

# The 47th “Viking” Infantry Division

## *Minnesota’s Cold War Division*

*Organized 10 June 1946*

*Inactivated 10 February 1991*

The 47th Infantry Division typified the role played nationwide by the National Guard during America's Cold War. The division's makeup, training, and readiness changed constantly, paralleling significant political, technical, and social developments of the latter half of the twentieth century. As a National Guard division and a first-line reserve of the U.S. Army, it was an instrument of shifting directions and goals for national security and the containment of Communism. But it was also shaped by state-federal politics. Historic tensions between state interests and federal authority—and between the Guard and the Regular Army in particular—were always present. Although it never saw combat, the citizen-soldiers of the 47th Division stood ready on the line during America's 45-year Cold War. And throughout, they responded when needed in time of local emergency.



Geographically, the division was largely a Minnesota outfit, although other states provided important elements. It was officially named the Viking Division because of the ethnic heritage shared by so many people from North Dakota and Minnesota, from which the 47th was initially drawn. In later years, Iowa and Illinois contributed full brigades to the division.

### **Organization: a new postwar division for Minnesota**

As World War Two drew to a close in 1945, Minnesota's Adjutant General, Ellard Walsh, was already gathering the information and political support necessary to rebuild the state's National Guard. Walsh, who was also president of the politically powerful National Guard Association, was a skilled administrator and organizer. Postwar plans called for a large National Guard. Many new divisions would have to be created in addition to reactivating the prewar ones. Rather than share the 34<sup>th</sup> with Iowa, Walsh opted for a totally new division with clear Minnesota roots. By January 1946 a detailed plan outlining what was both feasible and desirable had been prepared, and he had laid the necessary ground work in Washington for creation of a new, Minnesota-based infantry division. A few months later, June 10, 1946, the 47th Infantry Division was officially born. Brigadier General (soon Major General) Norman Hendrickson of Minneapolis, Chief-of-Staff for the 34th Division during the North African and Italian campaigns and a long-time member of the Minnesota National Guard, was named as the division's first commander. His job was to create a new division from scratch

The 47th Division was to be based in Minnesota, which would provide most of the manpower, but North Dakota would also contribute important elements. It was given the name "Viking Division" in honor of the ethnic heritage shared by so many people of both states. Although the division was new *per se*, its regiments, battalions and companies took their numerical designations from earlier state units with proud, distinguished histories. Some, such as the 135<sup>th</sup> and 136<sup>th</sup> Infantries, had lineages dating back to the Civil War.

Recruiting was laborious. Finding good officers was as big a challenge as filling the ranks with young privates. All previous members of the Minnesota National Guard had been given full discharges following the war, and most other veterans were glad to put the military behind them. The new division had to be recruited one man at a time, enlistment by enlistment.

Seasoned war veterans eventually joined along with eager high school students to create an unusual amalgamation of youth and hard core experience. The division's first two-week "summer camp" was conducted July 1947 at Camp Ripley with 1300 men from Minnesota and 400 from North Dakota. By the summer of 1948, Minnesota's share of strength had grown to 5,300 and North Dakota to 760. Vikings were on the march.

### **The Korean Call Up**

On June 25, 1950, North Korean forces swept across the 38th Parallel of latitude to invade South Korea. Within days, President Truman vowed to protect South Korea with US troops and supplies as part of a larger United Nations military force. General Douglas MacArthur was named to head the UN Command. International order would not be flouted, said Truman, who was also convinced that the Soviets were using Korea as a surrogate to test American will.

US intervention was at first successful. By October UN forces had retaken South Korea and were launching decisive offensive operations in North Korea. But in November North Korean troops were covertly reinforced by 300,000 Chinese Communists who nearly pushed a surprised, outnumbered UN force off the Korean peninsula. In response, US draft calls were stepped up, impending discharges were cancelled, and Guard and Reserve forces were mobilized.

The 47th Division received word of its mobilization in mid-December. No time was wasted. By late January 1951, 9,000 Vikings found themselves at Camp Rucker, Alabama, where they were assigned to train new draftees. Shortly thereafter the 47th was named as a replacement division and gradually split up, its men reassigned individually or by unit to other Regular Army commands in the US. Many went to Korea. The division in the meantime was kept at nearly full strength with Army recruits who replaced those transferred out. Memorable training experiences for the division included such maneuvers as Operation Longhorn held in Texas, and participation in a Nevada atomic bomb test by Company C, 135th Infantry.

Federalization lasted two years. The division was returned to state control in January 1953, but many of its men had already been released to civilian life.

As for the war, it had stabilized in the summer of 1951 near the now-familiar 38th Parallel. Armistice talks dragged on for two years as sporadic fighting continued. A ceasefire and agreement for repatriation of POWs was finally agreed to in July 1953 at Panmunjom on the 38th Parallel. The ceasefire is still under UN supervision at Panmunjom, a reminder of Cold War politics. The dividing line between North from South Korea remains near the 38th Parallel.

### **Reorganization and Transformations**

Following Korea, the 47th Division was again organized, although changes in the law made the task much easier than it had been after World War Two. This time, men were reassigned to the Minnesota National Guard rather than given complete military discharges.

