

CAMP MACKALL:

A History of Training

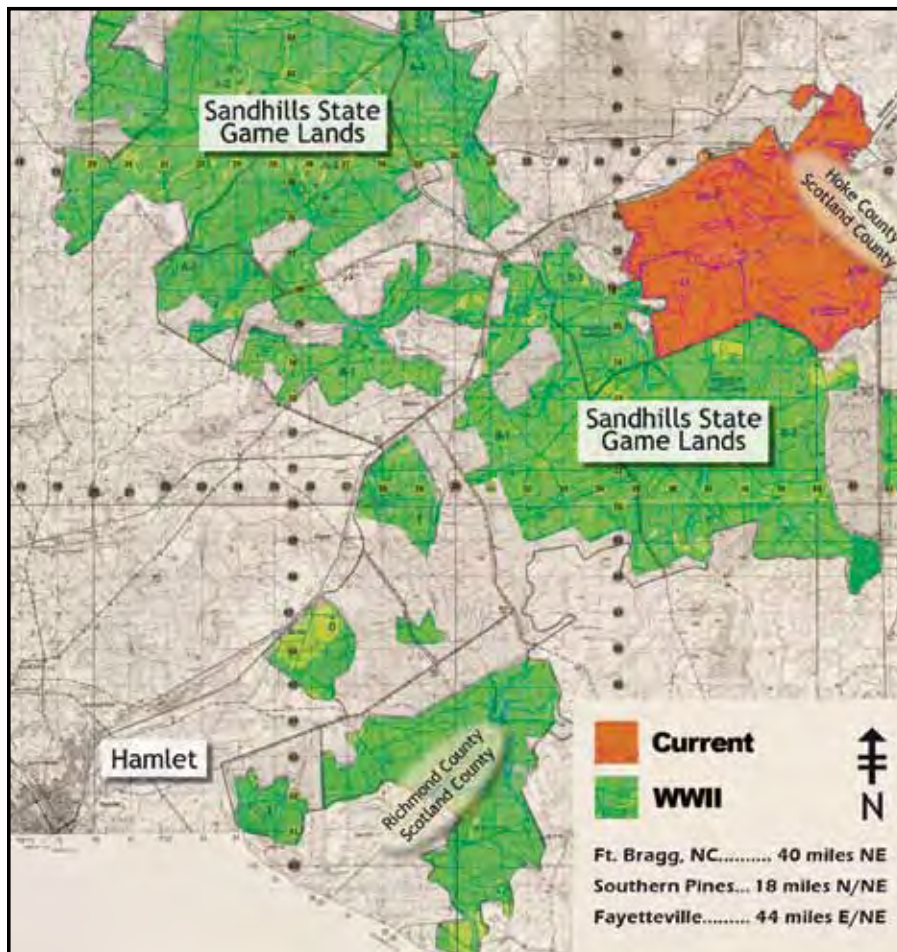
by Robert W. Jones, Jr.

LOCATED in the North Carolina sandhills forty miles southwest from Fort Bragg is Camp Mackall. The post began as a separate U.S. Army training base during World War II. From 1943 to 1945 three airborne divisions formed and trained there. After the war Camp Mackall became a sub-post of Fort Bragg, where innumerable units have trained. With the creation of

U.S. Army Special Forces in 1952, Camp Mackall became one of its training areas. However, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations forces also trained at the base. This photo essay does two things. It compares historical snapshots of Camp Mackall during World War II with current conditions. It also opens the “window” on Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations training being conducted there today. The scope of training at Camp Mackall during WWII was large.

On 8 November 1942, construction began on the Hoffman Airborne Camp. Within months more than 1,750 buildings were constructed. The vast majority of the buildings were one-story temporary construction made of rough pine plank siding and covered with tarpaper. The base had seven service clubs, two guesthouses, three libraries, sixteen post exchanges, twelve chapels, and a hospital. It became one of the larger towns in North Carolina. The post was divided into north and south cantonment areas with the Station Hospital between them.¹ The infrastructure was necessary to support over three divisions of soldiers.

