

**The Great War of 1932:
Making the Organized Reserve a “going concern”**



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The Great War of 1932

The enemy task force was northeast of Oahu, Hawaii, when the carriers turned into the wind and launched their aircraft. So far they had escaped detection and everything was proceeding exactly as planned. In those predawn hours of Sunday morning, the seventh, 152 aircraft were soon airborne and on their way to attack Pearl Harbor.

Coming out of the clouds along the Koolau Mountain Range, the attackers strafed rows of US aircraft parked on runways while dive-bombers dumped 20 tons of notional explosives on air fields, navy ships, and the Army Headquarters at Fort Shafter. Not a single defending aircraft attempted to intercept them. The attack on Pearl Harbor's defenders had come as a complete surprise.

A New York Times correspondent covering the Joint Army-Navy Maneuver exercises that fateful morning of theoretical infamy – 7 February 1932 – reported that US Admiral Harry E. Yarnell's attacking Blue Force planes, "made the attack unopposed by the defense, which was caught virtually napping, and [they] escaped to the mother ships without the slightest damage being inflicted on them."¹

Fortunately, the 1932 attack on Pearl Harbor had been an Army Navy exercise, but what if this had been the real Pearl Harbor of 1941 . . . in 1932? How prepared was the United States Army to fight another world war after 14 years of peace, and specifically, how would the relatively new Organized Reserves of the 1920-1930s contribute to victory?

America's involvement in World War I changed the national defense strategy of the United States forever. The 1918 Armistice only exacerbated the debate between then Army Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. Peyton March and Col. John M. Palmer (an advocate of a citizen soldier army) over the size and shape of the peacetime Army. March advocated a peacetime Regular Army (RA) of 509,000 men and 3-month universal training for all eligible males. Palmer, on the other hand, recommended a smaller army of 280,000 and 6-month universal military training.

¹ Thomas Fleming, "February 7, 1932, A Date that Would Live in . . . Amnesia." *American Heritage*, July/August 2001 Vol. 55, Issue 5.

While neither man would totally get his way, both recognized the principal lesson of the Great War – mass armies, using divisions as their primary combat organization, would be utilized in future conflicts.² A new Army organization, mobilization scheme, and training paradigm would have to be implemented if the US remotely hoped to keep parity with potential threats such as Japan or war-recovering European states.³ Influenced by Palmer, as well as by the lure of a lower defense budget, Congress amended the 1916 National Defense Act as the National Defense Act of 1920. This Act essentially dictated how the Army would be organized and utilized during the interwar years.⁴

The 1920 Act emerged as a combination of idealism, ingenuity, and World War pragmatism. The Act created a structure from which to commandeer additional manpower in the event of a national emergency: three distinct components were established – the Regular Army (RA), National Guard (NG), and Organized Reserve (OR). It also created a commissioning mechanism for officers, the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) and the Civilian Military Training Camps (CMTCs), which fed OR officers and enlisted soldiers directly into units located geographically close to the schools or camps in question. This system was spiced up with annual 15-day training exercises, Army schools, additional training opportunities (when practical) and low cost officer and NCO correspondence courses. The end product was a low cost Organized Reserve component established by veterans which, at its heart, was voluntary in nature.

The OR consisted of infantry divisions, cavalry divisions, artillery brigades, and a rich assortment of other units. This structure replicated in almost every detail, the mobilization scheme that created the National Army of 1917 – the original units of today’s Army Reserve.⁵ Directly transferring National Army organization, including battle colors, to the OR, the task of filling divisions and units with reserve officers and men began 21 July 1921 under the guidance of the new Army Chief of Staff, General John J. Pershing, former commander of the American Expeditionary Forces (1917-1919).

² Both favored some type of Universal Military Training which, among other things, was deemed too expensive.

³ “Senators to Frame A New Army Bill,” *New York Times*, 17 November 1919.

⁴ In theory, the 1920 Act created an Army of 18,000 Regular Officers and 280,000 men, but cuts in Army appropriations would keep the Army at around 12,000 Regular Officers and 125,000 enlisted men for most of the 1920-1930s.

