

*John H.  
Hilldring*

Major General John Henry Hilldring

by Troy J. Sacquety



**MAJOR GENERAL** (MG) John H. Hilldring is a Civil Affairs pioneer. As the head of the Civil Affairs Division (CAD) in WWII, he helped to establish U.S. Military Government and Civil Affairs (CA) policies for operating in occupied areas. Because of his contributions, the Civil Affairs Academic Facility at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, will soon be dedicated to Hilldring. It is a fitting tribute for a man instrumental in establishing modern U.S. Army Civil Affairs. This biographical sketch covers only the highlights of his illustrious twenty-nine year military career.

Born in New Rochelle, New York, on 27 March 1895 to Swedish immigrants, Hilldring spoke their native language fluently.<sup>1</sup> He attended classes for two years at Columbia University in New York City before transferring to the Connecticut State College of Agriculture in Storrs, Connecticut. He spent the next three years there, specializing in Horticulture.<sup>2</sup>

While a student, Hilldring made what would become a life-altering decision by enrolling in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), and attending training at Plattsburg, New York. After earning a Bachelor of Science degree on 6 June 1917, he received a U.S. Army reserve commission as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry.<sup>3</sup> In October 1917, he was commissioned in the Regular Army.<sup>4</sup> Hilldring then received orders overseas as part of the rush to get troops to Europe following the 6 April 1917 declaration of war on Germany.

His first assignment was with the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in France during World War I. There he served as a platoon leader in K Company and later as an intelligence officer in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion.<sup>5</sup> Hilldring later participated in the Aisne (27 May-5 June 1918), Champagne-Marne (15-18 July 1918), and Aisne-Marne (18 July-6 August

1918) campaigns as an Infantry Officer.<sup>6</sup> For its stalwart role in these engagements, the 38<sup>th</sup> earned the nickname, "Rock of the Marne."<sup>7</sup>

For his actions during the Aisne-Marne Offensive, First Lieutenant (1LT) Hilldring earned the Distinguished Service Cross. Hilldring later wrote that of the sixty soldiers his platoon at the beginning of the Aisne-Marne Offensive, only twenty one remained uninjured eight days later.<sup>9</sup> After the Armistice, Hilldring had his first association with Civil Affairs/Military Government when he briefly served with the 355<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division as part of the Rhineland occupation force.

His mother's failing health prompted a return to the United States in the fall of 1919. As one of the few infantry officers retained in the Army after the deep post-WWI personnel cuts, Captain (CPT) Hilldring served as an instructor on detached service with the Texas National Guard. His superiors consistently gave him good evaluations. One glowingly described Hilldring as "efficient beyond those of equal grade and service."<sup>10</sup> In 1926, Hilldring transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, Fort Sheridan, Illinois, to serve as a supply and then intelligence officer, broadening his experience base.<sup>11</sup>

Three years later, on 14 January 1929, he went to the Philippines, and joined the 57<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Philippine Scouts, a constabulary force.<sup>12</sup> Comments on Hilldring's efficiency reports forecasted future assignments: "This officer is highly suitable for contact with civilian components of the Army."<sup>13</sup> Returning to the U.S. in 1931 for the Infantry Officer Advanced Course at Fort Benning, Georgia, CPT Hilldring met then-Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall, a future Army Chief of Staff, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and General of the Army (5 star rank).<sup>14</sup> From that point on, Marshall became a guiding force in Hilldring's Army career.

1LT Hilldring was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for heroic actions on 22 July 1918 during the Aisne-Marne Offensive.

**Citation:**

"For extraordinary heroism in action in the Fore Forest near Jaulgonne, France, July 22, 1918. During the attack on the slopes of Hill 210, Company K, 38th Infantry, lost contact with the units of the battalion, becoming exposed to a severe flank attack by overwhelming forces of the enemy. Lieutenant Hilldring, in command of a platoon of Company K, repeatedly exposed himself to heavy enemy fire while making personal reconnaissances to the right flank to maintain liaison, consolidate the troops and protect the company . . . Earlier on this day, during an assault against the heights north of Charteves, Lieutenant Hilldring displayed unusual courage in leading two platoon runners in a flank attack against an element of the enemy defense which was firing into the flank and rear of his company, capturing the gun and several prisoners and driving off the other members of the hostile combat group."<sup>8</sup>







