

TRAINING



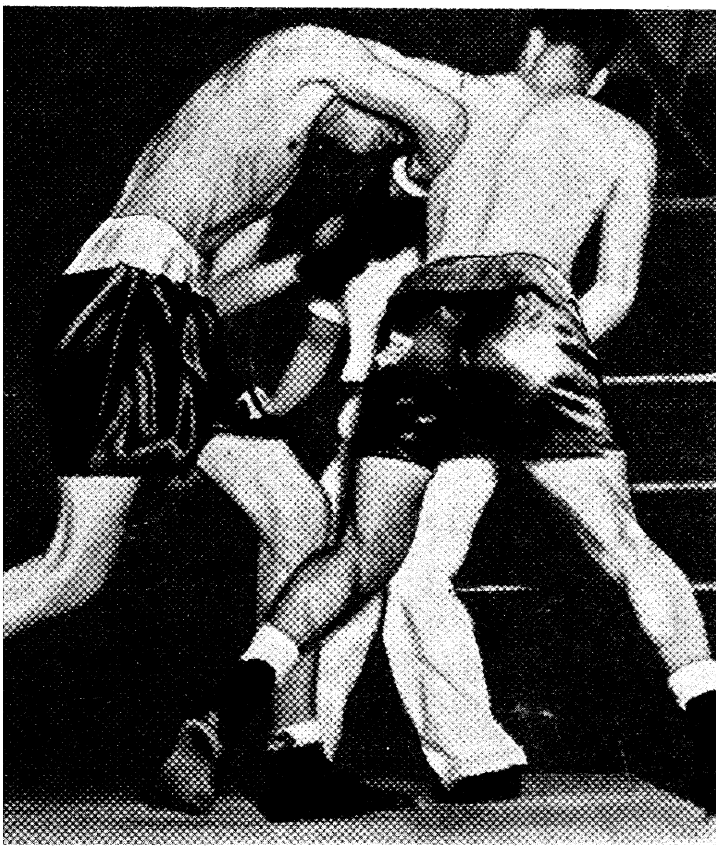
The first phase of our training began on December 28, 1942.

Once we were clerks, teachers, engineers, farmers, writers, a representative cross section in American life; but after thirteen weeks (it said in army directives), we all were now soldiers, strong and physically hardened, thinking in terms of our immediate jobs and capable of performing in combat when the call came.

Many of us, who led a sedentary existence prior to our reception into the army, could pace off eighteen miles a day by the time the thirteenth week rolled around. We all became competent in the handling of some weapon. We learned, and not the easy way, to make packs, fire, disassemble, clean our rifles, pitch a tent in nothing flat, use a gas mask, and the care of our feet. Some of us became specialists in jobs such as telegraph, telephone and radio operation. Former bank clerks could not do any banking, — so they cooked. Lawyers found no forum for arguing or even debating, — so they ran a message center or perhaps ghosted on court martials for the "gentlemen by Presidential order" in addition to their other duties. The strict disciplinarian, the school teacher, came to be the commando. In fact the kaleidoscopic changes made the Jekyll-Hyde story a tame bit of fictitious imaginings.

Along about the middle of January of 1943 we began firing at Leesburg Range. The Regiment took its positions on the firing line in freezing weather. We lived for a week in tents, "feeling" how a weapon fired. There were few who had more than their first brush that week with a firearm as scores of bandaged thumbs and swollen purple cheeks bore mute testimony to the novelty of this experience.

After seven arduous weeks we were deemed soldiers sufficient to parade in a Division Review at Ancrum Ferry Field. The excuse for the formation was to do honor to our host, the chief executive of the state. But to us novices, the spectacle of our very own Division extending for nearly



a half mile over the parade ground made us marvel at our potential might.

To break the monotony of training, and it was that, many dams of pent up talent were broken. The Regiment entered men in the Annual Golden Gloves Tournament at Charlotte, N. C., two of whom reached the finals. Our basketball team was successful in many Post Tournaments.

On March 27th, 1943, our basic training, at least that part of which applied to individual soldiers, ended. We now could glance back at our unusual experiences and laugh at the times when our immediate emotion had fallen quite

short of laughter. We were able to see a definite change in ourselves, in our ways of thinking, and in our relationships with our buddies. Our hutments had become so familiar a living place that we no longer found novelty in sharing our lives with several others but instead found this intimate association sort of a reward for being thrust from our dearly beloved.

Without so much as a "breather" upon completion of basic training, we dived straight ahead into the second phase of our training called "Small Unit Training." This meant the shaping of squads and sections into working teams for acting as one in combat. The tactical employment of materiel as well as personnel came in for emphasis throughout this new period. Our physical fitness was stressed and we literally sweated out many long marches and special exercises.