⁵ The National Army consisted of Army divisions created by volunteers and the national draft of the Selective Service, the largest reserve of the United States – the American people.

In an open letter to Colonel William Barclay Parsons, Colonel, Engineer Corps (Reserve), in 1922, Pershing described his vision for the OR saying: “Our ultimate goal for the organized reserve, is a skeleton force completely of officers and composed of cadres of noncommissioned officers and a few of the more important specialists, perhaps 10 or 15 percent of the war strength.”⁶

The 1920 plan for the OR was simple, straightforward, and cost effective: OR units would be manned at 100% officer strength with at most 33% of enlisted soldiers. In a national emergency or war, reserve officer staffs, field grade and company grade leaders were already in place to assume command, while the 33% Enlisted Reserve soldiers would become senior NCOs (cadre). Trained draftees would fill the lower enlisted ranks, creating combat ready divisions. The decision to create skeleton reserve divisions rather than man them at full strength was a significant political victory for the National Guard – their first victory over the Army Reserve. By limiting the Enlisted Reserve Corps to 33% of authorized wartime strength, there was less competition when recruiting enlisted soldiers throughout the country. This also ensured that the National Guard would remain the primary reserve force of the US for years to come.⁷

This suited citizen-soldier visionary Col. John McAuley Palmer quite well. According to Col Palmer’s blueprint for a citizen army, “As citizen soldiers pass from active service in the National Guard, they should be encouraged to prolong their military service under the less exacting conditions obtaining in the Reserves.”⁸

Adhering to this and fiscal constraints, the War Department determined that OR soldiers would be paid only when put on active duty orders, which were originally 15-day annual summer training exercises. Unlike the NG, OR reservists received no pay for monthly drills. There were no vehicles, tents, weapons, or equipment, for there were no OR armories in which to secure it.

⁶ *Army Navy Register*, 22 June 1922. Pershing went on to say, “these [men] should be recruited as far as possible from the men already trained in their positions and duties. With larger cadres our training problems would only be complicated without corresponding advantage.”

⁷ LTC (Ret) Steven Clay, *U.S. Army Order of Battle, Vol. 1*. (Combat Studies Institute Press, Leavenworth KS). 4.

⁸ Col. John McAuley Palmer, *Statesmanship of War*, (Doubleday, Page & Company, Garden City, NY. 1927). 161.

Mission Command: Corps Areas

On 20 August 1920, the War Plans Division under authority of War Department General Order No. 50, established nine geographically-based Corps Areas. Each of the nine Corps boundaries varied from three to eight states in size, designed to be roughly equal in population density. The plan required each Corps Area to provide administration, logistics and training support for one RA division, two NG divisions, and three OR divisions. To ensure the success of the Corps Area and the units in it, the Regular Army assigned RA officers and men to Corps Headquarters (HQs) as well as to OR divisions and in some cases to brigade or squadron level HQs throughout their areas. Training would be coordinated through the Corps HQs which utilized RA soldiers on assignment. The Corps HQs in turn would coordinate and finance the assignments of OR officers to RA and NG units for training, CPXs, and unit maneuver exercises. The Corps HQs also managed the development and administration of hundreds of new units of the OR and ROTC, in addition to maintaining personnel records for thousands of reserve officers, Enlisted Reserve Corps personnel, ROTC and CMTC. This would demand additional manpower from the RA for the lifetime of the OR and beyond.⁹

Organized Reserve Divisions and Units:

The Army created 27 OR infantry divisions. Each division wartime table of organization required two infantry brigades with two infantry regiments each, brigade artillery, engineer battalion, quartermaster train (transport: horses and motor), signal battalion, medical battalion, division air service, and special troops battalion. There were also subtle changes at first; companies of tanks and motorcycles were added, and with time, units – such as machine gun battalions – went away. Adding to the task of the OR were six cavalry divisions and their supporting elements.¹⁰

Pershing's first task was to fill the ranks of these National Army divisions (1917-1919) which now constituted the OR. "At present," Pershing stated in 1922, "effort is being directed chiefly to

⁹ The 1921 organization and purpose of the Corps Areas would be changed by General Douglas MacArthur in 1932 to speed mobilization in an emergency. Note: Pershing wanted to create triangular divisions but was overruled. The OR and National Guard would retain square divisions (two brigades with two regiments each) until 1939.

