely upon him, he would be considered one of them. To this end, many units would assign a veteran to mentor and teach a new soldier how to fight and survive. A replacement thus had a better way to learn the necessary skills, and the unit could more quickly trust him. It is not a question of whether unit cohesion kept survival rates high or whether survival bred unit cohesion, but rather acknowledgment of a culture where both survival and unit cohesion operated together in building an emotional brotherhood among soldiers.

In assessing the success of replacements directly joining units in combat compared to those who had more time in a unit prior to combat, the surveys present a clear picture while personal testimonies provide a more varied account. Survey S-177 reports no difference in success, once units were in combat for six months, between those who had entered combat immediately upon deployment from the depots and those who were able to wait for a longer period of time.[[69]](#footnote-70) While this may be a valid conclusion, an element of casualty bias may be in effect. The sample of respondents would not include those replacements who did not adjust quickly and died or those who cracked and were reassigned. Unfortunately, the survey results leave much unsaid about the effects on units that entered combat quickly. Here, testimony from individual soldiers is illuminating. Often, there were immediate concerns that replacements had insufficient time to learn to whom they were assigned. One individual commented that, “I have seen men killed or captured when even their squad leaders didn’t know their names.”[[70]](#footnote-71) This was an issue, also, for the regiment a man was joining. Rothbart recounts how only after retreating to a rest area was the unit able to catch “up in record keeping to the extent of knowing the names still in the regiment and new replacements.”[[71]](#footnote-72) Another man recounted how two brand new replacements on their first night of combat were killed by a silly mistake, leaving that soldier to wonder what had been their names.[[72]](#footnote-73) Don Malarkey relayed additional concerns in his memoirs. He observed that replacements “were the guys who seemed to get killed or wounded faster.”[[73]](#footnote-74) It is impossible to know whether the hard coded data of surveys are distorted by bias, or whether personal accounts are representative of a trend. Rothbart argued, “our new replacements are not really hit more than veterans, though the veterans think they are.”[[74]](#footnote-75) What is clear is that replacements faced numerous challenges upon joining their unit, and that their ensuing experiences could vary tremendously. No single piece of evidence can ultimately conclude whether immediate combat was detrimental to replacements. Here the historical literature straddles different sides of the argument, but even Stouffer purported through personal comments that troops experienced very demanding environments.

While the treatment towards basic infantryman replacements was often considered to be poor, the sentiments toward replacement officers were more harsh. In one survey, 58.3% of respondents thought it was bad when a non-commissioned officer (noncom) joined a unit in combat.[[75]](#footnote-76) This discontentment stems from a lack of respect that could only be solved by going through a fight. Troops that had spent months on the frontline simply did not respect a fresh stateside officer who thought he knew everything. Malarkey recounted one replacement officer described as “an East Coast blue blood with no combat experience who would later freeze like a Popsicle in the middle of an assault.”[[76]](#footnote-77) When he talked of another, he introduced him as “some nose-in-the-air Yaley who knew someone high up,” and when he was in combat he froze and almost cost the lives of many in the company.[[77]](#footnote-78) Malarkey did not trust an officer until he had proven his worth in combat. Stouffer argues that noncoms themselves “felt insecure because [they] doubted [their] qualifications for combat leadership.”[[78]](#footnote-79) Malarkey’s lack of trust and the noncoms’ insecurity certainly created a bit of a catch-22 when an officer would not be respected until he went through combat but also could not lead the men the first time. The same company that Malarkey was in, Easy Company of the 101st Airborne Division, also had issues replacing its executive officer. The replacement officer was described by a private as “really screwed up. He not only didn’t know what to do, he didn’t care to learn. He stayed in bed, made no inspections and sent for more plums. He was shortly relieved.”[[79]](#footnote-80)

Replacing officers was more than about replacing manpower; it also was about replacing leadership. A new platoon leader in Easy Company failed when during a fight “he never came to the front. He failed to live up to his responsibilities; the old men in the platoon never forgave him. For an enlisted man to fail in a grave situation was bad, but for an officer, who was supposed to lead his men, it was inexcusable.” Yet, the constraints of the Army’s manpower situation required new officers to either come in via replacement or be appointed right away without serious time for vetting. Rothbart describes when “there were never so few veterans in the companies, and when noncoms were appointed they (veterans) usually rejected offers of promotion.”[[80]](#footnote-81) The crisis was resolved when some men decided that if they had to fight, they might as well have officer status. For other veterans, the dangers of ‘leading’ from the front were not worth officer status. As much as many replacement officers did not inspire the best fighting spirit from veterans, those who succeeded in their roles were new officers willing to try to learn and earn respect.