The week of April 12th, 1943, saw us involved in our first real mission. Although we didn't know what was up at first, we knew it must be a pretty important undertaking even though the higher ups described it with usual army understatement as a "special training exercise." The order for the move came down to us on April 10th, the day we had just gotten back from our first arduous week of living in the field. We were tired and dirty from having been away from the diversions and comforts of camp and ready to set out on a weekend of relaxation in Columbia and other nearby spots.

When our Bulletin Boards carried an order that there would be no passes or furloughs over

the weekend, rumors ran wild as rumors are prone to do. Some even had us alerted for movement overseas. None of these guesses, inaccurate as they were on the details, could have overstated the actual importance of the mission — security of a certain notable during his inspection trip through South Carolina. Not only was this our first mission but it was the first time that virtually the whole division left the confines of Fort Jackson. It placed us on combat behavior which, in the army scheme, obviously must be the best.

The target was the entire Atlantic Coast line tracks running through the State of South Carolina. Each foot of track had to be covered for three days, with special attention paid to tunnels, culverts, bridges, and defiles as well as straight stretches — for a high personage, indeed high, was to move by special train over this track sometime during those three days. With this job before us, and emphasis placed on absolute secrecy, plans were initiated.

From the extreme northern border of the state, at Dillon, to the southern border of the Savannah River's town, Chatham, we were posted. On the morning of April 14th a train of ten cars pulled into the junction of Yemassee. Shades were drawn at all windows in the last car. While the train was being shifted from the main line to the line which connected with Parris Island, a small black scotch terrier was seen to bound out of the car. The same day the train with our Commander-in-Chief, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and staff returned over the same track, switching again at Yemassee and continuing south passed us as we stood ready for any eventuality.

Except for this four-day break in our training, work was the order of the day any day except Sunday and sometimes then. Without a doubt the most exhausting was our preparation for the XII Corps Physical Fitness Tests. We noted that this preparation was very much like the workouts given football squads as we began puffing through the six phases of exercises which were meant to toughen every part of our body. For several months we did push-ups in our daily calisthenics until we keeled over, trying each day to better our record. We ran 300 yards, lumbered through burpees, carried each other pig-a-back for 75 yards and ran a special 75 yard zig-zagging course, creeping and crawling for alternate ten yard stretches. The crowning achievement was a four mile dash covered in fifty minutes with full field pack.

Right along with this training were the inevitable long marches. Beginning with marches of eight miles gradually working to sixteen miles, every one of us, who was not evacuated, con-

lined or restricted, paced off 25 miles in eight hours with a full pack by the close of the period in June.

None of us will ever forget the infiltration course, later known as the "Mental Conditioning Course." No matter what they name it we will still wince at recalling the live fire of machine guns whizzing 36 inches overhead, the two points of lacing barbed wire, and the dynamite charges in pits along the way. We will never forget being one with the worms, burrowing for the entire 75 yards as if our life depended on it.

We had three separate weeks in the field, one each month. This business of roughing it was deemed absolutely essential, for habits in combat were formed in this practice. We grew used to digging a slit trench upon our arrival in each new bivouac area and to the futility of covering them up when we left. During these problems we dealt with combat operations. One day an entire battalion would set up positions in an offensive action and then on the next day would follow with a defensive position. We were subject at all times to careful inspection of the employment of our weapons and use of good fields of fire.

In the meanwhile we were undergoing many changes of personnel; those who left our regiment via the transfer or discharge route were mainly the overage soldiers. We lost some men to O.C.S. and others to different organizations. Quite a few went back to school under the newly-organized Army Specialized Training Program and another small group left because of dependency, military inaptitude and for the convenience of the government.

Again we found diversionary interest in sports. We had several men on the division baseball nine which won thirteen and lost seven. We showed ourselves once more as being tops when it came to slugging it out in the squared circle.

In this second phase of training, manufacturing representatives visited our area and saw how the equipment they made was being used. They observed our various activities of the day, noting particularly a gas demonstration, stream crossings, and typical infantry advances over the terrain. The second period of our training came to a close at end of June and we were pointing toward the large field operations of the third period which would test our knowledge and previous training in regards to our functioning as part of a large organization.

Through July, August and September, we fought intermittently the "Battle of Fort Jackson" and the "Battle of South Carolina." This third phase of our training was a combined phase, and

our large scale war games brought our regiment into a smooth functioning combat team and vital striking arm of the division. At the end of this period the entire division welded together in a single fighting team, practicing exercises supervised by XII Corps.

Our own small part in these exercises proved to have been an excellent indication of what we could expect in combat. We set off on long marches, struck through woods, dug in at the slightest provocation and set up our pieces. These combat team exercises, or "R.C.T.'s," were held from 19 to 30 July and it was during this time that the late Lt. Gen. Leslie J. McNair, then Commander of the Army Ground Forces, visited us.

