

## **The 34th “Red Bull” Infantry Division 1917-2010**

### **Organization and World War One**

The 34th Infantry Division was created from National Guard troops of Minnesota, Iowa, the Dakotas and Nebraska in late summer 1917, four months after the US entered World War One. Training was conducted at Camp Cody, near Deming, New Mexico (pop. 3,000). Dusty wind squalls swirled daily through the area, giving the new division a nickname: the “Sandstorm Division.” As the men arrived at Camp Cody other enlistees from the Midwest and Southwest joined them. Many of the Guardsmen had been together a year earlier at Camp Llano Grande, near Mercedes, Texas, on the Mexican border.



Training went well, and the officers and men waited anxiously throughout the long fall and winter of 1917-18 for orders to ship for France. Their anticipation turned to anger and frustration, however, when word was received that spring that the 34th had been chosen to become a replacement division. Companies, batteries and regiments, which had developed esprit de corps and cohesion, were broken up, and within two months nearly all personnel were reassigned to other commands in France. Reduced to a skeleton of cadre NCOs and officers, the 34th remained at Camp Cody just long enough for new draftees to refill its ranks. The reconstituted division then went to France, but by the time it arrived in October 1918, it was too late to see action. The war ended the following month.

### **Between Wars**

After World War One, the 34th was reorganized with National Guardsmen from Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota. Upon federal recognition in 1924, command of the Division was given to Mathew Tinley of Iowa, who led the 34th for the next sixteen years. The 1920's and 30's were especially hard for the 34th and the National Guard generally, as it struggled to cope with slim resources and restricted troop levels. The command went briefly in 1940 to George Leach of Minneapolis and then to Minnesota's Adjutant General, Ellard Walsh, who headed the division until August 1941.

### **Mobilization and Preparation for World War Two**

By the summer of 1940, war was raging in Europe and Japan had begun its intended conquest of Asia. No longer certain that the US could resist being drawn into another world war, Congress and the president authorized a draft and the mobilization of the entire National Guard for a year of "precautionary" training.

The nation-wide mobilization was completed in increments throughout the fall and winter of 1940-41. The Minnesota National Guard, which numbered 5,500 at the time, had 3,800 of its membership in the 34th Division. Its activation began officially on February 10, 1941, followed

by several months of intensive training at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. The division made a good showing in the massive Louisiana Maneuvers of August and September 1941.

War came to the US when Japan abruptly attacked the American fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. All enlistments were immediately extended for the duration of the war. The division was hastily moved to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and reorganized from its old fashioned "square" configuration of four infantry regiments to the new, smaller "triangularized" configuration of three regimental combat teams.

The 34th had been chosen as the first division to be deployed overseas. Within five weeks of Pearl Harbor, the first elements of the division secretly shipped out for Belfast, Northern Ireland, aboard *HMTS Straithard*. When newspapers throughout Great Britain headlined that the first Yank had landed, they were talking about Pvt. Milburn H. Henke of Hutchinson, Minnesota, a member of the division's Co. B, 133rd Infantry Regiment, who was first off the boat.

By the end of May 1942 the entire division was assembled for rigorous training in Ireland and Scotland. During this time, the elite First Ranger Battalion was formed under the command of one of the division's officers, Cpt. William Darby. Some 80 percent of the unit's volunteers were drawn from the 34th, and they soon became famous as "Darby's Rangers."

## **North Africa**

Allied strategy called for a three-stage, three-front attack on Axis forces in Europe: the Soviet Union was already fighting Germany on an Eastern Front, while British and American forces would attack from the south by way of the continent's "soft underbelly." The third front, invasion from the west by way of France, would require massive preparation. The Southern Front, in the meantime, required that German forces be dislodged from North Africa.

Real war began for the fledgling soldiers of the 34th on November 8, 1942, with Operation TORCH, a three-pronged series of coordinated Allied landings in French North Africa intended to cut off the escape of General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Corps after its defeat by the British at El Alamein. Elements of the 34th landed at Algiers. The operation was successful and the 34th, joining with other Allied forces, pushed eastward into Tunisia.\*

Stiff opposition by reinforced German troops was encountered in Tunisia. Many of the battles were for possession of mountain passes leading eastward, and particularly fierce fighting took place in February 1943. Engagements at Faid Pass, where an entire battalion was taken prisoner, and Fondouk Gap were costly and discouraging. A powerful German attack near Kassarine Pass inflicted heavy casualties, but Germany's failure to follow-up enabled the Allies to recover and resume their offensive.

