

JOHN BREITLING COULTER

John Breitling Coulter was born in San Antonio, Texas on April 27, 1891. He was graduated from the West Texas Military Academy in 1911, and was commissioned in the Regular Army as a second lieutenant of Cavalry on November 30, 1912.

PROMOTIONS

He was promoted to first lieutenant on July 1, 1916; to captain on May 15, 1917; to major (temporary) on June 7, 1918; to major (permanent) on July 1, 1920; to lieutenant colonel on August 1, 1935; to colonel (temporary) on June 26, 1941; to colonel (permanent) on July 1, 1942; to brigadier general (temporary) on October 31, 1941; to major general (temporary) on March 12, 1943.

SERVICE

He was first assigned to Brownsville, Texas, with the 14th Cavalry, moving to Fort McIntosh in June, 1914. As a lieutenant in Troop M, 14th Cavalry, he participated in the Battle of San Ygnacio, on June 15, 1916. On June 19, 1916 he became Adjutant, Fort McIntosh, Texas, and in August, 1916, was assigned as aide to the District Commander, Brigadier General William A. Mann. He was assigned to Camp Wilson, Texas in December, 1916. He went to Washington, D. C. in February, 1917 for mustering duty and was assigned as instructor of the National Guard of the District of Columbia between March and August, 1917. He was again assigned as aide to Major General William A. Mann, Commanding General, 42nd (Rainbow) Division. In that capacity he served with the American Expeditionary Forces in France between October, 1917 and January, 1918, when he returned to the United States with General Mann for five months duty at Governors' Island, New York.

He was Adjutant of the 154th Brigade at Camp Meade, Maryland between June and July, 1918; then joined the 808th Infantry at that post, as Battalion Commander, 2nd Battalion, and again sailed for France with his regiment in August, 1918, where he participated in the St. Mihiel operations. In October, 1918 he attended the General Staff College at Langres, France. He was graduated in January, 1919, and assigned as Adjutant of the 159th Infantry Brigade, 80th Division. He returned to the United States in July, 1919 for duty in the Personnel Branch of the War Department General Staff, Washington, D. C.

He went to Fort Des Moines, Iowa as Squadron Commander of the 2nd Squadron of the 14th Cavalry, between March and September, 1921, then he enrolled in the Cavalry School, Fort Riley, Kansas, from which he graduated in June, 1922. He was then assigned to Camp Meade, Maryland, and in August, 1922, was assigned as Chief of the Material Section, Office of the Chief of Cavalry, and later as Executive Officer.

He enrolled in the Command and General Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in August, 1926 and was a distinguished graduate in the class of June, 1927. He was then assigned to Fort Bliss, Texas as a Squadron Commander, 8th Cavalry, and Assistant Plans and Training Officer of the First Cavalry Division. He was assigned to the Board of Elections for the Department of Matagalpa, Nicaragua from May, 1928 to December, 1928. In December, 1928 he returned to Fort Bliss,

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Texas for duty with the 8th Cavalry, and in July, 1929 became AC of S, G-3, of the First Cavalry Division.

He enrolled in the Army War College, Washington, D. C. in August, 1932. After graduation in 1933 he entered the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, and was graduated in August, 1934 from the senior course. He then served as Chief, Latin American Section, Executive, and Foreign Liaison Officer, Military Intelligence Division, War Department General Staff from August, 1934 to August, 1938.

