



The 'Blue Spaders' of the 'Big Red One'

Blue Spaders: The 26th Infantry Regiment, 1917–1967. Edited by Steven Weingartner. Cantigny First Division Foundation, 1S 151 Winfield Road, Wheaton, IL 60187. (Also available from 26th Infantry Regiment Association, R.E. Egersdorfer, 359 Partridge Drive, Lititz, PA 17543-1347.) 234 pages; photographs; maps; organizational charts; \$25, paper.

By Lt. Col. Austin E. (Bud) Miller
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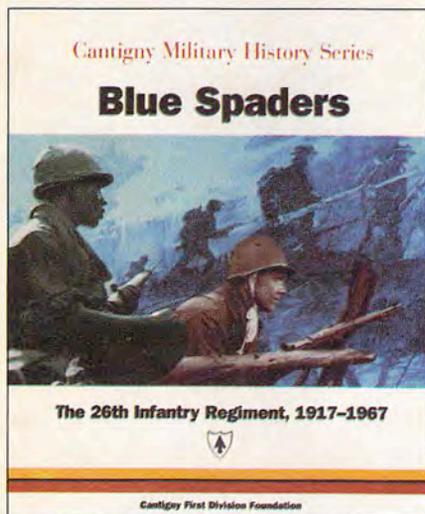
"To the 26th Infantry Regiment!"

"To the dead of the 26th Infantry!"

—Traditional toasts first offered by Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., after Soissons, in 1918.

The 26th Infantry Regiment was organized in February 1901 at Fort McPerson, Ga. It is the third unit to bear the designation—there was a 26th Infantry briefly activated during the War of 1812 and another organized for a short time after the Civil War. The 26th Infantry joined the 1st Infantry Division in 1917 and has remained with the "Big Red One" continually, except for a stint as a U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command training unit. The 26th's regimental colors carry 26 campaign streamers from the Philippines in the early 1900s to the winter-spring 1970 campaign in Vietnam. During World War II, the regiment took part in three amphibious assaults—North Africa, Sicily and Normandy.

The title of the book is misleading. As the editor acknowledges, this is not a history of the regiment over a 50-year period but is a series of vignettes covering selected actions in World War I, World War II and Vietnam. The reader is left wondering why North Africa and Sicily were omitted and why the history stops in 1967.



Blue Spaders is broken into three sections—Courage: Doughboys, 1917–18; Relentless Pursuit: Dexterous, 1944–45; and Resourceful Daring: Dobol, 1966–67. In each section, the narrative is interspersed with personal recollections of some of the participants. The section on World War I provides an interesting discussion of tactics, organization and training, and it culminates with the bitter five-day fight at Soissons, where the 26th suffered more than 30 percent casualties and lost two-thirds of its officers.

The World War II section covers the pre-invasion period in England, Normandy, the pursuit beyond the Seine River, the battle to break through the Siegfried Line, the Battle of the Bulge and ends with the race to Czechoslovakia. Again, this reviewer cannot understand the omission of North Africa and Sicily. The performance of the division in those arenas under the command of Maj. Gen. Terry de la Mesa Allen and Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt Jr. was among the reasons the division was chosen to lead the assault into Normandy. The section on the Vietnam War makes up the major portion of the book.

The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, ar-

rived in Vietnam in September 1965 and operated in the areas north and west of Saigon—War Zones C and D, the Iron Triangle and the Michelin Plantation. The battle narratives are well done and the maps in this section are particularly good. Also included is a good discussion of the fight at Tan Binh and the 1st Division's attempts to destroy the Viet Cong Main Force units in 1966. The section concludes with the battle at Ap Gu, near the Cambodian border, in the spring of 1967, for which the battalion received a Valorous Unit Award.

The book's organizational charts provide a good understanding of the evolution of infantry organizations from World War I to Vietnam. The maps in the World War II section are mostly taken from the Army's World War II series and do not show battle details. Unfortunately, there is only a general discussion of sources at the end of the book, and instead of footnotes, references are included in the text. The after-action reports in the Vietnam section detract from the battle narratives and should have been placed in an appendix.

Blue Spaders is at its best when it attempts to show the importance of esprit to a combat unit and how individual personalities contribute to the soul of a unit. Truly, the names and faces change, but the spirit of the regiment lives on.

The Big Red One has a proud history, and the Cantigny First Division Foundation has done a great deal to preserve and encourage the traditions and heritage of the division and its units. One hopes that they will continue the series, but that future unit histories will be more comprehensive.

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