¹⁰ OR Divisions numbered 76-91 and 94-104 were to be filled.

perfecting the organization of units in order that all reserve officers may shortly feel they are definitely connected with a going concern.”¹¹

As the new Army Chief of Staff, Pershing was ideally placed when recruiting men into the OR. He was a popular leader that inspired men to serve. In fact, he counted on his AEF soldiers of the Great War to come back and fill the ranks, and come back they did. Of the over 198,000 officers that returned home in 1918-1919 (including RA and NG), the Officer Reserve Corps (ORC) ended CY 1920 with 68,232 officers. The overwhelming majority of these were World War One veterans. They had to be, ROTC Appointments to the ORC added up to a paltry 945 in 1920.¹²

Most OR divisions were placed in the same geographic areas where the draft had stood them up in 1917-1918. Initially, a small staff of RA officers and enlisted men (generally 6 officers and 6 enlisted men) created a division headquarters. Once they determined a location, such as a post office or prominent building, they used World War One lists of ORC and National Army officers and men from which to recruit. Putting ads on the radio and in local newspapers helped fill the officer ranks to appropriate levels so that by 1925 most divisions were near full officer strength and remained so until the start of World War Two.¹³

The 77th “Statue of Liberty” Division (Organized Reserve New York) is one such example. The headquarters was located in Manhattan, NY, with the division units located primarily in New York City and throughout Long Island. It was the first OR division to fill its officer ranks to full strength; most of which were World War I veterans. As it was with many others, OR divisions such as the 78th “Lightening” division posted in New Jersey, was not far behind their 77th comrades.

Why They Served: Unpaid Incentives & Social Rewards

Why did thousands of men voluntarily serve in OR divisions and units? The pay was certainly not much of an incentive – even if they were afforded an opportunity to attend annual 15-day training exercises, this was hardly enough. One of many answers is their desire to serve –

¹¹ Army Navy Register, 22 June 1922.

¹² “Report of the Adjutant General, 1920” in *War Department Annual Reports, 1920* (Washington GPO, 1921). 257.

¹³ Clay, Vol. 1. 204.

voluntarism seemed alive and well. For the World War I founders of the OR, perhaps a combination of patriotism and a belief in a strong national defense motivated them. Veterans – especially officers – were not naïve to the dangers of the world. They had seen combat up close and the experience had left a lasting impression on their lives. Some were undoubtedly devoted to building the future Army, to pass on their knowledge to a new generation of officers and soldiers; others to continue making a contribution to the Army in some small way. A few of them may have sought military camaraderie, fellowship, and perhaps even healing. When fellow veterans of the 77th division got together, for example, there was the prospect of continued wartime friendships and for some, a source of acceptance, understanding, and perhaps therapy from the hidden wounds of combat. There were famous and important men, war heroes, men of influence and social climbers with whom one could associate. None other than Lt. Col. Charles W. Whittlesey, the commander of the famous “Lost Battalion” during World War I, helped recruit men for the 77th division. Brig. Gen. Cornelius Vanderbilt III, a great grandson of the Commodore himself, would command the 77th from 1922-1929 as would Brig. Gen. Palmer E. Pierce, who had commanded the 54th Regiment and 27th Division during the war.¹⁴ In addition:

The division established a clubhouse at 27 West 25th Street in Manhattan which added to the camaraderie. Some 300 officers and men of the division participated annually in the Army Day parade and over 550 participated in the homecoming parade for Charles Lindbergh on 13 June 1927. All of these served to increase the esprit and camaraderie of the Statue of Liberty Division.¹⁵

