

A READING PROGRAM FOR LINGUISTICALLY HANDICAPPED AND MENTALLY LIMITED PERSONNEL IN THE MILITARY SERVICE

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There has been no time in history when education has been given as important a role in the Army as in the present war effort. Because of the need for the rapid training of men, there has been no place for wasteful expenditure of effort or resources.

Maximum efficiency in the shortest time has been the aim of every educational endeavor. However, the emphasis on efficiency and rapid production has not limited the scope of education nor the personnel for whom it is provided. Instead, education is considered "the backbone of the Army" and the prerogative of every man. Thus, General Brehon B. Somervell, Commanding General, Army Service Forces, states: "We can lose this total war on the battlefield, as a direct result of losing it on the educational front. Education is the backbone of an Army."

Many other leaders of our great military organization have emphasized the need for education. This need is not limited to men who are average or above-average in intelligence and training; it includes also those men who are lacking in formal education, limited in intelligence, or deficient in the ability to speak English. It appears that the majority of the men in the latter groups can be salvaged and made available for military

service. The program for the rehabilitation of these men is one phase of an unparalleled effort on the part of the United States Army to provide sound and useful education for all its men.

PERSONNEL IN SPECIAL TRAINING UNITS

To Special Training Units are sent illiterates, non-English speaking men, the educationally retarded and soldiers having moderate physical handicaps. The majority of these men fall in the category of trainable illiterates who have been denied opportunities to learn to read and write the English language acceptably. The purpose of the Special Training Unit is to offer the rudimentary training which will enable these men to develop those academic skills which are needed in the Army. Class instruction is organized for an eight to thirteen week period to provide the necessary systematic training for all groups except the physically handicapped. For this group, corrective and therapeutic measures are introduced in a modified training schedule.

The number of soldiers involved is about the same or perhaps slightly less than the number normally distributed among such groups in the general male adult population of draft age. The num-

bers and geographic distribution within these groups correspond rather closely to the frequencies clearly recognized as representative of the educational levels in the various states.

BACKGROUND OF MEN IN SPECIAL TRAINING UNITS AND NEED FOR READING INSTRUCTION

Most of the men in the Special Training Units have had very meager opportunities. Consequently, they have failed to acquire academic skills. Their academic limitations are the products of many factors. Some have never attended school; others have gone to schools which had few books and materials. As a group, they have been brought up in homes of low socio-economic status, and they have lived in impoverished communities. These and other factors undoubtedly have contributed to their condition. Yet, it has been shown that these men can learn to read under the conditions which prevail in the Special Training Unit. It is the purpose of this paper to describe the methods and materials used in teaching reading in the Special Training Unit.

The attempt to teach these men to read is a worthwhile investment for the Army since inadequate reading skills limit a soldier's efficiency. Because of this deficiency, the soldier may have developed minor or even serious behavior problems. He may display a tendency to withdraw from the group. Or he may be indifferent or antagonistic to all training in which printed materials are used. Such attitudes not only impede academic progress; they make group participation difficult. To become successful soldiers, these men must learn to read. From the standpoint of developing and maintain-

ing morale alone, reading proficiency is important. When these soldiers have learned to read, their usefulness will be increased.

The program of reading in the Special Training Unit is designed to offer students the optimum conditions and opportunities for mastering the oral and silent reading skills which are needed in the Army. The soldier must be able to read notices, signs, instructions, and various other forms of communication. He should also be able to pass on certain information by reading it orally. There are certain secondary functions served by reading. On learning to read, the soldier will look upon himself as a more capable and valuable member of his group. He will feel assurance and confidence in his ability to read bulletins and other Army publications when they come to him.

Briefly, then, we may summarize the objectives of reading instruction as follows:

1. To develop the habits and skills in silent reading which will suffice for life in the Army; e.g. to read Army publications, books, bulletins, and field manuals.
2. To develop enough skill in oral reading to be able to pass on essential information to others.
3. To develop enough skill in silent reading to be able to read letters and other communications from friends and family.
4. To develop desirable attitudes and an interest in reading materials other than those prescribed in the Special Training Units.

THE METHOD USED IN INSTRUCTION

The method recommended for use in teaching reading in the Special Training Unit is referred to as functional. This

means simply that all teaching materials are presented in the form in which they appear or will be used in the soldier's every day life. This approach is particularly suitable for Special Training Units since the students in these units must be highly motivated in order to master in eight weeks those skills which they have not acquired in many years.

The functional approach is designed to correlate closely with life experiences; by its very nature, it promotes and sustains interest. It also offers the student assurance and self-confidence which contribute to his mental health and adjustment.

The functional approach is essentially eclectic; in it, any particular method of teaching reading may be used if it is thought to be essential in meeting the particular needs of individuals or of the class. Thus, while a single method such as the phonetic, the visual or the kinesthetic is not advocated, it may be used when the occasion requires it. The major emphasis, throughout the course, is upon acquiring all skills in the ways in which they will be used.

DEVELOPMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

In some types of training within the armed forces, it is a fairly simple matter to select from existing civilian textbooks that material which is of military value; one can then proceed promptly to adapt it for use within the Army. Unfortunately, suitable text material useful for the instruction of adults in elementary subjects is meager. Most of the existing textbooks are not adaptable to the military environment; as a result, it is necessary for the Army to develop the major

portion of the instructional books and devices for Special Training Units.

In order to meet the problem in the initial phases of the development of this training program, textbooks were developed hastily. The contents in the few texts that were on the market were shaped to fit military requirements, and important additions were made. These texts, however, have been revised. The new texts are based upon actual experience with men assigned to Special Training Units. The elimination of extraneous matter, and the addition of more pertinent, more easily taught and clearer contents have been the aims of those engaged in the production of readers and related materials.

From a practical standpoint the Army seeks to keep the volume of materials at a minimum; but at the same time, it aims to have them of qualitative excellence and of maximum utility. It must be remembered that the entire reading program, for example, must be accomplished in a maximum of 13 weeks; hence, materials must be compact and of such a nature that they will motivate the student strongly.

A rather complete assortment of reading materials is now available for use in Special Training Units. Others are in process. It will be noted that every instructional item is so designed that it will have an important place in a reading program which utilizes the functional method.

The *Army Reader*, the story of a typical soldier's adjustment to Army life, offers basic reading materials accompanied by supplementary drill exercises which correlate the teaching of reading with the development of skills in speaking and writing English and in

using numbers. This reader consists of four parts, progressing from the most simple type of reading to that of approximately the fourth grade level. The *Army Reader* begins with Private Pete's entry into the Army and describes his experiences with his new uniform, his barracks, and his mess hall. In the first part, a complete unit in itself, a fictional character, Private Pete finds out about certain aspects of camp life. When the student finishes this section, he will have acquired the basic skills involved in reading signs, notices, common words, and many essential sentences. He then proceeds to the second unit in which Private Pete develops new skills. The student learns new words and phrases as Private Pete engages in drill and other phases of military life. In this unit, Private Pete finally learns to read and write letters, an acquisition of utmost importance to all soldiers. The third unit carries Private Pete into more extensive experiences with language as he discovers the necessity for reading when receiving and spending his pay. Unit four introduces the student to rather complete reading episodes in which the central character explores the meaning and significance of the war, and his place in it.

The *Army Arithmetic* is designed to develop adequate skill in those simple arithmetic processes which the soldier needs. It deals with such useful number concepts as telling time by the clock, measuring distances, counting money, and keeping a budget. It provides, at the same time, further functional reading experiences with problems which recur in Army life. It is articulated closely with the *Army Reader*.

A number of other materials are available to provide further integration within

the reading program. *Our War*, an eight-page paper issued monthly, contains stories, pictures, cartoon strips, map and word games, and pertinent announcements. These articles are prepared for students of varied ability, but none is above the fourth grade reading level. They provide interesting and colorful supplementary reading on current topics, as well as simple instruction in military doctrine. The central character in the cartoon strip is Private Pete. Thus, another item brings together and integrates the various reading materials.

The *Newsmap Supplement* is a single sheet sent out each week to give the men in Special Training Units current information found in the Special Services *Newsmap*. This Supplement is written weekly in language which these men can read and understand.

Film strips are offered as visual aids in teaching basic reading skills in Special Training Units. Their titles serve to describe their content: (1) *Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic*, (2) *A Soldier's General Orders*, (3) *Military Courtesy and Discipline*, and (4) *How to Wear Your Uniform*. The most recent project in this series is *The Story of Private Pete*, a film strip covering early experience in camp; it is designed to teach the basic vocabulary for reading Parts I and II of the *Army Reader*. It is in reality a readiness device intended to help the student develop a basic stock of sight words.

Manuals have been prepared containing teaching devices and procedures for use with all these materials. *The Teacher's Guide for Instructional Materials* presents functional methods for teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic through the use of the *Army Reader*,

the *Army Arithmetic*, and the supplementary materials described above, with appropriate references to Army Regulations and other manuals. *Illustrated Instructor's References* have been made to accompany the film strips; they contain suggestions for teaching vocabulary and for developing reading concepts.

Your Job in the Army, another publication designed for men in Special Training Units, is a booklet which describes simply and clearly the different jobs for which these men might qualify. Interesting photographs of men at work in these

jobs help give color and meaning to the descriptions. These stories are useful as reading materials as well as one source of vocational orientation. This is, moreover, another unit in a program of reading designed to have the maximum usefulness for men in the Army.

These instructional materials form an important part of an efficient program for training illiterates—a program that already has made a substantial contribution to the solution of the manpower problem.