



88TH INFANTRY DIVISION "Blue Devils"

Activated (WW II)—15 July 1942

Inactivated—24 October 1947 in Italy

Battle Credits, World War II: Rome-Arno Northern Apennines Po Valley

Days In Combat—307

Commanding Generals (During Combat, WW II):

Maj-Gen John E. Sloan

July 1942—September 1944

Maj-Gen Paul W. Kendall

September 1944—July 1945

Combat Chronicle: The 88th Infantry Division arrived at Casablanca, French Morocco, on 15 December 1943, and moved to Magenta, Algeria, on the 28th for intensive training. It arrived in Naples, Italy, 6 February 1944, and the entire division relieved a British outfit along the Garigliano River near Minturno on 5 March 1944. This area was part of the German Gustav Line. To keep the Germans guessing, the men of the 88th were given British helmets to wear. So efficiently was the relief effected that all who witnessed it were amazed by the business-like manner in which the units of the division took over their respective sectors.

A period of defensive patrolling followed, and the soldiers of the 88th soon became wise to a number of German tricks including, notably, where a few of their men would offer to surrender, waving a white flag, but not coming forward. The unwary GIs would move out into the open and be mowed down by a hidden machine-gun. The 88th quickly got wise to this vicious trick and made any Germans who wanted to give up to come to them, while they remained in their foxholes, trenches, or behind other cover. During this static period of action the 88th sustained losses of 99 men killed, 252 wounded, and 36 missing. It was only the beginning!

On 11 May 1944, the Allies opened an all-out offensive to smash the Gustav Line, and the Blue Devils advanced in bitter and heavy fighting. It was on the very next day that the 88th had a Medal of Honor winner, 2nd Lieutenant Charles W. Shea, Company F, 350th Infantry Regiment, Monte Damiano, Italy, 12 May 1944.

While going over the crest of Monte Damiano shortly after dawn, Lt Shea's platoon leader was killed and his platoon sergeant wounded. Taking cover from enemy artillery, the lieutenant spotted two trip wires at his head and feet, and knew he was in the middle of a minefield.

Then a German machine-gun opened up on the men trapped in the field. Lt Shea realized it had to be silenced. Without hesitating he rose and started for the gun. As he approached, some sixth sense warned him to turn. He whirled about to see a German emerging from another machine-gun position and pointing a machine-pistol at him. He leveled his rifle and the German surrendered. Then 4 other Germans emerged from the position. One refused to come out. Motioning with his rifle, Lt Shea directed the prisoners to the rear, one being killed when he stepped on a mine. The last German rose to toss a grenade at an officer leading another platoon, and Lt Shea got him with one shot.

Maneuvering to keep out of range of the gunner he'd started out to get, Lt Shea suddenly found himself directly beneath another machine-gun nest, "so close I could have reached up

and touched the barrel." He captured 2 more Germans in this emplacement. A third German suddenly stood up and fired 8 shots from a P38 at less than 15 yards—and missed. Likewise, Lt Shea fired off an 8-round clip from his rifle, but, somehow, also missed. The two men then both ducked for cover. The lieutenant waited with another clip in his rifle. Then the German, blood streaming from his face, rose up to throw a grenade. The American fired his M1 and the German fell dead.

Altogether, that day, Lt Shea put 3 machine-gun positions out of action, captured several of the enemy, and his display of personal valor was an inspiration to his entire company.

Meanwhile, the 351st Infantry Regiment stormed into Santa Maria Infante and a particularly bitter battle developed. American tanks knocked out 21 enemy machine-guns in the first few hours. A hell of small-arms, machine-gun, and mortar fire fell upon the soldiers as they advanced up the rocky slopes. The Germans also counterattacked, but the relentless battering of the 351st was too much for them.

As the 88th slugged northward toward Rome, taking Itri, Fondi, and Roccagorga, the German 94th Infantry Division was eliminated as an effective fighting force. On 29 May, the 88th linked-up with forces from the Anzio beachhead area and, after some sharp fighting on the outskirts of Rome, entered "the eternal city" on 4 June 1944—two days before the invasion of Normandy.

