

The 1st Ranger Battalion

Activated: 19 June 42

Deactivated: 15 August 44

(per Ranger Memorial Fort Benning, GA)

Rangers found their introduction into the pages of American History with America's entry into World War II. Major General Lucian K. Truscott, U.S. Army, in liaison with the British General Staff, submitted proposals to General George Marshal that "we undertake immediately an American unit along the lines of the British Commandos" in 1942. A cable from the War Department quickly followed to Truscott authorizing the activation of the 1st U.S. Army Ranger Battalion.

After much deliberation, Captain William Orlando Darby, a graduate of West Point with amphibious training, was chosen as the Commanding Officer of the 1st Ranger Battalion. Promoted to major within a few weeks of receiving this assignment, Darby performed the impossible by organizing the unit. Of the 1500 men to volunteer for the original Ranger Battalion, only 600 were chosen and on June 19, 1942, the 1st Ranger Battalion was officially activated.

A select team of four officers toured the existing Commando Training Camps and selected the Center at Achnacarry, Scotland for the Rangers. Here they underwent intensely rugged training. Coached, prodded, and challenged by the battle-seasoned Commando instructors (commanded by Colonel Charles Vaughan), the Rangers learned the rudiments of Commando warfare. Five hundred of the 600 volunteers that Darby brought with him to Achnacarry survived the Commando training, many could not endure the exercises, one Ranger was killed, while several others were wounded in training so realistic, it was actually executed under live fire.

The first Americans to see active combat in the European conflict of WWII were forty-four enlisted men and six officers from the 1st Ranger Battalion. Dispersed among the Canadians and the British Commandos, these men were the first American ground soldiers to see action against the Germans in the famed Dieppe Raid. Three Rangers were killed, several captured, and all won the commendation and esteem of the Commandos in this raid. The first American soldier killed in Europe in WW II was part of the Dieppe Raid, and a Ranger, Lieutenant E.V. Loustalot. During this raid, he took command after the British Captain leading the assault was killed. Loustalot scaled a steep cliff with his men, was wounded three times, but was eventually cut down by enemy crossfire in his attempts to reach the machine-gun nest at the top of the cliff.

The first efforts to stop the German infiltration of Europe was by the 1st Ranger Battalion. In efforts to prevent German occupation of seaports in North Africa, the 1st Ranger Battalion spearheaded an invasion at the Port of Arzew in Algeria. This was accomplished by executing a surprise night landing, silencing two gun batteries, and opening the way for the capture of Oran.

In Tunisia in 1943, the 1st Battalion executed the first Ranger behind-the-lines night raid at Sened Station for the purpose of gaining information and terrorizing the enemy. Later, in March, American units were shot to pieces, time after time, trying to break through the critical mountain pass at Djbel Ank. Given this mission, the 1st Rangers undertook a twelve-mile night march through rugged terrain to reach the heights of Djbel Ank where, at dawn, the Rangers surprised the enemy from the rear, capturing two hundred prisoners and giving General Patton an opening through which he began the final and victorious battle in North Africa. Rangers played a crucial role in the battle of El Guettar which immediately followed, for which the First Ranger Battalion won its first *Presidential Unit Citation*.

The early successes of the 1st Ranger Battalion precipitated the creation of the 3rd and 4th Battalions. The original 1st Battalion was divided into thirds. One third of the Headquarters and each company was placed in each of the Battalions 1-3-4. The battle seasoned 1st Battalion moved into their newly assigned positions and trained their Ranger brothers. The 1-3-4 Battalions were trained under Darby in Nemours, North Africa and prepared for the invasion of Sicily and Italy.

Had it not been for the accomplishments of the 1st Ranger Battalion in the early entry of WWII, there would be no Rangers today. Their successful invasions in North Africa opened the sea and its ports for the Allied forces. The Allies were now able to move ships and equipment into the campaigns and raids that followed, enabling the later forces to successfully achieve the infiltration along the coast of Africa, into Sicily, and up into Italy.

Following the invasion of the Anzio beachhead, the 1st, and 3rd Rangers were destroyed behind enemy lines in a heavily outnumbered encounter at Cisterna, Italy. The 4th Ranger Battalion suffered massive casualties while attempting to break through enemy lines to rescue their Brothers in the 1st and 3rd Battalions. See the story below, an account of Christmas at Oflag 64 by one of the officers captured at Cisterna. The 1st, 3rd, and 4th Battalions were known as Darby's Rangers.

The 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions proudly carried on the Ranger reputation as they entered the war on D-day on the beaches of Normandy. The 6th Battalion carried on in the Pacific Theater as they fought in the jungles of the Philippines. These stories are documented more comprehensively by the Rangers who were there on the 2-3-4-5-6 Battalion pages.

Wikipedia

On 19 August 1942, fifty Rangers fought alongside Canadian and British Commandos in the ill-fated Dieppe Raid on the coast of occupied France. Three Rangers were killed and several captured. The first American soldier killed in Europe in World War II, Ranger Lieutenant E. V. Loustalot, was part of this raid. During the mission, he took command after the British captain leading the assault was killed. Loustalot scaled a steep cliff with his men, was wounded three times, but was eventually cut down by enemy crossfire in his attempts to reach the machine gun nest at the top of the cliff.

In November 1942, the entire 1st Ranger Battalion entered combat for the first time when they landed at Arzew, Algeria. The First were split into two groups in hopes of assaulting Vichy-French batteries and fortifications before the 1st Infantry Division would land on the beach. The operation was successful, and the unit sustained minimal casualties.

