

PHASE II 135TH INFANTRYA. NORTH IRELAND.

Early in the morning of the 11th of May, 1942, land was sighted. The boat attempted to dock in Bangor Bay, but the Bay was too shallow for the ship. The ship then went into the Firth of Clyde, up the Clyde River to Greenock, Scotland. The anchor was dropped here about 1000 hours, the 12th of May and at approximately 1900 hours that day, the Battalions were loaded onto 3 channel boats, "Ben May Chree" being the name of the one that carried the 2nd Battalion, and crossed the channel again under cover of darkness the night of the 12th disembarking at Londonderry, North Ireland. The Battalions unloaded there on the morning of the 13th and after a hot breakfast, were given separate destinations, each proceeding by train or British Lorries (Truck) to its assigned area. Regimental Headquarters, Headquarters Co., Regimental Band and the 3rd Battalion went to Camp Cromore on the estate of Mr. Montague where the troops were to have the new experience of being housed in Nissen Huts. Anti-Tank Co. and Service Co. were stationed at Portstewart, North Ireland. And the 1st Battalion in Portrush, North Ireland. After a scenic trip through the hills & dales of Ireland the 2nd Battalion found itself at Ballycastle, North Ireland along the coast where some of the units were housed in a summer resort and others in billets. This day was spent in assigning the men to quarters in civilian homes. Battalion Headquarters was set up in the building that was formerly a country club on the shore of Ballycastle Bay. Both Portstewart and Portrush were also summer resort towns along the coast. It was here that the Regiment had its first experiment with British currency, and learned the value of the different coins and notes.

Regular section training and marches were commenced immediately. This section of North Ireland presented a training problem inasmuch as all the terrain was divided up into very small plots and fields surrounded by hedges, and all under cultivation. It was also difficult to become accustomed to the fact that it was still daylight at 2:30 hours at night. During our short stay in this section of North Ireland, the Regiment was asked to send two officers and a number of enlisted men to the Rangers, a newly formed and special trained shock troop organization. 1st Lts. Alfred H. Nelson and James B. Lyle volunteered for this assignment.

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The need for extra terrain for training soon became apparent, and the Regiment left this pleasant section of North Ireland for new areas on the 30th of May, 1942.

Regimental Headquarters was established this time in a castle known as Ecclesville house located just on the outskirts of the town of Fintona, North Ireland, County of Tyrone. Headquarters Co., Service Co., Medical Detachment and Band were housed in Hissen Huts in Fintona and vicinity. The 1st Battalion was located at Ashbrooke and the 3rd Battalion was located at Colebrooke. Both of these camps were located on the estate of Sir Basil Brook near Brookborough, North Ireland. The 2nd Battalion was quartered in the City of Omagh, and Anti-Tank Co. at Clogher. These areas had sufficient areas for small unit training.

A new change in "Age in grade" ruling called for the removal of several officers from combat troops, and it was necessary for Lt. Cols. Albert A. Svoboda and Jarrold A. PSTRABORG, Majors Axel JENSEN and William H. WILLIAMS, Captains Charles Snyder and Joseph L. PFRICK and 1st Lt. William E. MUSEBRADES to leave the Regiment. These changes took place in the early part of June, 1942. Lt. Col. E. P. LUND remained in command of the 1st Battalion. Major Edwin T. STENSON in command of the 2nd Battalion and Lt. Col. Robert P. MILLER in command of the 3rd Battalion.

The Regiment's training at these stations took on the flavor of Battle School. There were obstacle courses to run, rugged training in bayonet drill, hand-to-hand fighting and unarmed combat, long hikes in Ireland's soft clays were begun. Each Battalion would go on two 25 mile hikes and three 15 mile hikes each week, the 25 mile hikes taking up the entire day, and the 15 mile hike taking up just afternoons. The regiment was then advised by higher Headquarters that there would be no rainy day schedules, but that training would go on regardless of weather. The status of training soon developed to where the troops went on the combat range, going through problems of fire and movement with overhead fire from mortars and machine guns supporting them. Safety precautions in the States up to this time had not permitted the use of this type of training. This type of training was adopted from the British, who had been using it for some time. This proved to be some of the most valuable

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as it instilled, in the troops, confidence in the supporting weapons, and valuable training in the operation of these weapons was gained by the gun crews. The pioneer sections took part in a school at Camp Killedeas the last week in June.

On July 2nd, 1942, the Regiment, as part of a larger force participated in what was called the Scheme "ATLANTIC". The British and Americans blended their efforts for the first time since World War I, with the aim of getting better acquainted with each others' methods, and also with the thought of ironing out certain little differences. The maneuver also taxed the endurance of the men of the Regiment, proving that still more conditioning was necessary. This exercise lasted one week.

On July 29th, the 2nd Battalion moved into training area No. 1, located near Norton's Pass, for one week of intense field training, which included a 24hour problem with overhead mortar and artillery fire.

Col. Charles L. PARKIN was relieved of duty and assignment with the 31st Infantry Division and assigned to V Army Corps (Reiff) as Provost Marshall on the 22nd of July, 1942, and Lt. Col. Lester A. HANCOCK was assigned and assumed command of the Regiment, being promoted to the rank of Colonel on the 23rd of July. Major Edwin T. SWENSON was relieved of command of the 2nd Battalion on the 30th of July, 1942. Captain William J. Kreger was assigned Executive Officer of the 2nd Battalion the same day. Major Clarence V. LES was assigned command of the 2nd Battalion on the 7th of August.

