

V. THE “CENTURY”

My orders sent me to Company “G,” 2nd Battalion, 399th Infantry Regiment, 100th (“Century”) Division, then at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina. It was March 27, 1944, just past my 19th birthday, and my “Good War” was about to become very much more real, with my assignment to the 3rd squad of the 3rd Platoon, where I eventually became the B.A.R. (Browning Automatic Rifle) man.

The 100th Division was activated, at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, in November 1942. Its original mission was to be the training of infantry replacements for the combat infantry divisions scattered, literally at that time, all over the world. There was a cadre of experienced non-commissioned officers, many of whom stayed with the Division throughout its original active life. Under their tutelage, and with their assistance, many hundreds, even thousands, of enlisted men and officers became combat soldiers and went off to war. This continued right up until the time in the Summer of 1944 when, the Division having finally received its own overseas shipment orders; though men continued to be transferred in, no one was any longer shipped out. Soon enough we would all ship out, together.

By 1944 the Division had acquitted itself with merit in a mammoth maneuver exercise in Tennessee, and had subsequently been relocated to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Here, in March of 1944, the Division received a large contingent of some 4,000 soldiers from the recently deactivated ASTP. I was one of this group.

For the next six months we trained, sometimes hard, especially near the end, sometimes not so hard, but always we trained. We learned to live with almost constant hard physical activity and not much sleep. As a matter of fact, we learned how to sleep soundly and restoratively during ten-minute breaks. We had weapons training, field maneuvers, physical conditioning, and we got to know each other very well. As a matter of fact, although I would never have admitted the possibility at the time—because I felt over-worked and abused—we were very well and skillfully trained, for which we had ample reason to be grateful not too much further along. Always in the back of our minds was the knowledge that sooner or later we would be somewhere in combat with the enemy. Now it seems to me that we always expected to be sent to Europe, but I don’t really remember whether that was true.

A long story started in the *Newsletter* in 1990 and continued in installments for several years. This story was told through the medium of the letters home from the Army of Alfred C. “Bud” Stimes who entered the Service from the family farm in Illinois. Bud was homesick sometimes, hungry always—and he tried conscientiously to share his new experiences. His family kept all of his letters and he was able to edit and transcribe them for us on his “1947 Model” Underwood typewriter. They are warm, sometimes funny, and are a valuable insight now into the feelings of one participant in the life of a young soldier in 1944. We printed them just as he sent them to us (though they’re edited down a bit here, as they were sometimes repetitive). Bud introduced the letters for us with the following:

"My parents were dairy farmers at Capron, Boone County, Illinois and I joined the army at age 18, on February 6, 1944 at Fort Sheridan near Chicago. We had only a few weeks basic training at Fort Benning at a time when ground forces were increasingly engaged in the Mediterranean and Pacific theaters and the cross channel invasion was immanent.

"Over 90% of my letters were preserved by my parents, aunts, uncle and others and were returned to me many years ago and preserved in two shoe boxes kept on my closet shelf in Broadview, Illinois for over 40 years. I missed cookies and cold milk in each letter. You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy. I was looking at crops while I wasn't thinking about food. What a chow hound!"

He gave us letters starting in March 1944, after he reached the 100th Division from his basic training Post, Fort Benning, Georgia, his correspondents included his parents, Mr. Boyd, editor of the *Boone County Courier* in Capron, two aunts and an uncle, and his sister. He headed the first group of letters:

COMING TO FORT BRAGG NORTH CAROLINA FROM FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

