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FOREWORD

For 100 years, the quintessential element of the US Army has been the combined arms division. First among the hundreds of divisions that have been organized, deployed, and deactivated in that time is the 1st Division, today's 1st Infantry Division, the "Big Red One." Nearly alone among the storied formations that have waged our country's wars, the 1st Division has been on continuous active duty since its assembly on the docks of Hoboken, New Jersey, in June 1917. Its story is the story of the US Army and the American soldier—and in many ways the story of the United States—in the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

The 1st Division got its name by happenstance. When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, it had no permanently organized divisions. Nevertheless, President Woodrow Wilson understood the urgency of French and British pleas for an immediate US presence in France. He promised to send a division at once, a psychological down payment on the forty-two that would follow. The regiments hastily ordered to Hoboken from duty in Texas on the Mexican Punitive Expedition were organized into the 1st Expeditionary Division, meaning just that—the first of many.

Since then, the 1st Division has been first many times—first to Europe in both world wars, and, in both, first in contact with the enemy; first ashore at Omaha Beach in 1944; first to deploy troops by jet transport from the United States to Europe; one of the first two divisions deployed simultaneously to Vietnam in 1965; first to train at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California. Its combat history is important and compelling, but its long list of firsts is also significant—how the United States adapted militarily to the changing strategic and domestic imperatives of the last hundred years can be traced in the story of the 1st Division.

Any division history is replete with commanders, battles, and weapons—this history is no exception. But just as important are the remarkable soldiers who have made up the 1st Division over the years. They have consistently shown an esprit de corps remarked upon by credible observers in every generation. 1st Division veterans banded together in 1919 to form the Society of the First Division, an organization that has published a newsletter and held an annual reunion ever since and is active today. Officers who have served in the division in combat have been gathering at an annual dinner since 1920. The division's soldiers and veterans have passed their legacy and traditions from generation to generation.

Recognizing the significance of this story, the First Division Museum at Cantigny Park sponsored the first edition of this book between 2003 and 2007. Dr. James S. “Scott” Wheeler proved and remains the perfect researcher and author. A combat veteran and retired army colonel, he has a passion for the subject that has carried this project through all challenges. Now, as the centennial of the Big Red One approaches and its soldiers have been at war for most of the intervening ten years, we are delighted to add this updated and revised edition to the Cantigny Military History Series. We are even more delighted to have the University Press of Kansas present it again in their distinguished Modern War Studies series.

Since we began this project, another generation of Americans has been called to service, many of them with the 1st Division. The 1st Division provided its 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor, to the 173rd Airborne Brigade’s parachute assault into northern Iraq in 2003, the largest airlift of an armor unit into hostile territory in American military history. The 1st Division’s 1st Brigade fought in Ramadi, Iraq, from September 2003 to September 2004. In 2004, the rest of the 1st Division deployed from Germany to Iraq as Task Force Danger. Combining Regular Army, Army Reserve, Army National Guard, US Air Force, US Marine, and Iraqi units, as well as civilian agencies, the division conducted sophisticated counterinsurgency operations in north-central Iraq for over a year, helping to make possible, in January 2005, the first free and fair election in Iraqi history. For three years, the 1st Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, oversaw the training of American military advisers to the Iraqi and Afghan security forces. After the modularization of the army in 2006, new “brigade combat teams” of the Big Red One deployed again and again to Iraq and Afghanistan, as did the division headquarters, aviation, artillery, engineers, and logistical units. The 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the division was part of the “surge” of US troops to Iraq in 2007. Since the withdrawal of major US combat forces from Iraq and Afghanistan in 2011 and 2014, units of the 1st Division have been back to both countries to assist their fledgling governments and security forces in their continuing struggles against terrorist organizations such as the so-called Islamic State and the Taliban. Soldiers and units of the 1st Division have provided military assistance to friendly states throughout Africa and stand ready for deployment anywhere in the world.

We are hard at work documenting this unfolding history. In time, we will help the soldiers of today’s Big Red One add their own important chapter to the story. This book offers them and all readers the story to date. We believe familiarity with our shared military past fosters responsible citizenship and the leadership, civic and military, that will help ensure our democracy for

the future. It is a goal worthy of the soldiers of the last hundred years who have served under the 1st Division's long-standing motto:

“No mission too difficult, no sacrifice too great—Duty First!”

