

## CHAPTER 2

### UNIT TRAINING

**B**ASIC training was over; now began the even harder task of welding the combat team into a single fighting unit. The men knew their weapons; they knew how to take advantage of cover; they could find their way long distances on the blackest night; they had worked together as squads on small problems. It remained to make platoons out of squads, companies out of platoons, and battalions out of companies. During basic the GIs finished their training and came back to a hot shower, a hot meal, and a warm if not always comfortable bed. Unit training would wean them away from this, enable them to live in the field for long periods, to endure cold, rain, inadequate blankets, to keep going even if they missed a meal or a night's sleep.

Platoon and company training began about October 20 and ended a month later. During those weeks casual observers would have found small units of Nisei charging through the alternate sand hills and swamps of Mississippi in pursuit of an enemy represented by a few targets or some of their less fortunate comrades armed with blank ammunition. The men learned the principle of fire and movement; one squad or one platoon laying down the fire to keep the enemy pinned to the ground while other elements circled to his exposed flank or rear to drive in and destroy him at his weakest point. They came in contact with the theory of economy of force: throw your greatest strength at the weakest point in the enemy line rather than hammer at his strong point. Always keenly interested in the "why" of things, the soldiers recognized these principles, among the oldest in warfare, as sound. They practiced them religiously, knowing that they might some day mean the difference between life and death on a battlefield.

Among other things the lads from Hawaii had never seen were snakes, in which the South abounds. Some adventuresome soul was forever throwing the bivouac into an uproar as he came wandering in with a snake of some description. The worst of these were the coral snakes, one of America's smallest, deadliest, and most beautifully colored snakes. When the men could catch and kill them they liked to preserve them in bottles of alcohol because they were so pretty.

By the middle of November the weather had turned wet and cold, which was especially hard on the Hawaiians, used to a very temperate climate the year round. By this time, however, they were hardy soldiers so they bundled up in everything they owned and went on with the job. At the moment the job was learning to operate with the heavy weapons and depend on them. Each rifle company learned to go as far as it could on its own considerable firepower and then call on the heavy mortars and machine guns to blast the enemy loose from his positions.

In the headquarters companies the wire men and radio men were learning their trade, keeping communications open under the worst possible conditions, laying wire as far forward as it would go and then relying on radio. Antitank Company and the battalion antitank platoons ranged far and wide as they defended the regiment's flanks from hordes of imaginary *Panzer* units. They found out that they couldn't always get to the best position on a truck, so they swore and manhandled the heavy 57s into positions they could defend. Service Company was getting acquainted with the problems of supplying a scattered regiment in the field, complicated by changes without notice coming every hour on the hour. Cannon Company, a late starter, was still learning the intricacies of baby howitzers.

While this was going on the 522d Field Artillery was on the field ranges day in and day out, rain or shine, perfecting techniques of fire. Both officers and enlisted men trained as forward observers, a practice which later paid big dividends when forward-observer casualties were heavy. The gun crews learned the dexterity which paid off in thousands of rounds which later blasted a path for the advance of the infantry in the hills of France and Italy. The battalion fire direction center learned to coordinate its three firing batteries, and tie in the battalion's fire with that of other artillery units.

On the completion of this phase of training Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair, Chief of the vast Army Ground Forces machine, made an inspection of the Combat Team, arriving November 22. The following day, the infantry swung into battalion training, and on the 24th, the 522d Field Artillery, having exhausted the possibilities of Camp Shelby,

swung south to participate in the Louisiana maneuvers.

At about the same time, November 18, 1943, the War Department reclassified American citizens of Japanese ancestry for military service, restoring to them the rights and duties of citizenship which had been denied them shortly after Pearl Harbor. Then, in an unprecedented step, the War Department also permitted the induction of Japanese aliens into the United States Army, provided they volunteered and met certain other specifications. It was also announced that one of the chief reasons for the change in policy was the outstanding record in training and conduct made by the 442d Combat Team.

Thanksgiving Day came and went and the men had turkey and all the trimmings, but they ate it out of mess kits in the field. The chaplains conducted services, and the men knelt on the ground and prayed to God to give them courage and to protect their loved ones. The war was tough right then, and the men knew it was getting closer for them. Not all the Nisei are Christians, and those who were not prayed to the Deity of their own faith in their own way, because that was their right and their privilege.

The battalion commanders and their staffs were busy then, welding their battalions together. Simple problems came first: attacking an objective 2500 yards away with two companies abreast. That sounded easy because the only problem was to walk 2500 yards in a straight line, stopping at pre-designated phase lines to reorganize. The problem was run solely to emphasize the difficulties of controlling a company of men in broken terrain when the men are moving forward a considerable distance apart. The officers and men learned something new that day: control is the most important and most difficult single factor in warfare. So the officers thereafter used their sergeants more to assist in keeping the attack organized. The problem had served its purpose.

