





# The 'Dogface Soldiers' of the 3rd Infantry Division

BY MICHAEL L. LEWIS

**N**ow advising and assisting Iraqi Security Forces as part of United States Division-Central, many of the Soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division are on their third, fourth and even fifth deployment overseas. But, 93 years ago, when U.S. Soldiers had never before been sent to fight on another continent, it was 3rd Division Soldiers who acquainted the world with the tenacity of the American warfighter. In the process, they earned honor, distinction and the three stripes that appear on their unit insignia patch.

The American Expeditionary Forces sent to France in April 1918 were untested and had never experienced combat. Rushed to bolster French defenses during what would be Imperial Germany's last major offensive, the 28,000 3rd Division Soldiers impressed their French and British counterparts. But, the massive German "Peace Storm" designed to end the war once and for all overwhelmed the Allies, pushing their defenses all the way to the Marne River on the outskirts of Paris.

Staff Sgt. Ditson Abraham of the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, forms up with his squad along a roadway leading to Ali Shaheen village, Iraq, in March 2008. His military transition team advised Iraqi soldiers as they conducted a clearing operation.

Photo by Sgt. Timothy Kingston



Above: A painting from the collection of the U.S. Army Center of Military History depicts 3rd ID Soldiers holding a German offensive during the Second Battle of the Marne in World War I. The division's refusal to retreat earned it the nickname, "Rock of the Marne."  
 Left: American Soldiers cross the Marne River via a pontoon bridge.

Courtesy photos

At the village of Château-Thierry, where the 3rd Division was entrenched, French commanders urged the American forces to retreat again. But, division commander Maj. Gen. Joseph Dickman barked back, "*Nous resterons la!*" — "We shall remain!"

On the morning of July 18, 1918, the division's 30th and 38th Regiments launched a surprise counterattack on the German forces, defeating their attempt to break through the Allied lines. Gen. John J. Pershing later wrote, "On this occasion ... the 3rd Division wrote one of the most brilliant pages in our military annals. It

prevented the crossing at certain points on its front, while on either flank, the Germans who had gained a footing pressed forward. Our men, firing in three sections, met the German attacks with counterattacks at critical points and succeeded in throwing two German divisions into complete confusion."

The battle turned the tide of the entire war; within four months, it was over. For their steadfast refusal to budge from the banks of the river, the division earned the nickname, "Rock of the Marne," and Dickman's words became the division motto. Its eventual participation in three

major World War I operations — Marne, Saint-Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne — inspired the design of its insignia patch: three white stripes on a field of blue, signifying "loyalty, steadfastness and undying devotion to the principles of right and justice by the American Soldier."

In the nearly 100 years since, the division's dogged determination has never lagged. With more Medal of Honor recipients than any other division, more combat deaths in World War II than any other U.S. division, and the distinction of liberating Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom, new 3rd ID Soldiers are told they're "in the big leagues now," said Walter "Buck" Meeks III, the director of the Fort Stewart Museum at the installation in Georgia the division now calls home.

"The 3rd Division is to the military profession what the New York Yankees are to professional baseball. We are the class of the league every year; we are where the best players gravitate to because they want to play with the best players. That's how we look at it. Is it true? Is it false? Well, I have the evidence all around me here: 51 recipients of the Medal of Honor," he said, pointing to rows of portraits on a wall.

For its NCOs, the division's immense history serves to motivate and inspire.

"The 3rd ID has an awesome history; you've got that as a starting point. But, that just gets you in the door and explains the patch on your shoulder," said 1st Sgt. Chad Brown of D Company, 3rd Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 3rd ID. "We take that 3rd ID mentality, that strength of history, then tell the Soldiers to come and create their own history. That creates a drive in them to be successful."

It also prompts today's Soldiers to compare their mettle with that of 3rd ID Soldiers of yesteryear, said Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph Altman, 4th IBCT's command sergeant major.

"When I was a young Soldier and a young sergeant growing up in light infantry units, I used to look back at our history. Those guys survived the Bataan Death March, but I can't do a 25-mile movement? I suck! I shouldn't even sit at the same bar with them. Soldiers in Korea during the Korean War lost limbs to frostbite, but I'm sniveling because I'm a little wet and a little cold? During hard



Above: Scott Daubert, deputy director of the 3rd Infantry Division Museum, Fort Stewart, Ga., displays a vintage 3rd ID patch sewn onto a uniform worn during World War I. The makeshift patch had three stripes of white ribbon affixed to a square of blue velvet.

Right: Perhaps the most well-known 3rd ID Soldier, Audie Murphy, seen here shortly after being awarded the Medal of Honor in 1945.

Photo by Michael L. Lewis (above); Courtesy photo (right)

times when I was younger, I used it to get strength and motivation to know what 'hard' really was."

That indomitable spirit sparked perhaps 3rd Division's most well-known moniker: Dogface Soldiers. The term was originally applied to all infantrymen during World War II. But in 1965, then-commander Maj. Gen. Albert O. Conner asked Walt Disney to design a mascot for the 3rd ID that would "mirror the qualities of the Dogface Soldier: heroic but humble; fierce but gentle; quick-witted and wise; with a confidence and dignity that comes from having proved oneself."