—Paul H. Herbert
Cantigny Park, April 2017



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Paul Herbert, Roger Barber, and Jane Wheeler read multiple drafts of the new edition and corrected many errors. The McCormick Tribune Foundation funded the original book, and Major General (Ret.) David Grange, then CEO of the foundation, gave me a free hand to tell the story of the Big Red One. Generals Paul Gorman, George Joulwan, Frank Murdock, Ronald Watts, Leonard Wishart, Bill Mullen, and Monty Meigs helped shape the work for the periods of their service. Rudy Egersdorfer, Tim Reese, Bill Schustrom, and Chris Kolenda also provided me with personal insights into the division's history. My close friends Walter Groves, Charles Kirkpatrick, Major General Bill Stofft, Harry Dolton, and Layne Van Arsdale reviewed portions of the first draft and discussed various issues and ideas with me over the years.

In spite of the encouragement, help, and work of all of these people, there may be mistakes in the book. I am fully responsible for those and have done all I can to minimize them. Last, and of most importance, I want to thank and remember the thousands of soldiers, and their families, who have served

Acknowledgments

with the Big Red One over the past century. They have made it their nation's premier division.

—James Scott Wheeler
Kalispell, Montana, April 2017



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THE BIG RED ONE



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Introduction

THIS IS THE HISTORY OF THE 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION, the quintessential organization of the US Army during the past century. The division saw action in all American wars since 1917, except the Korean, and performed magnificently in all of its service. Often the first unit of the army to deploy and to engage the enemy, the division has been characterized by an ability to learn systematically from experience and to distill this learning into techniques and methods to improve battlefield performance. Central to this learning has been the training of soldiers and the development of competent leaders at all levels. In the process, the Big Red One (so called for the red numeral that has adorned its shoulder patch since 1918) has been characterized by the remarkable esprit of those who have served in the division.

Divisions in the US Army

The military structure known as a “division” is a way to organize, command, and maneuver combat units of brigade, regiment, and battalion size. Historically, American infantry divisions have varied in size from 10,000 to 28,000 soldiers. The division headquarters is the heart of a division. The headquarters maneuvers and operates subordinate units to provide the maximum combat power on the battlefield while sustaining and training soldiers for future operations. The divisional structure has survived because it has been the critical link between the tactical and operational levels of war. Divisions have proven essential in providing “campaign quality” military forces to the nation in times of war.

Armies have organized their combat units into divisions since the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars. American armies in the Civil War adopted the division as their basic combat organization. During that war, divisions were composed of either cavalry or infantry regiments. The division headquarters maneuvered those units on the battlefield. Divisions served as parts of corps that were composed of two or more divisions supported by separate artillery battalions. After the Civil War, the US Army reverted to the regiment as its basic tactical organization.

From 1865 to 1898, the regimental organization proved suitable for the Indian Wars. However, the Spanish-American War of 1898 forced the army

to create ad hoc divisions for its overseas campaigns. The army found that it was cumbersome and inefficient to have army commanders maneuver individual regiments in battle and that an intermediate division headquarters lessened the army commander's span of control and maximized the tactical power of infantry and cavalry regiments. By 1912, the US Army recognized the need to maintain modern divisions similar to those used by European military powers.

In an appendix to the Annual Report of the Secretary of War in 1912, the Army General Staff proposed a reorganization of the army into brigades and divisions that could serve in expeditionary operations. The National Defense Act of 1916 authorized the army to organize brigades and divisions. Brigades were to consist of three infantry or cavalry regiments, and divisions were to contain three brigades and other supporting organizations, including artillery and signal units.

The army's first peacetime divisions were organized along geographical lines suited to the administrative needs of a widely dispersed army. National Guard divisions also were organized on a geographical basis. In 1916, the US government ordered the US Army to deploy forces to the Mexican border to combat Mexican bandits. Since the standing army was too small to carry out this mission, the Wilson administration mobilized a number of National Guard units, using powers granted to the federal government by the National Defense Act of 1916. The Regular Army gathered its "2nd Division" for this border operation. The divisions that occupied the US-Mexican border were organized in a number of different ways, in large part because the army lacked an agreed-upon divisional structure. Roughly 16,000 of the men gathered along the border entered Mexico under the command of Brigadier General John J. Pershing in his unsuccessful attempt to run down the Mexican bandit Pancho Villa.

Fortunately, the United States and the Mexican government worked out a compromise that avoided a major war, allowing Pershing's expedition to return to the United States after a fruitless campaign. Pershing did, however, learn valuable lessons about supply, aviation, communications, and the techniques of how to command a large force.