For a veteran proud of their service, and for the aspiring new ROTC commissioned officer, the opportunity to wear the uniform of the United States Army may have been a motive in and of itself. Organized Reserve service afforded the veteran an opportunity to parade his service in public. Americans honored the duty and sacrifices of its veterans, and statistically, the odds of seeing an officer in uniform in such places as Knoxville, Tennessee, where the 81st Infantry Division OR was headquartered, or the 100th Infantry Division OR in Charleston, West Virginia,

¹⁴ There was a symbiotic connection between the 77th ORC and the New York National Guard. Both BG Vanderbilt (see *New York Times*, 12 July 1931), and BG Pierce served in the 27th IN Division, a Guard division during the war. Note: BG Pierce was the first president of the National College Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1906.

¹⁵ Clay, Vol 1. 244.

were far and few between. To be an officer was patriotic and afforded the wearer a special prestige and status in their community which money could not buy.¹⁶

In fact, the Army actively used the lure of rank and title to tempt talented inventors, entrepreneurs and captains of industry to join them. The Army actively recruited RCA radio pioneer David Sarnoff, commissioning him in 1924 as a reserve Lieutenant Colonel in the Signal Corps. By 1927, Lt. Col. Sarnoff was giving talks to classes at the newly created Army Industrial War College.¹⁷ Other men used their rank as a calling card. Col. William J. Donovan, commander of the 301st Cavalry regiment, 61st Cavalry Division OR, and founder of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II, no doubt found his rank dignified and useful when travelling throughout interwar Europe assessing and meeting leaders such as Benito Mussolini.

All this was well and good, but for the majority of OR soldiers, paid or unpaid reserve duty still gave the participant the opportunity to play with what we today call really “cool stuff.” Thousands of men in the OR sought training opportunities which put them on the most advanced weapons systems of the day. There were hundreds of OR units which were intended to use complex weapons systems requiring military expertise and knowledge to operate. Imagine the OR officers of coastal railway artillery units who linked up with RA officers and men of coastal gun crews during annual exercises. Where else could you fire and maneuver an 8” railway gun? Where else could you work with the latest tanks, armored cars, radios, airships or for that matter, cavalry or an antiquated camouflage battalion? One need only consult Lt. Col. (Ret.) Steven Clay’s excellent four volume work on the *U.S. Order of Battle: 1919-1941* to realize that the OR skeleton divisions and units, if activated and filled with trained draftees, could form a formidable third line of defense in a national emergency.¹⁸

¹⁶ Indeed, by 1934 the Reserve Officer Association, responding to the desires of non-combat officers, suggested that medal and ribbons be created for reserve service. Richard Crossland & James Currie, *Twice the Citizen: A History of the United States Army Reserve, 1908—1995*. (Department of the Army Pamphlet 140-14, Office of the Chief. Washington, DC. 1997) 51.

¹⁷ Commissioning Sarnoff paid off. Activated in WWII as a reserve Brigadier general, among his many achievements, he was the first to open communications between liberated Paris and Great Britain.

¹⁸ Maj. M. J. Young concluded reserve officers stayed in the OR due to patriotism, desire for promotion, and for some, “the fact that military training has become a hobby.” Major Mason J. Young, “The Value of the Officer Reserve Corps as a Component of National Defense.” CGSC paper, No. 81, 1930. 6.

A Trained Organized Reserve

If there was an Achilles Heel to the OR it was training, maintaining and sustaining.