Future airborne units began filling south cantonment area in January 1943. Cadre conducted basic and advanced infantry and artillery training at Camp Mackall while perfecting parachuting and gilder operations.² Three airborne divisions



Map comparing the size of Camp Mackall during WWII to the present day.



US Army
Airborne Command
SSI



11th Airborne
Division SSI



17th Airborne
Division SSI



13th Airborne
Division SSI



SWCS
SSI



A tarpaper "theater of operations" building found throughout WWII training bases, such as Camp Mackall.

(the 11th, 13th and 17th Airborne Divisions) were formed and trained at Camp Mackall during World War II. The 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, while not formed at Camp Mackall, trained there before leaving for the European Theater. During the war a variety of units trained and conducted operational tests at Camp Mackall. After the war, Camp Mackall was used as an airborne maneuver area by XVIII Airborne Corps units. In the 1950s, Camp Mackall was a training site for the newly created Special Forces. However, it fell into disrepair until the 1980s. In the post Vietnam period the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS) built the Rowe Training Facility for Special Forces training.³ Other USAJFKSWCS courses also began using Camp Mackall as a training site.

A lesser-known part of Camp Mackall history is the Civil Affairs and PSYOP training conducted by the members of 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne). The training site for CA and PSYOP went through a series of evolutions since 1999. The first permanent CA/PSYOP training site was built by 18C Special Forces engineer sergeant students as a practicum during the "Q-course" (each building was constructed by a different class). CA and PSYOP cadre began using these temporary facilities as a command post and training area in late 1999 until a permanent compound could be constructed.

The present training site was constructed in stages from 2004 to 2007 to support capstone-training exercises for the Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations officer and non-commissioned officer courses.⁴ The CA/PSYOP training area has three individual sites. The largest is Forward Operation Base (FOB) Freedom, built to replicate a typical FOB anywhere in the world. The second is Freedom Village, a collection of buildings currently made to resemble a town in the Middle East. A contracted civilian population of role players enhances training. The third training site is the Soldiers Urban Reaction Facility (SURF). Here, role players challenge the students with a series of situational dilemmas.⁵ These scenarios serve as the culminating exercise for CA and PSYOP officer and NCO training.

After classroom training at Fort Bragg the CA and PSYOP students undergo a 10-day, three-phase culmination exercise. Named "Operation CERTAIN TRUST," the exercise is focused on preparing the soldiers for

operational assignments. Supported from Forward Operating Base (FOB) Freedom, the 214 hours of training in Operation CERTAIN TRUST is divided into 3 phases.

The operation begins with a 36-hour Situational Training Exercise (STX) to introduce physical and mental stress (Phase I). Next, in Phase II, they go to the Soldiers Urban Reaction Facility (SURF) to solve a series of problem based scenarios. The CA and PSYOP soldiers have separate challenges. The scenarios allow the cadre to evaluate individual and collective performance in a controlled, but realistic operational environment. Each student team responds to four different scenarios. Contracted male and female Middle Eastern and African nationals serve as role players, adding more realism to the scenarios. Contracted "Enhancement Coaches," all with operational military experience, accompany student teams to provide feedback on tactics, techniques, and procedures employed to solve the problem. Each dilemma is evaluated by an Enhancement Coach who, combined with coaching and mentoring, conducts an after action review for the teams. After successfully completing Phase II the soldiers move into a Field Training Exercise at Freedom Village and in the North Carolina counties surrounding Camp Mackall (Hoke, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, Richmond, Robeson, and Scotland).⁶ While Freedom Village is the focus of the exercise the counties provide an opportunity to assess real world public facilities. Though very involved in training at Camp Mackall few soldiers know anything about its history.

Most soldiers are unaware of the historic connection of the base to WWII. The FOB Freedom operations center tent sits where the former WWII Station Hospital was located. Freedom Village occupies the original hospital steam plant. The SURF was built where the hospital supply area was once located.