Even as many officers came from the same training schools, through the standardized replacement system, there were differences among them that made integration easier or harder. One of the frequent issues to arise, involved officers who either came from a higher social class than the average soldiers, or acted as if they did. Malarkey described a new officer, “Norman Dike Jr., an east coast blue blood,” as someone that was just never trusted or fit into the company.[[81]](#footnote-82) Courtney recounts how upon being introduced to his unit, he was incorrectly labeled a ‘college kid’ and how he “never could live it down that I was a ‘college kid’, as if it was a disgrace.”[[82]](#footnote-83) Linderman recounts one Robert Leckie who, after interacting with his new captain, described that “in that moment I hated [Captain] High-Hips and all his class.”[[83]](#footnote-84) The problem for most army men arose when another man made sure his actions demonstrated his higher class. All the men in the Army were in the war together, subject to the same challenges; there was the feeling that all should be equal in social status, as they battled to survive and after the war was over. Holding onto prior positions in society did not epitomize the parity that men believed should exist.

The rationale behind the varied and somewhat poor veteran treatment of replacements has several root causes. Survival was the primary among these. The Army’s policy was to keep units on the frontline or held in close reserve for the duration of a theater’s fighting. As Ambrose addresses the problem, “it also meant the veteran could look forward to a release from the dangers threatening him only through death or serious wound. This created a situation of endlessness and hopelessness.”[[84]](#footnote-85) Sergeant Bill Tucker, a member of the 82nd Airborne Division, in his memoirs recounted one of his buddies getting wounded: “Hill appeared, holding a wound in his neck. ‘So long, boys,’ he said. ‘I finally made it’.”[[85]](#footnote-86) Rather than alluding to imminent death, Hill was sharing the perceived good news that he would be relieved of duty, that his wound would require hospitalization that could result in weeks and months out of the frontline. These were the so-called ‘million dollar wounds’, valued so highly because they were serious enough to warrant withdrawal from combat but with limited or no accompanying lasting damage. Veterans reflected that even getting shot was preferable to continuing fighting. When asked in S-177, “what causes a man’s nerves to ‘crack’,” 27.3% of those who responded cited fear of getting killed while a further 23.2% cited too much combat. Soldiers needed a way to release emotional strain; often it was released on replacements who at the same time were being risked themselves to protect veterans from danger.

The fear of death and attempts to survive manifested themselves in further ways. Comradeship, while serving as a strong positive force, also had its costs. In S-177, men were also asked “when you were in combat did you worry about your chances of becoming a casualty?”[[86]](#footnote-87) Two-thirds of the men responded that they worried about it some or a lot. In S-234BE, 55.8% of men agreed with the statement that “after a man has been in combat for a long time, he comes to think more about the other fellows in the outfit and less about his own safety.”[[87]](#footnote-88) There existed a constant strain of worry about other men, an acknowledgement of the high likelihood that a close friend would get hit. 85.9% of army soldiers reported that they had the experience of seeing a close friend killed or wounded.[[88]](#footnote-89) Of the men who saw a best friend get killed, 56.6% reported feeling an immediate reaction of anger, hatred, desire for revenge, sorrow, fear or hopelessness. These were feelings that were dealt with on a frequent basis, and could not be bottled up. Private Richard Courtney, an infantryman in the 26th division, writes in his memoirs about the overwhelming emotions after his closest friend’s death saying, “finally, I had to shake myself loose from those thoughts. If you dwell on them too long, you can go nuts. I consoled myself by praying for the repose of his soul. He was such a good man. My buddy was gone.”[[89]](#footnote-90) Replacements often arrived soon after the traumatic death of such close friends. In many ways, replacements served as a reminder of the dead men they were replacing. Jim Morrison, of the 94th Division, acknowledged that replacements “know the only reason they’re here is because someone else got hit or killed. Otherwise they wouldn’t be here.”[[90]](#footnote-91) While it was not the replacements’ fault, many times veterans wouldn’t want to expose themselves to further emotional harm. Such harm could either come as a result of making friends with a replacement and then seeing him die, or by having to deal with resurfacing memories of dead comrades. Neither was desirable and both often led to harsh treatment or cold shoulders toward replacements.

Other issues that harmed integration concerned the difference between the appearances and attitudes of replacements and veterans. In positive ways, replacements came with energy and conviction to prepare for and to fight a war. Richard Courtney describes one replacement who was “new and wanted to shoot someone.”[[91]](#footnote-92) This fellow’s risk-taking attitude, however, was in stark contrast to the careful, safe practices veterans had developed. Veterans had their appearances hardened after enduring combat, such that even while “veterans were only a year or two older, they looked terrifying to the recruits.”[[92]](#footnote-93) Attitudes towards army regulations also were starkly different. Ambrose observed that “they were supposed to have handed in their live ammunition when they left Holland, but almost none had done so. They walked around… with hand grenades hanging off their belts, clips of ammunition on their harness wearing their knives and (unauthorized) side arms.”[[93]](#footnote-94) The cultural adjustment for fresh replacements to assimilate with combat-hardened troop was an additional challenge, added to the need and desire to establish bonds of comradeship and skills for battle. Even when the officers or companies in reserve worked hard to promote integration before being re-deployed, “it was difficult as the veterans could not take field maneuvers seriously.”[[94]](#footnote-95) The resulting troubles that arose in trying to bind together a new unit were as much a dislike for the unfamiliarity and differences of the replacement in appearance and attitude, as they were a conscious choice on the part of veterans for emotional and physical survival.

