



Three 40th ID Soldiers were awarded Medals of Honor for actions in Korea. (Photo courtesy of the California State Military History Museum)

40th ID: The history of the 'Sunshine' Division

For nearly 100 years, the Sunshine Division has protected California and the nation

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester

NCO Journal

They may not have a song or a famous motto, but the 40th Infantry Division has a full, important history of protecting the citizens of California and the nation. It's a history the division's NCOs have worked to keep alive and relevant for almost 100 years.

The 40th ID was created on Sept. 16, 1917, from National Guard units from California, Arizona, Colorado,

Nevada, New Mexico and Utah. Based at Camp Kearney in San Diego, Calif., the division was created after the United States joined World War I. Its well-known nickname and patch were created soon after, Sgt. Major Daniel Sebby said in a short history of the division he wrote for the California State Military Museum in Sacramento, Calif. Sebby is the museum's curator.

“It was soon decided that the new division’s nickname would be the ‘Sunshine Division,’ since its patch was a sun on a field of blue,” Seby wrote. “The division was one of the best-prepared for the great mobilization since a majority of the units had just been released from active duty on the Mexican border.”



Sgt. Jason Stevens, an agribusiness development horticulturist with the 40th ID, gathers a soil sample in November 2009 from a field in Marawara, Afghanistan. His group met with local farmers about their crop output in the area and gathered soil samples to learn how crop production might be increased in the area. (Photo by Tech Sgt. Brian Boisvert)

Later, during the Korean War, Brig. Gen. Joseph Cleland changed the patch to a multicolored diamond sewn on laterally, calling it a ‘Ball of Fire,’ but an outcry from division veterans led to Cleland being admonished and the original patch’s return. Sgt. Major Javier Becerra, the G1 sergeant major at California’s Joint Force Headquarters in Sacramento, said 40th Infantry Division Soldiers quickly gain pride in their patch and their history.

“In the division, there are a lot of really proud Soldiers who really wear the patch with pride,” Becerra said. “We joke about the patch, but it’s all I’ve known.”

World War I

Though many Soldiers and NCOs from the 40th Division fought in World War I, they didn’t fight as part of the division, Seby said.

“When the division arrived in France in August 1918, the Germans had just completed a series of offensives that started on March 21 and ended on July 15,” Seby wrote. “These offensives were designed to destroy the American Expeditionary Force before it could be fully constituted. They almost succeeded. It was decided that the new divisions would be used as depot divisions, supplying fresh troops to the more experienced combat divisions. By the end of the war, the 40th Division provided

more than 27,000 replacements to the 26th, 28th, 32nd, 77th, 80th, 81st, 82nd and 89th Divisions.”

By the end of World War I, 2,587 members of the 40th Division had been killed in action and 11,596 wounded. Another 103 died of their wounds at the Camp Kearney post hospital. On April 20, 1919, the division stood down. The division sprung back to life on June 18, 1926, with its headquarters first in Berkeley, Calif., before moving to Los Angeles in 1937.

World War II

By the day after the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, elements of the 40th Division were sent to various strategic locations in Southern California to defend against what many thought would be an imminent attack.

Retired Master Sgt. Duane Whaley, 88, joined the 40th Division in 1940 and still lives in Southern California. He remembers the time well.

“We got the mission to guard the whole West Coast,” Whaley said. “My regiment, the 184th, guarded from the Mexican border all the way up to Oceanside (Calif.). We kept expecting an invasion from Japan.”

Though the attack never came, members of the 40th Division were tasked with rounding up civilians of Japanese descent living in California to relocate them to internment camps. In the book, *The Fighting Fortieth in War and Peace*, James D. Delk wrote about the division’s role.

“Japanese-Americans were moved into relocation camps starting in early February,” Delk wrote. “The 40th Division was tasked with moving these unfortunate civilians and for guarding their possessions. They were forced to quickly liquidate their homes, or arrange for non-Japanese friends to act as caretakers.”

