

Fontainebleau, France Infantry Officers Candidate School (1945)

Last Officer Graduated by ETO 'Benning'

Gaffney Ledger Tuesday August 21, 1945

The Ground Force Training Center at Fontainebleau, France, known as the "Little Fort Benning" of the ETO, completed its official existence as an Infantry Officer Candidate School with the graduation of the 29th and last class.

The graduation of this class brings the total number of Infantry rifle platoon leaders trained and commissioned by the Ground Force Training Center in its 24 weeks of existence to 4,825. Over 4,000 of these were officer candidates, while the remainder were company grade officers in the ETO converted to infantry from other arms and services.

Both of these groups underwent a special 8-week course of instruction modeled after the 17 week course given at the Infantry School, Ft. Benning, Ga. The Ft. Benning program was greatly compressed and stepped up, however, in order to meet the urgent demands of the German campaign for Infantry platoon leaders. In addition, a special 3-week refresher course was given to some 500 Infantry lieutenants commissioned on the battlefields. These were sent to school direct from their units and returned to them upon completion of their course.

The Group Force Training Center was established in Fontainebleau, France on 24 January 1945, by a group of key officers and enlisted men from the Infantry School, Ft. Benning, Ga. This group, all highly trained specialists with experience in turning out infantry officers, had as its primary mission the establishment of a school in the ETO to produce 1,500 second lieutenants of infantry per month qualified to successfully lead infantry rifle platoons in combat against the Germans. The group was also charged with giving conversion and other types of infantry instruction.

The original cadre, organized into instructional sections and committees after the successful Ft. Benning system, had one month in which to reconnoiter and build firing ranges and training areas, secure and train additional personnel, devise training aids, and perfect an approved training program. All this was done, and in exactly 30 days after its establishment the first class entered. New classes were received at the rate of three per week, and by the end of April there were 5,700 students at the school, 5,000 of them officer candidates. In these two months the Ground Force Training Center successfully accomplished its primary mission by graduating and commissioning 3,500 Infantry rifle platoon leaders. After the defeat of the German Army The need for Infantry officers in this theater was greatly reduced and the flow of classes into the school stopped.

The Ground Force Training Center also gave instruction to members of the French and Luxembourg armies in special four week and on-week courses. Of the approximately 10,000 students who received infantry training at the school 1,500 or about 15 percent were officers and enlisted men of the Allied armies.

Another summary of the program with a different set of numbers. These totals might be for the OCS program only:

The first class of new OCS in France trained at Ground Forces Training Center, Fontainebleau, France. The first course began on February 26 or 28, 1945. It was originally planned as a 12 week course but was reduced to 8 weeks as soon as classes began. 30 Classes were conducted. Total Officer Candidates: 6,588. Total OCS Graduates: 4,167. The School was discontinued in July 1945.

For another look at the program, we include these memories of Fontainebleau graduate Bruce Glover from a blog by his daughter Brenda Leyndyke:

11 August 2022

Those Places Thursday: Fontainebleau, WWII Infantry Officers Candidate School, France

MILITARY EDUCATION			
14. NAME OR TYPE OF SCHOOL—COURSE OR CURRICULUM—DURATION—DESCRIPTION			
Infantry	Fontainebleau, Infantry Officers Candidate School	8 weeks	
	France		

Source: Military Records, citing World War II Army Service from 9 July 1943 to 6 July 1945; Private Papers; privately held by Brenda Leyndyke, [address for private use], Kalamazoo, Michigan 49009, 2022. Bruce Glover Military Papers stored in Records Jacket.

Wait, my dad was trained at Fontainebleau? In France? My dad, like many others, never talked about his time in World War II. It wasn't until I typed my dad's autobiography that I learned he spent time at Fontainebleau, France. Even in his autobiography he doesn't say much about it. I would have loved to have learned more about his time there. I don't think my dad was as impressed as I am about his living there for eight weeks. I have only seen pictures of Fontainebleau and I am in awe of the history of the place.

WWII Six Week Wonders

Here is what he says about it:

While in the hospital I heard through the army newspaper we received of an infantry officers training school in France and signed up for it and was accepted. I have no recollection now of whether it was an excuse to delay my return to the

front lines or not, but logically I imagine it had something to do with my decision. At any rate, the training was held in Fontainebleau, France which at one time was Napoleon's Castle. The horse troughs were still out in front of the buildings, and we were housed in various rooms of the castle. They talk about 90-day wonders which are men who became officers with 90 days of training. We were six-week wonders as the war was raging furiously on the fronts as the Germans were finally being pushed back into Germany and were being attacked in the East by the Allied forces and the West by the Russians. The training was a snap for me because I was an Infantryman. I felt sorry for some Air Corps enlisted men that were also in training but had difficulty in their training as it was like learning a foreign language to them.

As the men graduated after six weeks, they were immediately assigned to a front-line company and rushed to their posts. Some of them joined their company one night and the next day was either dead or back in the hospital as a casualty of War. As best as I remember I graduated on May 5, as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry, and May 6 the War ended in Europe. AS I LOOK BACK ON THESE EVENTS, I'M CONVINCED THAT SOMEONE UP ABOVE WAS LOOKING AFTER ME AND YOU'LL NEVER CONVINC ME OTHERWISE."

History of Fontainebleau



Napoleon remembers Fontainebleau as "...the true residence of Kings, the house of the centuries. It was not a rigorously architectural palace, but it was certainly a place of residence well thought out and perfectly suitable. It was certainly the most comfortable and happily situated palace in Europe." It was home to Louis VII, Henry II and his wife, Catherine de 'Medici, Kings Louis XII through Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and Napoleon. Eventually, during World War II it was occupied by Germany until the Allied troops pushed Germany out of the Paris area. It became a training center and now is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Fontainebleau is approximately sixty-nine kilometers (forty-three miles) southeast of Paris. What a piece of history Fontainebleau was and still is. I wish my dad had been a photographer and we had pictures of his time there. It is a wonderful piece of my dad's military history.