



Society of the First Infantry Division

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History

World War I

The First Expeditionary Division was constituted in May 1917 from Army units then in service on the Mexican border and at various Army posts throughout the United States. On June 8, 1917 it was officially organized in New York, New York. This date is the 1st Infantry Division's official birthday. The first units sailed from



New York and Hoboken, N.J., June 14, 1917. Throughout the remainder of the year, the rest of the Division followed, landing at St. Nazaire, France, and Liverpool, England. After a brief stay in rest camps, the troops in England proceeded to France, landing at Le Havre. The last unit arrived in St. Nazaire Dec. 22. Upon arrival in France, the Division, less its artillery, was assembled at the First (Gondrecourt) training area, and the artillery was at Le Valdahon.

On the 4th of July, the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, paraded through the streets of Paris to bolster the sagging French spirits. At Lafayette's tomb, one of General Pershing's staff uttered the famous words, "Lafayette, we are here!" Two days later, on July 6, the First Expeditionary Division was redesignated the First Infantry Division. On the morning of Oct. 23, the first American shell of the war was fired, screaming toward German lines by Battery C, 6th Field Artillery. Two days later, the 2nd Bn., 16th Inf., suffered the first American casualties of the war.

By April 1918, the Germans had pushed to within 40 miles of Paris. In response to this thrust, the Big Red One moved into the Picardy Sector to bolster the French First Army. To the Division's front lay the small village of Cantigny situated on the high ground overlooking a forested countryside. It was the 1st Infantry, who attacked the town, and within 45 minutes captured it along with 1,000 German soldiers, thus earning the special designation "Lions of Cantigny." The first American victory of the war was a First Division victory.

The First Division took Soissons in July 1918. The Soissons victory was one of the most costly of the war, with more than 7000 men killed or wounded. The First Infantry Division

helped to clear the St. Mihiel salient by fighting continuously from Sept. 1918. The last major World War I battle was fought in the Meuse-Argonne. The Division advanced seven kilometers and defeated, in whole or part, German divisions. This action cost the 1st Division over 7600 casualties. In October 1918, the Big Red One patch as it is now known was officially approved for wear by members of the Division.

The war was over when the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. The Division was then located at Sedan, the farthest American penetration of the West. The Division was the first to cross the Rhine into occupied Germany where it remained until the peace treaty formally ending WW I was signed. It departed back to the United States in August and September.

By the end of the war, the Division had suffered 22,668 casualties and 100 Medal of Honor recipients. Its colors carry campaign streamers for: Montigny; Noyon; Aisne-Marne; St. Mihiel; Meuse-Argonne; Lorraine 1917; Lorraine; Picardy, 1918.

World War II

On August 1, 1942, the First Division was reorganized and redesignated as the 1st Infantry Division.



The 1st Infantry Division entered combat in World War II as part of "Operation Torch", the invasion of North Africa, the first American campaign against the Axis powers. On Nov. 8, 1942, following training in the United Kingdom, men of the First Division landed on the coast of Algeria near Oran. The initial lessons of combat were harsh and many men were casualties in the campaign that followed and which stretched from Algiers into Tunisia. On May 9, 1943, the commander of the German "Afrika Korps" surrendered his force of 40,000 and North Africa operations for the Big Red One ended. The Division then moved on to take "Operation Husky." It stormed ashore at Gela, July 10, 1943, and quickly overpowered the Italian defenses. Soon after, the Division came face-to-face with 100 tanks of the Hermann Goering Tank Division. With the help of naval and own artillery and Canadian allies, the First Infantry Division fought its way up the island's hills, driving the enemy back. The Fighting First advanced on to Capua and opened the Allied road to the straits of Messina. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Big Red One stormed ashore at Omaha Beach. Soon after H-Hour the Division's 16th Infantry Regiment was fighting for its life on a strip of beach at Colleville-sur-Mer that had been marked the "Easy Red" on battle maps. As the assault progressed, the beach became so congested with destroyed equipment, dead and the wounded, that there was little room to land reinforcements. General George Taylor, commander of the 16th Infantry Regt., told his men, "Two people are staying on this beach! The dead and those who are going to die

let's get the hell out of here!" Slowly, spurred by the individual heroism of individuals, the move inland got underway.