**Entering Combat and Fighting Effectiveness**

The first time a man fought was a test of his mettle, training, and courage. Whether his initial combat encounter was as part of an offensive attack, undergoing a shelling, or going on patrol, enemy fire and the accompanying nerves of actually being on the frontline shook up a lot of men. When asked how they felt before combat, 39.3% of replacements and veterans alike responded that they felt more scared before entering combat than at any other time, while 37.6%, a similar percent, responded that they felt most scared during combat.[[95]](#footnote-96) This fear is showcased in a lot of personal testimony rendering account of replacements entering combat. Courtney recounts how on an attack, two new replacements flat out told the commanding Sergeant, “we are not going up that road.”[[96]](#footnote-97) He reports that after they were pulled back from the line the replacements were not seen or heard from again. Malarkey reports of one lieutenant who “went nuts and just buried his head in the sand. Froze up completely.”[[97]](#footnote-98) For these men, the danger and stress of battle were simply too much. Fortunately, most replacements did not completely freeze or find themselves unable to follow orders. They tried their best to fulfill their duties.

Veterans found combat just as scary as did replacements, in many cases. Among veterans and replacements surveyed in S-177, 72.7% of both groups reported that combat was more ‘frightening the more you see of it.’[[98]](#footnote-99) McManus reported one instance when a new replacement “wrongly assumed this [shell fire] no longer bothered him (a veteran). I made a feeble attempt at humor and he returned a disgusted look.”[[99]](#footnote-100) The replacement did not know that “veterans were just as scared in combat as new men.”[[100]](#footnote-101) Veterans had in many cases just learned how to avoid making deadly mistakes and how to deal with the danger. It was not that they were stronger physically or mentally, just that they had previous experience to draw upon. Replacements who survived early combat experiences, and did not freeze or otherwise fail, quickly found themselves following the same tactics.

Initial combat was fraught with numerous and common mistakes from which replacements suffered needless casualties. Stouffer, pulling results from S-165, highlighted the differences in combat error frequency between replacements and veterans.[[101]](#footnote-102) Replacements were over 30% more likely to punch up, 25% more likely to talk loudly or make noise at night, 20% more likely to shoot before they could see a target, and 15% more likely to freeze. The errors often did not result in death, but were extremely dangerous to the replacements and other troops. Bunching up under fire presents a most interesting case. One combat veteran reported bunching up as “the first mistake recruits make under fire.”[[102]](#footnote-103) While replacements were guilty of this mistake so, too, were some veterans, suggesting that the need for mutual support in combat was an overriding factor for many men despite clear training to the contrary.[[103]](#footnote-104) As Stouffer suggests, “the obvious irrationality of the action suggests the imperativeness of the motivation behind it.”[[104]](#footnote-105) This primal mistake showcases how subconscious or emotional motivations triumphed over training in some situations. While placing themselves in grave danger, they were also preserving their mental strength.

Replacements made many other mistakes. While still detrimental to survival, these are attributed to inexperience more than to psychological need, and could be fixed. Charles Fulton, an infantryman in the 103rd division, recounted how “two brand-new men on their first night in combat attempted to heat up their food by lighting a fire.”[[105]](#footnote-106) The men were killed by German artillery before they could be warned about the danger they had placed themselves in. Perhaps, they had sought to maintain one of the comforts encountered during their training that normally was sacrificed at the front-line. Regardless of their motivation, these rookie soldiers were simply not acclimated to the requirements of combat. Another mistake, firing before one could see the enemy, is deemed to manifest from unbridled fear, nerves winning over reason. It, too, had disastrous results. Lawrence Nickell, of the 5th Infantry Division, related, “A replacement soldier with only a few days of combat experience was on the outpost line. The group checking the outpost missed him in the dark… and then approached the outpost. The replacement thought they were an enemy patrol, did not halt them or call for the password, and killed the company commander.”[[106]](#footnote-107) The survey shows an extremely low percentage of veterans engaging in this rash action, suggesting that replacements were able to control their nerves as they developed into veterans. Stouffer describes this short-lived psychological problem as “anticipatory anxiety”, a problem related to fear of combat and death. There is no doubt that challenges faced by replacements were severe and that, in most cases and in many ways, replacements quickly overcame them to become effective soldiers. As demonstrated in the earlier discussion about the speed of a replacement’s integration into his unit, replacements were considered combat-hardened by veterans after a short while in combat as they gained the necessary skills.