After a few weeks of rest and rehabilitation in Rome, the 88th went into defensive positions near Pomerance, 5 July and, after relieving the 1st Armored Division, launched a double enveloping attack with the 349th and 350th Infantry Regiments on the ancient Etruscan stronghold of Volterra. The 351st Infantry, which had been held in reserve, was brought up even with the other two regiments. Volterra fell on 9 July 1944. Against bitter resistance the Blue Devils pushed further north taking Laialico on the 11th, Villamagna on 13 July, and crossing the Arno River on the 20th.

After a rest period, the 88th opened an assault on the Gothic Line, beginning 21 September 1944. The Gothic Line was some of the toughest fighting of the entire war. The Blue Devils slugged across mountains and through concrete defenses thought to be impregnable. The Germans struck back savagely and fanatically as the 88th forged ahead in its sector, outdistancing other units and fighting with its flanks wide open as it caught hell from 3 sides in this raw, rainy autumn of 1944. Elements of the 88th battled to the top of the key bastion of Monte Battaglia against violent German counterattacks. It was during this bitterly fought action that the 88th had another Medal of Honor winner, Captain Robert E. Roeder, Company G, 350th Infantry Regiment, 27-28 September 1944.

Captain Roeder commanded his company in defense of this strategic hill mass. Soon after they occupied this hill, the Germans came on with determined counterattacks. Capt Roeder constantly circulated among his men, reassuring and encouraging them and directing their defense. During the sixth attack, the Germans, using flamethrowers and under cover of a fog, succeeded in overrunning the position. Captain Roeder led his men in a fierce battle which repulsed the Germans with heavy losses.

The following morning, while the company was repulsing another counterattack, Capt Roeder was seriously wounded by shell fragments and rendered unconscious. Regaining consciousness, he refused medical aid, and then, though weakened, dragged himself to the door of the command post and picked up a rifle, shouted encouragement to his men, and issued orders. He personally killed two of the enemy, before he was killed instantly by an exploding shell.

Captain Roeder's indomitable courage and fighting spirit were an inspiration to his entire company, and was vitally important in helping to fight off the enemy on Monte Battaglia.

Altogether, for 7 days and nights in the face of incessant and violent counterattacks by powerful German forces from elements of 4 different divisions, the 2nd Battalion, 350th Infantry Regiment clung tenaciously to its positions. Each enemy assault was preceded by artillery and mortar barrages and climaxed by bitter fire fights, use of flamethrowers by the Germans, hand-to-hand combat, bayonet charges, and hand grenade duels. The gallant men of the 88th repulsed each attack with a marked display of fighting ability and teamwork. Evacuation of the wounded was extremely difficult because of the inclement weather conditions, the nature of the rugged terrain, and the fact that the Germans covered every route of approach to Monte Battaglia with heavy artillery fire. On several occasions the ammunition supply became dangerously low, and when the men exhausted their hand grenades they resorted to throwing rocks at the oncoming enemy. Though fighting under the most

adverse battle conditions, the Americans never wavered. For this outstanding action the 2nd Battalion, 350th Infantry Regiment received the Distinguished Unit Citation, one of three such awards won by the 88th in Italy.

At Gesso, Monte Acuto, Monte la Fine, Castel del Rio, and San Clemente the Blue Devils stood off the worst that the enemy could throw at them. And, like so many of the earlier battles in southern Italy, supplies often had to be brought up the mountains by pack-mule. During this time, the 88th fought some of the best units in the German Army.

The various units of the U.S. 5th Army, after breaking through the Gothic Line in the bitterest type of combat, continued to battle further north through the mountains. The 88th was in the center of the assault and the closest to breaking out of the mountains south of the key city of Bologna. Courageously the Blue Devils slugged forward against desperate resistance and succeeded in capturing the key feature of Monte Grande on 20 October 1944. But then, in a vicious night attack, the Germans shattered three companies of the 88th, made up mostly of recently arrived replacements, near the village of Vedriano.

By this time, the 88th was exhausted, as were most all of the other 5th Army units, and the effort to break out of the mountains and into the Po Valley failed. The 88th, for its part, had done all it could. Just since 10 September 1944, the 4 main infantry divisions of the 5th Army—the 34th, 85th, 88th, and 91st had lost 15,716 men killed and wounded. This may give an idea as to how tough the fighting was in the northern Apennines. And the weather was often miserable, and the American formations in Italy were lacking in sufficient replacements.