On 23 August we commenced the "D" Exercises. At a point some 50 miles north of Fort Jackson, in a series of six exercises from 23 August to 1 September and from 22 to 30 September, we spread ourselves over the northern half of South Carolina — mainly in the area between Winnsboro and Chester. Under the general supervision of the XII Corps Headquarters, the first three exercises called on us to attack, occupy and organize a defensive position. For the last three, we joined with the 399th Combat Team to be known as the Blue Force and succeeded in enveloping the enemy Red Force to end the problem. They constantly reminded us that these field problems were not "tests" but "practice" to iron out mistakes which we were bound to make.

At the end of September we began preparations for strenuous training ahead in the Tennessee Maneuver Area. Through October and half of November we made ourselves ready for big time war exercises. We also held final touch football eliminations and planned big events pointing to the close of our stay at Fort Jackson.

The fateful day was 8 November when we began to move by truck from the now friendly Fort Jackson. In less than 10 days we were established in the Maneuver Area. Before we began our maneuvers and throughout the entire maneuver period one phrase hung in our minds; "This will separate the men from the boys."

Aside from the casualties and emotional heartbreaks of actual overseas combat, these maneuvers were no doubt the hardest period in our army careers. No one will dispute the fact that the hardships and demands of outdoor living on our constitution as well as our thought process, during our stay in that rugged state, brought out sorely needed soldierly qualities. To say that the days of working, marching, eating, and sleeping in penetratingly cold and rainy weather tried the hardest men is an understatement.

We were among the first units to be tested in this way and the eyes of the War Department were upon us to see just how much we could take. Since all previous maneuvers in the army had ended in the fall and not resumed until spring our physical and mental reactions to the winter conditions were subject to careful scrutiny. Although the bitter, almost unbelievable cold, coupled with steady rain, sleet and snow threatened continuously to call a halt, the scheduled number of eight problems was permitted to run its course. There were no ill effects other than temporary discomfiture.

The fifteen hundred square miles of Tennessee Maneuver ground east of Nashville revealed red clay soil, rocky hills, deep cutting streams and rivers. The natives manifested the epitome of kindness, doing little things which helped make the rough going a little easier at times. We all at one time or another enjoyed favors when they were needed most: an unasked for but welcome pitcher of hot coffee; an invitation to sleep in their home despite the wet fatigue clothing and muddy shoes; and a huge sign in towns welcoming us to use the bathing facilities in the residents' homes.

In the new technique of battle many horizons opened before us. It seemed that every conceivable ground unit, and many aerial outfits, were coordinated with us and against us in these large scale operations. There were tank and tank destroyer outfits; there were aircraft and anti-aircraft in abundance; and in addition to the Century Division there were two other entire infantry divisions. These were augmented by many Special Service Units including engineers, signal, ordnance, and quartermaster, all serving to familiarize us, the doughfeet, with the equipment, organizations, and huge numbers of personnel with whom we could expect to be surrounded in combat. Despite these unmistakable signs that we were anything but alone, each magnified the present place and time out of all reasonable proportions. The individual "me," in our own small world of misery, was the only world of the moment. As doughboys, our life was a sticky freezing entity completely surrounded by mud and ice.

The actual "Battle of Tennessee" began 21 November and one of eight problems lasting two to five days was conducted in each of the succeeding weeks. The "battle" ended 11 January with the completion of the eighth problem. A wide variety of tactics was involved in the Regiment's operations ranging from meeting engagements to river crossings.

In our first problem it was required that we encounter and hold the foe until another unit

could strike the opposition from the rear. In this and other problems we accomplished our mission and gleaned many indications and tips which we were to put to use in future operations. Our second problem put us on the heels of a retreating and outnumbered enemy and after making contact, a flanking movement resulted in breaking the hostile lines. We, known as the "Blues," were about to close in on the opposition, or "Red's" final defense position at Leesville. Having completed two problems, we had learned that weather can be as tangible and real a foe as men and weapons. Though we were gradually becoming acclimated, the worst was yet ahead.

The third problem gave us added "starters" of mud and rain which taxed to the utmost the effectiveness of movement and action. While beating our way through the rugged terrain in this one problem we engaged in four entirely different kinds of strategic movements. In the first of these we completed a withdrawal under cover of darkness and followed the next day with an attack in the dark. In the third phase we met the enemy in actual battle and the problem ended with our attacking prepared positions. The weather, now reaching its lowest temperatures, took added importance even above our immediate tasks. Impossible to get away from, we were forced to learn to live with it. Huddled groups of us, trying vainly to restore circulation through our bodies, could be seen breathing into cupped hands and beating our feet together.