Pershing understood this all too well when he said:

it is hoped that future appropriations will admit of assembling divisional and non-divisional groups for a 15 day period of instruction at least every other year, if not each year. It is planned to have this instruction normally take the form of conferences or refresher courses with just enough practical work in the way of terrain exercises to keep up the interest of the personnel. If practicable, these assemblies will be held every third year or fourth year in conjunction with troops of the Regular Army in order that reserve officers may have an opportunity to observe and perhaps participate in up-to-date demonstrations of the various arms.¹⁹

Hope is not a plan – an austere budget determined the amount of training OR soldiers received. When the amount of money was matched to officers and men, the odds of getting a two week active duty tour in 1930 were one in four.²⁰ It is here that Col. Palmer’s ideas of using the National Guard as a feeder to units of the OR hit home. In his view, the Guard should have functioned as the “*training echelon* of the whole citizen army.” In his opinion, “If reserve officers are to be fit to command they must base that fitness on military service.” And for Palmer, if the officer did not first come from the RA or was a combat veteran, they needed to get their training with the Guard – its units, formations, equipment, paid drills and field exercises. Otherwise, he warned, the Army would be forced “to form an entirely separate and expensive training establishment for the benefit of reserve officers.”²¹ This, however, was not reality, as the new ROTC system pushed the majority of commissioned officers directly into OR units.²²

What to do? “[T]he reality,” scholar Lt. Col. Steven Clay surmised, was “that army leaders, though starved for funds by a parsimonious Congress, squeezed every penny to enable their units to conduct field training to ready their commands for combat. Granted, the training was not always as realistic or as frequent as the commanders wished, but it contributed to the army’s ability to keep a fighting edge that, while not razor sharp, was not entirely dull”²³

¹⁹ Army Navy Register, 22 June, 1922.

²⁰ *Twice the Citizen*, 45.

²¹ Palmer, *Statesman*. 160.

²² The ROTC feeder system pushed new officers into OR regiments, not NG.

²³ Clay, Vol IV. Appendix B. 2717

For those dedicated to the OR, a dull bayonet was better than none at all. In truth, the OR used a combination of volunteerism and a shoestring budget to generate training activities in each Corps Area. When examined, OR training is a remarkable achievement, implemented by a generation of World War I veterans determined to build America's next army. Organized Reserve training was multifaceted, a potpourri, a hodgepodge, a jumbled assortment of individual and unit level initiatives that resulted in training opportunities for soldiers. Much of this – similar to today's hip-pocket training – might be a lecture, a tactical walk, a non-paid trip to visit an RA unit, or a piggy-back attachment to a NG unit in the field. Soldiers and units conducted Contact Camps: non-paid weekends or outings during which OR personnel and units trained at ROTC units, NG field armories, or simply met in order to acquaint themselves with leadership and fellow staff officers. As a general rule, many of these activities occurred under the tutelage of an RA officer from Corps HQs, or an RA officer assigned to the unit.

Finally, there were training activities funded by Corps Area HQs and implemented by OR divisions. While lengthy, this summary of 77th Infantry Division OR activities contains a comprehensive look at the types of training that could take place.

The division HQ generally conducted summer training at Camp Dix, and in 1934 and 1937, conducted major division-level CPXs there. On a number of occasions, the division HQ also participated in Second Corps Area or First Army CPXs in conjunction with other R.A., N.G., and O.R. units. These training events gave division staff officers' opportunities to practice the roles they would be expected to perform in the event the division was mobilized. The 77th Div. HQ occasionally trained with the staffs of the 1st Div. or the 1st Inf. Brig. at Camp Dix, or sometimes at Fort Slocum, NY. For 1 year, in 1926, the officers of the division HQ trained with the staff of the 27th Div. at Camp Smith, NY. In 1923, the division officers, with assistance from Col. Peter E. Traub, the division chief of staff, established Camp Blauvelt at Nyack, NY, for the purposes of providing a small training area for the division. Camp Blauvelt was frequently used for "contact camps" by subordinate units and occasionally by the division staff for mini-CPXs. The subordinate infantry regiments of the division generally held their summer training primarily with the units of the 1st Inf. Brig. at Camp Dix, but other units, such as the special troops, artillery, engineers, aviation, medical, and quartermaster, trained at various posts in the Second and Third Corps Areas usually with other units of the 1st Div. For example, the division's artillery trained with the 7th F.A. at Pine Camp, NY; the 302d Engineer Regt. usually trained with the 1st Engr. Regt. at Fort Du Pont, DE; the 302d Med. Regt. trained with the 1st Med. Regt. at Carlisle Barracks, PA.²⁴

