



United States Army

The First Filipino Infantry

Military Corner

Constituted in March 1942, the 1st Filipino Infantry Battalion was activated in April at Camp San Luis Obispo to liberate the Philippines. Colonel Robert Offley was selected as the unit's commanding officer, as he spoke Tagalog and had spent time on Mindoro in his youth. During the following months, Filipino Americans continued to volunteer and the unit grew. Philippine Army personnel who were in the United States and Filipino military personnel who had escaped the fall of the Philippines and were recuperating in the US were also instructed to report to the unit. In July 1942, the battalion was elevated to a regiment.

The Regiment continued to train and grow, leading to the activation of the 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiment at Fort Ord in November 1942. The 2nd Regiment was assigned to Camp Cooke and the 1st to Camp Beale. Eventually, more than 7,000 soldiers would be assigned to the Filipino Infantry Regiments. While at Camp Beale, there was a mass naturalization ceremony of 1,200 soldiers of the Regiment. As members of the armed forces, they were able to become citizens; in 1924, naturalization of Filipino Americans had been barred, as it was determined that only aliens could be naturalized and Filipinos at the time were nationals.

Members of the Regiment faced discrimination during this period. The anti-miscegenation laws in California meant that the soldiers were banned from marrying non-Filipino women; soldiers who wished to marry in this way were transported to Gallup, New Mexico, as New Mexico had repealed its anti-miscegenation law after the Civil War. Soldiers of the Regiment faced discrimination in Marysville while visiting from neighboring Camp Beale, as the local businesses refused to serve Filipinos. This was later remedied by the Regiment's commander, who informed the Chamber of Commerce that they were failing to cooperate with the Army, at which point they changed their business practices. Further instances of discrimination against soldiers of the Regiment were also reported in Sacramento and San Francisco, where they were mistaken for Japanese Americans.



In April 1944, the Regiment was deployed to Oro Bay, New Guinea. Upon arriving at Oro Bay, it was assigned to the 31st Infantry Division, 8th Army to provide area security and continue training. Some soldiers were then assigned to the Alamo Scouts, the 5217th Reconnaissance Battalion, and to the Philippine Regional Section of Allied Intelligence Bureau. Due to the reassignment of these soldiers, both Filipino Infantry Regiments became smaller than authorized. In response, the 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiment was disbanded and used to bring the 1st Filipino Infantry Regiment to 125% of its standard allocated size. During its time at Oro Bay the Regiment was reinforced with Filipinos from Hawaii. These men had not been able to enlist in the Army until 1943 as the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association had successfully argued that their labor was needed in the sugar industry.

In February 1945, the Regiment was sent to Leyte and was assigned to the Americal Division, 10th Corps. It would later be reassigned back to the 8th Army, in May 1945. Finally in the Philippines, it conducted "mopping up" operations on Leyte, Samar, and other islands in the Visayan islands group. In addition, some of the companies of the Regiment provided security for 8th Army General Headquarters, Far East Air Force, two airstrips at Tanauan and Tacloban, and Seventh Fleet Headquarters. Other soldiers would also participate in the Luzon Campaign, fighting on the Bataan Peninsula, and the recapture of former Fort Mills; the Regiment was not awarded formal campaign participation for these individual actions. *[Wikipedia]*