The fourth problem found us in a position requiring the defense of a bridgehead. As a "Red" army now, we met an onslaught of numerically superior enemy at the Cumberland River. Forced into a withdrawal, we completed the maneuver during the hours of darkness in sub-freezing temperatures. Thoroughly aware of the cold, it was yet another matter to become used to it. The thought that we must bear numb toes, fingers, and noses for another month was hardly a warming one.

Fighting on the banks of the Cumberland River in the fifth problem we were actively defending a large portion of the unfordable waterway against a stronger foe.

When the sixth problem came along, in response to impassioned pleas, higher headquarters permitted the building of fires, provided careful cover of flames and smoke was observed. Everything burnable and many objects, questionably of that type, were employed for this purpose. Singed overcoats and shoes were a common occurrence as men hypnotized by the flames and cold, edged as closely as possible to the glowing embers. Though only a temporary relief, the mere sight of cheerful flames spirited water-drenched and mud-caked soldiers. Available wood,

soaking wet from the unrelenting downpour, was carefully dried from the heat of one fire so it could be consumed in another. The making of fires soon became an obsession and constantly occupied our thoughts.

Returning to cross country fighting and reverting once more to the "Blues", we pushed the enemy from Lebanon some thirty miles east to the outskirts of Carthage in the sixth problem. In this two-column drive with another division we were able to smash a hole in the center of the "Red" resistance, enabling an armored force to drive through for the kill.

For the third time during the Tennessee Maneuvers we received training in operations centering around a river line in fighting problem seven. We were part of a "Blue" Corps which had to force a crossing of the Cumberland River against the opposition of a "Red" force while at the same time contending with the terrain difficulties presented by rain, mud, and an unusually increased river current. We made assault boat crossings — coming events cast their shadows — near Woods Ferry which were followed by ferryings of support weapons. Construction of a heavy pontoon bridge was completed to provide a crossing for the armored elements and we were ready to take the Corps objective of Bairds Mill and Holloway across the river when the problem ended.

The eighth problem ended after we had made a long tiresome advance from outside of Carthage to the outskirts of Murfreesboro in the south. Thus we concluded the most intensive form of our training since activation. 11 January 1944 marked the closing of sustained physical exertion and the absence from indoors during weather which called for superman conditioning. The problems had been held with Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays noted only by a field kitchen's N.C.O. imagination of a turkey dinner. The breaks which were given at the end of each problem afforded a meager opportunity to clean up in towns near the bivouac areas. Fleets of government transportation would deposit men in the parking lot of a community and for short hours grimy soldiers hastily piled into public showers or private homes for the weekly bath. The little remaining time enabled us to secure a meal and perhaps take in a short sight-seeing tour. Nashville was usually within driving distance but most of us were drawn to previously made acquaintances in the smaller communities such as Lebanon, Murfreesboro, Galatin, Hartsville, and Carthage. We fraternized to our hearts' content.

Observers had visited our Command Post, including Lt. Gen. Leslie J. McNair, AGF.

Commander. He inspected headquarters and elements of the regiment in various operations during one exercise. Our regimental strength remained around the same level throughout the entire period. With the windup of operations, in the usual confusion of assimilating what might be termed "combat-worn" equipment, we learned we were to be moved by truck to our new home in barracks at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Our emotions upon arrival at the division area after a 500 mile truck journey could best be described as ecstatic. Here were roofs, indoor latrines, mess halls and entertainment facilities. Here were dry and heated quarters, company streets and theatres. Our arrival meant to us the official end of living out of barracks bags and sleeping on the ground. Not only did it mean commodious barracks and hot showers at all times, but also the beginning of furloughs for the men.

We were the first column of troops to leave the maneuver area. By the end of January the entire division was bedded down in North Carolina's largest army post. Situated twelve miles from Fayetteville, our regimental area provided all comforts one could aspire to after the recent animal-like existence. While the town itself was not quite as accessible as Columbia had been, this was a trifling complaint as we grew accustomed to the comparative luxuries which garrison life offered. Even the post-maneuver training which began January 31, 1944, we considered kid stuff to the life in the field.

Under the post-maneuver training period plan, phase one was to be a review of the program conducted at Fort Jackson with concentrated emphasis on physical training. Organized athletics



were to be held Wednesday and Saturday afternoons and figured largely in the latter part of the plan. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday after February 5th we were on the rifle range for record firing. That week there were huge supply inspections for the purpose of seeing how much equipment had been lost, ruined, or overused during the maneuvers. Another prominent spot in the first five weeks of the new training program was held by an extensive course in the laying, detection, and removal of mines.