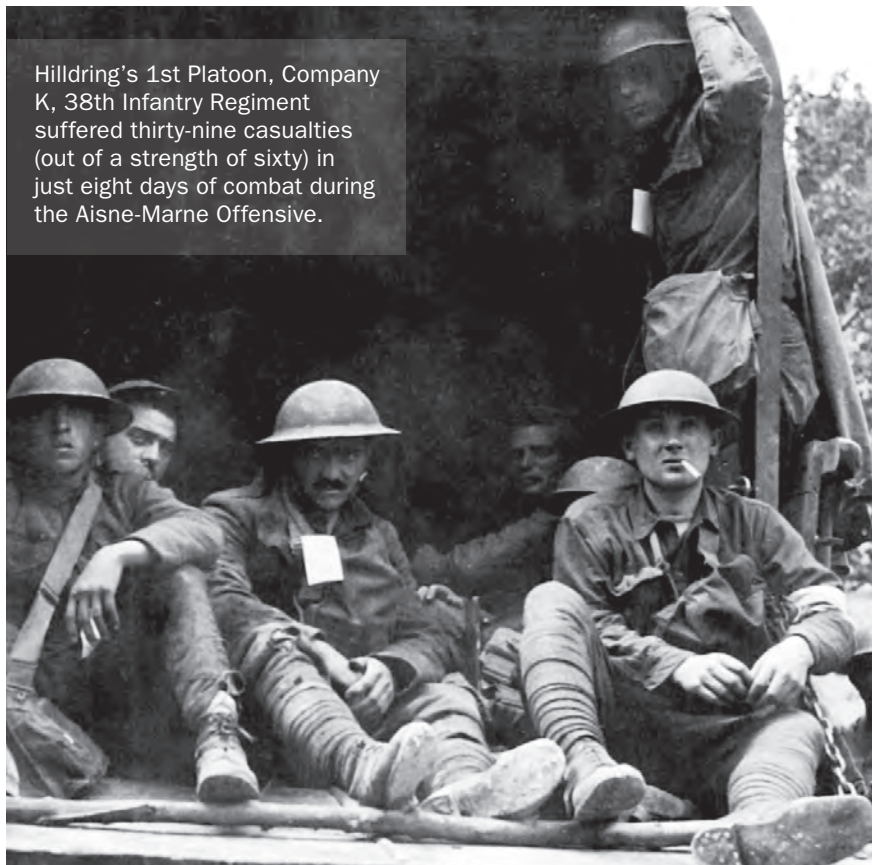
Group portrait of officers of the 355th U.S. Infantry.<sup>6</sup>



The post-WWI occupation of Germany fostered Military Government policies that provided examples for training in WWII. This soldier wears a Third Army SSI. The 'A' inside the 'O' stood for Army of Occupation.







Hilldring's 1st Platoon, Company K, 38th Infantry Regiment suffered thirty-nine casualties (out of a strength of sixty) in just eight days of combat during the Aisne-Marne Offensive.



World War I period  
Third Infantry  
Division SSI



World War I period  
89th Infantry  
Division SSI



38th Infantry  
Regiment DUI (WWII  
period DUI shown).



355th Infantry  
Regiment DUI (WWII  
period DUI shown).





General George C. Marshall had an extremely positive influence on Hilldring's career. This is when he was Assistant Director of the Infantry School.

At Marshall's behest, Hilldring served a short stint on the Infantry School Staff before attending the Medical Field Service School at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, as the first Infantry representative. Although Hilldring hesitated, Marshall insisted. Hilldring later reflected on the decision, "I didn't realize at the time how important it was in my relationship with General Marshall and therefore to my

own future, that I took his advice. I had the opportunity later to observe colleagues of mine who chose not to accept General Marshall's advice, and they were the losers."<sup>15</sup> At Carlisle, the Camp Commander predicted that Hilldring "will go far in the Army."<sup>16</sup> Promoted to Major (MAJ) on 1 August 1935, Hilldring then attended the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.<sup>17</sup>