He left Washington, D. C. in 1938, and was assigned as Executive Officer, 4th Cavalry, Fort Meade, South Dakota. In September, 1939 he was assigned to organize the Arkansas Recruiting District where he served for two months and later proceeded to Little Falls, Minnesota as Headquarters Commandant, VII Army Corps, and Commanding Officer of Troops at Little Falls. He rejoined the 4th Cavalry at Fort Meade, South Dakota in October, 1940 and became Regimental Commander in January, 1941. Upon promotion to Brigadier General on October 31, 1941 he was assigned to command the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, 2nd Cavalry Division. On December 12, 1941 he moved his brigade to Arizona, and with the 25th and 368th Infantry Regiments, organized and commanded the Southern Land Frontier Sector of the Western Defense Command. In April, 1942 he acted as Aide to the President of Peru during the latter's visit to the United States. On April 18, 1942 he was assigned to command the 2nd Cavalry Division with station at Fort Riley, Kansas. In July, 1942 he was named Assistant Division Commander of the 85th (Custer) Division, Camp Shelby, Mississippi. He served as Aide to the President of Cuba during his visit to the United States in December, 1942. In February, 1943 he became Commanding General of the 85th Infantry Division. After maneuvers in Louisiana and in the Desert Training Center in California, he moved his division to North Africa, where it arrived in January, 1944 for further training. The division moved to Italy in March, 1944 and entered the line at Minturno, Italy, as a unit, on April 10, 1944.

On May 11, 1944 General Coulter's division, one of the first two all selective divisions to see action in World War II, attacked as a part of the Fifth Army in Italy, successively broke through the Gustav, Dora, and Hitler Lines and, after annihilating the German 94th Division and cutting up much of the 29th and the Goering Panzer Grenadier Divisions, made junction with the Anzio Bridgehead forces and continued on to reach Rome on June 4, 1944. Passing rapidly through that city, the 85th Division pursued the Germans for 40 miles beyond, where it was relieved on June 10, 1944 for rehabilitation and rest, after an advance of 135 miles in 28 days of fighting. In recognition of the 85th Division's record, General Coulter was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal on June 18, 1944 by General Marshall, with the following citation:

"As Commanding General, 85th Infantry Division, from February 21, 1943, to June 5, 1944, he led his troops on a series of brilliant advances over a hundred miles of the most difficult terrain, climaxed by their entry into Rome on June 4, 1944. The outstanding accomplishments of this division in its first experience of combat, against a ruthless and battle-hardened enemy, were due primarily to his aggressive leadership. His continued emphasis on rigorous, intensive training, his indoctrination of his men with the proper mental conditioning for battle, and his comprehensive grasp of military tactics proved decisive factors in the grim fighting against the enemy-held strong points of Colle San Martino, Hill 121, Formia, Terracina and Mount Ceraso. By the diligent exercise of his gifts of leadership and constant presence at the front he made a signal contribution to the smashing defeat of the enemy's forces before Rome."

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General Coulter's division again entered the line in August, 1944 and on September 13, 1944 was assigned the main effort for the 5th Army in the attack of the Gothic Line. After five days of hard fighting the division captured Mts. Altuzza, Verruca, and Pratone, thereby cracking the strongly prepared and defended German line and fought steadily forward to reach the northern slopes of the Apennines, overlooking Bologna, in October, 1944. The achievements of the 85th Division during this period earned for it the name of the "Elite Assault Division," given it by the German I Paratroop Corps. During the attack on the Gothic Line, General Coulter was awarded the Silver Star Medal for gallantry in action and the Bronze Star Medal for heroic achievement.

During the winter of 1944 the division occupied defensive positions on the II Corps Front, including the key Mt. Grande Sector, overlooking Bologna,

On April 13, 1945 in the Po Valley Offensive, General Coulter's division was initially held in reserve. On April 17 it entered the line to the southwest of Bologna and with the 10th Mountain Division, made the main effort for the 5th Army, and, breaking through the German defenses, raced for the Po River, capturing thousands of German prisoners and rear installations intact. Rapidly crossing the Po River by all available means within the division, the 85th Division reached Verona on April 26th and was the first to penetrate the Adige Line (German inner-fortress line in Italy). In congratulating the division for the action, the Fifth Army Commander stated:

"Now I can use the 85th Division to assist the other divisions in case they are unable to breach the line on their fronts."