March 27, 1944. "Our trip was slow and dirty and very tiring. On Saturday morning we got in our O.D.'s and packed our barracks bags. I loaded them in a baggage car on a siding about 6 miles from our barracks. We hauled them on a truck and came back for an early dinner. By noon we were marching the six miles afoot. It was plenty warm with blouse and furlough bags. I got your latest letter before you left and the cookies the day before. No gift can have been more welcome as that train ride was torture. A trip of 450 miles in the amazing time of 30 hours. We have four meals on the train served in the baggage car. All there was to do was read and eat so I am glad I had some cookies. Our train wasn't a Pullman so we didn't spend a very enjoyable evening. Every freight had the right of way and in one siding we watched 5 trains with stream line engines go by. All pulled freight cars and were headed south... Don't believe the ads about troops traveling in comfort... On the way up here, the grain is 6 inches high and everyone has a garden growing. The whole state is covered with cherry and peach blossoms in full bloom. Frankly, the South disappoints me inasmuch (as) I haven't seen one plantation. Some towns have beautiful homes but the R.R. tracks are lined with shacks..."

March 28, 1944. "... The South has fewer cotton fields than the average person expects. For miles there is little to see besides pine trees and swamps. I have seen more saw mills than cotton gins although there are several cotton gins and warehouses.

"None of the farms are large or prosperous looking compared to the Middle West. There are no large plantations as the movies depict but all kinds of shacks. No matter how poor the house looks it invariably has a shining tin roof. All rural buildings seem so weatherbeaten and a painted house is an oddity. Some of the cities are stately looking with fine houses and paved streets but the villages of poor homes far outnumber them.

"None of the fields are over 10 acres and the barns are only large enough for a cow and a few mules. Two familiar objects absent from the landscape are fences and outdoor billboards... I am thankful my roots are still in Illinois."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

March 27, 1944. "This is Fort Bragg in North Carolina and the weather is superb... When we got off the train a band greeted us and we were glad to touch good earth... This camp is 100% better than Benning. We are now in a line outfit and therefore our basic will be cut short. Everyone is glad there is no more ASTP. Our outfit is the 100th Division. We move to our permanent companies at 4 o'clock. All of us are split up into this large division and I drew Co. G. It is a rifle company and I will have to start all over as we have been separated. There are advantages as we have better mess halls and nice dayrooms besides a super-duper PX. In a line outfit we get insignia and a better deal. No one was sorry to leave our dear non-coms. I have retrieved my barracks bag and it hasn't been damaged."

March 28, 1944. "I am in the 100th Division which is being reorganized. It is a line outfit and is vastly superior to our basic training center... In this outfit we practice with the real McCoy and not imaginary objects. No one is permitted to transfer to the Air Corps... I can say that I personally think the infantry is tops."

"This camp has everything and then some. We are next to a mess hall which pleases me immensely as the cooks know how to dish it out. There are conveniently located chapels, PX's, and theaters within 2 blocks. Also we have a service club with civilian employees and an opportunity for every sort of recreation... We are on line with an airport runway and huge cargo planes go roaring over at low altitudes all the hours of the day. Also to the north of us is a firing range which sounds like popcorn popping all the time."

March 31, 1944. "Yesterday afternoon we marched 5 miles in an 1 1/2 [sic]. Some walking is hard when the sand is ankle deep... I have \$14 left so it will last till we get our supplementary pay around the 10th... The movies are 15¢ and a carton of candy bars for 96¢. Our chow is so good there is little excuse to eat too much sweets. Tonight I bought 2 pints of ice cream for 15¢ a pint. At this camp we have cereal for breakfast and plenty of desserts. Tonight we had roast pork and for dinner the best fish I've ever tasted. Of course we always have 2 or 3 vegetables. I have gained about four pounds but my waist is one inch smaller... Maybe I will get into Fayetteville over the weekend, but they tell me one is soon glad to get back to camp. There are four chapels within sight so I have no excuse for not attending... Last Wednesday Lt. Gen. McNair and 5 other generals reviewed our 100th Division. One of the sergeants was awarded the first Expert Infantryman [sic] Badge. Two large bands played and the whole division passed in review. We were in formation at the right of the stand. It is impressive with all the flags and vehicles and artillery. The days aren't too warm but spring isn't too far distant. I will close as they sell two sheets per envelope and I must come out even."