In the spring of 1917, the United States entered World War I on the side of the Allies. It quickly became apparent that an American army was going to deploy to France. At first, the War Department planned to send one million men. Consequently, it was necessary to develop organizations to provide tactical command and control for this large force. The US Army decided to use a divisional structure as the basic building block of its expeditionary force. The army initially copied the European model, with each division consisting of about 12,000 soldiers in infantry, artillery, machine-gun, and

engineer units, supported by medical, signal, and logistical troops. Hence, the 1st Expeditionary Division was created in June 1917. This division was renamed the 1st Division shortly after it arrived in France. From that date forward, the army has adapted and modified the division structure to fit its tactical needs and the changing technologies and dynamics of war.

First Born and First to Fight

The 1st Division was the first US division organized and fielded in World War I. It was the first division committed to combat in 1917 and the first to suffer casualties. It launched the first offensive of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in 1918 and played a key role in all subsequent American offensives. The Fighting First, as it was sometimes known, led the way in devising tactics and practices suited to the large “Square Division” used by the US Army in World War I. The division, with over 28,000 soldiers, was so named because it contained two infantry brigades (1st and 2nd), each with two infantry regiments (16th, 18th, 26th, and 28th). The 1st Artillery Brigade, with three artillery regiments (5th, 6th, and 7th), provided artillery support. The Square Division included the 1st Engineer Regiment, the 2nd Signal Battalion, and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Machine Gun Battalions to provide support to the infantry units. Medical and logistical services were provided by the Trains, which included a Military Police (MP) Company, the 1st Ammunition and the 1st Supply Train, and the 1st Sanitary Train (with four hospital companies and four ambulance companies). Twice the size of a German or Allied division, the Square Division provided staying power in the tough fighting of the Western Front.

The 1st Division was General John J. Pershing’s test bed for “open warfare” tactics and epitomized the AEF’s use of after-action reports to shape training. During 1917 and 1918, the 1st Division was the schoolhouse for a number of remarkable officers who went on to command divisions, corps, and armies. Three of the division’s officers became army chiefs of staff in the 1920s and 1930s, including the most famous, George C. Marshall. Many of the division’s junior officers in World War I, such as Lesley McNair and Clarence Huebner, served at high levels of command in World War II.

The commitment of the division to the front lines in October 1917 was an important boost to French and British morale. American divisions helped stop the German offensive of 1918, and the 1st Division launched the first American offensive action in May. In July, the 1st and 2nd Divisions spearheaded the French army’s counteroffensive at Soissons, cutting the Germans’ lines of communications and forcing them to begin a withdrawal that stopped only when they left French soil. From May through October 1918,

the 1st Division took part in four major campaigns, sustaining over 20,000 casualties. Nonetheless, after each battle, the division assessed the lessons learned and trained thousands of replacements, ensuring that the division remained combat ready. In the final offensive of the war, the Fighting First endured two weeks of heavy combat and cracked the German defenses in the Meuse Argonne.

After the Armistice, the 1st Division led the American army of occupation across the Rhine at Koblenz. It was the last American division to leave Germany in 1919. Its occupation service provided lessons used by the army in 1940 to develop its doctrine for military government. Upon its return to the United States, the division was greeted with homecoming parades in New York City and Washington, DC, before moving to posts first in Kentucky and then in New York and New Jersey.

During the interwar years of 1919 to 1939, the 1st Division was one of the few army divisions to serve continuously on active duty. In 1940, when the US Army expanded for a global war, the 1st Division was the first to train for amphibious warfare. It also was one of the first divisions to convert to the "Triangular Division" structure, and it conducted field tests that confirmed the utility of that design. The Triangular Division, with about 14,000 soldiers, contained three infantry regiments (16th, 18th, and 26th), four artillery battalions (5th, 7th, 32nd, and 33rd), and the 1st Reconnaissance Troop as its combat units. Support was provided by the 1st Engineer and the 1st Medical Battalions, the 1st Quartermaster, the 1st Signal, and the 1st Ordnance Companies. The army chief of staff, George Marshall, converted the army's infantry divisions to the new structure because tests proved that it was easier to maneuver than its predecessor in World War I. During the 1940s, the division was designated the 1st Infantry Division.

