Germans followed these victories up with the first major airborne operation in history with the invasion of Crete. Maneuver and movement would be the hallmark of the Second World War, and infantry would no longer be continuously sent "over the top" to be slaughtered.

While Billy Mitchell had a good idea at the end of the Great War, the United States lagged far behind the other Great Powers in establishing anything that could conceivably be an airborne unit. What changed was the appointment of General George C. Marshall as the Army Chief of Staff in April 1939. After reading reports from his military attaché in Germany about their development of paratrooper and glider projects, Marshall requested a study on the feasibility of similar American troops. The different sections of the Army fought over who would be in charge of these new units, the engineers wanted them because the soldiers would have to be trained in explosives, the air unit because they would have to jump out of airplanes, and the infantry wanted them to be part of the ground forces. The infantry ultimately won out, but it was not until July 1940 that the First Parachute Test Platoon was formed.

While they started late, the United States proved capable of catching up fast. Once it entered World War II, the United States raised five airborne divisions, the 11th, 13th, 17th, 82nd, and 101st. The 17th, 82nd, and 101st all saw action in the European Theater of Operations. The 11th and 13th were held in reserve in the United States. The 13th was deployed to Europe it did not see combat.

The 11th Airborne, nicknamed "The Angels," was sent to the Pacific Theater of Operations in early 1944, to New Guinea for intensive jungle training. In November 1944, the Angels landed (in a conventional infantry role) at Leyte Beach in the Philippines. In January, the two glider regiments, operating as infantry, landed on Luzon and fought their way inland, while the paratroop regiment finally conducted a combat drop on Tagaytay Ridge, fortunately unopposed since Filipino forces had secured the target landing zone, but several hundred men were dispersed by jump master errors. After the Liberation of Manila, two companies of paratroopers raided the Los Baños internment camp, liberating some 2,000 civilians. Their final combat in the Islands was near Aparri in support of Filipino and American forces fight-
ing to terminate Japanese resistance on Luzon. They trained for OPERATION OLYMPIC, the invasion of the Japanese home islands, but after the Japanese agreed to surrender, on 30 August 1945 the 11th began occupation duty in Japan and remained there until 1949.

Conceived at the end of the Great War, airborne operations solidified their place in the annals of warfare in the Second World War, and became an integral part of the modern military.

Further Readings:

Announcements:
Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 18 Oct. 2016 – Battle of Falling Waters - www.tc-cwrt.com - info@tc-cwrt.com
St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 24 Oct. 2016 – Hollywood’s Civil War - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net
Cannon Valley CWRT - 20 Oct. Trials after US-Dakota War – dnl1.peterson@gmail.com
Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail - 651-338-2717
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafm-n.org 651-455-6942
Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org
Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble: 26 Oct., Barker, Agincourt: Henry V & the Battle … - sdcubenspeck52@gmail.com

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

See our programs on YouTube at http://youtube.com/ww2hrt