In December 1942, the division moved to Guadalcanal in the South Pacific for training and combat patrolling, Delk said.



Soldiers from the 40th ID arrive at Malaybalay, Mindanao, Phillippines, May 26, 1945. (Photo courtesy of the California State Military History Museum)



Soldiers from the 40th ID arrive at Malaybalay, Mindanao, Phillippines, May 26, 1945. (Photo courtesy of the California State Military History Museum)

“By the middle of January (1943), the movement of the division from Oahu, Hawaii, had been completed,” Delk wrote. “Troops were ordered to always wear their helmets — not to protect themselves from the enemy, but from the very real danger of coconuts falling on their heads. There were coconuts everywhere, planted primarily by the Proctor & Gamble Co., and the heavy coconuts falling 60 or 70 feet could be deadly.”

Whaley said the training and patrols were some of the most difficult in his National Guard career.

“We started doing patrol work all through the jungles of Guadalcanal, looking for a spare Japanese someplace maybe left behind,” Whaley said. “Worst jungle I’ve seen in my life. Mosquitoes were so thick we had to wear a net over our helmets. That’s where I got malaria.”

By December 1944, the Soldiers of the 40th Infantry Division were preparing to depart toward the Philippines for their first major battles of the war, Delk wrote. On Dec. 1, 1944, Maj. Gen. Rapp Brush sent the following message to the Soldiers of the 40th Division:

“We are now entering the most important period in our lives and in the history of our division. The operation in which we are about to participate constitutes the culmination of three long years of war in the Pacific. I am sure that every member of the division is proud that we have been selected to participate in the spearhead attack on this vital objective.

“Through long periods of rigorous training we have molded and hardened ourselves into a highly efficient combat team. Those periods are now behind us. We are about to receive the real test. I feel that we are fully prepared to meet this test and

bring the operation to a speedy and successful conclusion. I have the utmost confidence in you.

“Good luck and God bless you. THIS IS IT!”

Indeed, it was. The division attacked the Japanese at Luzon, Panay and Negros in the Philippines. By March 1, 1945, the enemy had been successfully driven into the mountains, Delk wrote.

“The division was proud of their first real combat,” he wrote. “After the bloody fighting for several weeks, the division was disappointed they were not selected to take Manila. Many Soldiers were convinced that ‘the brass’ didn’t want a National Guard regiment to take Manila, and sent in the Army’s 5th Cavalry (Regiment).”

Japanese staff studies captured in the battles showed how much respect they had for the 40th Division, Delk wrote.

“In the words of the Japanese staff officers, ‘The American ability to organize and deliver hard-driving assaults and their alertness in meeting our night raids was astonishing,’” he wrote. “They were particularly impressed with the division’s mortars, considering them to be the division’s most effective weapon.”

At the end of the fighting, the division was credited with killing or capturing 6,145 Japanese on Luzon, and with killing or capturing 4,732 Japanese on Panay and Negros. In the course of all its fighting during World War II, the 40th Division had 715 killed in action, plus five missing.

Korean War

Peace did not last long after the end of World War II. On June 25, 1950, the North Korean People’s Army invaded the southern Republic of Korea. A month later, the 40th Infantry Division was told to begin mobilizing for Korea. The division was first sent for training at Camp Cooke, Calif. In March 1951, the division’s Soldiers were sent to the Japanese island of Honshu. There they defended the north part of the island while continuing their preparation.



Soldiers from the 40th Infantry Division fight during the Korean War. (Photo courtesy of the California State Military History Museum)

In January 1952, the members of the 40th Division were sent to Pusan, South Korea, to begin relieving the 24th Division on the front lines.

“When the troops arrived in Korea, they were immediately put into the front line,” Delk wrote. “As troops passed the war-weary veterans returning from the front lines, anxiety and apprehension were heightened. The veterans of the 24th Division looked physically tired and emotionally beat. As they pulled off the line into reserve, many of them whispered to 40th Soldiers as they passed, wishing them luck and a safe trip home next year.”