Changing ideas and needs within the Army resulted in three major reorganizations of the division within a ten year period. In 1959 the division was configured to the Pentomic structure in which infantry regiments were dropped and replaced by battle groups bearing the regimental number (1st Battle Group, 135th Infantry, for example) as well as numerous other redesignations and reconfigurations. North Dakota elements were also separated from the division and the 47th became an exclusively Minnesota outfit. The division was again reorganized in 1963, this time according to the ROAD concept. Battle group designations were dropped and substituted with battalions assigned flexibly to brigades. Other redesignations and changes followed. The most

sweeping reorganization occurred in February 1968. Principal among them was the extension of the division into Iowa and Illinois as a result of Pentagon-mandated cutbacks of the Guard in those states. Iowa's 67th Brigade was disbanded, redesignated as the 34th Infantry Brigade, and assigned to the Viking Division. In Illinois, units of the disbanded 33rd Infantry Division were reorganized into the 66th Infantry Brigade and also assigned to the 47th. The basic structural changes implemented in 1968 remained in place until the division's termination in 1991.

### **A Winter Warfare Mission**

The division was assigned a new mission in the early 1960s: Arctic warfare. The winter-wise Vikings were chosen by the Army to man the continent's snow-clad northern defenses in case of war. Elements of the division were sent to Fort Greeley, Alaska, for winter training in 1964. The next winter the 2nd Battalion, 136th Infantry, undertook its annual field training at Camp Ripley in February, a "first" for the Minnesota National Guard and for Camp Ripley. More winter training on a unit and individual level followed in both Minnesota and Alaska. The outgrowth of this mission was one of the Army's largest cold weather training programs. It was conducted entirely by instructors from the Minnesota Army National Guard and carried out each winter in the frozen, snowy fields of Camp Ripley, which was being rebuilt into a year-round facility. This winter-related mission had an international component. An exchange with the Norwegian Home Guard was begun in 1973 and has been held annually ever since. Each winter a platoon from Norway trains at Camp Ripley; in exchange, the 47th Division sent counterpart troops for training at Camp Torpo, Norway.

### **Vietnam and its Repercussions**

The 47th was fast adapting to its cold-weather mission when the nation's attention turned in 1964-65 to tropical Vietnam. Rapidly growing American participation in Vietnam's civil war created need for a reserve force capable of immediate deployment in the event of mobilization. While Washington debated the pros and cons of calling up the National Guard and Reserves, the Army designated several Guard and Reserve organizations as a "Selected Reserve Force" (SRF) in December 1965. The 47th was one of three National Guard divisions so designated. Its SRF status resulted in an increase from 48 to 72 training assemblies per year for several elements of the division (96 for some individuals), accelerated training, better equipment, shifting of supply records, medical exams and shots, ID tags — in short, almost everything except reporting for active duty.

Political hesitation and public controversy over the appropriateness of American involvement in Southeast Asia eventually precluded a large-scale mobilization of National Guard divisions. The SRF assignment ended February 1, 1968. It had demanded great sacrifices in time and effort, for families and employers as well as soldiers, but the increased responsibility was borne with remarkable dedication and good spirit.

The war in Southeast Asia left many legacies, among them elimination of the draft in 1973 and creation of an all-volunteer Army. Economic reality necessitated reduction in the size of the standing Armed Forces, but military responsibilities for national and international defense remained. As a result, a Total Force Doctrine was instituted which called upon reserve components to assume missions formerly performed only by active components. It also meant that the National Guard had to be better prepared for quick mobilization in the event of a national emergency. By the late 1970s the true impact of the Total Force Doctrine on the 47th Division began to be felt. Mobilization preparedness became the watchword. The division was given more and better equipment, training opportunities with Regular Army counterparts in other parts of the US and the world were significantly expanded, and more emphasis was placed on schools

and special educational programs. The division — indeed, the entire National Guard — changed markedly as a result of the Total Force Doctrine. Throughout the 1980s, the level of seriousness, professionalism and time commitment required of its members was at a higher level than ever before known in the peacetime National Guard.

### **Conversion Into the 34th Division**

Minnesota units had formed an important part of the 34th "Red Bull" Division from 1917 to 1945, but that tradition ceased when the 47th Division was formed after the war. The post-war 34th in the meantime was reorganized as an Iowa-based National Guard division. However, cutbacks of Guard manpower in 1963 and again in 1968 resulted in the elimination of the 34th Division, which had a combat record that was second to none in World War Two. Resurgent interest in Army history and traditions during the 1980s prompted a decision in Washington to return the 34<sup>th</sup> to the force structure. It was recommended — and the Adjutants General of Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois agreed — to do this by inactivating the 47th and reactivating it as the 34th. It would simply be a name and number change. The mission, organization and personnel would remain the same. The conversion took place during a special ceremony at the St. Paul Armory on February 10, 1991, exactly 50 years to the day that the 34th Division had been mobilized for World War Two. On that day, the Vikings became, once again, Red Bulls.

### **Commanders of the 47th Infantry Division**

Norman E. Hendrickson	1 Aug 46 - 20 Jan 54
Philip C. Bettenburg	25 Jan 54 - 31 Jan 58
Richard Cook	1 Feb 58 - 14 Jan 60
Robert P. Miller	15 Jan 60 - 6 Oct 63
Donald C. Grant	7 Oct 63 - 31 Mar 71
Paul V. Meyer	1 Apr 71 - 27 Sep 73
William S. Lundberg Jr.	28 Sep 73 - 30 Jan 76
James S. O'Brien	1 Jul 76 - 23 Jun 79
Robert G. Walker	24 Jun 79 - 31 Oct 82
Edward W. Waldon	1 Nov 82 - 8 Dec 85
Allan R. Meixner	9 Dec 85 - 20 Sep 86
Robert L. Blevins	21 Sep 86 - 31 Oct 88
David H. Lueck	1 Nov 88 - 10 Feb 91

*By MAJ Jack K. Johnson, Command Historian, Minnesota Army National Guard, 1991*