There then followed a lengthy period of patrol activity until mid-January 1945. Then the division defended the Loiano-Livergnano area and, after a short rest, returned to the front. By this time, the Blue Devils had destroyed or severely mauled 6 German divisions and captured over 5,500 prisoners.

Finally, on 14 April 1945, the 5th Army opened its all-out offensive to destroy the German Army in northern Italy. It was bitter, intense fighting almost every step of the way, but the 88th captured Monterumici on 17 April after an intensive artillery barrage, and the Po River was reached on 23 April. The 88th bagged 15,000 more POWs including Major-General von Schellwitz, commander of the German 305th Infantry Division.

In bitter street fighting the cities of Verona and Vicenza fell on 25 and 28 April, and the 88th pursued the disintegrating Germans into the Alps. The 88th met elements of the 103rd Infantry Division which had fought through southern Germany in the Brenner Pass, and the Germans in Italy surrendered on 2 May 1945. During the push through the Po Valley, the 88th captured more than 30,000 POWs in 16 action-packed days.

The 88th was better than good. As a captured major from the German 1st Parachute Division, pride of the Wehrmacht, told his interrogators, "The 88th was the best we ever fought against."

The 88th formed part of the Army of Occupation (although most all of its men who had seen a lot of action were rotated back home) until it was inactivated in Italy in October 1947.

Honors: Congressional Medals of Honor—2
Distinguished Unit Citations—3
Distinguished Service Crosses—40
Silver Stars—522

Casualties: Total Battle Deaths—2,606
Killed In Action—2,298
Wounded—9,225
Missing—941
Captured—647
Total Casualties—13,111

88TH INFANTRY DIVISION "Blue Devils"

JUNE 1944

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 9 June l
 10 June l
 25 June l
 26 June l

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JULY 1944

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SEPTEMBER 1944

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88TH INFANTRY DIVISION "Blue Devils"

OCTOBER 1944

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 2 Oct 1111111111 11
 3 Oct 1111111111111111111111111111 26
 4 Oct 11111111
 5 Oct 1111111111111111 15
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NOVEMBER 1944

1 Nov 111
 2 Nov 11111
 3 Nov 1
 4 Nov 1
 6 Nov 1
 9 Nov 1
 10 Nov 1
 11 Nov 1
 13 Nov 111
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 16 Nov 11
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 19 Nov 1
 20 Nov 11
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 27 Nov 1
 29 Nov 1
 30 Nov 11

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DECEMBER 1944

7 Dec 11111
 9 Dec 111111
 13 Dec 1
 16 Dec 1
 20 Dec 1
 21 Dec 11
 26 Dec 11
 27 Dec 11
 29 Dec 1
 30 Dec 1
 31 Dec 1

23

JANUARY 1945

1 Jan 1
 2 Jan 11
 6 Jan 11
 7 Jan 1
 8 Jan 11111111111111 12
 9 Jan 1
 11 Jan 1
 22 Jan 1
 23 Jan 11

23

88TH INFANTRY DIVISION "Blue Devils"

FEBRUARY 1945

1 Feb 1
2 Feb 1
9 Feb 1
13 Feb 11
14 Feb 1
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MARCH 1945

2 Mar 1
3 Mar 1
6 Mar 1
7 Mar 1
18 Mar 1
26 Mar 1
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APRIL 1945

13 Apr 1
15 Apr 11
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17 Apr 111111111111111111111111 24
18 Apr 11111111111111 15
19 Apr 11111
20 Apr 11
21 Apr 111
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23 Apr 11111
24 Apr 1
26 Apr 111111
27 Apr 11
29 Apr 1111111
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MAY 1945

1 May 11
2 May 11
8 May 1
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88TH INFANTRY DIVISION'S

- *bloodiest day-----12 May 1944
- bloodiest month-----October 1944
- 2nd bloodiest day-----24 September and 12 October 1944; 16 April 1945
- 3rd bloodiest day-----29 September 1944
- Total battle deaths-----2,529
- 1,322 are listed=52.2% KIA--2,282