Legend has it that Disney himself drew the now-famous cartoon of Rocky, the canine mascot that graces nearly every place 3rd ID Soldiers call home. Disney sold the division the rights to reproduce the drawing for \$1.

Then there's the song.

"That's how we start our day," said 1st



Sgt. Christopher Williams of 4th IBCT's 6th Battalion, 8th Cavalry Squadron. "Being the first sergeant standing up front, you can tell how well the day is going to go based on how well they're singing."

"The Dogface Soldier Song" was written by Cpl. Bert Gold and Lt. Ken Hart in 1942 about all infantrymen. It was adopted as the official song of the division later that year and ends with the lyrics: "I'm just a Dogface Soldier / With a rifle on my shoulder / And I eat raw meat / For breakfast E'V'RY day / So feed me ammunition / Keep me in 3rd Division / Your Dogface Soldier's A-OK."

## 3rd ID timeline

**1917** Nov. 12: The 3rd Division is constituted at Camp Greene, outside Charlotte, N.C.

**1918** July: 3rd Division Soldiers hold back a German offensive at the Marne River at Château-Thierry, France, earning the nickname, "Rock of the Marne." In the fall, 3rd Division Soldiers take part in the Saint-Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne operations.

**1942** Aug. 1: The division is reorganized as the 3rd Infantry Division. In October, 3rd ID Soldiers land in North Africa to take part in Operation Torch.

**1944** Jan. 10: 3rd ID lands on the beaches of Anzio, Italy, then drives toward Rome, liberating it in May. On Aug. 15, they invade southern France, reaching the Rhine River in November.

**1945** January–February: 3rd ID takes part in the Colmar Pocket offensive, during which Audie Murphy's actions earned him the Medal of Honor and the division a Presidential Unit Citation. The division captures the German cities of Nuremburg and Munich in April. By the end of the war in August, 3rd ID is the only U.S. division to have fought Germany on all fronts.

**1950** Elements of the division, now based at Fort Benning, Ga., arrive in Korea to fight in the Korean War. After capturing Seoul the next year and holding off relentless Chinese assaults, they are called the "Rock of Seoul."

**1958** April: As part of the build up of U.S. forces in Europe during the Cold War, 3rd ID moves its headquarters to Würzburg, West Germany.

**1991** Jan. 16: Units of the 3rd ID enter Iraq as part of the coalition force battling Saddam Hussein's regime following his invasion of Kuwait the year before.

**1996** With Germany reunited and the Cold War over, the 3rd ID moves its headquarters to Fort Stewart, Ga., as part of the drawdown of U.S. forces in Western Europe.

**2003** April 5: During its "Thunder Run," the 3rd ID enters Baghdad, capturing the capital on April 9. Over the next eight years, the division deploys three more times in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn.



Soldiers from the 3rd Infantry Division take up firing positions during an enemy approach on their position at Objective Rama, in southern Iraq, March 24, 2003, during the initial days of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Photo by Sgt. Igor Paustovski

a battlefield commission to first lieutenant and went on to command a company in northeastern France.

There in January 1945, with Murphy's unit at an effective strength of 19 out of 128 men, the company engaged German soldiers outside the hamlet of Holtzwihr. Climbing atop a flaming tank destroyer, Murphy used its .50-caliber gun to kill dozens of enemy soldiers, spending nearly an hour alone in his position while Germans fired at him from three sides. For these actions, Murphy was awarded the Medal of Honor that summer. By the end of the war, he was the most-decorated U.S. Soldier, having been awarded every medal in the Army at least once.

Thanks to Murphy's own recollections, Meeks was able to track down the carbine Murphy used in the war, which had been collecting dust in an Alabama depot. It's now a centerpiece display at the museum.

"In his autobiography, he wrote, 'Losses are inevitable. You learn not to get too friendly with anybody. One way or another, people come and go,'" Meeks said. "Murphy is talking about the incredible losses that 3rd Division was taking. 'You don't remember the guys' names, but you remember that #1108783 is the serial number of your rifle.' We found that in the War Reserves stocks in Anniston, Ala.; we just did a computer search, and there it was."

The museum's collection also contains objects associated with the division's most recent Medal of Honor recipient, Sgt. 1st Class Paul Ray Smith, who was honored posthumously after being killed in Baghdad during the early days of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In addition to his load-bearing vest and machine gun, the museum also has the armored personnel carrier on which he lost his life.