In other ways, replacements offered an instant boost to the fighting capacity of a unit and some longer-term benefits. Combat fatigue was a very real danger to many troops. Since there were no breaks during which a unit was able to recover from frontline duty, men could be engaged in combat for months. When a group was surveyed about how long they had been in combat before being rotated out of active duty, 17% reported fighting for almost one month, 41% reported fighting for between one and two months, and 16% reported fighting for two to three months.[[107]](#footnote-108) These extended lengths of time on active duty reduced the fighting ability of men. Supporting this assertion, in another survey, almost two-thirds of the men did not believe that the longer a man stays in fighting, the better a combat soldier he becomes.[[108]](#footnote-109) Similar results were found among both privates and officers. The fresh energy of replacements could be a welcome boost to veterans on the frontline. Replacements were not as likely to experience combat fatigue as immediately as were veterans. While replacements encountered a steep learning curve, some veterans describe that “after their initial baptism of fire, replacements generally were as effective as veterans.”[[109]](#footnote-110) Some units had a mini-replacement system of dealing with the adverse effects of combat, where “each company commander endeavored to have an officer see each enlisted man on the front line at least once each day, and if any enlisted man appeared nervous, restless or on the point of breaking, [he]… would pull him out of the line and send him on a fatigue detail,” which constituted resting.[[110]](#footnote-111) As new troops, replacements would quickly become experienced but would be more resistant to such breaking down.

The period during which a man was at his best as a soldier is hard to pin down, but surveys and personal accounts provide some insight. Survey S-222 asked men to rate the best men in a unit by the number of months in combat.[[111]](#footnote-112) Platoon leaders, those perhaps in the best position to decide which men were the best due to their close familiarity with troops and their leadership position, reported that the best men had, on average, between three and five months of active combat service.[[112]](#footnote-113) There is a sharp rise in skill level from initial deployment, but after five months skill declines for standard riflemen. Concerns about the presence of casualty bias surface here, acknowledging the possibility that the best soldiers may have been killed first with the cautious ones left behind. Stouffer dismisses this issue with minimal consideration based on testimony from veterans that good daring soldiers were as likely to be killed as poor lazy ones. The key here is that after a prolonged period of time, riflemen were no longer at their best. Replacements were needed by fatigued units to provide the next wave of fresh and strong fighting men.

Non-commissioned officers faced a much longer transition period to becoming effective in their roles than did privates. Using the same data from S-222, where riflemen were judged to be at their best with between three and five months of experience, noncoms were rated the highest by platoon leaders when they had been in active combat for between six and eight months.[[113]](#footnote-114) After two months, there is a plateau in their rating followed by a gentle rise, suggesting that only through continued leadership and experience, after coming in as a replacement, could they be viewed to be at their best. Since the data peaks at a later time period, there is also much less concern about possible casualty bias regarding the noncoms’ conclusion. Early casualties would have skewed the data toward an earlier date, an improbable event considering that effects of troops unfamiliar with combat likely would have disappeared prior to the first plateau at two months. The difference between the results for standard infantrymen and noncoms suggests, once again, that while combat skills could be learned, leadership needed to be earned, and that often required more time.

While the survey question regarding peak effectiveness does have its limits, it remains clear that after eight months, both noncoms and privates operated at a lower standard of efficiency than they had done earlier. There are potentially many reasons why the men continued to fight beyond their time of optimal performance, and neither personal testimony nor survey data offers a conclusive and universal rationale. What is clear is that the replacement policy required veteran men to be in combat well past their prime performance time since there was no relief mechanism in the system. As Stouffer argues, “it represents a limitation inherent to the individual replacement system, whatever its other advantages. It also is in agreement with the discussion of combat motivation, where it was suggested that no set of motives or incentives remained permanently effective in indefinite combat.”[[114]](#footnote-115) This left veterans often in a bewildered state about why they had to keep fighting. John Martin, of Easy Company, confessed to Ambrose, “I could not believe that they were going to give us replacements and put us on the attack… but no, they get you replacements and ‘Come on boys, let’s go.’ And then that’s when we [go].”[[115]](#footnote-116) This took place after the original men of Easy Company had been on the front line for seven months, since their initial attack on D-Day of the Normandy Invasion. There was a certain frustration about continued combat, but the veterans felt a responsibility to continue. This is partially explained by McManus, who disagrees with Stouffer’s broad conclusion, instead arguing on behalf of the strength of relationships that “it usually only took a short time before replacements were accepted into the brotherhood of men at the front, the brotherhood that forged the unique bond that enabled American combat men to fight and endure.”[[116]](#footnote-117) One might doubt the functionality of the men, their energy level challenged after being left in the line for so long, but their mental fortitude seemed unbreakable. The esprit-de-corps is well described by William Tucker who recounts, “regiments replaced regiments. Battalions replaced battalions. But no one could replace the men and friends we lost.”[[117]](#footnote-118) Comradeship and brotherhood was shown once again to be a powerful force for unit strength and courage.