FIRST DAYS AT FORT BRAGG WITH THE A.S.T.P. TRAINING PLATOON

Company G, 399th Infantry Regiment,

Led by T/Sgt. Michael Doherty

March 28, 1944. "As you already noticed I have a new home... our basic training here will be hurried up ... today a shipment of college fellows in the ASTP joined us [I was in this group]... This summer we will go on maneuvers and after that we might see an ocean. There is a desperate shortage of vigorous infantry divisions so they are yanking all the young fellows out of the Air Corps and colleges to form it... Our morale is good when we can point to our shoulder patch and say we are in the 100th Division... Our food is excellent and facilities are better in general... to our north is the firing range so we have plenty of sound effects ... Today I had a physical exam and finished up my shots. I washed out my underwear, socks, & towel in no time flat so I am learning fast."

April 6, 1944. "I hit the hay at 11:15 and I really fell away to slumberland as we had a 7 mile fast march in 1 hour 45 minutes and half of it was through ankle deep sand... Tomorrow night we have a tactical problem from 6:30 until 3:30... Today we had instruction in field fortifications, barbed wire entanglements, defense from mechanized forces, recognition of enemy equipment, and recognition of U.S. equipment... One day we had 3 hours of first aid and field sanitation and we learned the use of sulfa drugs and bandages in our first aid pouch... Also I could use some clean sheets that are beyond salvage. I want them to wipe my rifle as I cut them into 2 inch squares and run them through the bore ... soon we will have a supplementary pay so I need no money."

April 12, 1944. "Last night I attended the 100th Division boxing matches and they had some high caliber talent. Our company champ won the heavyweight and was it a fight! ... We have now been issued everything except bayonets. Our leather gloves would cost a civilian a pretty sum if bought in a store. They are for plowing through barbed wire. This will be my first time I will eat out of my mess gear... Tomorrow I have table waiting which is clearing off the table and cleaning the floors. It is a relief for the KP's... We practiced a half hour today with the whole battalion as there is to be a review this weekend. (Then lots of questions about the baby chicks, the price of oats, spring planting, the new horse team, and the school elections.)"

April 16, 1944. "Some hermits sit in the barracks all the time writing letters but I see all the good movies and then write letters. On the other hand some of the veterans of this company never get much mail but they have time to play poker and shoot craps. I haven't received a regular payday since I was inducted... I am never hungry for pop or candy but I average a pint of ice cream daily... Yesterday I purchased some patches to sew on my shoulder and it took me all afternoon to sew on 4. I kept sewing my sleeves together... (After a night exercise) at 11 o'clock we started back to camp across country. Over hills and dales, but mostly over bushes and logs. Several soldiers fell down in McPherson's creek, but the worst for me was wet feet."

April 18, 1944. "(Thanked mother for boxes of donuts and magazines.) I ate two donuts and two Ping candy bars for my lunch on our compass course this

morning. I carry them in my mess can so I am always prepared. We walked a compass course of 3 1/2 miles this morning in groups of three. The highlight was a jaunt through the swamps about 150 yards deep. Everything here is either a sand dune or a swamp. This afternoon we started range procedure for the rifle. We have all kinds of training on sight and sling adjustment, sighting, use of score book, rapid fire, and trigger squeeze. Next week we are on the range and then our training will be sufficient for us to join the regular company... Our detachment started at 90 and is now down to 24... It is rumored that all ASTP men are being transferred and the 100th regulars get P. of Embarkation... As to your questions, I wear my dog tags at all times and we have pillows and mattresses. We have two wool blankets and a comforter in cold weather. Once a week we turn in our soiled sheet and pillowcase. We have one sheet, so it is a problem to use it. For one thing I don't thrash around like I used to as a civilian... I am thankful for the sheet (I received from you) as we can't get patches or even a cleaning rod to clean our rifles."

April 20, 1944. "I can buy Look magazine and each Sunday I buy the Baltimore American which is a Hearst paper... I attend the movies 2 or 3 times a week depending on the caliber of the show... I am going to Fayetteville this week or bust. Our barracks is thinned out now and we have lots of room.