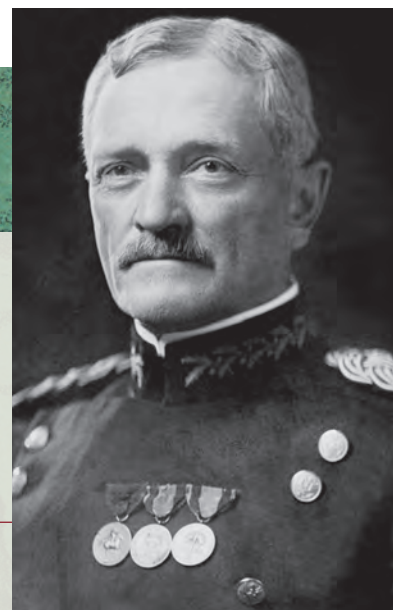
His next assignments with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in Arizona dictated that he had to work closely with civilians and local officials. The CCC was a Great Depression-era New Deal public works program that put unmarried young men to work building infrastructure and developing natural resources on public lands. Hilldring's final CCC assignment was as the officer in charge of forty-five camps in the Arizona District. High points during his tour were weekly visits with WWI General of the Armies John J. Pershing, in Tucson.<sup>18</sup> But the assignment was also extremely challenging. Because each of the widely-dispersed camps could have as many as 200 workers, this was a huge level of command responsibility for a junior field officer in terms of administration and personnel issues.

Hilldring received universal praise from civilian officials for his efficient administration of the CCC camps.<sup>19</sup> One colleague commented upon Hilldring's departure: "You leave behind you . . . a large group of admiring and appreciative friends who view your reassignment with mixed feeling—regrets that you are severing your connection to the CCC and with us, coupled with congratulations in this further advancement in your military career."<sup>20</sup> Although he did not know it at the time, MAJ Hilldring would soon use his CCC experience to good advantage in working with high level civilian officials.



Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) patch.

General of the Armies John J. Pershing commanded the American Expeditionary Forces in Western Europe in World War I. When he worked with the CCC in Arizona, Hilldring visited the retired general weekly.







MG Hilldring at Camp Howze, TX, in December 1942. From left to right: Hilldring, Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, MG Courtney H. Hodges, MG Alexander E. Anderson, and John P. Wheeler.<sup>1</sup>



MG Hilldring at the reactivation of the 84th Infantry Division on 15 October 1942 at Camp Howze, Texas. Hilldring commanded the division until February 1943.<sup>5</sup>



84th Infantry Division SSI

In mid-1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt nominated Brigadier General (BG) Marshall to become the Army Chief of Staff. Marshall called MAJ Hilldring to Washington, D.C., to serve in the Planning Branch, Personnel Division, G-1, of the War Department General Staff.<sup>21</sup> Hilldring's fortuitous placement and the growing U.S. involvement in World War II meant rapid promotions. In 1940, he made Lieutenant Colonel, and a year later, on 22 December 1941, Colonel.<sup>22</sup> Less than a month later (15 January 1942) he was promoted to Brigadier General (BG).<sup>23</sup> As a general officer, Hilldring became Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, and again garnered the respect of colleagues.<sup>24</sup> BG Wade H. Haislip [a future four-star general], described Hilldring as "an outstanding officer in every respect."<sup>25</sup>


His War Department assignments led to a field command. From July 1942 to April 1943, he was the Commanding General of the mobilizing 84<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, ordered into active military service on 15 October 1942. The 'Railsplitters' were stationed at Camp Howze, Texas, one of the largest infantry replacement centers in the U.S. He received his promotion to Major General (MG) on 7 September 1942.<sup>26</sup> Events halfway around the globe soon had a life-altering effect on MG Hilldring.

On 2 December 1942, MG Edwin F. Harding, the commander of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division (ID), was relieved for his lack of progress against firmly entrenched Japanese positions on New Guinea. General Douglas A. MacArthur, the Supreme Commander, Southwest Pacific Area, requested



OCT 7 1942

THE  
**PRESIDENT**  
 OF  
**THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**



To all who shall see these presents, greeting:  
 Know Ye, that reposing special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valor, fidelity  
 and abilities of John Henry Hilldring  
 I have nominated and by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, do appoint him,  
 temporarily a Major General in

**The Army of the United States**

to rank as such from the seventh day of September,  
 nineteen hundred and forty-two. He is therefore carefully and diligently to  
 discharge the duty of the office to which he is appointed by doing and performing all  
 manner of things thereunto belonging.

And I do strictly charge and require all Officers and Soldiers under his command  
 to be obedient to his orders as an officer of his grade and position. And he is to obey and  
 follow such orders and directions from time to time, as he shall receive from me, or the  
 future President of the United States of America, or the General or other Superior  
 Officers set over him, according to the rules and discipline of War.

This Commission to continue in force during the pleasure of the President of the United  
 States, for the time being, under the provisions of section 127a, National Defense Act,  
 as amended.

