

THE ARMY PROGRAM FOR ILLITERATES

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To help meet the country's manpower problem, the Army found it necessary to accept for military service many illiterate, non-English speaking, and educationally retarded men. These were assigned to Special Training Units, whose mission is to provide preliminary training through which such men will attain the required academic and military proficiency which is essential to proceed with regular basic training. The Army's program of special training has proved highly successful. Most of the men in these units have acquired sufficient skill in language, arithmetic, and preliminary training to be able to proceed with regular training. Thus, the Army is doing its share in helping to meet the manpower problem. However, it is doing more. It is demonstrating the possibilities inherent in a sound program of adult education. Application of a comparable program in postwar America should help to remove illiteracy as a national problem.

The program of training in Special Training Units is organized to cover an 8-12 week period. Eighteen hours a week are devoted to reading, language, and arithmetic, and the remainder to military subjects. The time spent by a man in a Special Training Unit serves both as a period of preparation and explora-

tion. On the one hand serious efforts are made to equip him for the pursuit of regular basic training and Army life generally. On the other hand he is studied carefully to ascertain whether he has the capacity to maintain himself and perform some useful job in the Army. The Special Training Units not only prepare men for more direct and effective discharge of their duties but help to make them more cheerful and better adjusted soldiers.

Considering the urgency of the general military situation at the time America entered the struggle as an active belligerent and the extent of the mobilization program undertaken by the Army, it is surprising that effort should have been made to introduce a well-rounded system of instruction in Special Training Units. Yet, judged by usual criterions which may be set, study of the Army's program of instruction reveals a broad constructive approach which incorporates many desirable educational features. Some characteristics of the program follow.

1. *Classification of students.* — The men assigned to Special Training Units are studied individually. Information pertaining to the soldiers' past school attendance, occupational history, avocational interests, and intellectual abilities is avail-

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able on their soldiers' qualification card which is completed by the time they reach the Special Training Unit. There each man is tested for placement purposes to determine to which of four possible groups he will be sent. The levels of these groups are roughly equivalent to the first four years of elementary school instruction. Classification of students in Special Units is a dynamic process in which every effort is made to place the student correctly, analyze his needs, record his accomplishments, and advance him in accord with his ability to assimilate newer material.

2. *Subject matter and methods.* —

The material which has been prepared for the classroom is highly functional in character. It deals with episodes and experiences which are an outgrowth of the man's life in camp and the Army. It presents the issues and progress of the war in language the men can comprehend. Thus, it represents a fulfillment of needs and interests. It is well graded and so correlated that instructors can easily integrate their instruction in one area with that of another.

A particular method of instruction is not prescribed for use in Special Training Units. For example, in the field of reading, teachers are provided with instructional guides which utilize several different approaches. They are then permitted to select those methods which will best meet their needs. The material furnished is highly diversified and richly illus-

trated. Many film strips and other visual aids have been prepared to facilitate learning of difficult subject matter. The approach to reading represents an incorporation of the best features of different methods which have been recommended over a period of years by competent educators. A basic stock of sight words is taught first. This is presented through the medium of a film strip, in which 46 basic words are associated with their pictorial representations. The acquisition of this basic stock of sight words is facilitated in many ways and all efforts are directed toward building up rich associated meanings for each word and toward developing the ability to recognize words at sight from their general configurations. Through the administration of a simple test, the teacher is able to select those men who are ready to proceed with the *Army Reader*. The *Army Reader* presents "Private Pete" in four graded sections, through very simple to more complex soldier experiences, through words, phrases, and short sentences, to complete reading episodes.

Through various types of materials, such as a weekly paper and a monthly magazine, students are taught to read for details, to follow directions, and to acquire the central thought of a passage. A recent publication, *Teaching Devices for Special Training Units*, describes many aids and games which instruc-

tors can employ in the teaching of reading, language, spelling, handwriting, and arithmetic. Diagnostic and remedial procedures and methods for each of the subjects are presented.

3. *Method of dealing with individuals who experience difficulty in learning.* — Students who experience great difficulty in learning are carefully studied. The teacher consults with the personnel consultant. If, at length, following tests and interviews, it is decided that the man is inept and uneducable, arrangements are then made for a Board of Officers to meet to consider the desirability of his discharge from the Army. The approach to the individual is positive and constructive.

4. *Teacher selection, preparation, and supervision.*—Individuals chosen as teachers are carefully selected. Many have had college training and previous teaching experience. Many of the teachers have the Master's degree and some have received the Doctor of Philosophy degree. Instructors are selected not

only on the basis of their academic qualifications but also in consideration of their interest in and ability to handle slow-learning individuals.

Once selected, teachers in many units are prepared for their work through local training conferences. The local training conferences are modeled after the two national training conferences which were conducted by the Development and Special Training Section, Training Branch, A. G. D. Representatives from each of the major units attended the national conferences and then returned to their own units to initiate improved teacher training. A program of teacher supervision is in operation. Teachers are observed by the educational director of many units. Periodically, a supervisory "inspection" is made by representatives of the Development and Special Training Section under the supervision of the Training Branch, A. G. D. and the Director of Military Training, A. S. F. Recommendations for the improvement of a unit are contained in the report of the "inspecting" officer.

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THE U. S. Office of Education estimates that 7 percent of the teachers of the country hold only emergency teaching certificates.