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The Angels: A History Of The 11th Airborne Division



Synopsis

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The 11th Airborne Division was activated at Camp Mackall North Carolina on February 25, 1943, and was primarily composed of former glider troops with some Airborne veterans. Immediately following activation, the 11th Airborne Division began jump training, and was ready to be transported overseas barely a year later. In early 1944, the 11th Airborne Division was moved to San Francisco, California, and ordered to prepare for embarkation to the Pacific Theater. They were sent to New Guinea, where they trained in jungle warfare techniques, prior to the invasion of the Philippines, in November. The 11th Airborne Division landed at Leyte Beach, the Philippines, on November 18, 1944. They relieved 24th and 37th Infantry Divisions, and their objective was to clear a mountain pass from Burauen to Ormoc. After three 3 months of tough fighting, including hand-to-hand combat, the Japanese were driven from the pass and surrounding heights. Members of the 11th Airborne Division rested and were resupplied when they reached Ormoc. On January 26, 1945 the 11th Airborne Division landed at Nasgubu Beach, Luzon, approximately 70 miles from Manila. Their mission was to remove the enemy from Highway 17 and to link up with the Allied forces that were attacking Manila. After just 5 days, the 11th Airborne Division accomplished their mission and broke through the enemy defenses on Tagaytay Ridge. The 551th Parachute Infantry

Regiment conducted a combat drop to reinforce the main body of the Division. After capturing Fort McKinley, Clark field, and Nichols field, the 11th Airborne Division joined the 1st Cavalry Division and the 37th Infantry Division in the attack on Manila.

My Dad (who passed away in 2012) was a medic in the 221st medical company of the 11th airborne division. Growing up I used to thrill to his various war stories about events he had experienced in the Philippines, Okinawa, and Japan itself. As things turned out he was late getting into the war. He didn't ship out until May 1945 which was almost a year after the main body of the division had shipped out of the States. He arrived in the Philippines in June 1945 while mopping up operations were going on. Lucky for him he missed out on some of the toughest fighting of the war that the division went through in southern Luzon a few months before he arrived. So most of the stories told in the book happened before my dad arrived on the scene. He did participate in the invasion of Japan and flew into Atsugi field near Tokyo in late August or early September 1945. Since he was in the medical company they were sent in to liberate a POW camp containing mostly Chinese prisoners who were dying of malnutrition in northern Japan. Unfortunately these events were not covered in the book but from my dad's recollections this prison camp was every bit as bad as the concentration camps found in Germany. Corpses littered the ground, typhus was running rampant, and the prisoners had not been adequately fed in weeks. Even after my dad's unit took control of the camp the inmates continued to die for several weeks due to the harsh treatment they had received under the Japanese. I wish the book had talked about that episode. My dad went back to the States in January 1946 and was happy to be discharged. He had never really liked army life at all. As far as I know he never participated in any division reunions over the years or kept in touch with any of his army buddies.

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