The replacement system was unable to effectively adapt to fix its deficiencies because of strategic and manpower constraints. There were simply not enough reserve divisions to allow for replacements to be assigned in waves, to units which were not fighting, as historians have deemed optimal. Pulling out decimated units and rebuilding them with a combination of veterans and replacements allows “familiarity and cohesiveness [to] be build up among the new men, who were in the same boat as replacements.”[[118]](#footnote-119) While not perfect, other armies during World War II used this method to maintain the bonds of training and trust as best they could. Yet the United States was never able to enjoy this luxury, for the country “had not raised enough infantry divisions to fight a two-front war. This was a consequence of the prewar decision by the Government to be lavish with deferments… and to refrain from drafting fathers.”[[119]](#footnote-120) In the Pacific Theater, manpower shortages seemed to be standard. Bruce Carlson, a soldier in the Pacific, in a letter home wrote “men were needed here. Replacements were slow in coming, most outifts going to the higher priority European Theater.”[[120]](#footnote-121) There can be endless debates about the merits of each political decision, but the resulting effect was that the US Army was required to adapt to it circumstances. It did so by placing the burden for integration and combat training on the individual units, and by keeping them on the frontline for much, if not all, of campaigns. Whether a success or a failure by military standards, the men dealt with the issues and completed their missions.

**Attitudes of Replacements toward the Army and the War**

The attitudes of replacement troops as they integrated into their Army units provide insights into their thoughts about the structure and goals of the Army. Soldiers faced extreme pressure while on the front lines to make decisions and act quickly, yet there were a myriad of regulations and standards that they were expected to follow. Regardless of placement within the hierarchy of the Army, a reasonably strict, bureaucratic and somewhat inflexible structure existed. There were rules that covered physical condition, how to organize a pack and what gear to carry, that were easily understood. The feelings of troops regarding regulations such as these are reasonably clear-cut and straightforward to analyze. What are more challenging, but provide a more important picture of how soldiers felt as they were preparing for and entering combat, are the sentiments of the replacements towards the goals of the Army. Convictions regarding the war, willingness to fight and personal belief in success are all topics that hold value in understanding a soldier’s psyche. The Army attempted to measure these elements, but the surveys conducted offer only limited clarity as they are restricted by the questions that can be asked without inducing bias. However, when combined together, personal stories and survey results are able to paint a picture of the attitudes of replacements toward the goals of the Army and how they developed a social world while under the stress and dangers of combat. Their attitudes help to explain why men acted as they did, and provide valuable insight into their military contributions, attitudes towards regulations, and overall impression of life the Army.

The convictions of replacements differed from those of veterans regarding some issues, and were influenced by those of veterans in respect to others. A prime example of the difference in backgrounds of veteran and replacement troops is highlighted in their attitudes regarding their own physical condition. A majority of replacements reported that they were in good physical condition regardless of which unit to which they were assigned.[[121]](#footnote-122) Among Privates, 56% of replacements in a veteran division reported favorably, 57% of replacements in inexperienced divisions reported favorably, while only 35% of veterans reported that they thought they were in good physical condition.[[122]](#footnote-123) The difference in this assessment widened to 74% for inexperienced divisions versus 41% for veteran divisions when non-commissioned officers (noncoms) responded.[[123]](#footnote-124) This is likely due to replacements coming recently from training where peak physical conditioning was highly prized. However, there were also motivational factors at stake. Veterans tended to report poorer physical conditioning in efforts to reduce workloads and avoid combat. These feelings are exhibited when troops were asked whether or not they felt prepared for combat. When asked whether their physical conditioning was suitable for combat, and if they felt their physical conditioning would hold up in combat, replacements exhibited a difference between those who were grouped with veterans and those who were not. Replacements ranked as privates and grouped with veterans responded about 5% less favorably than those who were not.[[124]](#footnote-125) Again, the difference significantly widened among noncoms to 18%.[[125]](#footnote-126) There are several possible explanations for the differences in survey responses. A correlation in the results indicates a possibility that the veterans who had a negative sentiment regarding combat influenced some replacements. Additionally, when the veteran leadership cadre, with their negative views, was missing in inexperienced divisions, the gap widened. This suggests a deference in respect to the opinions of veterans and, more importantly, a strong respect for veteran leadership. Overall, the Army would have been pleased with the results, for over two-thirds of those soldiers surveyed reported that they believed they were ready for combat. On the part of green troops with only hearsay reports of the frontline, there existed an expectation of sufficient preparation for success. This holds true irrespective of exposure to veteran troops.

