

# History of The 96th Division: 'Bunch of Guys Named Joe' Near Their Date With Destiny

## World War I Division Reborn; Ends 1st Year

By Lt. Orlando R. Davidson

The 96th Division is fast approaching its date with destiny.

Saturday we celebrate our first birthday. The story of our first 12 months is a modest story—one we present simply for the record and wholly as a prologue.

For the history of the 96th Division is yet to be written; where we do not know. Perhaps it will be in the fields of Brittany, perhaps up the fjords of Norway, perhaps in the rice paddies of China. It will be scrawled in jagged red letters by the wits and heroism of a bunch of guys named Joe.

This first year has, of course, been one of preparation for the job at hand. But before we review those months, a glance backward is in order.

### Glancing Backward

In the spring and summer of 1918, a dramatic race was on. Hindenberg's Prussian armies were striving desperately to crack the stubborn Allied line before the fresh and unlimited manpower of the United States could be moulded into a fighting force and thrown into the battle.

It was in this atmosphere that the 96th Division was conceived. It came into being on Sept. 5, 1918, at Camp Wadsworth, S. C., under the command of Major General Guy Carleton, a master tactician who had trained many of the troops already at grips with the enemy.

### Division Dies

But history was too fast for the young division. Not yet even activated, it died for all practical purposes on Armistice Day. On January 17, 1919, it was officially buried—with honor but without distinction.

Five years passed. Our citizens' thoughts were far from war. But in Washington, the men directing our tiny peacetime military establishment knew that wishing ourselves away from war was a poor guaranty of peace. Their job was to keep the powder dry, so, quietly, they laid the framework for our next wartime army.

It was in 1923 that the 96th Division came to life again—on paper. Regiments (approximate strength: one man and a telephone) were set up in Portland, Seattle and Eugene. Reserve officers in the Pacific Northwest were earmarked for the 96th. On "M" day it would be ready to go.

### Reborn In Calamity

There was never an "M" day, but there was Pearl Harbor. Killed in its youth by victory, the 96th was reborn in calamity. It wasn't official till a few months later but the die was cast on that terrible Sunday.

The character of the new division was determined in May, 1942, when Major General James L. Bradley was chosen to command. From that moment, the throttle was open with battle as the destination.

### Talent Recognized

The assignment was a fitting recognition of abundantly-proven military talent. A native of Missouri, General Bradley was a member of the West Point class of 1914. In later years, he was graduated with distinction from the Army War College, the Infantry School and the Command and General Staff School and taught at the latter two. He saw foreign service in

Hawaii, Mexico and Puerto Rico and rose to the position of G-3 of the old Ninth Corps Area.

Upon activation of the Fourth Army, General Bradley became its G-3, and subsequently was appointed Deputy Chief of Staff of the Fourth Army and Western Defense Command. It was this position he left to take command of the 96th.

### Ably Assisted

The War Department flanked General Bradley with a trio of able assistants—Brigadier General Wil. M. Miley, Assistant Division Commander; Brigadier General Paul V. Kane, Division Artillery Commander, and Colonel Hammond M. Monroe, Chief of Staff. Even before activation, General Miley was whisked off to another job and to replace him came an equally competent officer, Brigadier General Claudius M. Easley. The permanent "first team" was complete.

Conferences in Washington followed and other key officers were selected. Off they went to the various service schools. By this time, all but a handful of the Northwest Reserve Officers once marked for service with the 96th had already been called to other units and in addition the War Department had abandoned the policy of regional divisions. Accordingly, the officer complement emerged as a cosmopolitan cross-section of the Nation. More on that later.

### Northwest Division

But in an important sense, the 96th was still to be a Pacific Northwest Division. The site selected for its training was a raw cantonment, still largely in the blueprint stage, set amidst the fertile farmlands of MORE — MORE — MORE — the Willamette Valley. Appropriately, it was named Camp Adair in memory of a youthful Oregon officer who died heroically in the Mexican Border campaign.

Early in July, 1942, officers and men began trickling into Camp. For awhile officers outnumbered enlisted men, and second lieutenants lived in daily terror of finding themselves on the next day's KP roster. The enlisted cadre, drawn largely from the Seventh Motorized Division, Camp San Luis Obispo, California, approached full strength, by July 16, and by July 23, most of the officer personnel was on hand.

### Activation

On July 28, an Army Ground Forces made its visit and the stage was set for Activation Day, August 15.

The events of that day were a pretty good tipoff that the 96th was to be no "Fancy Dan"—"Good-time Charlie" outfit, but simply a hard-slugging infantry outfit, well aware that its reason for being was to do the dirtiest, nastiest job in the book of war. General Bradley set the theme.