A German blockhouse above the beach became a command post named "Forward."

After the beachhead was secured, the Division moved through the Normandy Hedgerows. The Division liberated Liege, Belgium, and pushed to the German border, crossing through the fortified Siegfried line. The 1st Inf. Div. attacked the first major German city, Aachen, and after many days of bitter house-to-house fighting, the German commander surrendered the city on Oct. 21, 1944.

The Division continued its push into Germany, crossing the Rhine River. On Dec. 16, 24 enemy divisions, 10 of which were armored, launched a massive counterattack in the Ardennes sector, resulting in what became known as the Battle of the Bulge. The Big Red One held the critical shoulder of the "Bulge" at Bullingen, destroying hundreds of German tanks in the process. On Jan. 1, 1945, the First Infantry attacked and penetrated the Siegfried line for the second time and occupied the Remagen bridgehead. On Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945, the Division marched 150 miles to the east of Siegen. On April 8, the Division crossed the Weser River into Czechoslovakia. The war was over May 8, 1945.

At the end of World War II, the Division had suffered 21,023 casualties and 100,000 men had served in its ranks. Its soldiers had won a total of 20,752 medals and awards, including 16 Congressional Medals of Honor. Over 100,000 prisoners had been taken.

Following the war, the First Division remained in Germany as occupation forces until 1955, when the Division moved to Fort Riley, Kan.

Vietnam

On 12 July 1965, the 2d Brigade of the Big Red One landed at Cam Ranh Bay and Vung Tau, making it the first element of an Infantry Division to arrive in Vietnam. As the rest of the Division arrived, it was separated into five base areas: Division Headquarters and the Support Command were at Di An; the 1st Brigade, at Phuoc Vinh; the 2nd Brigade at Bien Hoa; the 3rd Brigade at Lai Khe; and Artillery at Phu Loi. Initial combat operations were devoted to securing the immediate area of the base camps and establishing the 1st Infantry Division's sphere of influence. By 1 November the entire division, under the command of Major General Jonathan O. Seaman, was operational. Eleven days later, near Bau Bang on



the 1st Infantry Division's sphere of influence. By 1 November the entire division, under the command of Major General Jonathan O. Seaman, was operational. Eleven days later, near Bau Bang on

National Highway 13, the Big Red One fought its first major battle in Vietnam. Here, elements of three Divisional units overcame an estimated VC regiment. The next big engagement, that of Ap Nha Mat, on 5 December, the 2nd Battalion Infantry, defeated the Viet Cong in the Michelin Rubber Plantation, north of the Division's Lai Khe base camp. By the end of 1965 the Division had participated in three major operations: Hump, Bushmaster I and Bushmaster II.

In early 1966, the Division took part in Operations Marauder, Crimp II and Stone. On 15 March 1966 MG William E. DePuy became the Division commander. Under its new commander, the BIG RED-ONE moved to prevent a suspected enemy monsoon offensive. During Operation Birmingham, huge supplies of salt and other essentials needed by the Viet Cong for their offensive were destroyed. MG DePuy also instituted several tactical innovations such as cloverleaf defensive positions and a new style of defensive positions. In June and July the Division defeated large numbers of Viet Cong in 5 major battles on or adjacent to Highway 13, in the battles of Ap Tau O, Srok Dong and Minh Thanh Road. The 1st Squadron Cavalry distinguished itself during this period. In September the 2nd Brigade headquarters was relocated to Phi Loai. From 5 through 25 November, the Division participated in Operation Attleboro. During the Battle of Ap Cha Do, the 1st Battalion 28th Infantry defeated numerous enemy.

