
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the first April session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is James Fenelon author of *Angels against the Sun*. He will discuss the 11th Airborne Division war service from the Leyte landings to Luzon and Manila, and its role in the occupation of Japan.

Aesop's observation in "The Crow and the Pitcher," that 'Necessity is the mother of invention,' was never truer than after the Great War's four years of senseless slaughter on the Western Front. All the great powers desperately sought ways to break the perceived tactical stalemate favoring the defensive force. The Germans had some successes with stormtrooper infiltration tactics but did not have the logistical capacity to capitalize on the openings they created. Two alternative approaches gained greater currency: a heavy aerial bombing campaign that would be so destructive that any war would be quite short; and "vertical envelopment" – the subject of tonight's talk.

In the fall of 1918, General John Pershing's air service advisor in France Colonel William P. "Billy" Mitchell proposed the novel idea of gathering all the Allied bombers, loading them with men armed with submachine guns who would be dropped by parachutes behind enemy lines to attack rear echelons. The men would be supported by fighter planes until supporting forces arrived. Pershing approved the plan and it was set for the spring of 1919, but the war ended before it could be executed.

During the inter-war years the two international pariahs, the Soviet Union and Germany, seized on and developed the concept of "vertical envelopment," that is, parachuting infantry troops behind enemy lines to surprise and envelope an opposing force. By 1935, the Soviet Union had battalion sized parachute troops engaging in mass jumps and had even perfected parachuting a tank unto a battlefield. During the 1930s the French, Italians, and Germans all opened military jump schools. The German paratroopers (*fallschirmjäger*) quickly increased first to regimental size and then expanded to divisional strength. In May of 1940 the Germans made the first combat use of paratroopers and glider-borne troops in combat in their attack on the Netherlands, seizing and holding bridges until the infantry

forces could catch up. In addition German glider-borne forces seized the Belgian fortress of Eben Emael. A year later the Germans followed these victories up with the first major airborne operation in history: 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. The appointment of General George C. Marshall as the Army Chief of Staff in April 1939 changed this for the better. After reading reports from his military attaché in Berlin about German paratroop and glider projects, Marshall explored how American troops could be used in these ways. This led to conflicts between different branches of the Army. The engineers felt they should be responsible for airborne training, as expertise in explosives was part of the training program. The Army Air Corps claimed precedence, because of the decisive role aircraft would play, while the infantry argued successfully that paratroops would fight on the ground and were thus specialized infantry. In July 1940 that the First Parachute Test Platoon was formed.

While starting a bit behind the Germans, the United States proved capable of catching up fast. After entering World War II, the United States eventually created five airborne divisions, the 11th, 13th, 17th, 82nd, and 101st divisions. Four of these, the 13th, 17th, 82nd, and 101st divisions made combat jumps in the European Theater of Operations.

The 11th Airborne nicknamed "The Angels," was sent to the Pacific Theater of Operations in early 1944, arriving in New Guinea for intensive jungle training. In November 1944, the Angels deployed as 'leg' infantry at Leyte Beach in the Philippines. In January, the 187th and 188th glider regiments made an amphibious assault southwest coast of Luzon, demonstrating the tactical flexibility the troops had trained for, and fought their way inland. Finally, on February 3, 1945, the 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment executed its very first combat drop on the vital Tagaytay Ridge on the approach to Manila.

This drop came close to having some major problems. They were deployed in three lifts starting at 3 am, with support from P-61 night fighters. Pilot error in navigation coupled with some issues with jump discipline caused some of the troops to be scattered off target. Despite

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

these complications, the troops quickly reorganized themselves. Close cooperation with the local Filipino guerillas (who had been successfully driving Japanese troops from the ridge prior to the air drop) meant that the objective was secured by 3 o'clock that same afternoon.

After the Liberation of Manilla, two companies of paratroopers assisted by Filipino guerillas raided the Los Baños internment camp, liberating some 2,000 civilians in a heroic race against time. This raid has been considered one of the most successful rescue operations during the war. Their final combat in the Islands was near Aparri in support of Filipino and American forces fighting 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, serving 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:

James Fenelon, *Angels Against The Sun* (New York: Regnery History, 2023).

E.M. Flanagan Jr. *The Angels: A History of the 11th Airborne Division, 1943-1946* (New York: Presidio Press, 1989).

E.M. Flanagan Jr. *Airborne: A Combat History of American Airborne Forces* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002).

William B. Breuer, *Geronimo! American Paratroopers in World War II* (New York: St Martin's Press 1991).

James A. Huston, *Out of the Blue – U.S. Army Airborne Operations in World War II* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1998).

Announcements:

Civil War Symposium – 12 Apr. 2025,
Vicksburg and the Mississippi –
Twin Cities Civil War Round Table – 20 May.
2025, *Civil War in the Rio Grande* –

www.tccwrt.com – e-mail: info@tccwrt.com
Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley,
15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345.
320-616-6050.

<http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>.
8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall
Bloomington, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays at 1100.
<https://www.8thmn.org>.

Friends of Ft. Snelling - www.fortsnelling.org
Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN -
Air show – TBA 2025 – 320-564-6644

<http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.
Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie –TBA
2025 - Flying Cloud Airport - 952-746-6100 -
www.wotn.org

Alliance Française 612-332-0436 - www.afmisp.org
Friends of the National WW II Memorial –
<http://www.wwiimemorialfriends.org.US>
Pittsburg Veterans Breakfast Club
- <http://www.vbcphg.org>.
Western Naval Historical Association –
info@wnha.net

WWII Discussion Forum – [wwiidf.org](http://www.wwiidf.org)
History Happy Hour - Sundays, 3 pm -
www.historyhappyhour.com
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 -
www.cafmn.org
Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 -
jkyser45@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

Round Table Schedule 2024–2025
22 Apr. Eighth Air Force (new)
13 May Patton’s Tactician: War and Occupation
The Round Table is a 501(c)3 nonprofit.
We would greatly appreciate your supporting the HCDWW2HRT.



MG Swing, CG of 11th AB and LG Eichelberger, CG 8th Army, plan Los Banos Riad 3 Feb 1945



Co. B/511th PIR boarding C47 for drop on Los Banos



B/511 PIR dropping on Los Banos

