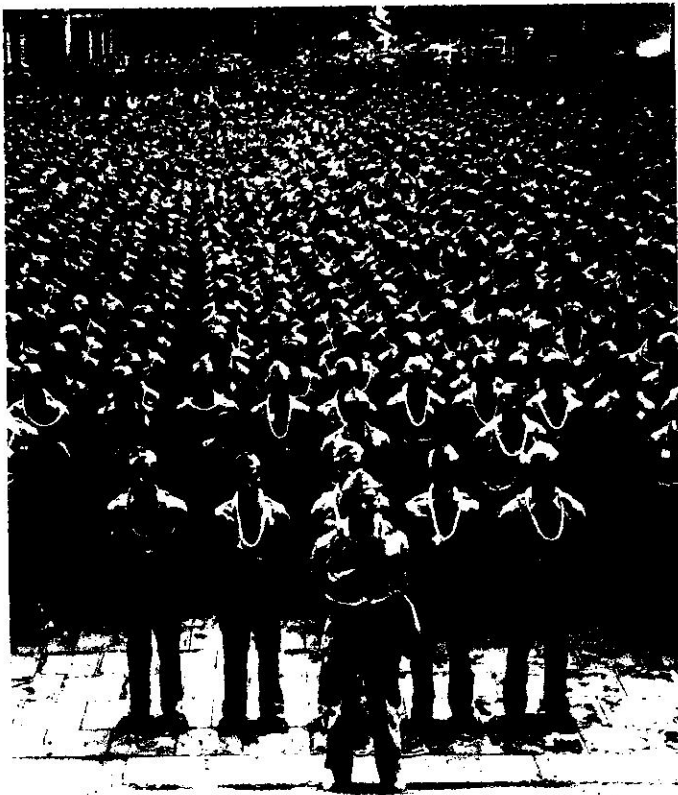


GO FOR BROKE



442nd Regimental Combat Team



"They were superb!"

"The men of the 100/442 took terrific casualties. They showed rare courage and tremendous fighting spirit... everybody wanted them."

— General George C. Marshall

This is the story of the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, two units that consisted mainly of Americans of Japanese Ancestry (AJA), who faced the adversity of ignorance and prejudice after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, but whose battlefield record helped gain the trust and respect of a nation.

The opening chapter began with the formation of the 100th Infantry Battalion. At the time Pearl Harbor was bombed, there were many Japanese Americans already in the army both in Hawaii and on the mainland. A number of them were serving with the 298th and 299th Infantry Regiments, Hawaii National Guard. Others who had been drafted were stationed at Schofield Barracks. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, their loyalty was in question. Their weapons were taken away and they were assigned to menial labor duty. The AJAs were classified enemy aliens: Class C and no longer eligible for the draft. The community pressed for an active role for the AJAs. In June 1942, the impending invasion of Midway Island by a Japanese armada posed a problem for the military — what role would the AJAs in uniform play? The solution was to ship the AJAs, officers and men, of the Hawaii National Guard to the mainland as the Hawaiian Provisional Infantry Battalion. This group was comprised of 29 officers, many of whom were AJA ROTC graduates, and 1,300 enlisted men. They sailed to the mainland on June 6 and traveled by truck and rail to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin and were assigned to the Second Army. At Camp McCoy, the AJA unit from Hawaii was designated the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate). Shortly after their arrival, approximately 67 men were reassigned to the Military Intelligence School at Camp Savage, Minnesota. In February 1943, the 100th Infantry Battalion was transferred to Camp Shelby, Mississippi and participated in maneuvers in Mississippi and Louisiana to undergo large-unit training. They achieved a superb training record.

On February 1, 1943, the President authorized



the formation of a combat team made up of Japanese Americans. A call went out in Hawaii and on the mainland for volunteers for an all-AJA unit—the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. The response in Hawaii was overwhelming, as nearly 10,000 men applied. Selected were 2,645 men, including 230 draftees from Schofield Barracks. On the mainland, approximately

1,300 volunteers were selected. The lack of response on the mainland was understandable due to the incarceration of those of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast who ended up in heavily guarded “relocation centers.” In April 1943, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team assembled in Camp Shelby, Mississippi for training that would last one year. During summer of 1943, the 100th, after completing their Louisiana exercise, met briefly with the new recruits of the 442nd, a reunion of sorts for the men from Hawaii. Shortly thereafter, the 100th completed their long training period and was ready for overseas duty.