It should be understood that OR, NG, and ROTC units were not the isolated independent components they are today. Instead, OR officers and units, and those of the RA, NG and ROTC

²⁴ Clay, Vol. 1. 244.

mixed freely. The OR regularly used armories of the NG and ROTC for training when possible and would draw weapons and equipment from them – for they had none. More often than not, OR officers and men usually participated in RA and NG training exercises as individuals. In fact, it was customary for individual OR soldiers to fill out NG and RA units for field exercises. Training in the 1920s and 1930s was subject to the creativity of officers and was often a case of feast or famine.²⁵

Feast or Famine: Interwar Austerity

Organized Reserve training was not always the “hobby” Major Mason J. Young believed it to be, but it could come close. It depended on OR unit and location. The fate of units hinged on the generous support of the RA, NG, as well as civic minded citizens and facilities located in their geographic areas. Of these, Culver Military Academy, Indiana, is a shining example of what a small military school could do to support the training of OR units in an era of austerity and later the Great Depression.

First and foremost, Culver Military Academy (CMA) had a patriot visionary as its superintendent during the interwar years – Brigadier General Leigh R. Gignilliat. A veteran of the Great War (he had served on Pershing’s staff), Gignilliat became an outspoken proponent of ROTC and the benefits of military training to national defense.²⁶ Gignilliat led by example; from 1922-1939 he served as the commanding general of the 168th Infantry Brigade, 84th Infantry Division OR. From day one of the OR’s inception, Gignilliat put the facilities and resources of the school to use. The Culver cadet corps maintained hundreds of Springfield rifles, numbers of machine guns, World War I lorries, and even mini-Sopwith Camel biplanes! The academy boasted both cadet infantry and cavalry units, not to mention a battery of horse drawn 75 mm guns. The school radio station (WCMA) allowed soldiers to practice signal skills, to include an amateur

²⁵ As to the quality of the training, it was, according to one OR soldier, “hit or miss.” Quoted in, *Twice the Citizen*. 41.

²⁶ Leigh R. Gignilliat, from *Hearst’s International Cosmopolitan Magazine*, cited in “Summary of Experience on ROTC Duty,” Captain William L. Wharton, Class of 1933-1935, C.A.G.S.S., 1 March 1935. 16. Of military training Gignilliat stated: “it instills confidence, teaches the reason for discipline, gives experience in organization and the handling of men, and builds the spirit of service.”

radio station. Lastly, CMA owned thousands of acres of maneuver area for CPXs and tactical walks – similar to today’s Tactical Exercise Without Troops (TEWTS).²⁷

Gignilliat literally built an army for the OR. Culver served as a primary ROTC feeder school for the regiments of his 168th Brigade and others as well. In all, Culver sent officers to the 333rd, 334th, 335th, and 336th infantry regiments, along with faculty and staff who served as senior officers. But wait! Culver also furnished officers to two cavalry regiments of the 64th Cavalry Division, the 313th and 314th. For several years the 313th Cavalry Regiment trained under the able leadership of Gignilliat’s number two officer, Col Robert Rossow – commandant of cadets.

Culver’s contribution to national defense is all the more remarkable when we consider that Gignilliat had persuaded the Army to give Culver the elite status of an Honor Military School. In other words, the Army commissioned, as officers, CMA high school graduates. Newly minted Second Lieutenant Orlo B. Sheldon, wrote that his “examining board said many complimentary things about Culver, among them ‘that coming from there was about enough to give one a commission.’”²⁸

Other men and institutions did what they could. Medical OR units held meetings at local hospitals or medical schools. Brig. Gens Charles and William Mayo created free seminars for reservists starting in 1920 at the Mayo Clinic, as did many other universities such as Tulane and Vanderbilt. To ease the burden of those attending a two-week medical seminar on a non-pay status, these institutions paid for their room and board.²⁹

But, for each example of ingenuity the OR struggled in other Corps Areas. Although the number of OR officers continued to grow each year, numbers always seemed to lag behind required wartime projections. As for the Enlisted Reserve Corps, it never grew beyond 6,000 – no doubt a casualty of NG recruiting and drill pay.