Formation

Major General Lucian Truscott, U.S. Army, in liaison with the British General Staff, submitted proposals to General George Marshall that "*we undertake immediately an American unit along the lines of the British Commandos*" in 1942. A subsequent cable from the U.S. Department of War authorized the activation of the 1st U.S. Army Ranger Battalion.

After much deliberation, Company A, 1st Ranger Battalion was constituted on 27 May 1942. Captain William Orlando Darby, 31-year-old graduate of West Point with amphibious training, was chosen as its commanding officer. Within weeks he was promoted to major for his efforts in organizing the unit. Of the 1,500 men to volunteer for the original Ranger Battalion, only 600 were chosen. Eighty percent of these original Rangers came from the Red Bulls U.S. 34th Infantry Division. On 19 June 1942, Company A, 1st Ranger Battalion, was officially activated in Carrickfergus, Northern Ireland.

A select team of four officers toured the existing commando training camps and selected the center at Achnacarry, Scotland for the Rangers. Here they underwent intense training. Coached by the battle-seasoned commando instructors (commanded by Lt. Col. Charles Vaughan), the Rangers learned the basics of commando warfare. Five hundred of the 600 volunteers (83.33%) that Darby brought with him to Achnacarry completed the commando training. Many could not endure the exercises; one Ranger was killed, while several others were wounded in training that was often executed under live fire.

On a June morning in 1942, a battalion of American soldiers stepped down from a train at Fort William in the northern highlands of Scotland. Bagpipes of the Cameron Highlanders' band sounded the call to battle, and the Americans were greeted by Lt. Col. Charles Vaughan, a burly, ruddy-cheeked British Army officer. Radiating enthusiasm and goodwill, he welcomed the Americans to Scotland and told them he would lead the way to Achnacarry Castle, site of the British Commando training depot

1st Ranger Battalion was activated on June 19, 1942. Notices were pinned on bulletin boards at the American camps in Ulster inviting GIs to sign up for adventure and a hardy life in the new Rangers. Darby set up a headquarters in Carrickfergus, 20 miles north of Belfast, and spent almost two weeks interviewing officer volunteers and about 2,000 enlisted men. Only those in good physical shape with athletic ability, stamina, and good judgment were chosen.

The original 1st Battalion comprised 575 officers and men organized in a headquarters company and six line companies. Truscott and Hartle took a special interest in the new unit. The volunteers ranged in age from 17 to 35 years and came from all parts of the United States. There were few regular soldiers and Darby was the only regular officer. The first Rangers included a Golden Gloves boxing champion, a bull fighter, a lion tamer, a wrestler, a professional gambler, a jazz trumpeter, a burlesque stagehand, a hotel detective, a Hollywood screenwriter, a church deacon, cowpunchers, American Indians, and a Cuban who was a machine-gun expert.

They were a tough bunch, but Colonel Vaughan's grueling 12-week training course at Achnacarry was a rude awakening for them. They marched, ran, and climbed over the moors, up cliffs, and across frigid rivers as charges exploded in the water and live rounds were fired at them. Darby pushed them on, and Colonel Vaughan told the Americans, "It's all in the mind and the heart." After an unimpressive first 10 days, according to a British instructor, the fledgling Rangers "got with

it.” They mastered a tough assault course, crawled across rope bridges, scaled cliffs, and paddled across the lochs while instructors fired machine guns at them.

They learned to kill with a twist of rope, a knife, or their boots or bare hands. They trained to fire a weapon accurately on the run, march 14 miles in just over two hours, build shelters from tree boughs, make a cooking fire that gave off little smoke, and to butcher and cook a doe in the woods. Some trainees even cooked and ate rats.

Most important, the Rangers learned the value of stealth and surprise in combat. The Commando training was rigorous and realistic (40 recruits were killed at Achnacarry during the war). The Americans adopted the Commandos’ methods and added some of their own. They specialized in night fighting, sleeping by day and rising at nightfall. They sat for an hour in darkness to adjust their eyes, and learned that you can hear distant sounds better if you stick a bayonet in the ground and put your ear to it.



Commando trainees practice silencing an enemy sentry.

After the Rangers completed their course, they were sent to a bleak island in the Hebrides for the “most miserable part of the training.” They endured driving rains, cold nights, and Royal Navy rations. There was some inevitable brawling between the Americans and British servicemen in the inns, the most notable being a 48-hour donnybrook during a leave in Oban. The Rangers did not fight with the Commandos, who by now were their comrades in arms, but there was resentment among the British because the Americans were paid twice as much. Some Britons were sure that all Rangers were paroled convicts. Eventually, the Americans were happy to move into civilian billets in Dundee.

Some of the Rangers received their first taste of action when 50 of them, led by Captain Roy Murray, took part as observers in the bloody, ill-fated raid on the French port of Dieppe by Commandos and Canadian infantry in August 1942. Sniping from a stable, Corporal Franklin Koons was the first American soldier to kill a German in ground action in World War II. He was later awarded the Military Medal by Lord Mountbatten. Another Ranger, when captured at Dieppe by the Germans, was asked how many more there were like him in England. “Three million, all as tall as I am,” he replied. When the survivors of the raid returned to England, a Ranger pronounced, “Commando training is real battle life insurance.”

In Jan. 1974, Gen. Creighton Abrams, Army Chief of Staff, directed the formation of a Ranger battalion.

The 1st Battalion (Ranger), 75th Infantry, was activated and parachuted into Fort Stewart, Ga. on July 1, 1974.

The 2nd Battalion (Ranger), 75th Infantry followed with activation on Oct. 1, 1974.

The 3rd Battalion, 75th Infantry (Ranger), and Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 75th Infantry (Ranger), received their colors on Oct. 3, 1984, at Fort Benning, Ga.

The 75th Ranger Regiment was designated in Feb. 1986.