The most spectacular training was the massed infantry-artillery attack exercises with live ammunition. This gave us the feel of working and maneuvering close to the exploding live artillery and at the same time showed the public, through the medium of the press, the actual difficult operation of ground forces. The demonstrations, given in the Gaddys Mountain area, employed the 397th and the 399th Regiments as infantry troops with artillery fire from the combination of Division artillery and XIII Corps heavy guns.

The group to view this thunderous array of fire power was Under Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson and a party of 28 publishers and editors of leading newspapers and magazines of the country on March 3rd. Those in the publishers' and editors' party represented News Week Magazine, New York Sun, Ironwood Globe, Christian Science Monitor, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Boston Globe, Detroit News, Chicago Daily News, Washington Star, New York Herald Tribune, Baltimore Sun, Washington Post, Des Moines Register and Tribune, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Burlington Free Press, Time Magazine, Minneapolis Star Journal, Louisville Times, Dayton Journal-Herald, Louisville-Courier Journal, New York's P.M., Kansas City Star, Eastern Express, St. Louis Post Dispatch, and the Domestic Relation's Branch of the Office of War Information.

Less than two weeks later, on March 14th, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and a party of War Department officers observed the same demonstration. A third party of some 40 representatives of the press, radio, magazines and newsreels also witnessed our massed attack demonstration on April 15th. Writers of large papers and wire services of the cities in the eastern half of the country were greatly impressed with this example of America's Ground Forces, as shown by articles about the demonstration. The Associated Press Writer declared the division to be trained to pinpoint perfection and stated that physical training left even "spectators out of breath." The Boston Evening Globe, paying deserved tribute, described "not an infantryman faltered under the battle inoculation" of artillery fire nearby.

Meanwhile, getting back into all things, our regiment showed the stuff of which it was made when on March 11th the 397th "Blues," our basketball team, won the division title by a score of nine points, and on March 20th won the Post Tournament.

A War Department distinction was awarded for the infantryman, trained and fit for combat — the Expert Infantryman's Badge, a blue oblong badge with a raised silver musket. It was a considerable honor to qualify for the medal in the stiff physical and combat course tests prescribed.

All during this flurry of training and preparations for the receiving of military and civilian visitors we were active in a host of special doings on our few off duty hours. The Post Exchange, the motion picture theatre, the Service Club, the library of 7000 books, were the places of recreation, literally jammed nightly with interest far exceeding that shown in Fort Jackson. It was no doubt a combination of our having been away from these seeming luxuries for three months and the fact that Fayetteville was virtually inaccessible due to the transportation difficulties.

Boxing again attracted widespread interest and our unit took the initiative in training and grooming a five man team which represented us at the annual Charlotte Gloves Matches in mid-February. Two of our men reached the finals. In April, with spring in the air, the proverbial phrase "take me out to the ball game" found many sympathetic listeners in the regiment. We sponsored a team that soon became division champion.

On March 18th a contingent of men from the recently disbanded ASTP joined the regiment and took a special training program to make up for the dearth of training under the college plan. These men were able to compete physically with the rest of us, after a while. We never did finish telling them our tales of the hell that went under the pseudonym of "maneuvers."

On April the first, non-commissioned officers, fittingly enough, were permitted to reign supreme in our regiment, taking over complete command of staff functions and staging a spectacular review. While our officers assumed a back seat, these specially picked noncoms proved that they were entirely capable of the difficult functions to which they were assigned. The day was both invigorating and revealing in many ways for all of us.

Upon completion of maneuvers, the division left its place as a unit in Second Army and became a member of XIII Corps. During March a large number of infantrymen was transferred from our regiment to the Army Ground Forces Replacement Depot for overseas duty. It soon developed that our division, as other ground organizations, was an intermediate stopping off point for trans-

ferring men to permanent units. Half of the men we had recieved from ASTP were soon transferred. Amid all of these activities and changes we ended the first phase of our post maneuver training at Fort Bragg at the end of April and turned to the work ahead in the second phase.

This second phase which ran four months starting on May 1st engulfed us in widely varied activities ranging from field training to strike duty in Philadelphia. Large shifts in personnel made it necessary to alter the original training plan to provide for newcomers who had little previous training. As a result, the second phase became known as the supplemental period which officially ended August 26th. A good part of this training came as review to the older members of the regiment and to the new men as an extension of basic training. All individual small unit and combined training was reviewed and all phases of training for combat were completed. At the end of this period despite our shifting population we were ready for the real thing. Toward this end we put out for the business of bloody battles ahead. Included were training with the bayonet and running of the bayonet assault course; traversing the now-familiar infiltration course; squad combat firing tests; squad leadership tests; physical fitness tests.

During July and August every combat platoon of our regiment underwent firing tests to determine their efficiency in various departments of combat operation. Climaxing the training of small units within our regiment the problem tested the tactics and fire of rifle, weapons, heavy machine guns, 80 mm. mortar, antitank and cannon platoons. The tests graded group leadership, issuance of orders, effectiveness of fire, unit dispositions and movements.