"We of the 96th Division have a clearly-defined task," he said. "It is to become a well-trained combat division in the shortest possible time. We must keep our eyes, we must keep our thoughts on that goal. Any time spent on efforts which do not lead to that goal is

### Commanding General of the 96th



MAJOR GENERAL JAMES L. BRADLEY, commanding general of the 96th Infantry division—which has returned to Camp Adair, is "glad to be back," and prepared to celebrate its first anniversary with a great, all-around anniversary day, in this cantonment tomorrow.—Signal Corps photo.

### THE 96TH DIVISION

"We must have such determination to win that we are willing to undergo any hardships in preparing ourselves to gain that victory. We will welcome obstacles that we may glory in overcoming them. We will welcome the rain and the mud. We will be as tough mentally as we are physically."

"This is the kind of a Division we are going to be; well trained, tough physically and mentally, ready and anxious to fight, not for our own personal glory or advancement, but for the honor of the Division and the service of our country."

—Major General James L. Bradley  
August 15, 1942

MISSION: To bring the Division to such a state of proficiency as a fighting unit that it will be selected early as a front line combat division.

—Training Memorandum No. 8  
96th Infantry Division

time wasted, and we have no time to waste . . .

"Our enemies are tough. We must be tougher . . .

"Total war calls for total effort . . .

"We kill or we get killed . . ."

### Knuckling Down

The ceremony was brief. And, without further delay, the 96th threw off its party clothes, spit on its hands and got down to work.

The next two months were rugged. You can't teach what you don't know, so cadre schools sprang up from Division down to Battalion. An Army is supposed to shoot, so hours were spent on the range. An Officer of NCO won't last long if he's not a bit tougher than his men, so there were hikes, hikes, hikes and more hikes.

### Fillers Arrive

When the raw material out of which a combat division was to be moulded—the fillers—began to arrive

October 19, their teachers were ready.

This is a good place to tell you where our men are from. The answer is simple—everywhere. Specifically, we were born in every State in the Union, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and 28 foreign countries. No matter where we may fight, it will almost certainly be on homeground for at least one of our soldiers.

Basically, however, the 96th is a Mid-Continental Division. About 85 per cent of us come from the wide belt of states splitting the country from the Michigan and Minnesota on the North to Texas and Louisiana on the South. More than 2000 of us were born in Illinois alone, another 1500 in Texas and more than 1100 in Michigan. Five other states — Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Missouri and Minnesota—all have more than 500 stars in their windows.

But we have deep roots to both

Oceans. California and New York each have contributed more than 200 men to the Division. Forty of us are native Oregonians. And we have 85 New Englanders to give us respectability. Pan-American solidarity is served by our 40 Canadians, 16 Mexicans and 1 representative from Peru and Cuba.

If it is our privilege someday to march down the Avenues of Berlin, 23 of our men will be walking on their native soil. Another half dozen are of Italian birth. We have one man from indomitable Malta, and five of us will take a peculiarly personal satisfaction if this Division helps in liberating unhappy Poland.

### Basic

The weeks that followed the arrival of the troops were not exciting—yet, in a sense, they were. These were the crucial 13 weeks the Army allots itself to transform civilians into soldiers. The paunchy ones grew lean. The scrawny ones put on pounds in the right places. The strong flourished. The weak fell by the wayside. What had been a shuffling mob was becoming a pyramid of disciplined, functioning, fighting men.

Meanwhile, on Armistice Day, the Division met its commander, General Bradley, at the first formation of the new Division in its entirety, restated his determination to put a hardened combat team in the field at the earliest possible moment, and warned his men:

"We must grasp the thorn in our hand and prepare our minds and bodies for the hardships that will come before final victory. Aroused and in condition, we are the best fighting men in the world—a terror to our enemies and eager to close with them in combat."

### End of Basic

On February 20, 1943, basic training was completed so far as 13 brief weeks would permit, the men of the 96th were trained soldiers. Now the job was to transform the individual soldier into a working cog, to mold each unit of the Division into a single-purposed team.

This was a big job and another 13 weeks were set aside for it. But while this was going on, the picture was constantly changing, for no military organization is static.

### Promotions

Men who had but recently been privates began wearing sergeant's stripes. Lieutenants became captains, silver oak leaves sprouted where there had been gold. Officers who had seen the Division born moved on to new assignments. Others, both officers and men, were called back to school that they might return better equipped to do their jobs or to tackle bigger ones.

Officer candidate boards began to sift off officer material from the ranks. The army specialized training program came into being, startled soldiers found themselves back at college, while their startled superiors quietly went nuts as their key men filed off in orderly procession, never to return.

Too, the unfit, physically and mentally, were swiftly being weeded out. Also back to civilian life went a trickle of men more needed on their farms and behind their machines.

### The Cadre

In April, the Division suddenly realized it had grown from childhood to maturity when it found itself a parent. Trainloads of officers and men pulled out for Camp Shelby, Mississippi, charged with rearing a new division, the 69th.

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