

**Remarks by Col. Wm. Klimack, USMA
28th Annual Memorial Service • 12 July 2002 Tri-state Chapter • 34th Infantry Division
Association United States Military Academy • West Point NY**

On behalf of Lt. General William J. Lennox, Jr., I would like to welcome everyone to the United States Military Academy and to West Point. I further welcome you to the Old Cadet Chapel; built in 1836, it is one of the oldest buildings here that is still in use. It is appropriate that we gather here, in the oldest continuously occupied military post in America, amid the plaques and other memorabilia from the fiery founding of our nation, amid the final resting places of many of our honored dead. The Academy is a tangible presentation of the family that is the United States Army. The Academy recently celebrated its bicentennial, and continues today to produce leaders for our Army and our nation. The Army of today owes its existence to the Army, the soldiers, who have gone before. You probably have seen the actor Tom Hanks in a commercial fundraising for the World War II memorial where he says that World War II veterans "simply saved the world."

Most Americans today view World War II dimly, from the perspective of a victor safely removed by years and intervening events. I believe they perceive America's role in the largest conflict in history of that of certain victor, for whom triumph was simply of matter of time. They forget perhaps, or possibly never understood, that victory of the forces of freedom was not foregone. Certainly most Americans born after that war don't reflect upon the feelings of those Americans who bore the task of fighting the war; those who faced uncertainty of future for themselves, their loved ones, and their nation. They often don't reflect on those soldiers who never returned, whose sacrifices bought the hard won victory.

The 34th Infantry "Red Bull" Division holds a distinguished place among the units of World War II. The unit's history begins in the first World War. The 34th Infantry Division was created from National Guard troops from Minnesota, Iowa, the Dakotas and Nebraska in the late summer of 1917. It arrived in France in October of 1918 but was too late to see action in World War I as the war ended the following month.

The Division was reactivated on 10 February 1941 at Council Bluffs, Iowa, and trained at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. The Division demonstrated its well-trained status at the Louisiana Maneuvers, the Army's shakedown of doctrine and ideas that was needed for the war.

As the first U.S. Division to be shipped overseas, Pvt. Henke of Hutchinson, Minnesota was credited as being the 1st American soldier to step off the boat in support of the war effort. The Division completed their move to Northern Ireland by May 1942.

The battles of the 34th read as a history, a long history, of the conflict in the European Theater of Operations. The Division entered combat in November 1942 in North Africa, and fought there until the German surrender in May of 1943. The Division fought at Kasserine Pass, Hill 609, and seized Tebourba and Ferryville.

In September 1943, the Division landed at Salerno and began its role in the Italian campaign. The 34th was required to cross the sinuous Volturno River three times and in October assaulted Mount Pantano. There, without winter clothing, they held for 76 days before being relieved.

After a Christmas break, they relieved the 36th Division during a snowstorm and engaged in two weeks of house-to-house fighting with grenades and fixed bayonets. In January they drove to the Gustav Line, seized Mount Trocchio, and crossed the Rapido north of Cassino. They attacked Monastery Hill and suffered heavy casualties until relieved on February 13th. Eventually the Abbey was secured, but five divisions were required for what had originally been the 34th's objective alone. After R&R, the Division was deployed to the Anzio Beachhead where they held the line for two months against continual attacks. The Division engaged in bitter fighting during the breakout in May, capturing Cisterna and Civitavecchia, and occupying Rome. The Division drove across the Cecina River on June 30th, entered Leghorn on July 18th, and Livorno on July 19th. Crossing the Arno River near Pisa on September 10th, the 34th began a five-month campaign that took it through Florence and Montepiano. A subsequent attack in April 1945 led to the capture of Bologna on April 21st.

On May 1st, the U.S. 34th Division captured the German 34th Division. The German 34th was a highly trained unit that had spearheaded the German attack into France in 1940. German forces in Italy surrendered on May 2nd, leading to the complete surrender of German forces on V-E day on 8 May 1945.

The Division left Naples on 22 October, landed at Newport News, Virginia, and deactivated at Camp Patrick Henry, Hampton Roads, on November 3, 1945.

The Division had participated in six major Army campaigns in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. The Division is credited with amassing 517 days of continuous front line combat. Portions of the 34th Division are credited with over 600 days of front line combat. This combat record surpasses all other Army Divisions in World War II. This record exceeds the combat time of the Marine 1st and 3rd Divisions combined.

The Division suffered 21,362 casualties, of which 3,737 were killed. Members of the Division were awarded 11 Medals of Honor, 98 Distinguished Service Crosses, 116 Legions Of Merit, 1,052 Silver Stars, 51 Soldier's Medals, 1,713 Bronze Stars, and over 21,000 Purple Hearts. Divisional units received three Presidential Unit Citations, seven British awards, seven French awards, and six Italian awards.

The U.S. Rangers trace their lineage through the 34th Infantry Division. During World War II, the 1st Ranger Battalion was formed under the command of one of the Division's officers, Captain William Darby. Eighty per cent of the 1st Ranger Battalion's volunteers were drawn from the 34th, and they soon became famous as "Darby's Rangers". The Division, therefore, may claim as their direct descendents those brave soldiers depicted in the movie Blackhawk Down.

The Division also directly carries on its proud heritage. Currently, the 34th Infantry "Red Bull" Division is ranked No. 1 of the eight National Guard divisions with regard to readiness indicators. The Division's nearly 11,000 soldiers are located across five states -- Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, Colorado and Michigan. The Division currently has soldiers deployed worldwide with elements in Croatia, Kosovo and a detachment aboard the USS John F Kennedy. More than 100 soldiers are serving on the federal airport security mission. Additionally, there are soldiers serving in the Minnesota border with Canada as part of Operation Noble Eagle. The Division is ramping up for deployments, highlighted by projected assignments to Bosnia, the Sinai and Kuwait. A slice of the Division staff just completed a Joint Task Force exercise aboard the USS Mount Whitney, the Navy's Second Fleet flagship.

The Division's great heritage has been bought at a price. Many Red Bull soldiers did not return, and many returned to endure injuries. Today we remember them, and those who have passed since V-E day. We honor them, and commemorate them. We also note that their service, their sacrifice, purchased for us our freedom this past half-century and more, and provides for us a paragon of citizenship in our great nation.

William K. Klimack Colonel, Infantry United States Military Academy

***Source:** Colonel Klimack kindly provided us with an e-mailed copy of his notes for the above page. Originally posted to the internet by Pat Skelly, Association Sr. Historian.*