

The Tennessee Maneuvers

by Bob Wells, 399-H

Bob Wells was an ASTPer who was assigned to Company H, 399th. He trained with the 100th Division through Tennessee Maneuvers, but was pulled out as a replacement and went overseas with the 88th Infantry Division.

Having been in the 100th Division from October 25, 1943 until June 4, 1944, my role in the Division was not a very important one. However there were a lot of us who had similar experiences in the 100th, and maybe these months would be of interest.

One of the vast US Army's worst programs in WWII was the Army Specialized Training Program. This will surely be recognized by a lot of Centurymen whose experiences in line companies in the 7th Army are still real!!

I was assigned to A.S.T.P. after 13 weeks of Infantry Basic Training. I was sent to Georgia Tech as an engineering student for which I had neither the aptitude nor the proper preparatory high school background. Ergo, I made it through an intense term, and was sent back to the real Army.

On the 25th of October 1943 I and a bunch of other former A.S.T.P.ers were put in a couple of busses that went to Fort Jackson. One bus turned right to the 106th Division, and my bus took us to the 100th. Fate was kind as the 106th was chewed up in the Bulge!

I was assigned to E-399th as a heavy machine gunner. The old guys and I got to know one another in the next two weeks, and then took off for Tennessee and Winter Maneuvers. We were tactical from the time we left the Company area. I rode on the back of a Jeep with a heavy machine gun anti aircraft mounted as we drove at intervals across Georgia with no top nor raised windshield.

In Tennessee we were as 'in the field' as we could be. When we slept it was in our pup tents, but each week for, as I remember, six weeks, we had problems Monday through Thursday. It was cold and wet, and I for one learned a lot about keeping myself together with no roof or facilities.

This was a really big experience to all of us in the Division, and we were happy soldiers when we left Tennessee for Fort Bragg, and, Fort Bragg was a paradise, even compared to Fort Jackson. We had nice barracks, and as good a camp as we could hope for.

I was at Bragg from 19 January until 4 June 1944. Company H, 399th was a revolving door company. I remember none of the Company officers as they came and went constantly. We received too many stray non-coms to the point that there was no job for them. The pass and furlough policy was a generous one, at least for me.

In the spring of 1944 the Army ground forces realized that they needed the men who had been selected to go to Colleges and Universities. The A.S.T.P. program was gutted, and way over 100,000 talented and bright young men were herded into Infantry Divisions, 4,000 into the 100th.

Also, that spring trained replacements were much needed overseas, and what was called a "draft" occurred. Several thousand of us were reassigned from the 100th to the replacement pool. We passed through Fort Meade, MD, the P.O.E. and were on our way to new division . . . for us.

The 100th's overseas adventures are well known, and a record to be proud of. My peers and I came in, learned a lot, had a pretty good time, and most of our memories of the 100th are pleasant. We just experienced our combat in other units.

This poem appeared in the *35th Divisionaire*. Even though it was written by and for the 35th Division vets, since they were opposite us at Tennessee Maneuvers, the sentiments expressed are the same ones we were feeling at the time.

The Tennessee Maneuvers

The devil was given permission one day,
to select a good place for the soldiers to play.

He looked around for a month or more
wanting a place that would make them sore.

And, at last was delighted a country view
where the black walnut and the hickory grew,
and vowed that Tennessee could not be beat
as a place for maneuvers in rain, snow, and sleet.

He scattered the rocks so the men could not sleep
and brought weather so cold it froze the sheep.
He then sent some rain, the bed rolls to soak
and a few cards and dice, so the men could stay broke.

He brought the Division from old Camp McCain
and put all its soldiers out in the rain.
He then sent an order to a place called Fort Bragg
to send guns so heavy the bridges would sag.

The 100th Division has their men here too
and the good old 35th fought on the side of the Blue.
Then he brought in some Armored, the 14th I think,
enough soldiers to fill all the towns to the brim.

There are plenty of umpires with their flags of green,
and the craziest ideas I have ever seen.
The trucks are wiped out by simulated shell,
so the umpires can laugh and give the men hell.

The cooks with us are OK, I think,
but they never have rations or water to drink.
All that we got is the coffee they brew
and some stuff in a can that they call G.I. Stew.

And the Devil is happy over the things he done,
to the men in the army that carry a gun.
For the men from the ranks to the General Staff,
are so cold, and hungry, he just has to laugh.

After this War when a man's around me,
he better not mention the word Tennessee
or a trip to the hills where the Nature is law,
for as sure as He does, it will be the last straw.

On Christmas in Nashville a Tennessee town,
thousands of soldiers were prowling around.
They were hunting some fun, or a good place to eat,
and half of the men had no place to sleep.

And most of the men as long as they are here
will want no passes, not even for a beer.
For the towns in this State, though they seem complete,

can furnish no place for the soldier to eat.

Then January the first in the year forty-four,
the good Lord Himself pulled open the door,
and let the sunshine come into our camp,
and the men covered bushes with clothes that were damp.

That night with bushes still holding up clothes,
and all the men had started to doze.
I know that old Satan came to our Camp again,
for who else but Him could bring such a rain.

One day of sunshine in four weeks of hell,
and most of the soldiers still feeling well.
He's shaken the plans of the demon below,
who is trying to drown us, while waiting for snow.

Then on the fifth problem with men nearly froze,
down came the order simulate mosquitos,
so we got our head nets, and bars,
for the order came down through the man with the Stars.

He said, "Wear your head nets until seven AM",
and keep bars in pup tents or hanging on limbs,
and take atabrin pills, the General said
at the first of chow line or you won't get fed.

For all the Commanders, and the men in their charge,
are exposed to malaria with these insects at large.
If you go without headnets you'll surely be seen,
by the men from headquarters, that fly flags of green.

Then an order came down that made us all sore,
the cooks serve breakfast at quarter till four,
and the First Sergeant said as he looked straight at me,
We will all get up early in the Artillery.

So at zero three hundred, we all had to rise,
and pull the old headnets down over our eyes,
and disperse on a hill side at about fifteen feet,
then feel in our mess kits for something to eat.

After five problems, we all needed a rest,
but here is what happened now this is the best,
some Big Shot on the staff picks us a spot
where there wasn't a stick of wood on the lot.

With five weeks now past us, and one more to go.
In this place without firewood, it started to snow.
We've now taken all that the devil had,
and all that's accomplished is to make us mad.

Now we're on the last problem we've all done our part,
and at the end of this week the furloughs will start.
Then the men will go home with tall tales to tell
of the things that they did through this six weeks of hell.

March 2006 Association Newsletter