Part of the OR existed only as a paper army, while in other areas of the country units were formed only to fold, deactivate and go away. Alas, for the 526th Infantry Battalion, Organized

²⁷ Culver’s amateur wireless station, 9EZ under Major G.B. Eisenhard, participated in the American Radio Relay League and was undoubtedly part of the Army Amateur Radio League program. *The Culver Alumnus*, October 1928, Vol. 9 No. 4.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Clay, Vol IV. 2273.

Reserve West Virginia, and units like her: “Constituted in the O.R. on 2 July 1923, allotted to the Fifth Corps Area, and assigned to the Zone of the Interior. Further allotted to the 100th Div. mobilization area (West Virginia). Withdrawn from the O.R. on 5 September 1928 and demobilized.”³⁰ Hundreds met a similar fate.

The Organized Reserve at War: 1932

To repeat the original question of this paper: “How prepared was the United States Army to fight another world war after 14 years of peace, and specifically, how would the relatively new Organized Reserves of the 1920-1930s contribute to victory?”

Assuming the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 February 1932, instead of US Admiral Harry E. Yarnell, the answer to this question hinges on two considerations: what was the size and condition of the Japanese Army in 1932, and how comparatively prepared was the United States to respond?

First, it is important to consider the changes occurring in the US Army and OR in the early 1930s. The technology and tactics of war were rapidly changing; armies were experimenting and perfecting armored warfare, aerial bombardment, navy carrier tactics and more. Soldiers changed too. In 1932, Secretary of War, Patrick J. Hurley observed, “the march of time has so changed the character of the Officers’ Reserve Corps that an organization which was in the beginning made up entirely of World War officers has now but one-third of that class.”³¹

Pershing, the all-knowing all-seeing, had pondered the consequences of a generational shift in 1922. “[T]here is one point of view which may not have occurred to you,” he wrote Colonel Parsons:

namely, that while the present personnel of the reserve corps is composed almost wholly of veteran officers who have had active service with troops, the young replacement officers who will come into the corps will not have had such service and that some provision must be made whereby the opportunity will be afforded them. Moreover, I think that you will agree with me that a proportion of the veteran officers will doubtless desire active training with troops wherever possible. To provide for both classes of officers we hope to make arrangements

³⁰ Clay, Vol. I. 532.

³¹ Quoted from *Twice the Citizen*. 51. NOTE: The new generation of officers would begin to lobby for drill pay and other benefits enjoyed by the National Guard.

whereby they may be attached to units of the Regular Army and also of the National Guard, if that can be arranged, which they will join for annual training. Incidentally, this will serve to solve another problem, namely that of providing the additional officers required for expansion of the Regular Army from its peace to war status.³²

Veterans would make a difference in combat. A war in 1932 would test the interwar army forged by World War veterans. Fortunately, or unfortunately, there were still enough veterans to give the new officers the necessary backbone to go over the top. But this was equally part of the problem, the veteran senior officer mindset, even with technological advances, was probably not enough to get their troops beyond no man's land. Combat-1932, would more likely resemble World War I. It would be a slow and bloody war.³³

The Japanese Army and nation by 1932 had entered a period of militant militarization. In 1931 the Japanese Army fielded 198,000 officers and troops, but was expanding, drawing on a population of over 64 million Japanese. Invading Manchuria in 1931 (setting up a puppet state of Manchukuo), Japanese soldiers quickly became battle-hardened veterans. If the US experience from World War II is any guide, Japanese soldiers would fight for the emperor as tenaciously in 1932 as they did nine years later.