Replacement troops, feeling prepared for combat for the most part, also exhibited strong convictions regarding the war. Here too, there are strong differences between replacement and veteran attitudes. When questioned whether “you ever get the feeling that this war is not worth fighting”, replacements again responded with a majority that they only did so once in a while, or never.[[126]](#footnote-127) When asked, “how much do the things that this war is being fought over mean to you personally,” favorable responses among replacements jumped to nearly three-quarters of respondents.[[127]](#footnote-128) To both these questions, veterans again responded less favorably than did replacements by a significant margin. The exposure to combat had raised the personal stakes for veterans whereas replacements did not yet see as great a personal sacrifice needed to win the war. There would have been a more distant and less intimate expectation of the cost of war, both in terms of personal injuries and injuries to those for whom one cared. The referenced survey was limited to a small segment of the fighting population. While it is unreasonable to generalize its results to cover the entire army, similar results can be found in polling of veteran divisions throughout the different theaters.[[128]](#footnote-129) Unfortunately, in these polls, it is impossible to separate new replacement troops from veteran troops. What remains clear is that once exposed to combat, much of the vigor that replacements had upon deployment and initial integration was lost. It was actual participation in combat that caused this change for there is no separation in conviction about the war between replacements who had been exposed to veterans and those who had not. Personal experiences would trump pre-conceived notions resulting from training and hearsay from veterans.

The consideration of certain army requirements helps to illustrate how the beliefs and attitudes of veterans affected those of new soldiers. There are numerous reports of ‘chickenshit’, times when rank was pulled unnecessarily or orders were made simply for the sake of making work for new soldiers. This is perhaps best defined by Paul Fussell as “behavior that makes military life worse than it needs to be: petty harassment of the weak by the strong… insistence on the letter rather than the spirit of ordinances… it is small-minded and ignoble and takes the trivial seriously.”[[129]](#footnote-130) Officers who engaged in such activity were widely despised. Given a pervasive distaste for these activities, when troops were asked, “Do too many of the things you have to do seem unnecessary for making your outfit or the Army run better”, veterans reported least favorably with only 37% marking responses that the Army deemed positive, followed by replacements in inexperienced divisions with 39% and then replacements in veteran divisions with 53%.[[130]](#footnote-131) Revealed here is a greater acceptance or tolerance of menial or pointless work on the part of replacements in veteran divisions than by other replacements or veterans, themselves. Replacements with exposure to veterans of combat experience were consistently more likely to respect the way things were done than were inexperienced men alone. Importantly, a majority of replacements across the board responded unfavorably to Army regulations. The existence of certain Army regulations that they viewed as required, but unnecessary, was a sticking point for new troops.

As much as it was the inherent structure of the Army that made chickenshit a constant possibility, its incidence was very much based on the nature of individual soldiers and officers. Some officers went out of their way to pull rank, make problems, or just flout their authority. Captain Sobel, the officer in charge of training Easy Company, was notorious for such actions. Malarkey recounts numerous chickenshit occasions, such as during inspections when Sobel would sneer and say, “dirt on your rifle’s hinge spring, Malarkey. Weekend pass revoked. Lint on your chevrons. *Revoked…* Don’t like the sound of your name. *Revoked*.”[[131]](#footnote-132) Malarkey’s view was simply that Sobel “loved to humiliate us.”[[132]](#footnote-133) Gustafson, spoke of his distain for chickenshit, explaining, “we got back to our room [and] there was a slip on our table listing several things that needed cleaning… our room was rated in a condition of ‘poor’. It looked good to us when we left. We can’t spend all our time cleaning.”[[133]](#footnote-134) The methods were not limited to training or to inspections. When one combat company lost it’s commanding officer who was very relaxed regarding rank and rules, the “successor immediately re-established formal channels and rigid officer-men relationships, restoring… what [the men] called ‘a Chicken Shit outfit’.”[[134]](#footnote-135) Regardless of how it was done, John Ellis points out that, “there were… subtle ways to impose the tyranny of rank.”[[135]](#footnote-136) In many ways men came to expect the poor treatment and random punishments, but there were different levels of tolerance. Still, fear of a court martial or more extreme punishment kept men obeying orders and following regulation. Chickenshit was another standardized problem that men dealt with in their individual ways.

When it came to actually preparing for combat and belief in success, veterans had a positive impact on replacements. Replacements on their own in new divisions reported lower morale, worse teamwork, and less pride.[[136]](#footnote-137) Combat was seen as a rite of passage, and until a unit was ‘bloodied’, the bonds between men were not solidified. There was not a sense of accomplishment, something that could be bragged about, or something that could be touted in a letter home, until then. The Army trained soldiers to have pride in their unit and to become like brothers to one another. Combat was a way of cementing these vital bonds that were so valued as well as of overcoming the disparaging views that veterans held of replacements. Likely, in part because they had not yet dealt with the impacts of battle described above, but also likely because of a desire to prove themselves, replacements responded more favorably to questions regarding whether or not a man wanted to get into the battle zone. Yet, the benefits and drawbacks to combat are assessed differently by replacements than by veterans, creating a common theme among survey responses. In each case relating to combat, lack of experience on the part of the respondent led to favorable responses regarding interest in combat, and less favorable responses regarding unit pride. In his diary, Sgt. Don Malarkey described some replacements as just wanting “to send a picture back home to convince everybody that they were a war hero.”[[137]](#footnote-138) The untested perception of combat induced very different effects than did the actual experience of it.