To obtain the highest possible efficiency in preparation for combat, G-3 established steep grading requirements so designed that moderately well-trained units would flunk and have to take a retest. When all these tests had been taken it was discovered with pride that two top scores had been made by our regiment. The highest rifle platoon in the whole division turned out to be the First Platoon of "G" Company with 89 %. The First Platoon of "H" Company was high 30 calibre machine gun platoon with a score of 90.4 %.

Sandwiched in between all this other training were more R.C.T. problems, and for the best part of a week we took to the field in exercises featuring overhead fire of artillery and other weapons. The primary goal of this training was to iron out wrinkles which had developed in liaison and coordination of infantry with artillery. Divided into four phases these R.C.T. problems called for a daylight shuttle movement to an assembly area; a night blackout assembly; a night

movement relieving a frontline unit; and a morning attack, supported by all arms. Engineer and medical units were attached to us.

Each man in the regiment during this supplemental training period was instructed and had practical work in both allied and enemy mines and booby traps. We received lectures, saw training films and even crawled along the sandy spaces of our area, gingerly prodding, with our bayonets, in front of us. Mines and booby traps in dummy form were broken down and their uses described. Special emphasis was made upon laying and disarming mines; the likely spots in which mines were sown; the uses of mines and booby traps in combination; and their characteristics and capabilities.

Another form of specialized training was brought to us in late July when they began to prepare us for sniper training to supplement the roles we were to play in combat. They used crack shots selected from the division as a training nucleus and our actual practice was in the firing of the Springfield rifle with attached telescopic sight. Methods by which snipers can be made useful in combat and such things as firing without change of sights were taught us from lessons which had been learned in actual warfare.

Training in the important field of firing antitank weapons was accorded in August. We all grew familiar with the bazooka and were amazed each time at its accuracy and power. Bazooka teams were organized as part of each platoon with supplementary men schooled primarily in the vital use of this weapon. Through this same period we also were instructed in the firing of an antitank personnel grenade launched from our permanent friend, the M-1 or the Garand Rifle.

Dotting the entire four month period, midst the host of training activities, was a large number of special missions and formations in which we played a vital part. During the first week of June a composite battalion of the division led by one of our own battalion commanders, Lt. Col. John M. King, travelled to New York City as the representative of the Army Ground Forces in a celebration of the nation's first Infantry Day. This big event, which was to fall on the launching of the Fifth War Loan Drive, had been earlier introduced with Bond Rallies at Times Square and in New York's five boroughs. These select men put in at Camp Shanks. They marched up Fifth Avenue from 40th St. to 82nd St. on Sunday, June 11th, led by the Division Band and followed by token forces of the Navy and other auxiliary units. Four days later they paraded up lower Broadway and were greeted at City Hall by the Mayor, Fiorello H. La Guardia. In this

battalion was a picked number of overseas veterans who had previously been assigned to us. These men were interviewed over the loud speaker systems and the radio about their experiences. The main body returned to Fort Bragg toward the end of June with a special platoon remaining for several more weeks to act as an honor guard at retreat ceremonies each day in Rockefeller Center. While this went on in the Empire City, other organizations in the unit were active on Infantry Day in the area around Fort Bragg, N.C. Our Third Battalion staged a dramatic demonstration in the City Municipal Stadium at Wilson N.C. on June 14th.

On August 11th and 12th an important inspection visit was made by Lt. Gen. Ben Lear, AGF. Commander, succeeding Lt. Gen. McNair, who had been killed several weeks before in France. We maintained regular training during this general inspection. General Lear, while touring the division, saw many of us and questioned us regarding our training and soldier knowledge. At his departure he was accorded an honor battalion formation at Pope Field.

Behind all our activities there was the ceaseless ebb and flow of personnel which told probably better than anything else the mission which we had been performing since activation. Through transfer we had lost about an entire regiment of personnel to combat. Officers too, had come, trained, became part of us only to be lost as overseas replacements. Reflected in this fact was the army policy of conditioning troops and officers some three months before ordering them to combat. Men of the regiment although not wearing our insignia were using, on the battlefield, all valuable training gained while with us.

Men and officers who filled the gap left by these shipments poured constantly into the division, even as the older men were leaving. Largest single consignment was that of air forces men coming to us from other infantry divisions. Like the handling of ASTP men in the preceding months, these air force men most of whom were aviation cadets had been funneled into divisions most handy and from there assigned. The flying students and operating personnel were released from their places when the army called for all physically able men to be assigned to the infantry. With the report that casualties in the air were less than anticipated, a large number of aviation cadets throughout the country plus some overhead personnel, were released to the ground forces. Also assigned during May and the first week of June were M.P.s from the west; AAA men from Camp Stewart, Georgia; non-coms from Fort Meade, and AAA balloon barrage men from Camp Tyson, Tennessee.

