

# A look back



## World War II, Part I: The 38th Infantry Division in the Philippines

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The Distinctive Unit Insignia of the 38th Infantry Division incorporates its own history in detail.

According to the Institute of Heraldry, the clover leaf is reminiscent of the original badge for the first established units of the 38th Infantry Division based out of Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia.

The lightning flashes represent the unit's participation in three campaigns in the Pacific Theater of World War II: New Guinea, Leyte, and Luzon. An assault landing on Luzon is indicated by the arrowhead tip in the center flash.

The cloud and lightning flashes also allude to the cyclone, a circular counter-clockwise rotating storm, from which the division takes its name.

The colors blue, white and red refer to the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation awarded to the unit for World War II service from Oct. 17, 1944, through July 4, 1945.

The 38th was mobilized for World War II service in January 1941. They mobilized at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, as they had 24 years earlier for World War I when they were dubbed 'Cyclone.'

The men of the 38th conducted training over weeks and months in Mississippi, Florida and Louisiana, finally embarking out of Louisiana and Florida in 1944. They were bound for Hawaii to conduct security patrols, as the Japanese had "suddenly and deliberately" attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1942.

The 38th left Hawaii bound for Oro Bay, New Guinea, in July 1944 where they underwent four months of jungle training. Some of the troops encountered enemy Japanese soldiers during this training and dispatched them.

Though the 38th did not see any real action in New Guinea, they were awarded a campaign service streamer, as they were in the combat zone during operations. This combat credit is represented by one of the lightning bolts in the DUI.

The 38th had trained well and was ready for the ferocities of war that waited them.

The first units of the 38th to experience combat were the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 149th Infantry, the 138th Field Artillery Battalion and the 1st Battalion, 152nd Infantry.

They landed at Leyte Island in the Philippines on Dec. 6, 1944, under fire from the Japanese 16th and 26th Divisions and the 3rd and 4th Airborne Raiding Regiments. The day prior, their transport ship, the SS Marcus Daly, was struck by a dive bomber, killing three sailors and rendering another 200 troops killed or missing.

In the end, the 11th Airborne Division, reinforced by 1st Battalion, 382nd Infantry, and 1st and 2nd Battalions, 149th Infantry, 38th Infantry Division, defeated the enemy paratroops by nightfall of Dec. 11, 1944.

Leyte was the second combat service streamer awarded to the 38th Infantry Division and is represented on the unit insignia by a lightning bolt.

The first enemy combatant to fall to the 38th was credited to Sgt. Bill Stewart: "It was Pearl Harbor Day, 1944, when Sgt. Bill Stewart of the 149th Infantry's 1st Battalion raised his M-1 to his shoulder, braced his feet in the sucking mud and fired."<sup>1</sup>

The center lightning bolt with the arrowhead represents the assault landing on Luzon. The 38th hit the beach at San Narciso at 8:30 a.m., Jan. 29, 1945.

"Though initially heavy Japanese resistance was anticipated, prior to landing, the ship's loudspeaker announced, 'Men! The Bridge has just been informed by Army Intelligence that the Japanese forces have withdrawn from the beach area and that Filipino Guerrilla forces under Lt. Col. Merrill have secured all roads as far east as Castellejos. The red flare some of you may have just seen indicated that our advance beachmaster party is ready for business. There will be no pre-invasion bombardment.'

"1st Lt. Charles J. Tabler of Newark, Ohio, went ashore in the fourth wave and the first person he encountered was a Filipino woman holding out two hard-boiled eggs."<sup>1</sup>

This would not be the end of combat operations for the 38th Infantry Division, nor would the rest of their tour be so sedate.

They still had to take Zigzag Pass, cutting off the Japanese retreat through Bataan, then move southward while another 38th Division Task Force consisting of units of the 34th RCT and the 151st Regiment, would land at Mariveles, move northward and link up with the first task force.

### Zig Zag Pass

"There are many tough battles ahead, but Zigzag Pass will remain the 38th's campaign monument," AP Dispatch.

Zigzag Pass was reported to the commanding general of the Philippine Department to be a "natural fortress" in the Zambales province.

It is a horseshoe-shaped bend on Route 7, a.k.a. the Bataan-Olongapo road, east of Olongapo City, with mountainous terrain all around it.

The Japanese were entrenched in fortified strongholds within the mountains

and they held the higher terrain with which they were very familiar when the 38th moved into Zigzag Pass on Jan. 31, 1945. The Japanese spent years digging tunnels within the mountains and used them to move from one position to another, enabling one team to defend two positions without exposing themselves.

The battle for Zigzag pass lasted 16 grueling days. The 34th Regimental Combat Team attached to 38th Infantry Division was the lead element.

As they approached the pass, the 152nd Infantry was to come through the 34th and take the pass. It was a good plan in theory, however execution proved to be problematic for many reasons, mainly the Japanese's advantageous knowledge of terrain and tunnels.

The fighting was brutal and almost nonstop. The Japanese employed everything they had, but could not hold out against the U.S. Forces.

"Throughout the night (they) threw in harassing fire from mortars and mountain guns. Several times in several places they infiltrated, calling out names

they had heard the previous afternoon. They stood off outside the perimeter and rattled clumps of bamboo. If they drew fire, they smothered the source with grenades. The light of morning was never more welcome to the men of the 152nd."<sup>2</sup>

The Battle of Zigzag Pass was not the only area of the Philippines that the 38th was involved in fighting. Once that 38th Division task force moved through Zigzag Pass, it was to move southward on the Pilar-Bagac Road and meet up with the other 38th Task Force fighting its way North from Mariveles.

There were also three islands in the Manila Bay that needed attention.

D-Day for the Mariveles landing was Feb. 15, 1945, the day after the two regiments on Zigzag Pass were united and began working their way south.

The island campaign began on Feb. 11, 1945.

### Photos:

Indiana National Guard photos by Tech. Sgt. Ed Androse, 38th Infantry Division Public Affairs Office, 1944-1945

### Bibliography:

The Registry for Heraldry

<sup>1</sup> 38th Infantry Division, 'Avengers of Bataan', World War II History Book, published 1947

<sup>2</sup> Attributed to "Yank Magazine" in the 38th Infantry Division, 'Avengers of Bataan', World War II History Book, published 1947.