Other differences regarding opinions of combat are highlighted in the disparity between how veteran troops responded and how replacements with those veterans responded to certain survey questions. When asked questions about an individual’s pride in his company or battery, the positive responses of replacements were a few percentage points higher than those of veteran troops in the same division.[[138]](#footnote-139) When asked about teamwork and cooperation, replacements replied more favorably by over ten percentage points than did veterans.[[139]](#footnote-140) While these units that were surveyed were not actually on the frontline and were instead waiting to be deployed, results can reasonably be extrapolated with caution to draw conclusions between experienced combat divisions and newly minted ones. It seems that replacements viewed the prestige of experiencing combat much more highly than did veterans who had gone through it. It could simply be the case that the supposed bonds forged under fire were not as strong or highly valued by veterans as they were perceived by green replacements. What is known is that replacements held in high regard the spirit of companies that had been on the frontline. The replacements themselves were proud to be part of such a team. Whether or not the veterans viewed replacements favorably, and irrespective of how much their own feelings of pride translated to replacements, the replacements drew confidence from the group.

What is showcased throughout these responses is that replacements believed they were ready for combat. From physical endurance, to the right mentality, these men were confident that army training had prepared them to enter the frontline. Certain results even pose the possibility that replacements were excited to enter the combat. Veterans who had been exposed to the personal costs of war were no longer making the same value judgments, and in some cases passed their cynicism to replacements joining their divisions. Their effects can be seen as occasionally damping perceived replacement preparedness or enthusiasm for battle, but they were not able to wipe it away completely. The results and personal stories illustrate a sentiment about replacements that they were ready for the horrors of combat. As has been shown earlier, this did not always hold true. Yet when orders came to fight and risk lives, men followed the orders. They subordinated themselves to the structure of the Army, and acknowledges the inherent dangers of combat. Their lives, whether they consciously thought about it or not, were only a very small part of a deadly war. Still, soldiers believed that the war was worth fighting, that the risks needed to be taken, and that they could handle what was thrown at them.

**Conclusion**

Replacements faced significant challenges–from their uncelebrated send offs from home to their initiation into combat, from inexperience to demands on morale –and still overcame them. The replacement depots were psychologically demoralizing, yet the troops were able to re-focus on combat once deployed. Unit integration called for simultaneously working to build camaraderie, gain necessary experience and figure out how to survive. In combat, the men adapted to the multiple problems they faced. While each of these challenges was endemic within the replacement system, the multitude of methods devised to cope and adapt were developed throughout the army. Most tellingly, when troops were asked, in Italy as part of S-177, if they could change one thing in the army what they would want to change, a mere fifteen men out of 2,551 or half of one percent chose to improve the replacement system or improve the quality of replacements.[[140]](#footnote-141) This does not prove either success or failure, simply that the replacement system was not the total disaster some historians have made it out to be. The men believed that there were greater issues that they could not face or overcome. There were systematic problems, but the men who joined the Army, either through the draft or by volunteering, did what they could to succeed despite the physical, emotional, and moral challenges they faced.

These challenges that replacements faced, the dangers of combat, the terrors of war, were constant within the structure of the Army and reality of combat. While individual action was often crucial to survival and success, in many ways it was restricted. Orders, even when they placed men at risk above what was necessary for a strategic goal, were to be followed. Trust in the fellow soldier next to oneself, was limited by a poor system that restricted time together before entering combat. The reality was that war in many ways was a random slaughter of individuals who had limited control over their lives. Regardless of training or experience, a direct shell hit on a foxhole spared neither veteran nor fresh replacement. For as many ways as a soldier was able to take responsibility for his own life, there were equally as many ways he could be killed or wounded randomly. The difference between a ‘million-dollar’ wound and death was often a matter of inches, something no man could control. It was a harsh environment, where the psychological battle was as important as the physical one.

The psychological tensions that replacements experienced dealt with social, military, and moral issues. Their role in the Army was starkly different from civilian life prior to the war. Many of the adjustments that were made in training, deployment, and combat, ran counter to the morals espoused by the society they were fighting for. There was constant conflict between the liberty and freedom experience at home, and the authority of the Army, a continuing historical conflict as Mill had argued earlier. The values that were protected in civilian life, enabling individuals to choose and be responsible for their actions and outcomes, were severely restricted in World War II army life. There was a sacrifice of standard societal morals, to ensure emotional and physical survival. American democratic values were at risk on the battlefield in more ways than one. The anonymity that many replacements experienced, helped other troops avoid acknowledging the constant death of fellow Americans. It was a way of forgetting the value that the life of each man was worth on a personal level. Other concerns included how chickenshit removed individual freedoms, and subjected a soldier to the whims of another man. The organizational structure restricted creativity in many ways, yet relied upon its success in other situations. A replacement, like veterans, could never truly be sure whether deviation from a standard practice or policy would be hailed as initiative, or punished with latrine duty or a court-martial. As replacements battled the enemy, they also faced the challenge of addressing the tensions of brotherhood with death, valor with fear, training with experience, purpose with indifference, Army with society, danger with survival.

