

HISTORICAL SECTION
HEADQUARTERS
EUROPEAN THEATRE OF OPERATIONS
APO 887 U. S. Army

1 January 1945

Memo : To All History Teams of the European Theater

Subject: Clarification of Objectives

m So that we may proceed toward the established objectives of historical work with the Army of the United States, the following statement of policy and procedure is made for the guidance of all concerned;

1.. The mission of History Section, European Theater of Operations and of the history teams of the field armies is to bring forward a comprehensive and well-proportioned history of military operations by our forces. The final objective is the writing and publication of such history.

2. 2. The functions of all personnel entrusted with the writing of any portions of this history or with the collecting and organizations of data for such writings are as follows:

- a. The integration and clarification of matters which are already of record, and
- b. The supplementing of existing records with fresh data provided through the oral examination of the witnesses.

3. Since these functions are complementary and since the purpose of both is to round out the body of history by concentrating on those matters which would otherwise be lost, neither is to be given priority over the other.

4. On whatever level of operation and information the Historical Officer works, his prime responsibility is to establish the truth of what happened, as fully as lies within his resources and as accurately as all means of research will permit.

5. Except as noted in the next paragraph, small unit combat studies or group interviews will not be pursued where they are of an isolated character and where the prime value of the study is its tactical nature. The small unit group interview is essentially a device by which to clear the confusion from the record when the role of the small unit was such that it is vitally related to the operation as a whole. Where Battalion and Regimental records are reasonably clear and the parts played by the smaller units appear to be well understood by the higher commands, and where the records do not provide major contradictions or express doubt as to what occurred in the smaller units, it is not necessary to carry the search lower. Or again, where the role of the Regiment or the Battalion was not especially conspicuous in the operation of the larger elements, or where the operation was of indecisive character, it is not necessary to carry out extensive researches at the lower levels. But in all cases, where the military success or failure of a command is vitally related to the course of a campaign, in terms of decisive ground gained or lost, large casualties and losses of material, unexpected results gained at a slight cost or planning which miscarried, and where search at the Battalion and Regimental levels does not explain why these things happened, then the small unit interview is to be given priority over all other methods of research. It is given priority because there is no other more practical way to complete that portion of history.

6. If operations are at a stage that all actions along a general front have only local importance and when there is no further work to be done on campaigns at the higher levels, the Historical Officer may at his own discretion proceed to the organization of small unit narratives by the interview method.

7. Since it is manifest that in the circumstances of the preceding paragraph small unit study will not cover a Pivotal action, the search then should be directed toward:

a. The Illustrative Action, which is typical of what goes on along the whole line of a larger unit (Example: Night patrolling across the river when a Division is held for a prolonged period along the high bank), or

b. The Unique Action, which is one that in the main expresses new applications of lessons in tactics or is of such startling consequence that it commands itself to general attention. (Example: One Battalion of our Infantry engaging and destroying a Regiment of the enemy in a local action).

8. Even after making close search of the records or after questioning the Command and Staff of higher echelons, the Historical Officer is not always able to determine when a small unit action has Pivotal, Illustrative or Unique Character. His decision as to what actions call for study in detail can usually be guided, however, by what is told him by the higher commanders. He will generally find that where Regimental Commanders inform him as to what actions in a given campaign deserve study, the information is correct. However, any small unit action, once taken under study by the Historical Officer, should be carried to completion, and he should not shirk its detail even though he discovers in the course of his enquiry that it does not have critical character.

9. In doing small unit interviews, accuracy and completeness of detail should be the ever-present aim. Better one interview sharply etched and answering all questions than ten which are hazy and lacking in any of the essentials. The focus should be as revealing as a spotlight suddenly to a darkened stage.

10. The small units study must be tied in with the larger action or story of operation. This can be done along broad lines in a preface telling briefly the circumstances which led up to the action and the general movements of larger bodies of troops out of which the small unit operation developed, or the small unit action may be used to illuminate a narrative which is moving along for the most part at a high level. But unless the setting is established by the Historical Officer, his close scrutiny of the small unit has little historical value.

11. To reconstruct the story of a platoon or company it is necessary to assemble all survivors only when the action was particularly diffused and a number of components of the unit has each a portion of the story not known to the others. For the average company action, a group of one or two officers and anywhere from six to twenty enlisted men, including a majority of key non-coms, will usually suffice. The larger group will yield a greater store of information but they are also harder to control and not as accessible. The principle is that the Historical Officer must make the most efficient use of his time, bearing in mind that our objective is to develop a history of operations which is in perspective and which recites a balanced story of all levels.

12. The History Section, European Theater of Operations, has been entrusted with developing a series of operational monographs, to be written by its personnel and published by the War Department. The History Teams of the field armies were established to do this work. Except for the final stage of preparing these monographs (pamphlets) for press, the assignment is not separate from other duties of the Teams. If the teams is not researching each campaign thoroughly enough that its work will suffice for a monograph, then it will not satisfactorily serve some larger enterprise, such as the history of an Army or the over-all History of the War.

13. No rule-of-thumb is possible regarding the command level at which the teams should direct the greater part of their effort to obtain a balanced history. It will vary from situation to situation, according to the nature of the command, the character of the warfare and other factors. For example, in airborne operations, at least 50 per cent of our work must be done at the company platoon level for the operation to be intelligible. In infantry and armored divisions, unless the story of operation is clear and cogent at the Regimental and combat command level, the Divisional story will be obscure and there will be no frame of reference against which to evaluate the findings among the lower units.

14. In consultation with the team chiefs, the Theater Historian or his Deputy will make assignments to cover the writing of pamphlets according to a schedule drawn up by History Section which will specify the studies wanted. The policy will be to direct these assignments so that there will be minimum loss to the field work of the teams.

15. Priority on these studies will be regulated according to the availability of personnel and documentary material.

16. Recommendations by team chiefs on appropriate studies for pamphlets will always be welcome.

S/ W. A. Ganoe
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