As always, behind our heavy schedule of training and military functions was the relieving backdrop of special entertainments, sports, and other extracurricular activities able to cater to the individual taste. Golf had blossomed forth in the form of teams which took to the links early in May. Softball kept all companies busy on off-duty hours. Volleyball attracted virtually the regiment to the courts. It was something of an oddity that a game not too common in civilian life found so much appeal and general participation. League games or not, the courts were always alive on evenings. Horseshoe tournaments were also held during the May-August period.

In the arts and entertainment field there was a variety of events engaging our spare time during this supplemental training period. In an effort to make us self-sustaining in the entertaining field, our Special Service Office procured enough basic musical instruments to outfit a unit orchestra, and to these were added other instruments which brought the instrumentation up to fourteen pieces and full dance orchestras. Shortly after the arrival of the new instruments a battle of music was held in the division amphitheatre. Our band took third place.

The Protestant Chapel Choir composed of 50 voices became well known on the Post and in Fayetteville and was much in demand at local churches and entertainments. In addition to its usual Sunday morning service, the choir sang each Wednesday evening on the 397th Infantry Vespers Radio Program which was written and produced by men of the regiment. Branching out also into the field of radio, Special Service presented a weekly half hour variety program.

Augmented by approximately thirty young girls of Fayetteville our Regimental Choir presented an unusual bit of theatre with the adaptation of Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S. Pinafore to the Fort Bragg life and called it "U.S.A. The Century." Again written and produced by enlisted men of the regiment this bit of entertainment, presented as a three act musical comedy, was well received.

An unit magazine supplying detailed accounts of individual doings and gossip, "The Regiment," appeared in early June. Printed on slick paper and replete with photographs and sketches of regimental doings and personalities, "The Regiment" was a success and was widely read. Each company had representation in this 24-page magazine and any unusual event was fully covered.

Near the end of August indications were sustained that an overseas movement was in the offing. A tremendous amount of work was involved for all the men and administrative personnel. P.O.M. charts graced all of our orderly rooms and added an ominous undertone to our activities.

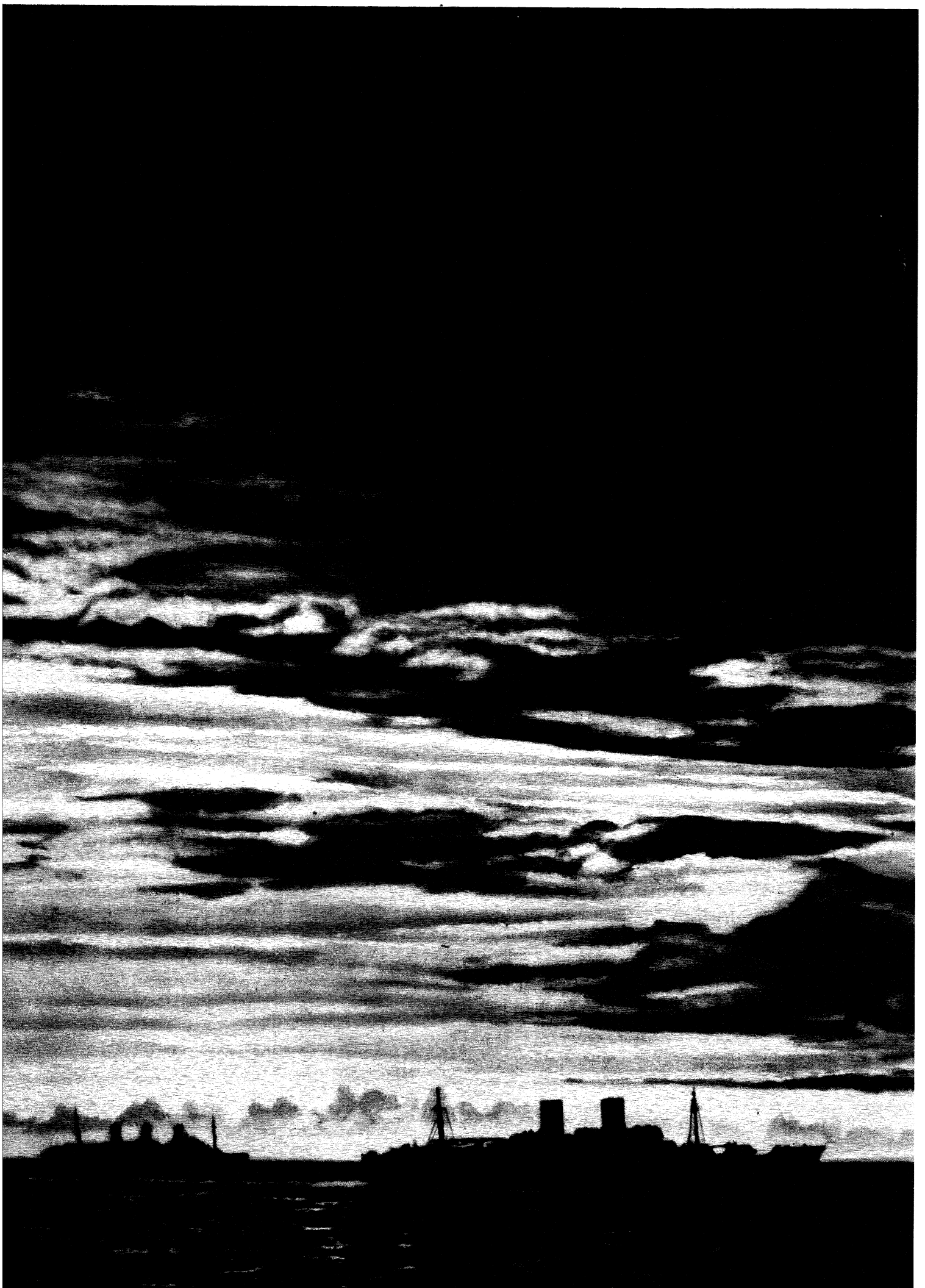
Qualifications with all weapons we were to use in combat was stressed and our days and nights were spent in shaping up equipment and personnel.