On April 30, 1945 the 85th Division moved near Faltre, Italy and on May 1 and 2, 1945, attacked the rear of the 76th Panzer Corps retreating into the Alps through Mas, Italy, causing the surrender of the rear enemy division, including the Division Commander, prior to the cessation of hostilities. Thereafter the 73rd Corps, 76th Panzer Corps, and elements of the Germany 10th Army surrendered to the division. On orders of the Commanding General, II Corps, the right element of the 85th Division continued the advance on May 3, 1945; liberated political prisoners at Lago di Braso, including Leon Blum, Martin Niemöller, Hjalmar Schacht, Kurt von Schuschnigg, and others; captured \$80,000,000 in Italian gold; captured art treasures from Florence, Italy; and closed the Brenner Pass with the 1st Battalion Combat Team of the 339th Infantry on May 4th, to prevent the escape of German forces to the north. Here the battalion met elements of the 103rd Division (which the 85th Division had provided cadre for when activated), thus effecting a happy completion of the mission. For the Gothic Line and Po Valley offensives, General Coulter received an Oak Leaf Cluster to his Distinguished Service Medal on May 16, 1945, with the following citation:

"JOHN B. COULTER, 03488, Major General, United States Army, for exceptionally meritorious service in duty of great responsibility, from 17 August 1944 to 2 May 1945, in Italy. General Coulter commanded the 85th Division in its operations from the Cecina River to the Arno River and Gothic Line. Later, in the difficult cracking of this strongly held and prepared line the 85th Division, under the exceedingly brilliant direction of General Coulter, took Mount Altuzza on 18 September after a 5 day battle. This was one of the most important tactical features of the Gothic Line, the capture of which greatly facilitated the further advance of the Fifth Army through the strongly defended German positions. Throughout winter action in the Apennines and during the victorious Allied

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offensive in the spring, Major General Coulter ably led his troops in the accomplishment of a vital role leading to the crushing defeat of German forces in Italy. While preparing his division for its assignment in the offensive, he skillfully readjusted troop dispositions, consolidated and strengthened a vulnerable and important mountainous sector and at the same time provided all possible facilities for the welfare of his troops then undergoing the hardships of mountain fighting in bitter weather. Having perfected plans for the offensive, Major General Coulter directed his division in a smashing attack, inspiring his men by his aggressive leadership and firm determination to press the attack rapidly and relentlessly. Advancing across the Po Valley, the 85th Infantry Division severed the vitally important Highway 9, crossed the Po River and continued its drive through the Adige Line, accomplishing an advance of more than one hundred miles in a period of ten days. The brilliant tactical skill and inspiring leadership of Major General Coulter resulted in an extremely vital contribution to the victory achieved by the 15th Army Group. Entered Military service from El Paso, Texas."

General Coulter prepared his division for inactivation at Volturno, Italy during June and July, 1945 and he arrived at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia on August 25, 1945, where the 85th Division was inactivated as of August 26, 1945.

He then was assigned to command the Infantry Replacement Training Center at Fort McClellan, Alabama. On May 15, 1946 he was transferred to Fort Sam Houston, Texas and assigned Deputy Commander, Fourth Army, his present station,

DECORATIONS

Major General Coulter has been awarded the following decorations by his Government and foreign nations:

United States:

1. Distinguished Service Medal, with Oak Leaf Cluster,
2. Silver Star Medal.
3. Bronze Star, for heroic achievement.
4. Mexican Campaign Medal.
5. World War I Medal, with St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne Campaign Bars.
6. Nicaraguan Service Medal (U. S. Navy).
7. Pre-Pearl Harbor Service Ribbon.
8. European Theater Medal, with three campaign stars.
9. World War II Victory Medal.
10. American Theater Ribbon.

Belgium:

11. Order of Leopold II, Second Class.

Ecuador:

12. Estrella de Aldon Calderon, Second Class.

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Mexico:

13. Military Merit.

Peru:

14. Insignia of Grand Officer, Order: El Sol of Peru.

Cuba:

15. Order of Military Merit, with white insignia, First Class.

Italy:

16. Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus, grade of Commander.
17. Silver Medal of Valor.

Great Britain:

18. Honourable Order of the Bath, rank of Commander.

France:

19. Cross of Officier of the Legion of Honor.
20. Croix de Guerre, with palm.