The next Allied objective was capture of Bizerta and Tunis, crucial ports which the Germans used for bringing in reinforcements and supplies by way of Sicily. But Hill 609

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\* The 34th also holds this first: the first artillery round fired by American ground forces against German troops was leveled by PFC Joseph Pisch of B Battery, 175th Field Artillery Battalion, using a British 25 pounder on November 19, 1942, at Medjez-El-Bab, Tunisia.

(Djebel Tahent), a rugged mass of rock in a mountainous region, barred Allied Armies from these vital ports. This hill was also the last heavily fortified German position left in North Africa.

The critical task of taking Hill 609 was given to the 34th. An attack began early on April 29, 1943, when the 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry moved to the base of the hill and captured a small village. From there the 34th began all-out assault under intense fire. After two days the bastion was finally taken, and with Hill 609 in American hands, the German Army's defense line collapsed. It was a momentous victory and fitting revenge for the division's set backs at Faid, Fondouk and Kassarine. Two weeks later, on May 15, 1943, the enemy surrendered and the battle for North Africa was over.

The now tough, combat-hardened men of the 34th were justifiably proud of what they had accomplished, but they were acutely aware of the price they had paid: total battle casualties of the 34th in the Tunisian Campaign numbered 4,049, of which half were missing in action.

The 34th remained as a garrison force in Northeastern Tunisia until July when it was sent to Oran for another round of training. Next came Italy.



## **Italy**

The campaign for North Africa had taken six months and many lives, but it was essential in order to invade Italy. Sicily was the stepping-stone. The 34th was assigned to set up staging camps for the assaulting Allies, who pushed the Italian and German troops out of Sicily in July and August 1943. The success of the Sicilian invasion prompted the Italian government to drop out of the war, and Italy signed an armistice on the same day that the invasion of Italy was launched from Sicily September 3, 1943.

The 34th was designated as a reserve force for the invasion, but its 151st Field Artillery Battalion was temporarily detached to help the 36th Division establish a beachhead at Salerno. The Germans had launched a bewildering nighttime counter-attack on the beachhead just as the 151st was landing, but with sheer grit and courage, the artillerymen stopped it cold. The Chief-of-Staff for the 36th later commented: "The beachhead would have been destroyed had it not been for the early arrival of the 151st."

The 34th, now part of General Mark Clark's 5th Army, arrived at Salerno a few weeks later. From there it advanced slowly northward through mountainous terrain, freezing wet weather, and the turbulent Volturno River, capturing Montemilieto and Benevento in the process. The objective was to capture the "Gustav Line," a formidable chain of German defensive positions, which spanned the entire Italian peninsula above Naples.

Fighting along the route was as hard and unforgiving as ever to face an army, but the Germans were gradually pushed back as, one by one, the strategic objectives were taken: Monte Pantano, San Vittore, Monte Chiaia, Monte Trocchio, the Rapido River. Bitter hand-to-hand combat was often needed to root the enemy out of his holes in the mountains, and the men frequently fought in regions, which could only be supplied by animal pack trains. Then came the

long, grim assault on Monte Cassino, the most heavily fortified keystone of the Gustav Line. The division attacked the network of hills near Cassino and attempted to storm the ancient abbey itself, but the Germans defied all attempts to wrest control of it.

In the brutal winter fighting of 1943-44, the Red Bull lost thousands of its men. Finally relieved in mid-February and given a month's rest, the 34th was sent into action again in March—this time to Anzio. Allied commanders had decided to by-pass the Gustav Line and establish a narrow beachhead at Anzio, but powerful German attacks were preventing Allied forces from moving inland. The division's breakout finally came May 23, followed by the drive on Rome. Men of the 135th Regiment were among the first to enter the city on June 4, 1944, and mopped up snipers that evening in the vicinity of the Coliseum. The 133rd Regiment, in the meantime, was taking the vital port of Civitavecchia northwest of Rome. Elsewhere, off the coast of Normandy, Allies were about to invade France. Germany was now defending itself on three fronts.

After Rome, the division continued its drive up the boot of Italy through heavily entrenched German positions. Resistance was dogged but declining in strength as the 34th rooted Germans out of Belvedere, San Vincenzo, Cecina, Rosignano, Leghorn, and Pisa, among others. Then came the Arno River, the Gothic Line along the Apennines, and finally a bold campaign for the Po River Valley, which contained 80 percent of Italy's war industries.

The final offensive came in April 1945. The German retreat became a rout as their supplies ran out, and on May 2, 1945, the remnants of the LXXV German Corps, totaling over 40,000 men, surrendered to the Red Bulls near Milan (ironically, the surrendered troops included the 34th German Division). The war in Europe came to an end a few days later, with some elements of the division on the borders of France and Switzerland.