After that came more difficult exercises. The men were stopped and pinned to the ground by simulated artillery fire as they advanced to meet the enemy. The battalion commander was forced to commit his reserve company after the company commanders had committed their support platoons and failed. This problem demonstrated that the time involved in getting messages back and getting a large group of men moving forward was much greater than was commonly supposed, for problems in training do

not take so long to complete as the same operation in battle. Still other problems brought the heavy weapons company into play. Night attacks and night withdrawals to new positions gave the battalions insight into the difficulties of operating in darkness, when even the most familiar ground looks strangely different and it is almost impossible to move quietly. They learned that it was necessary to make elaborate plans, prepare for any eventuality, and make visual reconnaissance of every foot of ground before launching a night operation. Withdrawals had to be planned to the job of the very last man. In battle there was not always time to do these things, but the fundamentals were the same. Every man knew the how and the why, and as much preparation was made as time and the enemy permitted.

The regimental commander, Colonel Pence, took his regiment into the field as a unit for the first time on December 13, holding exercises that ran until the day before Christmas. Training was getting into higher levels now. Battalion staffs learned to work with the regimental staff. Battalions attacked or took defensive positions side by side, coordinating their fires, helping each other out of tough spots, keeping contact in heavily wooded terrain. Tactics were going into high levels, but the privates in the rear rank, the guys who carried the rifles and brought up the ammunition, still wanted to know why. Why did the regimental commander do this? Why did we withdraw to this position instead of another one?



Someone was always wandering in with a snake of some description

The officers and NCOs did their best to answer an avalanche of questions ranging from "How much artillery support do we have for this problem?" to the inevitable "What the hell happened to the chow last night?" Some of the GIs who kept the officers on their toes with questions were later officers themselves—platoon leaders and company commanders.

Christmas day saw the regiment back in Camp Shelby getting ready for Christmas dinner. Thanksgiving had been spent in the field, but the cooks and mess sergeants gave the companies a real Christmas feast. The men stuffed themselves until movement became an effort. Company parties that night shook the walls and rattled the windows for miles around as the men adjourned to the mess halls to drink beer and sing. The next day they took to the field again for more problems.

The final phase of training before maneuvers was combined training, which involved work with artillery support. Since the 522d was still on maneuvers it was impossible for the Combat Team to function as a unit; however, the problems went on with the aid of a "borrowed" artillery battalion. Part of the time was spent working with the 232d Engineers, who demonstrated their abilities in support of the infantry. Several times the regimental commander called on the engineers to execute demolitions and then dig in as infantry to defend them so as to delay an enemy advance. The rest of the time before maneuvers was devoted to cleaning up equipment after many weeks in the field and brushing up on small-unit problems and firing again.

The Office of Strategic Services, the cloak-and-dagger society, put in an appearance at regimental headquarters early in January. On the 14th, four officers and nineteen enlisted men left with Captain Parker of OSS for an unknown destination. What part these men played in the war is not known to the members of the Combat Team to this day, but most of the GIs felt that if the Nisei were good enough for OSS, they could play on anybody's team.

Just five days later, on January 19, ten officers and 165 men were transferred to Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. They were going overseas as replacements for the Nisei 100th Infantry Battalion, fighting with the veteran 34th Division in the hills before Cassino. This first group of replacements reached the 100th just in time to participate in the battle of Anzio when Anzio was still one of the hottest spots on the face of the earth.

"D" Series maneuvers began on January 28, 1944,

in the DeSoto National Forest, Mississippi. They were conducted by the 69th Infantry Division, Major General Charles L. Bolte commanding. The 442d Infantry and the 232d Engineers were attached to the division for operations, working as a part of the division for the first three problems and being the "red" or enemy force for the last three. The men probably learned more as a unit of the division, but they had a lot more fun being the enemy.

Maneuvers being what they are, there were always a certain number of snafus. The umpires were the unhappiest people on the field no matter who won or lost the battle. There were not enough umpires to mark the simulated artillery and mortar fire properly. As a consequence when the shells, represented by some unhappy second lieutenant with a red and white flag, rained down on some command post, the bearer of the bad news was always subject to a long speech on his ancestry, manners, morals, and several other items. Neither were there always enough umpires to stop attacks on enemy positions short of physical contact. When this happened, the bayonet charge or encircling movement usually ended up in a grand and glorious brawl because the defenders were never convinced that the position was lost.

