U.S. Army History Vignettes
For Basic Combat Training

1st Edition
March 2018
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Delaware and Trenton: After several months of tactical defeats, General Washington realized that without decisive action, the Continental Army was likely doomed. Running out of viable options, he planned a daring, and successful assault on the Hessian garrison at Trenton.

Hero of the Battle: General (GEN) George Washington; Continental Army. With weather conditions being dire, morale being low, and lacking proper equipment, the Continental Army, led by GEN Washington, crossed the icy Delaware River and began its march on the city of Trenton on Christmas day 1776. The American attack commenced on the morning of 26 December and by noon Washington’s force had moved back across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania, taking their prisoners and captured supplies with them.

Central Message: Soldiers are disciplined, mentally and physically tough.
Valley Forge: On December 19th, 1777, General Washington led 12,000 Soldiers to their winter encampment at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. GEN Washington’s Soldiers trudged into camp, their feet bloody from a lack of proper footwear and hundreds of miles marched during a long campaign season. Though the Soldiers were half-starved, ill-equipped and poorly clothed, they persevered and received intense training and discipline. On June 19th, 1778, six months after arriving at Valley Forge, the Continental Army pursued the British forces who were moving towards New York City. Washington’s Soldiers engaged the British at the Battle of Monmouth. Strengthened by the hardships they had already overcome and the training they had received, the Americans defeated the British and prevented the attack on New York.

Hero of the Battle: General (GEN) George Washington; Continental Army. While at Valley Forge, General Washington greatly enhanced the discipline, training, supply and morale of his Soldiers in part because he shared the hardships they all faced, ensuring that the Continental Army emerged as the professional fighting force that he would lead to victory over the British, thus securing American independence.

Central Message: Soldiers are disciplined, physically and mentally tough.
Cowpens: On January 17th, 1781, British forces attacked American militia and regular positions near Cowpens, South Carolina. The British Commander, having little regard for the abilities, discipline or training of the American force, massed his forces in a frontal assault. But the American Soldiers were well-prepared, and they enveloped the British Forces, resulting in an overwhelming American victory.

Hero of the Battle: Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) John Eager Howard, 5th Maryland Regiment, Continental Army. Commanding the Continental forces during the battle, LTC Howard baited the advancing British to pursue him up rising ground. Once the Americans achieved the full advantage of the high ground, Howard ordered his men to turn and fire, stunning the British lines. Howard then ordered a bayonet charge that thoroughly routed the enemy and ensured victory. For his actions, he was awarded the Congressional Silver Medal.

Central Message: Soldiers are members of the Total Army team.
The Battle of New Orleans: A series of engagements fought between December 1814 and January 1815, constituting the last major battle of the War of 1812. After defeating Napoleon in Europe earlier that year, Great Britain redoubled its efforts against its former colonies. If Great Britain could seize New Orleans, it would gain dominion over the Mississippi River and hold trade of the entire American South under its thumb.

Hero of the Battle: Major General (MG) Andrew Jackson; 7th Military District, U.S. Army. Although the American forces, under MG Jackson, were vastly outnumbered, the Battle of New Orleans was remarkable for both its brevity and lopsided lethality, with a total loss of British soldiers estimated at 2,600, and American losses at less than 100.

Central Message: Soldiers never accept defeat and never quit.
**Gettysburg:** On the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg, Union forces were recovering from initial setbacks and hastily regrouped into defensive positions on a line of hills South of the town. Sensing a momentary vulnerability of the Union forces, the Confederates began an attack against the Union left flank.

**Hero of the Battle:** Colonel (COL) Joshua Chamberlain; Commander of the 20th Maine Regiment, Union Army. During the attack, COL Chamberlain quickly understood the strategic significance of holding the small hill (later known as Little Round Top). With many casualties and low ammunition, COL Chamberlain ordered his left wing to initiate a bayonet charge which he led himself, thus saving the flank and holding the position for the Union Army.

**Central Message:** Soldiers always place the mission first.
Vicksburg: The Battle of Vicksburg was the culmination of a long land and naval campaign by Union forces to capture a key strategic position during the Civil War. President Lincoln recognized the significance of the town and said that, “Vicksburg is the key, the war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket.”

Hero of the Battle: Private (PVT) Uriah Brown, 30th Ohio Infantry, Union Army. During the Battle of Vicksburg, despite the death of his captain at his side during an assault, he continued carrying a log to the defense ditch. While he was laying the log into position he was shot along with several of his comrades. Despite his wounds and intense fire, PVT Brown dragged 5 of the other wounded Soldiers from the ditch and put them in a place of safety.

