World War II Re-enactor
Guidelines and Information

For volunteer re-enactors of the World War II History Center
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I. Important things to keep in mind

A) Remember first and foremost that when you are in uniform, no matter where you are, you are representing an honorable soldier. Always be on your best behavior and do what you can to bring honor to yourself and those you are trying to portray.

B) Remember that you are a re-enactor because you care about the history and educating others, not because you like to carry guns around, look cool in uniform, or get some "trigger-time" with a machine.

C) Remember that as reenacting units under the banner of the World War II History Center, we will be held to a higher standard and we expect you to do your best to help us maintain that higher standard of historical accuracy, even when participating in tactical events.

II. Personal Goals

A) To learn all you can about the time period, the life of the particular type of soldier you are portraying, the theater of combat in which he served, and his unit's history.

B) To acquire as soon as possible, the minimum required uniform/equipment/weapons necessary to fulfill your particular soldier's impression.

C) To learn basic military discipline including rules for saluting, addressing higher ranks, following orders and all of the other typical rules of order common to military life.

D) To become completely familiar and comfortable with the use and arrangement of the uniform, equipment and weapons of the combat soldier which you are portraying, including equipment and weapons utilized by other soldiers in your unit, such as machine guns and vehicles.

E) To help others achieve the goals above.

F) To recruit others to enter the world of World War II re-enacting, thereby increasing our numbers and adding more to our effort to educate the public about life as a soldier during WWII.

III. **Requirements**

A) If you are portraying a soldier from a nationality whose primary language is not English, you are requested to learn basic military commands in the native tongue of the nationality which you are portraying.

B) If you are portraying a soldier from a nationality other than that of the United States, and if you are capable, try to speak in an accent of the nationality which you are portraying when speaking to the public

C) While in uniform, you will be expected to act as a soldier and follow the military code of conduct. Officers will be saluted (unless in combat conditions), higher ranks will be addressed by rank, and you will follow the orders given to you. Your best guide would be to acquire a copy of a 1941 or later U.S. War Department Field Manual entitled "Soldier's Handbook". This will teach you everything you need to know about being a WWII soldier. You can usually find good condition original copies on eBay for as little as $5.00. The World War II History Center's Research Library also has a few copies that you can check out.

D) The minimum age to participate is 16 but the maximum age is dependent upon you. If you are physically capable of portraying a soldier, then you will be allowed to participate. If you are over 45, depending on how old you look, it may be better for you to portray a German soldier as the German Army conscripted older men towards the end of the war, or you may be asked to be a vehicle driver as an American soldier. There were very few infantrymen over 40 during WWII in the U.S. Army.

IV. **Appearance**

a. There must be no visible tattoos or piercings of any kind that are visible while you are in uniform.
b. Hair must be kept short and above the ears. Sideburns must be kept no longer than the middle of the ear.
c. Facial hair is limited to trimmed mustaches that must not hang over the lip, and can not be any wider than the corners of the mouth. "Five o'clock shadows" are permissible, unless you are an officer.
d. You must keep yourself in at least average physical condition, able to walk at least a few miles per day while carrying weapon and equipment. You will not be expected to do 50 pushups and run a timed mile, but you have to be able to keep up on a march without the potential for a heart attack. Beer guts are not only not allowed, but you won't find any equipment that will fit you.

V. **Safety**

a. Safety is the number one priority! If you see an unsafe condition, no matter what the situation (even in the middle of a public battle), do whatever it takes to make the situation safe before doing anything else.
b. Never bring live ammunition to any event where you will be carrying a WWII-era weapon. If you must bring a weapon for self defense, bring one that uses ammunition different from that used in your weapon. For example, if as an American soldier you carry a .45 auto, bring a firearm for self-defense that uses a .38, .40 or 9mm caliber. The idea is that there will be no way that you will accidentally load a live round into your WWII-era weapon.
c. Live ammunition is strictly prohibited on World War II History Center grounds, even for personal defense. If you bring any by accident, you will be expected to put it in your POV immediately.

d. Pyrotechnics are to be handled strictly by authorized personnel only. The only exception to this rule is any grenade, mortar or cannon shell simulator approved by the event Safety Officer.
e. Never aim a weapon of any type, loaded or unloaded, real or fake, at any person ever. The old rule of shooting, "only aim at what you plan to kill" applies here. During combat, always aim at the ground in front of the person or off to the side or over his head. In case the worst should happen and you do have a live round loaded, this will save someone's life.

VI. **Vehicles**

a. Only trained personnel, approved by a vehicle's owner, are allowed to drive any vehicle other than POV's at any time, whether during an event or not. Training for vehicle drivers will be handled strictly by the owner of said vehicle, or other person as designated by the vehicle owner.
b. Vehicle owners (or their designee) are responsible for the safety of their own vehicle, and any riders, at all times. If there are any particular safety rules for the vehicle, it is up to the vehicle owner (or their designee) to explain any and all safety rules to the riders prior to movement of the vehicle.
c. Security of vehicles is the responsibility of the vehicle's owner or their designee. The World War II History Center and any event organizers are not responsible for any damage to, or theft from vehicles, that may occur.
d. All of the above rules also apply to POV's.