In the US, Army planners of the early 1920s determined that a force of 66 divisions: 11 Regular Army, 22 National Guard, and 27 Organized Reserves would be adequate for a World War level emergency.³⁴ Assuming that the OR remained the nation's third line of defense, the RA and NG would mobilize first and deploy against Japan, allowing OR divisions to fill their enlisted ranks with conscripts, replicating the stand-up of the National Army divisions of the World War.³⁵

Keep in mind, that the armaments of both nations in 1932 were technologically similar. The US did not yet possess enough of a technological edge and/or superiority in tanks or aircraft. Mobilization would have proceeded at a slower pace as well as deployment to the Japanese theater. Using World War I combat doctrine mixed with a touch of 1930s innovation in technology would ultimately demand mass armies of World War proportions. As a byproduct,

³² *Army Navy Register*, 22 June 1922.

³³ Military Historians have likened the US defense of Bataan (1941-1942) as the last battle of World War I.

³⁴ The 1920s plan envisioned an OR of 33 divisions.

³⁵ OR divisions would stand up with draftees drawn from their respective Corps Areas.

OR divisions and units would have time to mobilize and train draftees. If there were OR officers and troops left to fill them – this was already in doubt.

By 1933 the Secretary of War determined that 80,000 officer vacancies would exist in both the RA and NG “in the early weeks of an emergency.”³⁶ The Army planned to fill their ranks with 70,000 reservists and then, if needed, use the remaining 50,000 plus to mobilize reserve units. This might have worked. With a pool of 128,000 officers the ORC was near its zenith, the mobilization of OR divisions and other units remained a possibility. Surely, if not the OR divisions, medical, engineer, signal, quartermaster and many other units with special skills would have received the call and mobilized as units.

United States Army 1932

	OFFICERS	ENLISTED	TOTAL
Organized Reserve	128,000	4,872	132,875
National Guard	13,550	174,000	187,413
Regular Army	13,227	119,913	133,200 ³⁷

It is far more likely that the US Army would have done a little bit of both, taken from the ranks of the Officers Reserve Corps to fill the RA and NG (and decimate what was left of the ERC) and mobilize a mix of OR units, to include, in a long war, a gradual stand-up of OR divisions.³⁸ As to who would have won the Great War of 1932, the answer is obvious.

Conclusion:

Beginning in 1920, the force structure of the National Army of World War One (1917-1919) was moved directly into a new component called the Organized Reserves, a statute-level military force which eventually evolved into today’s US Army Reserve. The history of this force has largely been ignored by military historians, and if discussed at all, downplayed if not denigrated by those who have given the Organized Reserve a cursory look.

³⁶ Quoted in *Twice the Citizen*. 53.

³⁷ Clay, Vol. IV. 2743.

³⁸ The Army would certainly have taken the officers out of the six Cavalry Divisions by 1932 and put them where needed.

In reality the Organized Reserve was a brilliant creation for its day. It was innovative in both organization as well as comprehensive in scope. First and foremost, the infantry and cavalry divisions of the OR and other units were purposely designed as part of an expandable army. Each division was permitted to fill its officers' ranks to 100% of allotted billets, and one-third of its enlisted billets. In the event of war, the lower ranks of each OR division would be filled with draftees while the OR enlisted men assumed roles as senior NCOs.

Using the new Reserve Officer Training Corps as feeder schools, newly commissioned officers were fed directly into OR units where they mixed with veteran World War I officers and enlisted men. It is within this environment that new officers received theoretical training, attended and observed training with Regular Army and National Guard units, and conducted contact camps as well as other training during one-week or two-week active duty tours.

When objectively considered, the officers and men of the OR exhibited an amazing amount of patriotism and devotion to duty. Voluntarism was the order of the day – that, and the occasional active duty tour. Organized Reserve soldiers were not paid for monthly drills as were National Guard soldiers, and paid training opportunities were far and few between, especially once the crisis of the Great Depression was upon the nation. Nevertheless, these amazing soldiers conducted monthly meetings, contact camps, command post exercises, and more as they sought training opportunities throughout the interwar years. In reality, the OR and the other components were built by the veterans of World War I. This was the interwar Army they created which helped win World War II.