On 8 January 1967, the Division launched Operation Cedar Falls, a multi-pronged search and destroy mission in the infamous Iron Triangle, 30 miles north of Saigon. On 10 February, MG John H. Hay assumed command of the Big Red One. In March came Operation Junction City and 52 continuous days of pounding enemy positions in War Zone C. Units either organic to or under the operational control of the Big Red One accounted for numerous Viet Cong and North Vietnamese casualties. The biggest single battle victory achieved by the Division since its arrival in Vietnam took place at Ap Gu, and involved the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry in two days of heavy fighting, 31 March and 1 April. Operation Manhattan began on 23 March and uncovered one of the largest weapons and ammunition caches of the war. Major General Chanh (former Viet Cong) led the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry to the find, which included 350 weapons and 314,450 rounds of ammunition. On 29 September the Division initiated Operation Shenandoah II, one of the most significant operations of the war. Within two weeks, Big Red One units fought two violent battles with the 271st VC Regiment. By the end of October, the focal point of the operation became Loc Ninh, a little village situated in a rubber plantation 40 miles north of Lai Khe. Here the VC were attempting to overrun the Special Forces/Civilian Irregular Defense Forces (CIDG) compound. The operation ended on 19 November.

On 31 January 1968 during the Vietnamese celebration of the Lunar New Year (Tet), the Viet Cong launched a series of simultaneous ground and mortar attacks against most of South Vietnam's major cities and allied military installations. In response to the attacks, the Division was summoned to help secure the strategic Tan Son Nhut Air Base. By 13 February, units of the Big Red One had engaged and defeated numerous Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers. On 8 March MG Keith L. Ware became the 39th commanding general of the Division. Thereafter, the Division entered into a multi-division operation called Quyet Thang (Resolve to Win). On 7 April 1968, the Division embarked on the largest offensive of the Vietnam War: Operation Toan Thang (Certain Victory) which involved

allied troops throughout the III Corps Tactical Zone. One of the primary goals of this two-part operation was to stop the infiltration of the enemy into the S area. During the early days of September, Loc Ninh again became the focus of Big Red One operations. Hard fighting broke out on 11 September when the Forces compound was hit by a heavy barrage of mortar fire. In the next three units of the Division and cavalrymen of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment engaged and defeated many North Vietnamese Army regulars. On 13 September the Division Commander, MG Ware, was killed in action when his command helicopter was shot down by hostile fire. MG Orwin C. Talbott moved up to the position of Assistant Division Commander to assume command of the Division.

During the first six months of 1969, the Division conducted extensive reconnaissance-in-force and ambush operations in the Iron Triangle and I jungle areas as well as in the vicinity of An Loc. On 18 March, the Big Red One joined with the 25th Infantry and 1st Cavalry Divisions in a joint operation northwest of Lai Khe called Atlas Wedge. Meanwhile pacification operations were being conducted in such villages as Chanh Luu and An Dien. In late May and June several elements of the Division were involved in the Battles of An Loc I and II. In June 5th ARVN Division and Big Red One soldiers constructed and opened the 90-kilometer road from Phuoc Vinh to Song Be - a milestone in the struggle for freedom in South Vietnam. During the latter part of the year, the Division's participation in the "Dong Tien" (Progress Together) increased. This joint South Vietnamese military program was designed to enable the South Vietnamese Army to take on a more demanding part of the Vietnam conflict. Fire Support units were jointly manned; joint operations were conducted; patrols contained elements from both armies; tactical operations centers were jointly manned; training in effective tactics and techniques were conducted; and ARVN units were introduced to Big Red One support capabilities. These aggressive steps forward led to the development of joint military partnerships in Vietnam. On 10 August 1969, MG A. E. Milroy assumed command of the Division. In August and September, elements of the Division were involved in several Battles along Thunder Road (National Route 13) as enemy forces tried to disrupt convoys or attack Fire Support Bases. In October and November, Big Red One units discovered numerous enemy hideouts, camps and caches of weapons and supplies.