VII. **General Information**

a. Advancement in rank will be decided much the same as it is in the real military. Decisions will be made by your CO or NCO and will be based on your experience, skill, historical accuracy and the need for higher ranks. Participation in events will also play a role in your rank designation. We will never have need for any rank higher than a Major. Refer to the Unit Structure guide to see how many of each rank were typically found in each unit.
b. Training for our units will be conducted as if none of our members have ever served in the military. For those that do have military service, we will ask that you be patient with us and the inexperienced, and do what you can to help both.
c. For those of you who have prior military experience (in the real world), please keep in mind that some things were done different during World War II and some terminology was different. You will be expected to learn the "WWII way" of doing things as you will be portraying a WWII soldier. We are not doing this to minimize your honorable service to our country, but merely to be as historically accurate as possible.
d. Smoking is generally allowed outdoors, unless otherwise prohibited for safety concerns. It is a fact of the WWII soldier, from any nationality, that smoking was pretty much the only way to relax during the war. However, if you choose to smoke, you are required to use either un-filtered cigarettes or cigarettes with a white filter. You must also use a type of normal-looking cigarette similar to Camels or Winstons. No Virginia Slims or other exotic-looking types. Cigarettes did not have filters during WWII. Cigars and pipes are also allowed, although pipes would only have been used in camp.
e. Anyone trained in Emergency Medical Response or as an EMT will be encouraged to portray a Medic. This way you could actually carry real medical supplies and you would be on the scene instantly if any real injuries occurred. Real gunshot wounds may be non-existent, but scrapes, cuts, burns, turned ankles and the like are fairly common.

f. Training for our units will largely revolve around how to portray a WWII combat soldier, squad-level tactics, marching, rifle drill, and field problems. Training will include minimal shooting of blank rounds due to the cost of the ammunition; however you will be given a chance to shoot blank ammunition prior to an event if it is your first time. Live Fire target shooting events can be organized if enough interest is shown.

VIII. World War II Reenacting Explained

Reenacting in Tactical Battles is a lot like playing "War" when you were a kid, except we get to use way cooler guns and everything sounds real. "Hits" are taken by individuals when you can actually see someone shooting at you from a realistic range (i.e. if you are being shot at by someone using a rifle from no more than 100 yards away, you are "hit"). Ranges vary depending on weapons, but the general rule is if more than 1/3 of your body is exposed to the person shooting at you, and you are within range, then you are hit.

Specific rules vary depending on who hosts the battle, but these should be made clear prior to the start of the battle. If you are participating in a tactical battle and expecting a perfect system to work every time, you will be terribly disappointed. In the heat of battle with gunfire going off all over the place, it is often very difficult for participants to hear where shots are coming from, specifically when they are aimed at you. You could be shot in the back and never even know it. This situation then places the responsibility on the shooter. If you really want your shot to count, make sure that you are well within range, and that you only shoot when the person you are aiming at is looking right at you. Also make sure that a good portion of their body is exposed. For instance, a machine gunner in a bunker is never going to take a head shot, no matter what the range, except maybe if you are using a sniper rifle and he sees it. So it is your responsibility to use a grenade or outflank his position.

General Reenacting Rules – Tactical Battles

- Never shoot directly at a person. Always aim at the ground at their feet, off to one side, or over their head.
- Effective rifle and machine gun range is only about 100 yards. Don't take a shot beyond that range because it is too difficult for your target to understand that you are shooting at him.
- Effective submachine gun range is only about 50 yards.
- Effective pistol range is only about 10 yards.
- Effective grenade range is about 5 yards. If a grenade lands within 5 yards of your position, and you are exposed, you are a casualty.
- Never call your shot!! There is nothing worse at a tactical battle than guys running around yelling, "Hey, I shot you three times!" Only take effective shots as mentioned above, and keep shooting until the person can see you shooting. There is almost never a "one shot, one kill" rule.
- Casualties will be handled different ways at different battles. The battle commander should explain what you are to do if you are "killed" prior to the start of the battle.

IX. American Unit and Rank Structure Guide

Unit Structure (Smallest to Largest):

U.S. Rifle Squad – 12 men

Commanded by a staff sergeant, with a sergeant that could command half the squad.

U.S. Rifle Platoon – 40 men

Commanded by a first or second lieutenant, made up of 3 rifle squads, plus the CO, a radio operator and two runners.