The 100th left the U.S. and arrived in Oran, North Africa, on September 2, 1943. After a short stay, a message came informing the 100th that they were to join the renowned 34th “Red Bull” Division of the Fifth Army. On September 22, the 100th landed on the beaches of Salerno, Italy. Their first combat occurred at Castelvetere on September 28, where they suffered their first casualty. This was followed by fierce fighting at three separate crossings of the Volturno River. Combat intensity became even greater at Rapido River and Cassino, followed by the final breakout from the Anzio beachhead. During these battles, the 100th distinguished themselves, earning the respect of their fellow soldiers of other units. They survived enemy mine fields and assaults by enemy armor, infantry and artillery. They made bayonet charges and fought off countless counter-attacks.

Their ferocity in action and their determination to win against all odds earned them the respect and trust of the U.S. Army. They earned respect with a lot of bloodshed and loss of lives. Over 1,000 Purple Hearts were awarded during this period, gaining the 100th Infantry Battalion the nickname of the “Purple Heart Battalion.” The men of the 100th had proved that their loyalty was beyond question.

Back in Camp Shelby, the excellent training record of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team showed they were ready for overseas action. Any remaining doubts had been erased by the performance of the 100th on the battlefield. The 442nd had already sent replacements to the 100th beginning in December 1943; three complements totaling 524 enlisted men and 31 officers filled the ranks of the depleted 100th. This meant that the Regiment did not have a full complement. Therefore, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team went overseas with the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Battalions, the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, Cannon Company, Anti-Tank Company, Regimental Headquarters Company, Service Company, Medical Detachment, 232nd Combat Engineers, and the 206th Army Band. A group remained in Camp Shelby as the 171st Battalion and served as a cadre to train replacements for the 442nd.

On June 10, 1944, the 442nd RCT was attached to the 34th Division. On June 11, the 100th Infantry Battalion was attached to the 442nd RCT to serve as the 1st Battalion but keeping the 100th Battalion name. The designation “Separate” was dropped. All units of the 442nd RCT assembled at Grosseto on June 22. On June 26, the 442nd RCT first engaged the enemy near Suvereto spearheaded by the 2nd Battalion. Both the 2nd and 3rd Battalions encountered heavy enemy resistance. The 100th, which was in reserve, was called into action. They took the town of Belvedere and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. This outstanding victory by the 100th earned the Regiment the first Distinguished Unit Citation. The 34th Division pursued the retreating enemy northward and the Regiment participated in the capture of the port city of Livorno (Leghorn). By

July 19, the enemy had been pushed back nearly 50 miles to the northern side of the Arno River. The 442nd was part of the Fifth Army holding the south side of the Arno with skirmishes taking place at times. In August 1944, the regiment was bivouacked at Vada and training continued. The Anti-Tank Company had been relieved in July and became part of the airborne invasion force that was to invade Southern France. They took part in Operation Dragoon which launched an attack near Cannes on August 15, 1944. The Anti-Tank Company would rejoin the 442nd months later on October 24 in the Vosges Mountains.

Changes in command took place, and on September 12, the 442nd was assigned to the Seventh Army and sailed to France, landing at Marseilles. There, the 442nd was assigned to the 36th Texas Division and by truck and rail traveled up the Rhone Valley to Epinal. On October 15, 1944, the 442nd began its Vosges Mountains campaign. Their objective was to take the town of Bruyeres, a key transportation center. To secure the town, the enemy had to be dislodged from prepared positions on the hills surrounding the town. This was accomplished in five days. Following



this, they withstood counterattacks. Then, a battalion of the 141st Infantry of the 36th Division became trapped by the enemy and became known as the "Lost Battalion." After failure by units of the 36th Division to accomplish a rescue, the 442nd was pressed into action. On October 27 the 442nd began the

operation to free the Lost Battalion. During the next four days, the 100th and 3rd Battalions were engaged in the bloodiest and fiercest fighting ever undertaken by the 442nd. The men fought from tree-to-tree, against hidden machine gun nests and tank-supported infantry. They charged through shrapnel-filled barrages of



mortar and artillery fire and crossed minefields and booby traps. They never stopped in their drive to reach the entrapped battalion who had been isolated nearly a week and were low on food and ammunition. This feat is considered by the Army as one of its ten most outstanding battles. The 141st has never forgotten this and presented the

442nd a special plaque of appreciation.