"The Smith story, I predict, will be a teaching point in NCO professional development for the rest of the U.S. Army's history," Meeks said. "The senior guy in charge used every weapon system available, was confronted with hurt Soldiers and had casualties. So, he has to balance getting his wounded to help [at an aid

## Rocky's units: 3ID



### 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team "Raiders"

- 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment
- 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment
- 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment
- 1st Battalion, 41st Field Artillery Regiment
- 3rd Brigade Support Battalion
- 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion

### 2nd Heavy BCT "Spartans"

- 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment
- 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment
- 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment
- 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment
- 26th Brigade Support Battalion
- 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion

### 3rd Heavy BCT "Sledgehammers"

- 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment
- 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment
- 3rd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment
- 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment
- 203rd Brigade Support Battalion
- 3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion

### 4th Infantry BCT "Vanguard"

- 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment
- 3rd Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment
- 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment
- 1st Battalion, 76th Field Artillery Regiment
- 703rd Brigade Support Battalion
- 4th Brigade Special Troops Battalion

### Combat Aviation Brigade "Falcon"

- 1st Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment
- 2nd Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment
- 3rd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment
- 4th Battalion, 3rd Aviation Regiment
- 603rd Aviation Support Battalion

### 3rd Sustainment Brigade "Heart of the Rock"

- 260th Quartermaster Battalion
- 13th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion
- 87th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion
- 3rd Special Troops Battalion
- Division Special Troops Battalion

"Of course, while we're doing it, you hear, 'Man, why do we have to sing this song?'" Brown said. "But, when we were at the National Training Center and they played that over the loudspeaker, everybody cheered. It's something identifiable. You go on the Internet and play that song, and anyone who has ever had to sing it once is right back singing it again."

The song had its public debut in 1955 as part of the soundtrack of *To Hell and Back*, the movie that starred perhaps 3rd ID's most famous Soldier, Audie Murphy, playing himself in his life story. Eager to enlist at the start of World War II, the baby-faced Murphy was rejected by the Navy for being too skinny, by the Marines and Army paratroopers for being too short, and had to alter his birth certificate to seem old enough to enter the infantry. Assigned to the 3rd ID in early 1943, he first saw action in Sicily, and was promoted to corporal after killing two enemy soldiers. After holding off an enemy squad at Salerno, Italy, he was promoted to sergeant.

When he saw his best friend get shot and killed by German soldiers feigning surrender in a machine-gun nest in southern France, Murphy flew into a rage, single-handedly killing all inside and using the German machine gun to neutralize other nearby fortifications. For this, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Shortly thereafter, he was awarded

station 100 meters away] versus keeping guys with him to continue the mission.

“But, he made it the mission to get his guys some help. He chose to stay, to not give up a key piece of terrain. He had the situational awareness to know that, if you let the enemy get into the courtyard where he was, they would have a fort from which they could engage the docs in the aid station who were working on his people — guys with their backs to the fight. That’s the key thing about Smitty — service way above self, situational awareness far beyond just the sight of his rifle.”

Today, 3rd ID’s key role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq continues to resonate. The division entered Baghdad on April 5 during its famous “Thunder Run;” the city fell two days later.

“We were the liberation force,” Brown said. “For all the guys coming in now, all the stories they hear are from the guys who liberated Iraq. So, every rotation we go back, we’re living up to that initial history of being the first ones there. Now, with this deployment coming up, there’s a lot of people talking about being there for the beginning and now for the end.”

Brown, who is currently deployed in Iraq with the rest of the brigade as part of the last contingent of U.S. troops, said he takes special pride in the fact that the stripes of the 3rd ID insignia are readily recognized on the streets of Iraq.

“The best compliment I ever got in my life was during my second deployment. We were walking down what was considered the worst street in Baghdad, and we hadn’t had anything happen. The battalion that our company replaced had 181 Purple Hearts, so we knew we were getting into it. But, we get there, and everybody’s scurrying from us. We finally cornered some

Iraqis and asked them, ‘Hey, what’s going on?’ And they said, ‘You’re 3rd Infantry Division! You whipped our butts in the liberation. We’re not doing anything against you guys because you’re the best.’”

Meeks finds that the traditions of the division are so strong, Soldiers identify with the 3rd ID long after their service. Returning from one temporary duty assignment, Meeks was stopped in the airport by an elderly gentleman who recognized the 3rd ID patch Meeks was wearing. “Hey you! Third Division!” the man yelled before regaling Meeks with the tale of how he fought with the 3rd ID for a few weeks at Anzio, Italy, in World War II only to be

sent home “with a wound in the keister.”

“But, he so profoundly still identifies himself as a 3rd Division Soldier,” Meeks said. “If I can get somebody out of here thinking, ‘I am a Marine Soldier — don’t just call me one. I am a Dogface Soldier,’ you can see their chests puff out. You hear them say, ‘We’re rolling with the 3rd Division! We put dictators out of business.’ And, it’s true. We put the Kaiser out of business. We put Hitler out of business. We put Saddam Hussein out of business. That’s what we do.”

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Top: More than 400 Eastern Redbud trees line the sidewalks of the Warriors Walk memorial at Fort Stewart, Ga. Each is dedicated to a 3rd ID Soldier who died in Iraq or Afghanistan and blooms a vibrant red every spring around the anniversary of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Bottom: A visitor points to an exhibit at the 3rd Infantry Division Museum at Fort Stewart. The display in the foreground is dedicated to Sgt. 1st Class Paul Ray Smith, killed during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and features his load-bearing vest and rifle.

Photos by Michael L. Lewis

