



American Iliad: The History of the 18th Infantry Regiment in World War II

Robert W. Baumer, Mark J. Reardon

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From the invasions of Algeria, Sicily, and Normandy, to bursting open the very gates of the Reich at Aachen and in the gloomy and bloody Hürtgen Forest, to halting the great German offensive in the Ardennes, and to sealing the fate of the German Army in the Ruhr Pocket, the soldiers of the 18th Infantry Regiment established a battle record that is, in many ways, a microcosm of the American Army's experiences in World War II. After bloody setbacks in their first actions in North Africa, the Regiment persevered and overcame every conceivable obstacle placed in their path by their enemies, to include Panzers, elite paratroopers, and tenacious garrisons of concrete and steel stretching from Sicily to the Westwall. Not only did they uphold the honor of their regimental forebears, but they set the standard for their successors who have fought in Vietnam, the Gulf War of 1991, and the current war in Iraq, where the Regiment's 1st Battalion serves at the time of this book's publication.

American Iliad is, however, more than an especially complete and comprehensive regimental history. By combining information carefully culled from wartime reports with first-hand accounts provided by the riflemen and machinegunners to battalion commanders and regimental staff officers, the authors have created an exceptionally clear picture of an American infantry regiment's tactical operations. Hundreds of actions, chronicled and analyzed at every level from squad through regiment, are woven together to create a brilliant mosaic that illustrates exactly how the 18th Infantry Regiment of the famed 1st Infantry Division—the "Big Red One"—defeated its Vichy French, Italian, and German adversaries from Algeria to the Harz Mountains.

American Iliad is assured an important place in the burgeoning literature that documents the US Army's WWII combat record in an analytical, factual fashion. Unlike most of the regimental and division histories published shortly after the war which were intended to be mementos of soldiers' service and necessarily are often sentimental accounts based on unclassified information, American Iliad is an objective history based on reports not available to authors of unit histories in the immediately post-war era. The authors have artfully combined intelligence reports, captured operational documents, personal accounts by enemy participants, and myriad other facts relating to other American and Allied units to ensure the accuracy and integrity of this work.

Most importantly, American Iliad makes a highly significant contribution to the long-running controversy about the quality of American combat units in WWII. In *Citizen Soldiers*, the late Stephen Ambrose argued that the Army which entered the European continent in Normandy was good, but by the end of the war, it had achieved excellence; in *The GI Offensive in Europe*, Pete Mansoor documented the generally superior combat effectiveness of American infantry divisions in the ETO; in *When the Odds Were Even*, Keith E. Bonn proved that even when the US Seventh Army did not enjoy numerical, air, or armor superiority, its soldiers succeeded due to superior cohesion, organization, and training; and in *Draftee Division*, John Sloan Brown illustrated the decisive strengths of the 88th Infantry Division, the first American division to see action that was overwhelmingly of conscripts. More recently, in *Hell in Hürtgen Forest*, Robert Rush has chronicled how the extraordinary tenacity of a regiment of the 4th Infantry Division enabled it to overcome every conceivable obstacle and prevail against an enemy enjoying innumerable advantages.

Now, Bob Baumer and Mark Reardon show exactly how an infantry regiment achieved victory after victory

against three different armies on two continents. Combining Baumer's years of meticulous research with the professional and historical expertise that Reardon, a serving US Army officer, has previously exhibited in his book *Victory at Mortain*, *American Iliad* documents how the leaders of the 18th Infantry Regiment crafted combined arms teams and used effective, sometimes brilliant, maneuver to win battle after battle over 2 1/2 years of combat. The initiative, flexibility, and creativity these officers displayed is made abundantly evident, yet their failures and mistakes are also examined as well. Carefully crafted missions affording subordinate leaders maximum latitude were clearly the norm, and combined armor, artillery, engineer, and infantry combat teams, supported by air power (when available) were consistently preferred, in accordance with the American tactical precepts of the time. However, the authors make clear that when the tanks bogged down or were knocked out by the enemy, when the fighter bombers were grounded by bad weather or reallocated to higher priority targets, and when the artillery couldn't shoot for lack of observation or because targets were "danger close," the 18th Infantry Regiment was always prepared to whatever it took to accomplish the mission.

From the foxhole to the regimental command post, through firefights in dense forests and forbidding hedgerows, in desperate assaults up rocky desert heights and tenaciously defended beaches, *American Iliad* takes the reader through the epic journey in which 1,513 American soldiers lost their lives...and a regiment gained immortality.

424 pages; 17 original maps; 45 photos; endnotes; index.

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