One memorable day the 2d Battalion was held up by an extensive minefield which the enemy had apparently conjured up out of thin air. Looking around, Lieutenant Colonel James M. Hanley, battalion C.O., spied a herd of cattle peacefully minding its own business and ordered it driven through the "minefield." After a heated discussion of the legality of this move, the battalion continued with the attack. The cattle took a very dim view of the proceedings.

Weather for the first three problems was all that anyone could have asked for; it was cold, but clear and dry. During the last three problems it rained continuously until everyone was thoroughly soaked and miserable.

The exercises gave the men stories to tell in months to come, but they also gave them a very real picture of what battle would be like: the vast problems of troop movement and supply, the confusion resulting from sudden breakthroughs. Unless a unit is well trained a sudden breakthrough of the enemy's defenses can be just as disastrous as if the enemy had pierced our lines. Everyone learned to travel with only what he needed and to conserve rations and water, because there were times when the foot soldiers had to push on with bridges blown behind them

so that supplies and food could not get up. The GIs in the rear rank found that they had to think and take initiative when key officers and noncoms became casualties. Their officers had been telling them for months that every man ought to know how to fill a position higher than the one he had, and now the men found out that the officers had been right. The 232d Engineers discovered just how tough it is to keep the roads and bridges open so supplies can get through, especially when minutes count.

Perhaps the problem in which the Combat Team performed best was the third of the series. The three battalions moved out on parallel roads to seek out the enemy defensive positions. The mission was to locate his flanks and keep up a steady pressure until the rest of the division could be brought up to attack. The 1st Battalion was on the left, the 2d in the center and the 3d on the right. All three battalions made contact with the Red force. The 1st Battalion located the enemy right flank but was unable to advance. The 2d Battalion, bucking the strongest part of the enemy line; was stopped temporarily. Lieutenant Colonel Sherwood Dixon, commanding the 3d Battalion, discovered that the enemy left was protected only by a series of some thirteen blown bridges. Colonel Dixon immediately launched an attack on the enemy defenses, striking with one company until it was stopped and then striking the strongpoint in the rear with a second company. He was greatly aided in this by the appearance of G Company, sent by the 2d Battalion commander to make a wide encirclement to the right.

As the enemy flank came unhinged, the 2d Battalion, by then in contact with the 3d, advanced, and the now disorganized enemy was squeezed between the two forces. One company surrendered intact, most of two others were wiped out. The battalion command post, kitchen train, and motor pool were taken intact by the 3d Battalion. The Combat Team had not only found the enemy defenses, but was also in a good position to destroy them completely by rolling up the flank when the director of maneuvers called a halt so that the other two regiments of the division could be called into play before the end of the problem. The accomplishment of the unit was especially noteworthy in that the major attack was made at night.

The 522d Field Artillery, fresh from six weeks of maneuvers in Louisiana, rejoined the Combat Team on February 7, in time to participate in the

last three problems of the "D" Series exercises. The redlegs performed creditably in backing up the regiment, and some of their men came around to swap lies with the infantry Joes about their experiences.

After maneuvers the men came back to Shelby, scraped off the mud, and began again the endless task of cleaning up their equipment. The Combat Team was commended for proficiency by Major General Charles H. White, Commanding General of IX Corps, and Major General Charles L. Bolte, Commanding General of the 69th Division.

The entire Combat Team now began the business of brushing up on its small-unit tactics, reviewing and correcting the weaknesses that had turned up during the last hectic weeks in the field. Twenty officers and 210 men left for Fort George G. Meade, Maryland, for transshipment to Italy and the 100th Battalion.

There was also a certain amount of combat firing and review work on marksmanship to be completed, as well as some of the fundamentals of soldiering that had by necessity been allowed to fall into the background during the months in the field. All was peace and quiet on February 21 when forty replacement officers joined the combat team from various infantry replacement training centers. With them came a whole host of new and exciting rumors, the most prevalent of which was that the unit would go overseas without going on extensive maneuvers.

No sooner had the officers gotten the rumors squelched than it was announced that the Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, would review the Combat Team. Early in the morning of March 4, the Combat Team was drawn up on parade, officers and men at ramrod attention, polished and pressed to within an inch of their young lives. As the Chief of Staff marched down the line, many of the men were surprised that he was very tall and every inch a soldier. His keen eyes probed and prodded here and there in the ranks, missing nothing. Several times he stopped and asked a man a question. Then, as quickly and briskly as he had come, he was gone. Colonel Pence returned and announced to the men that General Marshall had been pleased with what he had seen. The men relaxed and a tiny ripple of conversation ran through the ranks. One lieutenant heaved a great sigh and muttered more to himself than anyone else, "Well, that was the kiss of death." Ten days later, the Combat Team was directed to prepare for overseas movement.