The Big Red One deployed to England in July 1942. By September, it was preparing for the first American offensive action against the Axis powers in North Africa. The division spearheaded the invasion at Oran, Algeria, on 10 November. In 1943, it played a crucial role in Allied success in Tunisia, winning significant victories at El Guettar and in northern Tunisia. During its service in North Africa, the division demonstrated the wisdom of deploying a unified division in combat, rather than frittering away its regimental combat teams and battalions piecemeal. During the heavy fighting in Africa, and later in Sicily, the Division Artillery refined practice and procedures that enabled the division to mass the fires of multiple artillery battalions rapidly against a single target. For the remainder of the war, American artillery was the envy of friends and foes.

The Big Red One led the II Corps' assault in Sicily in July 1943. Without adequate armor or air support during its first two days ashore, the division

defeated the concerted efforts of the *Hermann Goering Panzer Division* to drive it into the sea. The 1st Infantry Division fought its way across Sicily and fractured the German defenses at Troina. The division refined its use of its Regimental Combat Teams to mix infantry and armor as “combined arms” teams. These combat teams were backed by the division’s artillery and its organically assigned combat service support organizations. Under the leadership of Major General Terry Allen, the division set the example for night offensive operations.

Following its successes as an amphibious force in the Mediterranean theater of operations, Generals Omar Bradley and Dwight Eisenhower selected the division to lead Force O in the assault on Omaha Beach, Normandy. Starting in November 1943, the division trained for Operation Overlord under the exacting leadership of Major General Clarence Huebner. Six months later, the three combat teams were ready to face the challenges of another amphibious invasion. On 6 June 1944, the division overcame intense German resistance and, over the next six days, pushed farther inland than any other Allied division. In July, the 1st Infantry Division exploited the gap torn in the German lines by Operation Cobra. After the collapse of the German army, the division swept across France with VII Corps. Reaching the Siegfried Line near Aachen on 12 September, the Big Red One breached the German frontier defenses and captured Aachen, the first German city to fall to the Allies. For the next six months, the division served in the hottest of actions in the Hürtgen Forest, the north shoulder of the Battle of the Bulge, and the final offensive across Germany.

The Triangular Division structure was remarkably flexible and resilient in the heavy fighting of World War II. The 1st Infantry Division and its three regimental combat teams conducted three amphibious assaults, served as a motorized division, fought in the mountains of Africa, Sicily, and Germany, and captured the first major German city taken by the Allies in the war. The headquarters, staff, and signal units allowed the division commander to maneuver his combat teams and numerous attached tank and tank destroyer battalions in these varied operations. The division’s support units provided efficient logistical and medical support to a combined arms team that often numbered over 20,000 soldiers. Consequently, when the war ended, the US Army decided to retain the triangular structure as its major tactical organization. From 1946 to 1950, the 1st Infantry Division was the only US division in Germany. It helped dismantle the Nazi regime and provided deterrence to Communist aggression during the early Cold War. The Big Red One remained on the ramparts of freedom in Germany until its return to the United States in 1955.

The 1st Infantry Division was the first division to take part in Operation

Gyroscope, the wholesale swap of stateside for overseas units. It was one of the first to be reorganized in the “Pentomic” fashion in the late 1950s. The Pentomic Division controlled five battle groups, each with five infantry companies. Designed for a nuclear war, the Pentomic Division was too small and had too few supporting organizations to serve in operations other than a nuclear war. It lacked staying power for long campaigns and was cumbersome for a single headquarters to maneuver and sustain effectively. During the brief Pentomic era, the army broke the traditional regimental affiliations with its divisions. By 1959, few of the regiments or battalions that had served with the Big Red One in the previous forty years remained with it.

From 1955 to 1961, the division served at Fort Riley, Kansas, where it trained recruits for the army and provided Pentomic Battle Groups for rotations to Germany. With the buildup of conventional forces in 1961–1963 under President John F. Kennedy, the Big Red One ended its basic training mission and became a full-strength division assigned to the nation’s strategic reserve. In 1963, the division adopted the structure of the “ROAD” division (Reorganization Objectives Army Division). The ROAD structure was similar to the triangular structure, with three maneuver brigades to control the infantry and armor battalions assigned to the division. The division commander assigned combat battalions to the brigades for specific missions. The division artillery controlled four artillery battalions and provided support where needed.