## **Home**

After rest, sightseeing and occupation duty, the victorious division sailed from Naples in October for the USA. Its men were mustered out and the division deactivated on November 3, 1945, at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia. Of the several thousand Midwestern Guardsmen who left for Camp Claiborne on that frigid February day in 1941, and who had been among the first American troops to land in Europe, only a handful remained with the division at the end. Casualties, illness, transfers and rotations accounted for the rest. But pride in the accomplishments of the 34th during its 46 months away from home was deeply felt by all who had ever worn the Red Bull.

"Attack, attack, attack," had become the division's slogan early in its fighting career. With that battle cry it had gone on to complete a record that included: 517 days of front line combat in five major campaigns (more combat days than any other American division in any theatre of the war, with some elements of the division credited with over 600 days); 21,362 casualties (3,737 killed, 14,165 wounded, 3,460 missing in action); 11 Medals of Honor; 98 Distinguished Service Crosses; and 1,072 Silver Stars.

In addition to the personal awards and decorations, the division garnered three Presidential Unit Citations, 15 Unit Commendations and 525 separate division citations. The French government awarded the 34th the Croix de Guerre With Palms for gallantry in action alongside French troops. The 100th "Nisei" Infantry Battalion, composed of US citizens of

Japanese descent and attached to the 34th for much of the Italian Campaign, became the most highly decorated battalion in the US Army.

But for men of the 34th, the victory over Germany was bittersweet. Not only had the price of their victory come high, it was their unfortunate lot that once the Allies hit the beaches at Normandy, Italy became a forgotten front. Even when the division returned to the US, it was inactivated in obscurity and its men dismissed without fanfare or so much as a final parade.

## **After World War Two**

The 34th was reorganized in 1946 as a National Guard division from Iowa and Nebraska with headquarters in Iowa. In 1963 it lost its divisional status and it was inactivated entirely in 1968 as a result of Pentagon-mandated troop reductions within the Guard. Its reputation as one of the toughest combat outfits in World War Two survived, however, and in 1990, in recognition of the division's achievements, the Department of the Army authorized a conversion of the Minnesota-based 47th "Viking" Infantry Division into the 34th "Red Bull" Infantry Division. The switch took place on February 10, 1991, exactly fifty years after the division's mobilization for World War Two. The personnel and organizational structure remained the same; only the name was changed. Thus it was that the legacy and heritage of this great division could be taken up by a new generation of soldiers.

## **Rebirth and Transformation**

Shortly after its rebirth in 1991, the division began a process of reorganization and change that has continued to the present. One of the most significant developments was transformation from its old brigade structure into brigade combat teams and the broadening of its multi-state base. Division Headquarters remains located in Rosemount, Minnesota. The division is capable of deploying its Main Command Post, Tactical Command Post, and Special Troops Battalion to provide command and control for Army Brigades. Within Minnesota, the 34th now provides training and operational leadership to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, which emerged just prior to its mobilization in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the 34th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Outside Minnesota, the 34th Infantry Division provides training and operational guidance to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, Iowa National Guard; 116th Brigade Combat Team, Idaho National Guard; 32nd Brigade Combat Team, Wisconsin National Guard; 115th Fires Brigade, Wyoming National Guard; 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, Nebraska National Guard; 141st Combat Support Brigade, North Dakota National Guard; 157th Combat Support Brigade, Wisconsin National Guard; and the 1-189th General Support Aviation Battalion, Montana National Guard. The entire division is scheduled to complete its transformation by the end of 2010.

## **Since 9-11**

Since September 11, 2001, the 34th has been involved in several missions supporting the Global War on Terrorism: Operation Joint Forge (Bosnia); Operation Joint Guardian (Kosovo); Operation Vigilant Hammer (Europe); the Mediterranean Theater of Operations (Egypt); Joint Task Force Bravo (Honduras); Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan); Operation Iraqi

Freedom (Iraq), as well as multiple homeland defense missions for Operation Noble Eagle. Approximately 11,000 Soldiers from the 34th Infantry Division have been deployed in support of these missions since 9-11.

In March 2006, the First Brigade Combat Team (CBT) commenced combat operations in central and southern Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. It marked the largest single unit deployment for the division since WWII. Upon its return in July 2007, the brigade was the longest serving Army National Guard unit in Iraq, having been activated for 22 months total with 16 in Iraq.



**Insignia of the Red Bull**

The Red Bull insignia of the 34th Division was designed by Marvin Cone of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, who drew it for a contest while training with the division at Camp Cody, New Mexico, in 1917. A steer skull imposed on the shape of a Mexican water jar (an "olla") recalled the division's desert home not far from the Mexican border. During World War Two, German soldiers in Italy referred to the American soldiers who wore the familiar patch as "Red Devils" or "Red Bulls." The latter name stuck, and the division soon adopted it officially, replacing its World War One nickname of "Sandstorm Division."