

Foreword

This volume is a firsthand account of small-unit combat in America's biggest war. It is based on the original diary of then-Pfc. Richard D. Courtney. It traces in vivid language and detail the advance of United States Army forces, specifically the 26th Infantry Division, from its arrival in Cherbourg through its push to the Rhine and on to the German surrender. The men of the 104th Infantry Regiment of the 26th Infantry Division, in which Courtney was a soldier, are remembered and their deeds brought back to life while focusing on the largest land battle of World War II's western front, the Battle of the Bulge.

John Keegan, in his excellent one-volume history of World War II entitled *The Second World War*, dramatically states that this global conflict was "the largest single event in human history, fought across six of the world's seven continents and all of its oceans." He continues, "It killed fifty million human beings, left hundreds of millions of others wounded in mind or body and materially devastated much of the heart-land of civilization." Private Courtney and his fellow Yankee Division soldiers fought to defeat Nazi Germany and liberate its conquests.

In the war for Western Europe, America started slowly and finished as the strongest military power on the face of the earth. Hitler's war machine began with over a hundred divisions and the United States with virtually none ready for deployment. Yet with the refitting of Regular Army divisions and the calling up and mobilization of Army National Guard and Army Reserve divisions, the United States would end World War II with nearly a hundred divisions. Truly the "sleeping giant had been awakened."

By the design of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the war in Europe would be fought in phases and would be given priority over the Pacific theater and also over the China-Burma-India campaign. While the United States was mobilizing, England would carry the burden of the new Atlantic Alliance. Over the winter of 1941-42 with war supply and the Battle of the Atlantic in full swing, American forces began deploying for combat in what Churchill liked to call the "soft underbelly" This

would lead to the North African, Mediterranean, and ill-fated Italian campaigns. The last was designed to cause the Germans to recall divisions from Hitler's marvelous blunder, Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia that began in June 1941, thus causing the Germans to fight a two-front war. Although it did not, the Italian campaign nonetheless got the Allies on the Continent and helped set the stage for a cross-Channel invasion from England.

In the States, American forces were readying for this attack, which would be called Operation Overlord and which would become the largest air-sea invasion in the history of the world. Although much debated and delayed, when launched on June 6, 1944, Overlord sent American infantry forces into Normandy, France, to end Hitler's Third Reich. It would then take most of June and July to expand the beachhead with the breakout taking place at the very end of July in Operation Cobra. For the breakout, many follow-on forces would be needed and they after being trained in the United States, were on their way into the European theater in August 1944, to land at Cherbourg. They would help lead the push into Germany, and one of these units was the 26th Yankee Division of the Massachusetts Army National Guard.

The enlisted men's story is best told by Dick Courtney in this volume. After helping defeat the most serious threat to this nation's survival since the Civil War, the surviving men of the 104th Infantry Regiment would now help, in various occupations, build post-World War II America. After their homeward voyage across the Atlantic, they would begin a new life, free from the threat of Nazi Germany. Not everyone would be there. There would be many "empty chairs."

The 104th Infantry Regiment had lost 663 who died in combat and 35 who were listed as "missing in action." A total of 2,174 were wounded by enemy action, and 401 were injured while serving in the combat zone.

The 104th Infantry became one of the most highly decorated units of World War II. Adding to its long line of battle streamers, which ranged from Boston and Bennington in the Revolutionary War, through Chancellorsville, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and the Wilderness in the Civil War, plus those from the Spanish-American War and World War I, would be five new ones. These would be Northern France, the Rhineland, Ardennes, Central Europe, and the Combat Infantry Streamer.

Eleven men of the 104th Regiment earned the Distinguished Service Cross, more than any other regiment in the 26th Division, with one man receiving an Oak Leaf Cluster as a second-time award;

and 350 men were awarded the Silver Star, with seven men receiving Oak Leaf Clusters; 989 men received the Bronze Star Medal with 42 men getting Oak Leaf Clusters.

In addition, several French and Russian medals were awarded. The 104th Regiment received the Croix de Guerre from France for liberating Alsace-Lorraine. The 104th also received this award from France in World War I.

In combat operations, the 104th Regiment captured 19,835 German prisoners and, in addition, trapped 35,000 enemy troops between the 104th and Russian lines at the close of the war.

All of the above-mentioned statistics are from two books that are well worth reading. These are *History of a Combat Regiment, 1639-1945: 104th Infantry* and *The History of the 26th Yankee Division, 1917-1919, 1941-1945*. The first book was written by Pfc. Henry Parrott in 1945, and the second was published by the Yankee Division Veterans Association and printed in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1955.

I conclude by paraphrasing from the 104th Regimental History. Only in the less violent perspective of history is it possible to begin to evaluate the worth of the infantryman, whether rifleman or unit commander. I would add that only in reflection about the past can we now see the importance of the men's sacrifice under hostile fire, in the rain, snow, and mud of fifty years ago on battlefields far away. We thank every one of them for their service to our country.

William A. Foley Jr.,
Lieutenant Colonel, Infantry

Statistics

Total days in combat:

Division	210 days
328th Infantry Regiment	180 days
104th Infantry Regiment	177 days
101st Infantry Regiment	166 days

Battle stars:

1. Northern France (7-14 September 1944)
2. The Rhineland (6 October-12 December 1944;
28 January-23 March 1945)
3. Ardennes (20 December 1944--28 January 1945)
4. Central Europe (24 March-8 May 1945)

Prisoners captured:

221,501

Decorations:

Medal of Honor	1
Distinguished Service Cross	37
Distinguished Service Cross Oak Leaf Cluster	1
Legion of Merit	5
Silver Star	879
Silver Star Oak Leaf Cluster	24
Soldier's Medal	27
Bronze Star Medal	4,788
Bronze Star Medal Oak Leaf Cluster	295
Air Medal	33
Air Medal Oak Leaf Cluster	56
Purple Heart	2,779
Purple Heart Oak Leaf Cluster	401
Grand Total	9,296

Total casualties:

18,950 officers and men

Source: *History of a Combat Regiment, 1639-1945: 104th Infantry* (1945)
