



THE 36th INFANTRY DIVISION COMBAT DIARY

1943-1945



NOTE: Charles H. Coolidge participated in all the 141st Infantry Regiment actions listed below. He was the 3rd man on the beach at Paestum, Italy on 9 September 1943 for Operation Avalanche; invaded France on 15 August 1944 for Operation Dragoon; crossed multiple rivers including the infamous Rapido River crossing, where there were more than 2100 US soldiers killed, injured, or taken prisoner in one night. He was awarded the Silver Star for his actions in Velletri, Italy and the Medal of Honor for actions in the Vosges Mountains campaign in France.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This diary, first published in 1945 in the LAST overseas T-PATCH Newspaper by the 36th Division Pictorial History Team, has been slightly revised to include Gen. Fred L. Walker.

9 September 1943—At 0330, 13,000 36th Division troops stormed ashore from Salerno Bay onto the beaches of Paestum, Italy.

13-14 September 1943—High tide at Altavilla, Germans threatened encirclement of invading troops around critical beachhead hill town after launching powerful attack on the left flank of Corps. Second Battalion, 143 captured. Hasty defense line was held and the beach head won.

20 September 1943—Division withdrawn for rest; Salerno mission accomplished. 11 days. First to assault-to capture-to occupy & to secure enemy-held ground on the European continent.

15 November 1943—The 36th reentered the line near Mignano. Heavy seasonal rains began.

3 December 1943—In opening attack of winter offensive, 142nd Infantry smashed over Mt. Maggiore.

7-8 December 1943—The 143rd Infantry crept up and seized towering Mt. Sammucro, one of the highest peaks to be taken by assault in the war.

15-16 December—In a coordinated attack the 36th pushed, into San Pietro. Night assault by 142nd won Mt. Lungo, forcing the Germans to withdraw from "the key to the Liri Valley."

25 December 1943—First Christmas in foxholes. Snow.

17-January 1944—36th to cross Rapido; Gen Walker objects and is overruled by Gen. Clark.

20-21 January 1944—Two terror-packed days of bloody attempts to cross the treacherous Rapido River decimated the 141st and 143rd Infantry Regiments.

26 January-3 February 1944—142nd Infantry, switched north to French sector, battled uphill to Terelle and Mt. Castellone.

29 January-1944—5th Army CO Mark Clark arbitrarily relieved top 36th officers: Col. Martin, 143 CO; Gen Wilbur, Asst. Div. CO; Col. Kerr, Chief of Staff; Colonel Werner, 141; sons of Gen. Fred Walker, (Fred, Jr., G-3, and Charles, the general's aide), all capable officers over Sen. Walker's objections.

12 February 1944—Enemy attempts to retake Mt. Castellone after three-hour artillery barrage. Germans repulsed by 142nd.

15 February 1944--Bombing of Monte Cassino Abbey witnessed. "I see no tactical advantage in destroying it,"- Gen Walker.

26 February 1944—Exhausted 36th is relieved from Cassino sectors for rest and refitting.

11-12 May 1944—Opening of all-out Allied offensive. Division artillery supported first attack.

18-21 May 1944—Division sent to Anzio beachhead for breakout attack. Replaced 3rd Division.

30-31 May 1944—Brilliant night infiltration of entire 142nd Infantry deep behind the German lines at Velletri. Both 141st and 143rd followed up in either flank, clearing Velletri and breaking the last German defense before Rome.

4-5 June 1944—Rome, first Axis capital to fall, was entered gloriously. 36th first to pass through the entire city.

10 June 1944—Gen. Clark inquires by letter if Gen. Walker would be available as Commandant of Infantry School, Ft. Benning.

11 June 1944—Walker, knowing there was no alternative, wrote: "I have decided to accept the assignment."

12 June 1944—Mess Sergeant bakes Gen. Walker a birthday cake.

23 June 1944—Clark said Walker would be relieved on July 7, to be replaced by BG Robert Frederick.

26 June 1944—Dash northward nearly 200 miles above is ended as 36th is called back to prepare for a mission to Southern France.

7 July 1944—Shores of Paestum Italy; 36th Division in Farewell Review for departing Commander. Silver plaque with signatures of staff and commanding officers presented. (Plaque, given to the 36th Division Museum by Fred R. Walker, Jr., displayed at Camp Mabry).

15 August 1944—D-Day on the Riviera. Division lands near San Raphael and quickly secures large beachhead.

22 August 1944—Seven days after the invasion, the 143rd Infantry sweeps into Grenoble, 200 miles above the beaches.

24-30 August 1944—Battle of Montelimar. Division raced northward to block retreating German Nineteenth Army in the Rhone Valley. Litter wreckage of battlefield, tanks, trucks, and weapons testified to intensity of action.

3 September—Lyons liberated.

20-23 September 1944—Moselle Rover crossed by 141st and 143rd Infantry Regts. Remiremont fell to the 142nd Infantry.

30 September 1944—Exhausting fighting around Tendon concluded.

19 October 1944—Bruyeres cleared by 143rd and 442nd (Japanese American) Infantry Regiments. Little progress in the deadly Vosges wilderness.

24-30 October 1944—Lost Battalion (1-Bn.-141) cut off for seven days until contact is reestablished by the 442nd RCT.

20 November 3-December 1944—The 36th drives over the Vosges Mountains through the Ste. Marie Pass. The 143rd secured the bridgehead at Muerthe River; 142nd passed through, captured Ste. Marie and pushed to Selestat in the Rhine Valley. The 141st held a lengthy right flank.

4-18 December 1944—Extremely heavy fighting in Selestat-Ribeauville-Riquewihr sector. Germans counterattack fiercely.

25 December 1944—Christmas spent in Strasbourg area. On this day Division was relieved from the line after 133 consecutive days of contact with the enemy, THE WORLD WAR II RECORD.

1 January 1945—Enemy, in strength, attacked the Seventh Army positions near Bitch. The 141st was the first to be called to meet the threat at Montbronn. Two days later remainder of Division rushed to the scene. Montbronn sector was quieted.

19-30 January 1945—The 36th was switched to block the Germans threatening to break out of the Gamsheim pocket above Strasbourg. The enemy made a strong bid, was unsuccessful. initiative passed to our side.

3 January -11 February 1945—Division mounted full scale attack once more, ran into bitter street fighting at Oberhoffen, Rohrwiler, Herrlisheim and Drusenheim.

15 March 1945—Opening of Moder River attack and general Seventh Army offensive to pinch out 100,000 Germans in the Saar-Palatinate west of the Rhine. The 143rd took Bitschoffen, the 142nd, Mertzwiller, and the 141st, Hageneau.

19-22 March 1945—Through the Siegfried Line-the Germans laid down heavy concentrations of "screaming meemie" fire. Enemy was driven from his strong network of pillboxes and was outflanked over the wooded hills.

2 April 1945—Began rear occupation duty near Kaiserslautern.

30 April-8 May—In action again, the 36th drove to final victory in the Austrian Alps, capturing Goering, Von Rundstedt, Hans Frank, infamous for the Concentration Camps, and a number of other high ranking Nazi Generals and government officials.

WORLD WAR II WAS OVER. THE 36TH DIVISION HAD DONE ITS DUTY.