When the United States committed major ground forces to combat in South Vietnam in 1965, the 1st Infantry Division deployed to the critical area around Saigon. For this mission, the division took nine infantry battalions, an armored cavalry squadron, and four artillery battalions overseas. For the next five years, the division operated between Saigon and the Cambodian border, the crucial region for the defense of the South Vietnamese capital and many American logistical centers and air bases. The division helped to pioneer helicopter-borne “air mobile” operations and demonstrated time and again that mechanized infantry and armored units could play a valuable role in the defeat of a heavily armed insurgency. The Big Red One did not win every battle it fought in Vietnam, but under the innovative leadership of men like Major Generals Bill DePuy and Orwin Talbott the division drove the major Communist units away from population centers and played a large role in the successful pacification efforts of 1968 to 1970.

In early 1970, the division redeployed its colors and a few of its soldiers to Fort Riley, Kansas, where it took over the troops and equipment of the 24th Infantry Division (M, for Mechanized). For the remainder of the Cold War, the division headquarters and two brigades remained at Fort Riley, while one brigade served in Germany as the 1st Infantry Division (Forward).

The division deployed frequently to Germany from Fort Riley to take part in REFORGER (“return of forces to Germany”) exercises. The collapse of the Soviet empire and the Warsaw Pact was a tribute to the service of the thousands of men and women who served in the division and the rest of the American armed forces during the Cold War from 1946 to 1989.

In 1991, the 1st Infantry Division (M) deployed from Fort Riley to Saudi Arabia to serve with VII Corps in the destruction of Saddam Hussein’s forces in Kuwait. After the 1991 Gulf War, the Big Red One returned to Fort Riley and then, in 1995, to Germany, where the 3rd Infantry Division (M) was redesignated as the 1st Infantry Division (M). As part of NATO, the division deployed forces repeatedly to the Balkans and Southwest Asia to maintain the peace and to help rebuild the shattered infrastructure of that strategically important region.

In late 2002, elements of the Big Red One deployed to Turkey to prepare the lines of communication across that country for the 4th Infantry Division (M) to use during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Although the Turkish government ultimately chose not to allow American combat forces to cross its country, the division’s work in Turkey diverted Iraqi forces from the main theater in southern Iraq. During the successful American invasion of 2003, the 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor, which was one of the division’s battalions, deployed its tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles in US Air Force transports to Kirkut, in northern Iraq. The armor battalion, as part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, secured the northern oilfields of Iraq and proved to be valuable assistance to the Kurds in the area.

Since 2003, the 1st Infantry Division (M) has deployed units repeatedly to Iraq and Afghanistan to fight terrorists and to help rebuild those nations. In 2005, the division was moved from Germany to Fort Riley, Kansas, as the United States repositioned its forces in a new global strategic environment. During the ensuing twelve years the US Army made repeated changes in the division’s structure and in the organization of the battalions and brigades that make up the fighting edge of the army. From 1917 to 2017, the 1st Infantry Division (M) has played a leading role in American military operations and strategy. It has worked consistently to maintain its fighting edge through training and innovative tactical practices to meet the ever-changing challenges of combat in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The 1st Infantry Division’s Historical Importance

The 1st Division set the standard for the US Army in World War I for discipline, training, and tactical innovation. During the twenty years of peace after the war, it maintained a structure in which officers and noncommissioned

officers (NCOs) could retain the traditions of a successful army and practice their profession. As war again approached in 1940, the Big Red One expanded, reorganized, and, in 1942, deployed overseas, where it again led the way and set the standard for tactical performance, lesson-learning, training, and caring for its soldiers. In the postwar period, the division remained deployed to a critical strategic theater, where it provided stability and deterred Communist aggression.

In spite of the erratic structural experiments of the 1950s, the 1st Infantry Division was again ready to answer duty's call in 1965 when it deployed to South Vietnam. There it pioneered a number of tactical innovations and successfully exploited the potential of army helicopters. The division structure again proved its utility and versatility in training, sustaining, and maneuvering combat units on the battlefield.

During the final three decades of the twentieth century, the 1st Infantry Division (M) continued to demonstrate the viability of the division structure. It performed superbly in the 1991 Gulf War as a mechanized infantry division. It conducted numerous expeditionary operations in the Balkans and the Middle East, with its soldiers often serving as peacekeepers, police, and nation-builders. In the Iraq War the Big Red One demonstrated the need for a divisional structure in the heavy fighting in the cities of the Sunni heartland of Iraq. After 2005, the division no longer deployed as a unified organization to the antiterrorist campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the Big Red One has maintained the traditions, esprit, and unit morale that are such an important part of any military organization.

This book is a history of America's first division. From the beaches of France to the difficult terrain of Iraq and Afghanistan, the men and women who are the Big Red One have lived up to its motto: No mission too difficult; no sacrifice too great. Duty First!