This photo essay is just a "snapshot" of ongoing training at Camp Mackall. The historical snapshots of the post connect yesterday to today. This photo essay has a secondary motive, to prompt veterans to furnish vignettes, photographs, and documents that pertain to Camp Mackall. The current contracted history project for 2008 is a history of Camp Mackall, WWII to the present.

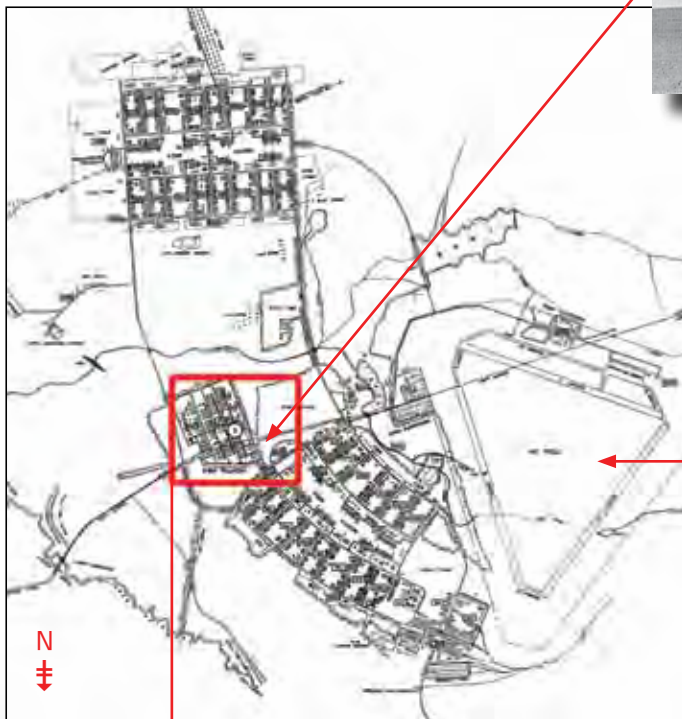
On 8 February 1943, General Order Number 6 renamed the Hoffman Airborne Camp to Camp Mackall in honor of Private John Thomas (Tommy) Mackall. While serving in the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment during Operation TORCH, the Allied invasion of North Africa, Mackall was mortally wounded when his aircraft was attacked by French Vichy fighters as it landed near Oran on 8 November 1942. Seven paratroopers were killed and several were wounded, including Mackall. He was evacuated by air to a British hospital on Gibraltar where he died on 12 November 1942.

CAMP MACKALL AREA 1945

Aerial view of Camp Mackall taken on 18 April 1945. This photo shows the northern cantonment area used primarily for logistics. The hospital area is marked.



The headquarters of the Station Hospital with some of the local Red Cross volunteers.



Paratroopers jump at Camp Mackall during training. The "parapack" equipment bundles were dropped from the belly of the aircraft while the men exited from the troop door.



Obscured in the ground haze above the hospital is the southern cantonment area where the Airborne Divisions lived and trained. Part of that area is now Rhine-Luzon drop zone.

CAMP MACKALL AREA 2007



The centerpiece of the CA and PSYOP training area, called FOB Freedom, is the "Big Tent." The tent is located on the site of the WWII Station Hospital.



PSYOP soldiers conduct a tactical loudspeaker mission at Camp Mackall.



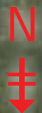
The Camp Mackall sign welcomes visitors to "The Home of the Airborne during WWII."



A group of CA students returning from a training mission.



RTF



Aerial view of Camp Mackall taken in May 2007. In the center of the photo is the Rowe Training Facility (RTF). The FOB Freedom area is outlined in red.

OPERATION CERTAIN 'TRUST'

PHASE I: Situational Training Exercise

STX

Aerial view of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Freedom in May 2007.



Ground views of the FOB.



During the STX a group of students plan for their next phase, the SURF.



PSYOP students take a rest break after a roadmarch. In 10 minutes this group will enter phase II, the SURF.