The biggest tension facing the replacements was the conflict between needing to sacrifice inherent societal values to protect them. The values of American democracy that men fought to preserve for the United States and its Allies were indeed compromised by the Army and on the battle field. It represents what American democracy was willing to sacrifice to wage total war. Throughout their training, processing, and deployment, replacements continually had efforts to resolve this tension. It was an issue that was not resolved, but managed. Replacements, throughout their careers experienced firsthand not only the way that they chose to cope with these issues, but how other veteran soldiers chose to handle the issues as well. The replacement system did not make it easy for men to adapt, but in the end success in the war proved that soldiers had learned how to manage the transformation from peacetime values into wartime conflict. It was a difficult task, one which required the best of efforts of men, and one where the commitment of all soldiers was equal to that of all civilians: total commitment for total war.

Appendix

1:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Length of Time Replacements Were With Their Unit Before Entering Combat (Italy, April 1945) | | |
| Question: How long were you with your present outfit before you went into action? | | |
| Response | Number | Percentage |
| I was with it less than 3 days before seeing action | 807 | 49.8% |
| I was with it 3 days up to 1 week before seeing action | 267 | 16.5% |
| I was with it 1 week up to 2 weeks before seeing action | 172 | 10.6% |
| I was with it 2 weeks up to 1 month before seeing action | 125 | 7.7% |
| I was with it 1 month up to 2 months before I saw action | 92 | 5.7% |
| I was with it over 2 months before I saw action | 91 | 5.6% |
| No Answer | 66 | 4.1% |
| Totals | 1620 | 100% |

2:

3:

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32. Note S-204: Sample Size 278, Location: France, Timeframe: February 1945, Target: Soldiers in a single replacement depot. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Note S-231: Sample Size 1276, Location: Pacific, Timeframe: June 1945, Target: Soldiers in a series of replacement depots. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
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89. Richard D. Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge: An American Infantry GI in Europe During World War II*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1997. Print, 58 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
90. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 278 [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
91. Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
92. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers*, 171 [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
93. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers*, 171 [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
94. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers*, 171 [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
95. Data from *The American Soldier Surveys*, S-177, Question 34 [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
96. Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, 56 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
97. Malarkey, *Easy Company Soldier*, 133-134 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
98. Data from *The American Soldier Surveys*, S-177, Question 36 [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
99. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood, 268* [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
100. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood, 268* [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
101. See Table 2 in Appendix [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
102. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood, 266* [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
103. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 284 [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
104. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 284 [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
105. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood, 267* [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
106. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood, 267* [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
107. Data from *The American Soldier Surveys*, S-177, Question 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
108. Data from *The American Soldier Surveys*, S-234BE and S-234BO, Question 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
109. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood, 271* [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
110. Kennett, *The American Soldier in World War II, 147* [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
111. Note S-222: Sample Size 6651, Location: Europe, Timeframe: April 1945 Target: Veteran Infantry Divisions [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
112. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 285, See Appendix Item 3 (Graph) [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
113. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 285 [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
114. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 289 [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
115. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers*, 208 [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
116. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood*, 272 [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
117. Tucker, *Parachute Soldier*, 132 [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
118. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood, 260* [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
119. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers*, 2195 [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
120. Parillo, Mark P. *We Were in the Big One: Experiences of the World War II Generation*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002. Print, 233 [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
121. Samuel A. Stouffer, *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, vol. 2(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), 260 [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
122. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 260 [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
123. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 260 [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
124. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 260 [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
125. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 260 [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
126. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 262 [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
127. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 262 [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
128. American Soldier Survey 100(A-F), which was given to combat divisions in Italy and the Pacifc Theaters, report similar percentages of around 60% of veterans admitting that they felt the war was not worth it, or the cost was too high. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
129. Ambrose, Stephen E. *Band of Brothers*. London: Chivers Press, 2003. pgs. 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
130. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 259 [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
131. Malarkey, *Easy Company Soldier, 42* [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
132. Malarkey, *Easy Company Soldier, 42* [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
133. Gustafson, *My Time in the Army*, 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
134. Linderman, *The World Within War*, 231 [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
135. Ellis, *On the Front Lines*, 323 [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
136. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 256 [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
137. Don Malarkey and Bob Welch. *Easy Company Soldier: The Legendary Battles of a Sergeant from World War II's "Band of Brothers"* New York: St. Martin's, 2008. Print. pgs. 196-197 [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
138. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 256 [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
139. Stouffer, *The American Soldier*, 256 [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
140. Data from *The American Soldier Surveys*, S-177, Question 84 [↑](#footnote-ref-141)