Done at the City of Washington, this twenty-third day of September  
 in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and forty-two, and of the  
 Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and sixty-seventh.

By the President:

**JOHN HILLDRING**  
 Major General  
 The Adjutant General.

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**HENRY L. STIMSON**  
 Secretary of War.



Hilldring's commissioning document promoting him to Major General.

European Civil Affairs  
 Division SSI





MG Hilldring, in uniform on the right, talking to President Harry S. Truman, left.<sup>4</sup>

Hilldring to take command of the 32<sup>nd</sup> ID. Although bedridden with influenza, Hilldring accepted immediately against his surgeon's advice. Flying to the West Coast, he suffered "a hell of a heart attack and wound up in Letterman Hospital [San Francisco, California] flat on [his] back," in February 1943.<sup>27</sup> A medical board determined that although MG Hilldring was "physically unfit for general service," he could continue to perform "limited service within the continental limits of the United States in a War Department Overhead or Service Command unit."<sup>28</sup>

MG Hilldring contacted GEN Marshall to explain his predicament.<sup>29</sup> Although the doctors predicted that he had just six months to live if he did not retire, Hilldring pleaded that "I'm a professional soldier in the middle of a war and how long I live I don't think is particularly significant to the Army . . . General I'd like a job."<sup>30</sup> In return, Marshall telegraphed: "You have my deep sympathy in your misfortune. Try to possess yourself with patience and do everything the Doctors direct, that we may regain your services at an early date, probably here in Washington."<sup>31</sup> Orders came on 31 March 1943, assigning MG Hilldring to the Office of the Chief of Staff, in Washington, DC.<sup>32</sup>

Capitalizing on Hilldring's post-WWI experience, in April 1943 GEN Marshall appointed him chief of the Civil Affairs Division (CAD).<sup>33</sup> As head of the CAD, he was "responsible for providing the Secretary of War with information and advice with which to establish policies in connection with the function of military government and civil affairs in areas occupied in the course of military operations in all Theaters of War." Contemporary sources note that "This was the first time in the history of the War Department that the subject

of Army control of civilian populations in war areas in furtherance of military operations had been given complete recognition."<sup>34</sup> This was a significant step in recognizing CA as a separate military specialty. Hilldring also assumed other duties associated with CAD.

Military government and civil affairs policies had to be coordinated with allied powers. Therefore, on 8 August 1944, Hilldring joined the Combined Liberated Areas Committee, an organization formed to "consider and agree upon policies for liberated areas during the post-military period."<sup>35</sup> He also was the War Department representative to the Combined Civil Affairs Committee (CCAC) of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Deputies from the War Department (Army), Navy, Department of State, the British Foreign Office, two from the British Joint Staff Mission, one American civilian, and a British civilian formed this body. The CCAC served to:

- 1** "Recommend to the Combined Chiefs of Staff general policies which should be adopted for civil affairs, including supply and related matters,"
- 2** "Under the direction of the Combined Chiefs of Staff be responsible for the broad civil affairs planning and the direction of civil affairs problems presented to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by theater commanders," and
- 3** "Under the direction of the Combined Chiefs of Staff be responsible for the coordination of the British and American military and naval establishments with the appropriate civilian departments and agencies of the respective governments which are concerned with civil affairs matters."<sup>36</sup>



MG Hilldring aptly led the CAD, as evidenced by his numerous awards. He received the Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) for exceptionally meritorious and distinguished service for his service in the G-1 during WWII. He also received an Oak Leaf Cluster to the DSM for his leadership of the CAD. The citation noted that MG Hilldring's "accomplishments have been a distinct and noteworthy contribution toward the successful culmination of the war."<sup>37</sup> However, his government service was not quite over.

In February 1946, the Department of State assumed responsibility for the administration of occupation governments. Hilldring retired as a Major General on 31 July 1946 to fill the Department of State position of Assistant Secretary of State for Occupied Areas.<sup>38</sup> In his new position, Hilldring was "directly responsible to the [Secretary of State] for the coordination of State [Department] policy with respect to all occupation matters."<sup>39</sup> After resigning from that position in September 1947, he received a subsequent appointment as an alternate U.S. delegate to the United Nations General Assembly. There he served as "the principal U.S. spokesman in the 1947 debates about Palestine."<sup>40</sup> However, the retired general resigned shortly afterwards for health reasons.<sup>41</sup>

Hilldring next became a business executive with General Aniline & Film Corporation, retiring in 1961. Simultaneously, he was the first president of the Military Government Association, today's Civil Affairs Association. He died on 14 January 1974, and was survived by his wife, Florence.