Operation CERTAIN TRUST is the culminating exercise for Civil Affairs (CA) and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) courses. Phase I of the exercise begins at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Freedom, which replicates a FOB that could be found anywhere in the world. The outer perimeter includes defensive positions and watch towers. The medium sized "expeditionary" tents provide work space and living areas for the soldiers while in the field. The center of the FOB is the large tent that the students use for work space and a briefing area. The main tent at FOB Freedom is located on the site of the WWII Station Hospital headquarters. The Situational Training Exercise (STX) imposes mental (planning) and physical (road marches) stress before the next phase.

PHASE II: Soldiers Urban Reaction Facility

SURF



A group of PSYOP students has just completed a series of road marches to stress them physically and mentally before beginning Phase II of the exercise. They are being briefed by Mr. Drew Borsz, an instructor in 3rd Battalion. In a few minutes they must prepare a plan of action before conducting their mission in the SURF.

External view of the Soldier Urban Reaction Facility (SURF).



The Soldier Urban Reaction Facility (SURF) is a new addition to CA and PSYOP training. The facility was built by U.S. Army engineers stationed at Fort Bragg who practiced their carpentry skills before overseas deployment. The SURF provides a unique training opportunity for soldiers. The facility resembles a small government compound found in many parts of the developing world. Students go through a series of adaptive learning scenarios, with role players providing realism. The scenarios are adapted to meet Army deployment needs and to prepare for specific missions.



Two contracted role players prepare for a scenario with an Enhancement Coach (in dark shirt).

PHASE II: Soldiers Urban Reaction Facility SURF



Internal view of the SURF courtyard where several of the role players relax between student groups.

In the SURF each scenario is recorded. The students' responses during the scenario can be replayed as a learning tool. It is better to learn from mistakes during training than during a deployment.



In this adaptive learning scenario a CA team meets with the local Imam. Two experienced role players adjust the flow of the scenario based on guidance from cadre and the Enhancement Coaches.



In another scenario a PSYOP team meets with local officials. Afterward the Enhancement Coach conducts an after action review.



PHASE III: Field Training Exercise

FTX



During the scenario the students have to cope with an armed population that many will face in Afghanistan or Iraq. The mere presence of weapons is not an indication of hostility but the soldiers have to keep alert and maintain situational awareness. The Freedom Village is located astride the steam plant for the WWII hospital.



Students meet with Freedom Village officials, a tribal elder, the Imam, and the police chief.



At the village mosque in Freedom Village role players relax between groups of students.

The final component is the Field Training Exercise (FTX). The majority of the FTX takes place in Freedom Village. The original buildings in Freedom Village were modified by 3rd Battalion soldiers for a population of native role players. Like the SURF, students go through a series of adaptive learning scenarios during the FTX. The contracted role players come from various Middle Eastern and African countries, including Djibouti, Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt. His/her role player has refined his/her persona for the scenario and plays that part throughout the exercise. The village's configuration and the role players can be changed to a different regional focus to meet operational needs.

Robert W. Jones Jr. is a historian assigned to the USASOC History Office and is a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve. A graduate of the University of Washington, he earned his M.A. from Duke University and his MS from Troy State University. Current research interests include Special Forces in Vietnam 1960–1966, military government and civil affairs, special operations in World War II, Operation JUST CAUSE, and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

Endnotes

- 1 Tom McCallum and Lowell W. Stevens, Sr., A History of Camp Mackall, North Carolina (unpublished manuscript), USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 **The reader should remember that over half of a WWII Airborne Division was glider borne.**
- 3 Named after Colonel James "Nick" Rowe, a Special Forces officer held for five years as a POW in Vietnam before escaping. Terrorists in the Philippines murdered Colonel Rowe in April 1989; <http://www.bragg.army.mil/18abn/CampMackall.htm>; James N. Rowe, Five Years To Freedom: The True Story of a Vietnam POW (New York: Little & Brown Co., 1971).
- 4 "3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne) Command Briefing, 31 July 2007," 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne), USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Qualification and MOS-T Course; Andrew Borsz, Instructor, 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne), interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 13 August 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 5 "3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne) Command Briefing, 31 July 2007," 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne), USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Borsz interview.
- 6 "3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne) Command Briefing, 31 July 2007," 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne), USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Borsz interview.