After this battle, General John E. Dahlquist of the 36th Division asked the men to be assembled so that he could thank them personally. When he saw the formation before him, he asked the commander of the 442nd, "Where are the rest of your men?" Colonel Virgil Miller choked when he replied, "You're looking at the entire regiment — that's all that's left." During its short stay in the Vosges Mountains, mid-October to mid-November, the 442nd suffered casualties of 1,086 including 161 dead. These numbers do not include the sick and non-combat injured. When the rescue was attempted, K Company had started with approximately 150 riflemen, but lost all of its officers and had 17 men left. I Company also lost all of its officers and had only eight men left. The "noncoms" took over. Other companies of the 3rd and 100th Battalions suffered similar losses.

The mission with the 36th Division was successful, but personnel and material had been severely depleted. The 100th was relieved on November 8 and sent to Southern France. The rest of the regiment followed on November 17. The 442nd guarded the French-Italian border in the Maritime Alps. They called it the "Champagne Campaign," as R&R was included. During this assignment, the 442nd was brought back

up to its regular strength with replacements and fresh supplies of material.

At General Mark Clark's personal request to General Dwight Eisenhower, the 442nd RCT, less the 522nd FA, was returned to Italy in March 1945. Their new assignment as part of the 92nd Division was to create a diversionary action on the western anchor of the Gothic Line. This sector had defied Allied assault for over five months. The enemy had had ample time to fortify their position, and the line appeared to be impregnable. Frontal assault was impossible – the enemy guns were in complete control. The solution was to conduct a surprise attack by scaling the nearly vertical mountainside. On April 5, 1945, the 442nd started their approach. During the dark hours before dawn, the men of the 442nd climbed for hours in tense silence to attain a "pincers" formation. They finally reached the top of the mountains and moved into position for attack. In the next 32 fantastic minutes, they took two key mountaintop enemy outposts. With this break in their line, the other enemy positions fell one by one. What started out as a diversionary attack by the 442nd soon developed into a major rout that destroyed the enemy's western section. The Gothic Line that had stood for six months was finally broken!

By April 30, 1945, the 442nd had breached practically every position held by the enemy, and they were the first Allied troops to reach Turin. The 92nd Division was in complete control of the western sector and the enemy was surrendering in greater and greater numbers. Finally, on May 2, 1945, the German army in Italy surrendered. On May 8, the Third Reich formally surrendered. The *Beachhead News* reported, "The 442nd ... never gave ground, never took a backward step."

The 522nd FA which had remained in France was called upon to provide artillery support as the American army marched into Germany. They were the first to open the gates of one of the Dachau concentration camp complexes. Shortly thereafter,

the war in Europe ended.



In less than two years, the 442nd RCT, including the 100th Infantry Battalion Separate and the 522nd FA, had successfully fought in eight major military campaigns: Naples-Foggia, Anzio, Rome-Arno, Southern France, the Rhineland, North

Apennines, Central Europe and the Po Valley. Among the thousands of awards received by the 442nd Regimental Combat Team were 21 Medals of Honor (authorized under Sec. 524, PL 104-106, 20 DSC were upgraded to Medals of Honor) and eight Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations. The 442nd is purported to be "...the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in the history of the United States."

Upon return to the United States in July 1946, the 442nd was honored with a parade at which time President Harry S. Truman pinned the final Distinguished Unit Citation (renamed "Presidential Unit Citation" in 1966) ribbon to the unit's colors. The President stated, "...I can't tell you how much I appreciate the privilege of being able to show you just how much the United States thinks of what you have done... You fought not only the enemy but you fought prejudice — and you won."



A colonel remarked during an award ceremony for the 442nd, "The only thing wrong with this outfit is it has too damned many heroes."
— Lyn Crost, *Honor by Fire*

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