Central Message: Soldiers never leave a fallen comrade.
Meuse-Argonne Offensive: In October 1918, the Allied Expeditionary Force conducted the last major offensive of World War I (WWI). It was one of the largest American military operation in history, involving more than 1.2 million Soldiers. American forces fought from trenches, across barbed wire, and through dense forests to defeat the heavily fortified enemy. The campaign was a success and led directly to an Allied victory in WWI.

Hero of the Battle: Sergeant (SGT) Alvin York; 328th Infantry, 82nd Division. SGT York was one of the most decorated Soldiers of WWI. He led an attack on a series of German machinegun nests, capturing 35 machineguns, defeating 25 enemy personnel, and taking 132 prisoners. For his actions, he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Central Message: Soldiers always place the mission first.
**Ardennes Forest:** Attack on Hill 188, Champagne Marne Sector, France, WWI. By the fall of 1918, the Central Powers were unraveling on all fronts, and during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, Corporal (CPL) Stowers’ unit was tasked with attacking Hill 188, key terrain in his unit’s assigned sector.

**Hero of the Battle:** CPL Freddie Stowers; 371st Infantry Regiment, 93rd Infantry Division (Colored). On September 28, 1918, after only a few minutes into the attack on Hill 188, the enemy ceased fire and began climbing out of the trenches with their hands up as if to surrender. As CPL Stowers’ moved forward within 100 meters, the enemy jumped back into the trenches and opened up with interlocking bands of machine gun and mortar fire causing well over 50% casualties to Stowers’ unit. CPL Stowers took charge and inspired the remaining men to follow him in the attack. During this attack, CPL Stowers was mortally wounded, but still pressed forward urging on the members of his squad until he died, inspiring his entire company to press the attack until Hill 188 was captured. For his actions that day, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

**Central Message:** Soldiers never accept defeat and never quit.
Omaha Beach, Normandy: On June 6th, 1944, American and allied forces crossed the British Channel and attacked the fortified German positions in Normandy, France. American Soldiers at Omaha Beach used individual movement techniques to negotiate mines, fortifications, and various other obstacles in order to defeat the enemy. Their dedication and fortitude ensured victory in the most important battle of World War II.

Hero of the Battle: Technician 5th Grade John Pinder; 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. During the invasion, Technician Pinder was responsible for carrying vital communications equipment to shore. He was wounded almost immediately, but continued to brave machinegun and sniper fire to move equipment from the surf to the beach. He was wounded twice more, but refused medical treatment. He died of his wounds, but not before establishing a critical communications link for the invasion force. For his actions, he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Central Message: Soldiers are trained and proficient in their Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills.
Battle of the Bulge: In December 1944, more than 200,000 German troops and nearly 1,000 tanks launched a counter-offensive that was intended to cut through the Allied forces in a manner that would turn the tide of the war in Germany’s favor.

Hero of the Battle: Sergeant (SGT) Jose Lopez; 23rd Infantry, 2nd Infantry Division. During a German attack during the Battle of the Bulge, SGT Lopez’s company was about to be flanked by the advancing German infantry. SGT Lopez moved his heavy machine gun to the company’s flank and single handedly cut down over 100 advancing German soldiers ensuring his company was not enveloped and allowing it to withdraw successfully, which gave other forces time to build a line and repel the enemy drive. For his actions, he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Central Message: Soldiers are proficient in their Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills.
The Battle of Leyte: The amphibious invasion of the Gulf of Leyte in the Philippines in late 1944 aimed to recapture and liberate the entire Philippine Archipelago after nearly three years of Japanese occupation. For the U.S., capturing the Philippines was a key strategic step in isolating Imperial Japan’s hold on the Pacific theater.

Hero of the Battle: Private First Class (PFC) Dirk Vlug; 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division. PFC Vlug was manning a roadblock on the Ormoc Road when his unit was attacked by heavily armed Japanese tanks. Reacting on instinct, PFC Vlug armed himself with a bazooka and 6 rounds of ammunition before charging the tanks. He single-handedly destroyed all 5 tanks. For his actions that day, he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Central Message: Soldiers are proficient in their Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills.
**Hacksaw Ridge:** In May of 1945, the 77th Division was engaged in combat on the Japanese island of Okinawa. The unit took heavy casualties while fighting in caves and along ridgelines, but the Division was able to seize the key terrain, and Army medics proved crucial in the saving and evacuation of wounded Americans.

**Hero of the Battle:** Private First Class (PFC) Desmond Doss; 307th Infantry, 77th Infantry Division. Army medic PFC Doss, who repeatedly risked his life to save fallen comrades, and though he was wounded four times, kept treating and moving wounded Soldiers to safety. He saved the lives of at least 75 American Soldiers. For his actions, he received the Medal of Honor.

**Central Message:** Soldiers never leave a fallen comrade.
Produced by the

United States Army
Center for Initial Military Training

In conjunction with the

TRADOC Military History Office

and the

United States Army
Center for Military History