U.S. Rifle Company – 120 men

Commanded by a first lieutenant or captain, made up of 3 rifle platoons, plus a Weapons Platoon which included machine guns and a mortar squad, an Executive Officer (second in command) and a few service personnel such as radio operator and runners.
Battalion
Regiment
Division
Corps
Army
Army Group

Rank Structure, WWII U.S. Army (1944) (Lowest to Highest)
Private – lowest rank possible, new recruit
Private, First Class – usually has some experience
Technician, Fifth Grade – Corporal rank with special training, such as interpreter or driver
Corporal – has some experience, some ability to command small groups of less than 6 men
Technician, Fourth Grade – Sergeant rank with special training
Sergeant – experienced, can command an entire squad
Staff Sergeant – experienced, can command an entire squad, or assist the platoon leader
Technical Sergeant– Platoon Sergeant, assists the platoon leader and can take over the platoon if the platoon leader is incapacitated.
First Sergeant – in charge of all NCO's of a company, assists Company CO
2nd Lieutenant – commands a platoon, or assists Company CO
1st Lieutenant – experienced platoon leader, or assists Company CO, or commands Company
Captain – commands a Company
Major – commands a Battalion
Lieutenant Colonel – commands a Battalion or Regiment
Colonel – commands a Regiment
Brigadier General – assists the division commander or commands a brigade or brigade group
Major General – commands a Division
Lieutenant General – commands a Corps or Army
General – commands an Army or Army Group
General of the Army – commands an Army Group or entire Expeditionary Force

X. **German Unit and Rank Structure Guide**
(The German Army command structure was very similar to the U.S. Army structure)
Rifle Squad – 10 men
Rifle Platoon – 30 to 40 men
Rifle Company – 100 to 120 men
Battalion
Regiment
Division
Corps
Army
Army Group

Rank Structure, WWII German Army (Lowest to Highest—includes pronunciations)
Grenadier (pronounced gren-a-deer) - Private
Obergrenadier (pronounced ober-gren-a-deer) – Private, First Class
Gefreiter (pronounced guh-fry-ter) – Lance Corporal

Obergefreiter - Corporal
Unteroffizier (pronounced oon-ter-off-itz-eer) - Sergeant
Unterfeldwebel (pronounced oon-ter-feld-way-bul) – Staff Sergeant
Feldwebel – Sergeant, First Class
Oberfeldwebel – Master Sergeant
Stabsfeldwebel (pronounced stobs-feld-way-bul) – Sergeant Major
Leutnant (pronounced loyt-nont) – 2nd Lieutenant
Oberleutnant – 1st Lieutenant
Hauptmann (pronounced howpt-mon) – Captain
Major (pronounced My-or) – Major
Oberstleutnant (pronounced o-berst-loyt-nant) – Lieutenant Colonel
Oberst – Colonel
Generalmajor (pronounced gen-er-all-may-or) – Brigadier General
Generalleutnant – Major General
General der Infanterie (or der Artillerie, or der Panzer) – Lieutenant General
General – General
Generalfeldmarshall (pronounced gen-er-all-felt-mar-shal) – General of the Army

XI. Achieving Higher Rank

In order to achieve higher rank in either of our units, several requirements must be met.

a) We must first have a need, or an open slot, to promote someone to a higher rank. For example, we will only promote someone to Sergeant if we need a new squad leader, or assistant squad leader. You can help create this need by helping us to recruit more members to our units. If we have more members, then we will have more squads and thus, more open positions to fill.
b) You must learn the job of the next higher rank. If you want to be a squad leader, you must learn what it takes to be a squad leader, understand the responsibilities and know your job.
c) In order to be promoted to anything above a Corporal, you must regularly attend our training sessions. It is not necessary to attend every month, but at least every other month. You can not properly fulfill a leadership role, if you yourself don't know what you are doing and can teach others what they are supposed to do. You must know your men and they must know you. The extra responsibilities that you will have require that you regularly work with those in command above you.

XII. Glossary

CO – Commanding Officer

Defilade – A firing position that can not be attacked from the flank because of natural obstacle to incoming fire.

Enfilade – A position that allows the attacker to fire along the longest axis of the enemy, i.e. firing along a trench line instead of head-on.

Farby – anything modern that is on your person, or that you are doing or saying, that is not of the time period that you are portraying (such as talking on a cell phone during a battle in plain view of the public)

Impression – the historically accurate persona that includes uniform, equipment, weapons, knowledge and mannerisms characteristic to a particular type of historical figure.

NCO – Non-commissioned Officer, or any rank below 2nd Lieutenant or any rank that wears stripes above a Private, First Class

POV – Privately Owned Vehicle or civilian vehicle not of the WWII era, (i.e. the car you drove from home to the event)

Public Battle – Any battle reenactment that takes place in view of the public and is orchestrated from beginning to end, often down to the smallest detail. This type of battle is more like a "play" than a combat scenario and is meant to provide an interesting battle for the public to watch. Casualties are usually worked out prior to the battle and objectives are made known to both sides. The Germans always lose public battles. Public battles may often seem like "dog and pony shows" to reenactors, but they are the best means for recruiting new reenactors and impressing the public. The point of these battles is to "wow" the audience, thereby building interest in what we do and building support for the World War II History Center.

Tactical Battle – Any battle reenactment away from public view. These are typically held away from cities on larger tracts of land and are meant for reenactors and their units to test their skills in mock-WWII scenarios. These events are usually organized by a host unit and orders and objectives are given to unit CO's. Reenactment rules are usually described prior to the event and explain how "hits" are to be taken and how "casualties" are treated. The Germans can win tactical battles although "winning" is often a difficult matter to figure out. Tactical Battles are the best learning opportunities for reenactors wanting to understand more about life as a soldier.