April 23, 1944. "On our radio we can listen to Chicago weather reports... Some days last week have been as bad as any August day in Illinois... Our furlough list came out and I am 37 out of 41 so I ought to home in July or August. Yesterday the ex-ASTP boys were addressed by Maj. Gen. Buress. He assured us that we are now official members of the 100th Division and that we would have proper training before seeing overseas service. Several scores of officers have been shipped overseas and our whole company has only 2 Lts. When we are supposed to have four 2nd Lts., one 1st Lt., and one captain... Our clothing is rugged and doesn't wear out rapidly. We wear our green fatigues most of the time and they are merely overalls... Last Friday I witnessed a bazooka demonstration. It is more technically known as the rocket launcher... They shoot out exhaust to the rear and the rocket the other end."

April 22, 1944. "Tomorrow I am going to town and learn some geography. Your \$5 bill was welcome as I could see very little in my wallet... Today we had practice (rifle) firing complete with flags and targets and all the accompanying oral commands... We trainees work harder than the regular company but only one week of basic remains to be completed. I feel I am earning my \$50 whenever I do get paid."

April 26, 1944. "Today we wound up our range shooting... I qualified on the record shooting and I got a score of 43 out of 45 on rapid fire at 200 yards... It takes 3 hours to clean the rifle after it has been fired... The rifle is very accurate once the sights are set and you know how to assume the positions. On rapid fire we stand erect with one cartridge in the chamber and a clip of eight in our belt. We have 51 seconds to fire them all and we do it from the sitting position. We also fired slow at 500 yards and I got 4 bulls out of 8 which isn't too bad. The other range we fire at is 300 yards. It is fun to shoot but oh! all these hours of cleaning it takes to clean them properly. Tomorrow we join the regular

company and start out by going through the infiltration course. I don't know what it is about so I will write the details in my next letter... Payday in 4 days."

The 100th division was at near full strength after we ASTP men arrived on the scene, but very quickly large numbers of fully trained soldiers and officers were transferred away as combat infantry replacements. The Division commenced then to complete the basic training of former students who hadn't finished it. Other ASTP men, myself included, had already had 13 weeks or more of basic training, and had "tested out," so we had been assigned to the regular platoons from our arrival. In comparison to the other newcomers, we almost got to loaf through their training days. During the course of that Spring and early Summer, however, the training for all intensified. We received many transfers in from the by then over-staffed MPs, Army Air Corps, Coast Artillery, Signal Corps, and many recent draftees as well, until we again reached full strength. Quickly enough it became obvious to all that the 100th Division's training mission had been fulfilled and that it was soon to become a combat division in its own right.

VI. MORE TRAINING – MAY & JUNE

LETTERS SENT HOME FROM FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

April 30, 1944. "... We are now done with (rifle) firing so once we get the carbon out it will remain fairly clean. Also I have fired the carbine... The carbine looks and feels like a toy, but it still is a deadly weapon. On Thursday we went through the infiltration course. We crawl 75 yards with live machine gun bullets firing just over our heads. To make it interesting they had barbed wire and smoke pots all over. It was a hectic 10 minutes and when we were finished up we had a coat of red clay on us. Almost 4 hours were required to clean up... Tomorrow is payday and also we change into our summer uniforms... Our food is plentiful and tasty. We even get berry pies that remind me of mother's... We are now ready to be assigned to the regular company... I am getting quite proficient in the art of sewing and laundering..."

April 30, 1944. "... I have been doing nothing all week but cleaning my rifle ... a pitted rifle ... makes for perpetual gigs... I have had no free time to write letters because my rifle comes first... I am gaining weight and weigh 164 pounds with civilian shoes and two suppers in me. Our chow is excellent but we live on eggs three meals a day. The QMC purchased the surplus eggs of the country and we get them for breakfast, in salads, vegetables, and they even put hard boiled eggs in today's meat loaf... This morning I sewed on buttons, a shoulder