The Regiment took part in exercise "PELICAN". This was a problem in motorized patrols, storming of various towns, reducing road blocks and being harrassed by guerilla warfare and snipers. The exercise lasted about 36 hours. The enemy forces consisted of the Irish Home Guard. Many lessons were learned, especially the use of flank protection and the use of an active and aggressive vehicle on the point.

On Saturday, August the 8th, the River Mourne became swelled, due to heavy rains and towards evening the water was rising towards the ammunition hut and also the huts occupied by the members of the 2nd Battalion. A detail from the Ammo. Section had to move the ammo to a higher spot, and shortly after that, the Battalion was forced to move all their barracks bags and equipment in the mess hall.

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The following morning the unit moved the equipment back into the Battalion area, only to repack and move to Training area #3.

On Saturday, August 22nd, the 2nd Battalion moved from Omagh to Ely Lodge, located on an island in the Lough Erne. Company "F" was across the Lough at Camp Killedeas on guard duty. Ely Lodge is an American built Camp with numerous facilities. The kitchen had electric dough mixers, potato peelers, and best of all, ice cream freezers. Regular section training and marches were commenced immediately after getting settled and policing the area. Al Jolson, Merle Oberon, Al Jenkins, Frank Mollugh, and Pat Morrison presented a show for the 2nd Battalion at the Auditorium during our stay at Ely Lodge.

Feeling the need of further training and a division standard of procedure on lessons learned, the Division G-3 conducted a Divisional Training School. From about the 8th of August to the 13th of September 1942, each Battalion was moved to the Division training area where for a period of three weeks they were given a series of problems, each one being arranged so as to teach a different lesson in tactics, and develop Battalion staff control. The main emphasis was put on offensive tactics and the use of close overhead artillery support together with supporting fire of Infantry weapons. This was the first time the troops of the Regiment had trained with close supporting artillery fire. One casualty was sustained by Co. L, 135th Infantry when an artillery smoke shell fell short.

On September the 15th, the 2nd Battalion went on a 40 mile march. On the 17th, the 2nd Battalion Rifle Team, coached by Captain Emil SKALICKY, took part in a match between the Royal Air Force, Ulster Home Guard and Royal Ulster Constabulary. The Battalion took 1st place honors, with each member of the team being awarded a medal. Three members of the Battalion, Cpl. James Gavecke, Pvt. John Lesger, and Pvt. Odmar Berg, were members of the team. Pvt. Odmar Berg and Pvt. Carl Wilson, also from the Battalion, tied for top honors in the individual sweepstakes match and split the pot. On Friday evening, September the 18th, a banquet was held for the Battalion, with all the Co. Commanders of the Battalion invited. Lt. Traux was master of ceremonies. Short talks were given by Major Lee and Major KREIER.

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On the 23rd of September, the 2nd Battalion moved from Sly Lodge to Camp Blessingbourne, near Fivemiletown. The Camp was in the final stages of completion when the unit arrived.

On the 18th of October, 1942, Companies I, K, L and a platoon of Company M were placed on detached service to Sunnylands Camp, Carrickfergus, North Ireland, Lt. Col. E. T. SWENSON in command, for eventual participation in the invasion of North Africa.

While here this force had two practice invasions against the harbor of Belfast. Securing of the harbor and the harbor installations being the main objective. On the 21st of October, 1942 they embarked on their mission from Belfast, North Ireland. The remainder of the Regiment continued with intensified training, small unit problems, long marches and combat firing. The Regiment received many junior officers who were given a short course of instructions to familiarise themselves with the Division's Standard of Procedure and tactical doctrines.

Throughout the various stations the Regimental Band was a consistent uplift to morale. Out of the Band was formed the "Ambassadors of Swing", a 14 piece dance band which gained popularity in the whole of North Ireland. In recognition of their outstanding success, they were selected to officially open the new Red Cross building in Belfast, during which time they played an Allied Forces program over the British Broadcasting Company and also a National Broadcasting Company program direct to the United States. The calls for the "Ambassadors" to play at dances, parties and concerts were so numerous that the one band could not accommodate all the calls, so a secondary dance band was formed, known as the "Reveilliers".

A number of the senior ranking non-commissioned officers were selected by a Division board to be returned to the States to attend Officers' Candidate School. Some of these non-commissioned officers returned to this Regiment as officers some time later.

The 2nd Battalion, 135th Infantry, less Co. "F", and with the addition of Co. "M", left Camp Blessingbourne, in the vicinity of Fivemiletown, North Ireland, with other Divisional troops in an advance party known as Group II-A under command of Col. Charles M. MARKIN, embarking at Liverpool, England on the 9th of December, 1942, enroute to North Africa.

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The remainder of the Regiment began to move from their stations in North Ireland to England on the 11th of December, 1942. They spent approximately ten days in England and embarked at Liverpool, England with other Divisional troops on the 23rd of December, 1942 enroute to join the 31st Infantry Division in North Africa.

The above narrative of Phase II was compiled and derived from the following sources--

1. G-2, G-3 Journals of the 31st Division.
2. S-2, S-3 reports.
3. Battalion Journal and Diaries.