Arriving in January — in the middle of winter — didn’t help matters.

“As advertised, the troops found the sub-zero weather bitterly cold,” Delk wrote. “Many Soldiers would recall this period in Korea as the coldest time of their lives. Artillerymen had to be careful. When they swabbed the bore of their howitzers, water would drip and freeze, which formed a miniature ice rink below the breech. That made it extremely slippery and dangerous when servicing the weapon.”

The battles continued through 1952 and into 1953. By April 1953, the 40th Division was at the Ihyon-Ni-Kalbakkumi sector, nicknamed the “Punch Bowl” because of the natural features in the area. Later, the 40th Division replaced the 45th Infantry Division in the Heartbreak Ridge-Sandbag Castle area before a truce was declared on July 27, 1953.

The fighting in the Punch Bowl was so important to the Soldiers of the 40th Division, a silver punch bowl handmade during the era remains on display at the division’s headquarters at Los Alamitos Joint Forces Training Base in Long Beach, Calif.

“Maj. Gen. Ridgley Gaither had contracted with a Tokyo silversmith to craft a special punch bowl modeled on the Punch Bowl where the division had fought and suffered so many casualties, ...” Delk wrote. “The artisan was given a relief map and told what was desired. He

then crafted a replica of the ‘Punch Bowl,’ which was delivered with a ladle to the division several months later.”

During 342 days of combat in Korea, the 40th Division had 376 men killed in combat, 1,457 wounded in action and three Medals of Honor awarded.

On July 1, 1954, the day after demobilizing from Korea, the 40th Infantry Division became the 40th Armored Division. The 40th Infantry Division came back to life in January 1974.

Peacetime duties

In addition to their wartime duties, the Soldiers and NCOs of the 40th Infantry Division have what is likely the record for most activity during peacetime of any National Guard division.

“The 40th Division has always been headquartered in the most disaster-prone state in the nation,” Delk wrote. “There have been many disastrous earthquakes. ... There have been innumerable forest

fires and floods. And there have been the many riots in prisons, at the docks and in the cities, including the most destructive rioting in our nation’s history. The 40th Division was involved in all of them.”

One of the earliest examples of this was the riot at Folsom State Prison in 1927.

“In November of that year, prisoners at the Folsom State Prison seized control of the main buildings and took several of the staff as hostages,” Sebby wrote. “The warden was unable to control the situation and asked the governor [to send] the National Guard. Telephone calls and announcements over the radio were made. Theaters stopped their shows to announce, ‘All National Guardsmen report to your armory.’ The entire 184th Infantry Regiment and supporting troops ... assembled and moved to Folsom. When the action was over, 11 inmates were dead and 11 wounded.”

In April 1992, the division was called to protect the people of California during the riots that erupted after four Los Angeles police officers were found not guilty in



Sgt. Maj. Javier Becerra, right, poses with a Los Angeles business owner after the 40th Infantry Division secured the streets after the riots in 1992 that started after the Rodney King verdict. (Photo courtesy of Sgt. Maj. Javier Becerra)

the beating of Rodney King. The violence in Los Angeles got so out of control that the division was federalized and reinforced by the 49th Military Police Brigade and 7th Light Infantry Division from Fort Ord, Calif., and the 1st Marine Division from Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Becerra was part of that mission and said what he remembered most was how grateful the residents were to have the Soldiers there keeping the area safe.



As part of a joint task force, Master Sgt. Timothy Kennedy of the 40th ID works side by side with soldiers from the Australian army and a U.S. Marine in July 2011 during Exercise Talisman Sabre 2011 at Kokoda Barracks, Queensland, Australia. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)

“All the lights were out when we pulled in,” Becerra said. “All the people thought we were going to kill them. But the minute the division got involved and was on the ground, everything ceased. I witnessed it; I was there. Everything ceased. There was no more violence.