MG Hilldring aboard the SS Isle of Guernsey.<sup>2</sup>



MG Hilldring received the Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) for his WWII service in the G-1.

State Department Chief of Protocol Stanley Woodward, Sr. administers the oath of office to Hilldring for service as the Assistant Secretary of State for Occupied Areas in the Department of State, 1946.<sup>3</sup>







A junior officer in the European Civil Affairs Division, Lieutenant Eli Nobleman presides over a Summary Court in Germany after WWII. Nobleman retired as a Colonel and later served as chairman of the Civil Affairs Association for many years.

Today, MG Hilldring is primarily remembered for his WWII leadership of the CAD. In that role he oversaw the development of Civil Affairs doctrine during the war and helped direct its application in occupied areas. The success of the CAD under his direction helped Civil Affairs remain a core Army function in the post-war period. This is why the CA School building will be named in his honor. ▲

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Troy J. Sacquety earned an MA from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and his PhD in Military History from Texas A&M University. Prior to joining the USASOC History Office staff he worked several years for the Central Intelligence Agency. Current research interests include Army and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) special operations during World War II, and U.S. Army Civil Affairs.

#### **Endnotes**

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- 16 Charles LeBaron, Jr., "Commendation of Captain J.H. Hilldring, Infantry," 18 July 1933, Hilldring Service Record.
- 17 Military Education, Hilldring Service Record.
- 18 Pogue interview, p. 5.
- 19 See numerous letters of commendation contained in Hilldring Service Record.
- 20 Frank C. Pooler to John H. Hilldring, "my Dear Major Hilldring," 15 June 1939, Hilldring Service Record.
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- 22 William A Beach to John H. Hilldring, "Temporary Appointment, Army of the United States," 31 December 1941, Hilldring Service Record.
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- 27 Pogue interview, p. 24.
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- 32 M.G. White, "Memorandum for the Adjutant General," 31 March 1943, Hilldring Service Record.
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- 34 William C. Chanler to The Adjutant General, War Department, "Recommendation for Award of Legion of Merit to Major General John H. Hilldring, U.S.A.," 21 August 1945, Hilldring Service Record.
- 35 Acting Secretary of War, "AG 334 Liberated Areas Comm.," 8 August 1944, Hilldring Service Record.
- 36 William C. Chanler to The Adjutant General, War Department, "Recommendation for Award of the Oak Leaf Cluster in Lieu of Second Distinguished Service Medal to Major General John H. Hilldring, U.S.A.," 21 August 1945, Hilldring Service Record.
- 37 "Citation for Distinguished Service Medal (Oak Leaf Cluster)," 24 September 1945, Hilldring Service Record.
- 38 War Department Washington, "The proceedings and findings..." 25 July 1946, Hilldring Service Record. **Hilldring's permanent rank was Lieutenant Colonel, but he retired at his temporary rank of Major General. MG Oliver P. Echols took over as the Chief of the CAD. See Special Order 66, 20 March 1946, Hilldring Service Record.**
- 39 D.S. Dunlap to the Adjutant General, U.S. Army, "Army Officer on duty with State Department," 16 September 1946, Hilldring Service Record.
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- 41 Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, "John Henry Hilldring (1895-1974), found on internet at <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/hilldring-john-henry>, accessed 2 June 2015.

## Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History Images Endnotes

- 1 "Scrapbook, Vol. I, John H Hilldring, Circa 1940-1945 (Courtesy of The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06196.105)"
- 2 "Scrapbook, Vol. III, John H Hilldring, Circa 1940-1945 (Courtesy of The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06196.107)"
- 3 "Scrapbook, Vol. IV, John H Hilldring, Circa 1940-1945 (Courtesy of The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06196.108)"
- 4 "Portrait in uniform, John H Hilldring, Circa 1940-1945 (Courtesy of The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06196.220)"
- 5 "Portrait in uniform, John H Hilldring, Circa 1940-1945 (Courtesy of The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06196.221)"
- 6 "Group portrait, John H Hilldring, Circa 1940-1945 (Courtesy of The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06196.237)"



The CA School at Fort Bragg will be named for MG Hilldring. It is a fitting tribute to an officer who was so influential in perpetuating the legacy of Military Government and Civil Affairs.