After sweating out last minute passes and furloughs, we were alerted in September at which time passes were frozen and it was possible only to leave the Post on official business and for emergency reasons. Our last mail had gone and censoring took effect, a new experience with which we were to become only too familiar. R.S.O. worked night and day packing and marking equipment "T.A.T." and with the familiar "2206 F."

The big day was September 25th when we formed out on what had been our regimental drill field, scene of flashing retreat parades and back breaking calisthenics periods, waiting for the word that would set us on the way. We had been well prepared for boarding the train and knew exactly what part we were to play. All of our earthly possessions were neatly piled at our feet and although not cautioned, our voices were low-pitched as if reflecting our hearts and minds. A token breakfast was served which did not help as a morale uplift. When at last each group was called we hoisted our packs to our backs, threw one arm into the sling of our rifles and the other into the loop on our duffle bags, took three steps and collapsed in a heap, at least, many did.

After a short three miles run there were the trains ahead of us and we piled in, dropped our burdens on the seats, heaved a sigh and then gazed around, wondering where we were going to sit. In a little while, however, we settled down and made ready for the journey. When the train finally pulled out it was with some remorse that we watched our home for eight months recede into the distance. We did not know what was ahead but the novelty of it all perhaps a belated wanderlust removed from our minds any morbid thoughts we might have had and we were ready for anything.





PHASE III – OVERSEAS MOVEMENT



INTRODUCTION

*"And there were sudden partings such as press
The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs
Which ne'er might be repeated."*

However bitter the parting when your furlough was over it was nothing compared to this. Then there was always the hope there would be another pass, perhaps a week-end; but now there was a finality that struck deep into the heart. Some who went home for the last time before sailing, regretted that they did and felt it might have been better to forego the tears and handclasps that seemed to take on a peculiar meaning, a dreadful one — and those that had not gone home felt just as miserable. We were afraid. "Overseas" until now had been a joke. Everyone knew this outfit would never sail because everyone knew we were the pin-up division of the Army and smart looking regiments don't fight. They just parade to keep up the morale of the folks in the States. The pity of it was that some believed it; were actually convinced that we would never make it and they were thrown off balance, way off. The men who said time and time again that they wanted a chance to fight, that they were sick and tired of garrison eye-wash, that all they wanted was a crack at the dirty Nazis, were silent. And the quiet guys talked a little because there had to be talk even though it didn't mean anything, just talk, talk that would drown out the quiet.

Some tried to write letters to people they loved, letters that said, "Please don't worry about me, I'll be all right and home sooner than you think" and a lot of us believed that, had to. That was a funny angle; afraid and yet positive that we would certainly get home again. It never occurred to the individual guy that a bullet would hit him, or could, still the fright was there and so was the terror. It was all mixed up.

The days on board the U. S. George Washington passed and we landed at Marseilles. The

sense of security that came from being on land again helped dispel some of our nervousness and the conversation was a little bolder because there we were three thousand miles from home, there was nothing we could do about it, so what the Hell, lets go, the sooner we start this thing, the sooner it will end, and though the fear was still there it was assuaged by the physical challenge of the new surroundings and the possibility of an enemy beyond the hill. But at this stage there was little time for talk — we were committed!