“When we were on the streets, I remember people coming up to us and giving us food. People gave us keys to their stores in case we needed anything at night,” he said. “Of course we didn’t accept, but just the thought. They said they hadn’t had the feeling of peace on the streets where they could walk at night. When we left, people were literally in tears in the street.

“Wherever we went, we were welcomed,” Becerra said.

The work continues as NCOs ensure Soldiers of the 40th Infantry Division are ready for whatever hits California next, said Sgt. Maj. Sergio Porrás, the operations sergeant major for the 160th Infantry Regiment, 40th Infantry Division.

“The planning that we are doing now is not just for earthquakes, not just for fires, not just for rescue. We’re actually planning a broad spectrum, from terrorist attacks to anytime local governments need support,” Porrás said. “One of the things we’ve been mandated to do is

talk to our local police department, our first responders, and have that relationship with them, to see what their needs are if something does happen.

“I just came from a two-day conference, and that’s all we did — plan how we’re going to support ourselves first, to support the community, either here in the Southern California area or in Northern California,” Porrás said. “Because if something happens in Southern California, the Northern California forces, our sister battalions, will support us and vice versa.”

Moving forward

The NCOs of the 40th Infantry Division said they are proud of their history and use it to inspire their service in the present. Sgt. Maj. Angel Rocha, operations sergeant major for the 40th Division, talked about how his 160th Regimental coin reminds him of the past.

“All around [the coin] it has the history, like the Mexican border, World War I, World War II, Korea, ... during [Operation] Desert Spring when they went over after 9/11 and [Operation] Iraqi Freedom,” Rocha said. “That’s all around the coin.

We’re proud of the history, and we’re taking that and running with it. ‘Old Soldiers never die, they fade away.’ ... They fade away because what we take from them is what makes the

division keep on going. Their training is still part of the lineage. Hopefully we’ll pass it along.”

Sgt. 1st Class Edward Gonzales, personnel service NCO for the Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion of the 40th Infantry Division, said the history he sees at Los Alamitos each day inspires him.

“The history of the 40th Infantry Division has affected me because I like to know about the men who have gone before me,” Gonzales said. “Here at Los Alamitos at division headquarters, we have a foyer displaying the Medal of Honor recipients during the Korean campaign, lots of pictures on the wall from Soldiers in the Second World War, and that gives me a lot of pride. I came off of active duty from the 82nd [Airborne Division]; when joining this unit, I realized that we had just as much glory and honor as the 82nd had during the Second World War.

“The one big thing that stands out that I don’t think I really appreciated when I was in the 82nd is that the 40th Infantry Division is made up of citizen-Soldiers in the true sense,” Gonzales said. “They have an outside life. They are civilians, and then when they are called upon, they put on the uniform and serve. Having deployed with them a couple of times now, I realize how

important that is. In 30 days, you could find yourself overseas somewhere. And to think that we've been doing that ever since the First World War, it's impressive how the members of this division quickly train up and take their part in history.

"I think it's important that our Soldiers know that they come from a long line," Gonzales said.

Remembering the difficult battles of the past and how hard Soldiers had it is also a good source of inspiration, Porras said.

"It inspires me because it's really humbling to know their experience," Porras said. "These gentlemen have put their lives on the line for us before we even got here, and some of the stories they tell us, they really had it hard. In comparison to what we have today, we're living the life of luxury. It's pretty inspirational, and in my battalion, I try to teach my junior NCOs, 'Hey, this is important, and here are the reasons why. Right now you might not understand it, but if you reach the senior ranks and you're involved in planning and other things, this is stuff you need to consider.'"

Recent cutbacks in the division had Becerra thinking about more ways to preserve and honor the sacrifice of those who have come before.