On 12 January 1970 it was announced that the Big Red One colors would be returning to Ft Riley. The reason, as stated by the Division Commander, MG Milroy, was " We have worked ourselves out of a job!" The Big Red One returned to Ft. Riley in April 1970. For nearly five years, the First Infantry Division battled against an aggressive enemy who made expert use of the dense and inaccessible countryside. During this conflict, the First Infantry Division mastered the use of helicopters as one of the best means of countering the enemy and the lack of roads; gained significant experience in resupply operations; evacuation and the tactics of the air mobile assault; instituted numerous tactical innovations; and provided extensive civic action support to the South Vietnamese people. The Division suffered 20,770 casualties during this war. Big Red One soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor for their heroic actions. Eleven Campaign Streamers and two Decorations were added to the Big Red One colors.

Desert Storm

On Aug. 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. This act precipitated U.S. military involvement in the Persian Gulf. The 1st Inf. Div. was put on alert for deployment on Nov. 8, 1990. The division deployed over 12,000 soldiers and 7,000 pieces of equipment to Saudi Arabia over the next two months.



At 2:00 a.m., 17, 1991, Operation Desert Storm commenced with air raids and artillery barrages on Iraqi targets. The Division continued to rehearse its mission to penetrate Iraqi defenses and the Republican Guard in its zone.

On the morning of Feb. 24, 1991, under Maj. Gen. Thomas G. Rhame, the Big Red One spearheaded the armored attack into Iraq, by creating the all-important breach in Iraqi defenses that enabled VII Corps units to smash into Iraq. The Division broke through the enemy defensive lines, decimated the Iraqi 26th Infantry Division, and took over 2,500 prisoners. After the breachhead was secured, the British 1st Armored Division was allowed to advance and pass through the Big Red One's breach. The Division kept up the momentum of the coalition force's attack. The Division then pushed forward and drove to the east deep into enemy territory.

Continuing its attack, the Division collided with the Tawakalna Division of the Republican Guard and the 37th Brigade of the 12th Iraqi Tank Division. On the night of Feb. 26, 1991, the Division battled with enemy forces and destroyed many units. Enemy losses included more than 40 tanks and 40 infantry fighting vehicles. The Division exploited its success and continued its pursuit of the demoralized Iraqi forces.

Following the Battle of Norfolk, the Division raced ahead to cut off the Iraqi retreat from Kuwait City. Division elements destroyed scores of enemy vehicles and took thousands of prisoners as they advanced.

By 8 p.m., 27 Feb., the 1st Squadron, 4th U.S. Cavalry had seized the main highway leading north out of Kuwait, barring the Iraqis' escape. By the next morning, the Division had taken up positions along the highway and fully secured the area.

At 8 a.m., Feb. 28, 1991, the war was over when a cease-fire was called. The Big Red One had fought through 260 kilometers of enemy-held territory in 10 days, destroying 550 enemy tanks, 480 armored personnel carriers and taking 10,000 prisoners. Eighteen of the Division's soldiers were killed in the war. The Division earned three campaign streamers for its colors: Defense of Saudi Arabia, Defense of Kuwait and Cease Fire.

On Mar. 3, 1991, negotiations were held between coalition forces and Iraq.

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In 1965, the First Infantry Division was again to be the first division to deploy, when the w Vietnam. The first unit to go from the Big Re the 2nd Brigade.

Advanced parties landed at Qui Nhon on Jul 1965. The first soldier to set foot on Vietnam was Pfc. Gerard Werster of Headquarters an Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 7th Artil

The Big Red One's first operation began July 22, 1965, when Company B, 2nd E 16th Infantry, conducted a search of the area around the base camp at Bien Ho:

The main body of the Division began leaving Fort Riley, Kan, Sept. 15, 1965, un command of Maj. Gen. Jonathan O. Seaman. Maj. Gen. Keith L. Ware, also a Div commander, was killed in action Sept. 13, 1968. His helicopter was shot down b fire near Loc Ninh, north of Saigon.

The First Infantry Division launched a series of operations that were to complet enemy activity. The Division pushed into areas known by such names as the Tr Iron Triangle, Catcher's Mitt, Song Be Corridor, Saigon Corridor, and Highway 1 known as Thunder Road.

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The Big Red One's colors now carry the Meritorious Unit Commendation Strear Embroidered Vietnam 1968, "The Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with P Streamer Embroidered Vietnam 1965-1968" "First Class Streamer Embroidered 1965-1970"