"When we get our new troops in, one of the things I have them do is walk down the hall and see some of the division history," Becerra said. "I want them to know at least a little bit about the division. I think the bottom line is we have to teach our young Soldiers the history, because one day, the division is going to be gone. And all that is going to be left of the 40th Division when they tear down this building is what we remember." ■

40th ID Timeline

- **April 6, 1917:** United States enters World War I.
- **Sept. 16, 1917:** The 40th Division is organized at Camp Kearny, Calif.
- **Aug. 31, 1918:** All 40th Division troops have been sent to Europe.
- **June 18, 1926:** 40th Division headquarters established in Berkeley, Calif.
- **Nov. 24–26, 1927:** 40th helps control Folsom Prison riots.

- **March 10, 1933:** 40th Division troops respond to Long Beach earthquake.
- **July 5, 1934:** 40th Division elements activated for longshoremen's strike in San Francisco.
- **Dec. 7, 1941:** Japanese attack Pearl Harbor. 40th Division immediately provides security for southern California.



A silver punch bowl, made to commemorate fighting during the Korean War, sits at the headquarters of the 40th Infantry Division at Los Alamitos Joint Forces Training Base, Calif. The division's Medal of Honor winners are also on display. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester)

- **July 8, 1942:** 40th Division starts move to Hawaii, completed in early October 1942.
- **Dec. 20, 1943:** 40th Division leaves for Guadalcanal.
- **April 23, 1944:** Elements of the 40th Division relieve 1st Marine Division on New Britain, Papua New Guinea.
- **Jan. 9, 1945:** 40th Division invades Luzon, Philippines.
- **June 15–18, 1945:** 40th Division elements return from Negros to Panay.
- **Aug. 14, 1945:** Japan accepts unconditional surrender terms.
- **April 7, 1946:** 40th Division inactivated at Camp Stoneman, Calif.
- **Oct. 14, 1946:** 40th Division reorganized and federally recognized at Los Angeles.
- **Sept. 1, 1950:** 40th Division activated for Korea. Advance party departs for Camp Cooke (now Vandenberg Air Force Base).
- **April 10, 1951:** 40th Division advance elements arrive in Japan. Division given mission of defending north Honshu while training.
- **Dec. 22, 1951:** 40th Division alerted for move to Korea to relieve 24th ID.
- **Jan. 6, 1952:** First ship departs Japan for Korea with first elements of the 40th Division.

- **Jan. 20, 1952:** 40th Division's first loss in the Korean War was Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Kaiser Jr., killed near Kumsong.
- **April 1952:** Enemy probes of the division's lines increase. A total of 3,636 enemy rounds hit in April.
- **May 1952:** Fewer contacts initiated by the enemy. A total of 2,722 enemy mortar and artillery rounds hit in May.
- **June 26–28, 1952:** 2nd Republic of Korea Division relieves the 40th ID.
- **Oct. 16, 1952:** 40th ID ordered to relieve 25th Division in the Paem-Ihyon-Ni sector.
- **April 27, 1953:** 40th Division deploys across Ihyon-Ni-Kalbakkumi (Punch Bowl) sector.
- **May 8, 1954:** Final review of 40th Division in Republic of Korea.
- **June 30, 1954:** 40th ID is released from active federal service and reverts to state control.
- **July 1, 1954:** 40th Infantry Division reorganizes and is redesignated as the 40th Armored Division.
- **Jan. 25–27, 1956:** 40th AD elements assist during floods in Los Angeles area.
- **Aug. 13–24, 1965:** 40th AD employed to control the Watts Riots in Los Angeles.
- **Jan. 13, 1974:** 40th ID (Mechanized) is organized and federally recognized with its headquarters in Long Beach, Calif.
- **April 1981:** 40th ID headquarters moved to Los Alamitos Joint Forces training base.
- **April–May 1992:** 40th ID employed to control Los Angeles riots after the Rodney King verdict.
- **Jan. 17, 1994:** After the Northridge earthquake, 40th Division elements establish tent cities and provide security.
- **From Sept. 11, 2001, to present day:** Elements of the 40th Infantry Division have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Division's Soldiers remain on guard and on watch to help after natural disasters or other emergencies in California.



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

