

HISTORY

First Battalion, 275th Infantry

## HISTORY OF FIRST BATTALION, 275TH INFANTRY

The 70th Infantry Division cadre, taken principally from the ranks of the 91st Infantry Division, filtered in to Camp Adair, Oregon during the early weeks of May, 1943. By 13 May 1943, the entire cadre had reported, and around this nucleus of trained soldiery, the 70th Division began to take form. There followed a course in cadre training, and on 13 June 1943, the 70th Division was officially organized. By a coincidence, on 13 June 1944, President Roosevelt designated this date as "Infantry Day", a fitting anniversary gift to the division.

The first fillers to swell the ranks of the division made their appearance in August, 1943. Further fillers arrived to fill the ranks until the first week of September, 1943. On 15 September 1943, with elaborate ceremonies and distinguished guests at Bradley Bowl, the division was officially activated.

Activation Day was a crisp, cool and sunny autumn day--perfect weather for a perfect occasion, and the personnel of the division were in good, high spirits. The program was high-lighted by little unscheduled items of human interest. There was the toddling child who scampered across the open area and up on to the stand, eluding the clutching MP's. There was the little white dog who crawled up on the stand and sniffed expectantly of the microphone stand, as he would have to a favorite tree, until he was shooed away. With the conclusion of the ceremonies, the men marched off the field, an activated fighting division. At the time of activation, the 1st Battalion, 275th Infantry was commanded by stern, fair but exacting Lt Col (then Major) Macaulica.

Following activation, there were hours of drill on hot sunny days. There were days on end of marching to the rifle range; and squatting, sitting, kneeling and lying prone in the puddles on the firing line; all done in a perpetual, driving rain. There were bivouacs and problems conducted in more rain. On 15 December 1943, the division had officially concluded basic training.

During the middle of the month of January 1944, the first group of men, all privates and privates first class, were transferred out of the division to fill the ranks of the 91st Division, then readying itself for embarkation. Several additional groups followed to further swell the ranks of the 91st, until approximately one-third of the original 70th Division was serving with the 91st, the parent division of the 70th. Following this, more troops were taken from the ranks of the 70th to bring up the ranks of other divisions alerted for overseas shipment.

There followed an influx of new men--Air Corps, ASTP and new inductees all contributed to bring the 70th division up to strength.

On 20 July 1944, the first elements of the 1st Battalion, 275th Infantry left Camp Adair, Oregon for Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The congenial spirit of the group on this train ride was of marked contrast to the somewhat apprehensive attitude of the new soldiers detouring at Camp Adair some months previously. The last elements of the battalion closed into the new area at Fort Leonard Wood on 24 July 1944.

History--1st Bn, 275th Inf. (Continued)

To many was brought home the truth of the army adage "There's no camp so good as the one you just left, none so bad as the one you're at". At Camp Adair the men griped about "Goat meat" and the weather, and did not consider the spacious PX's, the hot summer days which were always followed by cool nights, and the convenient bus schedules to the nearby friendly little towns, within a half-hour's bus ride. Fort Leonard Wood had none of these, but to the bulk of the men it was no more than a day's travel away from home. To a large degree, the proximity to home compensated for Fort Wood's shortcomings.

At Fort Leonard Wood the battalion received more training in weak subjects. Squad problems were stressed, in the knowledge that the squad leader is the backbone of the Army. At Fort Wood the battalion lost Lt Col Macoska in a transfer, and the battalion came under the command of Lt Col Pierce. With the transfer of Lt Col Pierce, Major Duffie, executive officer of the battalion, took temporary charge. Major Duffie was genuinely liked and respected by all the men of the battalion, and it was with regret that the battalion learned a new commander was to be placed in charge. Shortly thereafter the battalion was commanded by Lt Col Malloy, one of the best-liked and most thoroughly respected officers to command the unit.

Under Lt Col Malloy the first elements of the battalion left Fort Leonard Wood on 15 November 1944 for the staging area, Camp Hyles Standish, Massachusetts. The last elements of the 1st Battalion, 275th Inf closed into the staging area, on 20 November 1944.

"Standish was ok," was the general consensus of opinion among the men, with plenty of food and nearby entertainment, but the stay was not a long one. On 6 December 1945, in the frosty chill of the morning hours, the battalion entrained for the short ride to the dock. To the strains of the ship's orchestra, and the well-meant but meager consolation of coffee and doughnuts, the battalion boarded the transport.

The ship upon which the regiment travelled was named the "West Point", having formerly been a luxury liner, the "America". The West Point was the largest commercial boat built in the United States, grossing 26,000 tons. She had been stripped of her unnecessary appointments, and refitted with bunks in every nook and cranny, but she was still, to the men of the regiment, "A good deal, compared to a Liberty Ship". Most of the men of the regiment had never sailed on anything larger than a row-boat, and had their first unpleasant experience with sea-sickness on the first night out of port. Pulling out of Boston Harbor at approximately 1600 6 December 1945, the ship nosed into the cold, gray rolling swell of the North Atlantic. A day later found her hundreds of miles South, skirting the coast of the Carolinas, then swinging her prow Eastward, passing not too many miles from Bermuda. After many days of monotony, broken only by the appearance of flying fish and an occasional shark, the West Point passed the coasts of Spain and Africa. The Straits of Gibraltar, a mere pin prick of distance on maps, proved to be wide enough to string a fleet of battleships, end to end.

On 15 December 1944, the West Point docked at Marseilles, France. At Marseilles, the units that had shipped overseas and comprised the first elements of the division to reach the European theater, were christened "Task Force Herren". Task Force Herren was encamped at CP 2, near Aix, France.

History--1st Bn, 275th Inf. (Continued)

The equipping of the 1st Battalion continued at OP 2, efficiently and un-hurriedly, until, rather abruptly it ceased, Task Force Herron was alerted for movement to the front. It was here at OP 2, at the time the division was to move to the front that the battalion lost Lt Col Malloy, and again Lt Col Pierce was placed in charge. The first elements of 1st Battalion, 275th Infantry left OP 2 on 22 December 1944, in World War I vintage box cars--the famed "Forty and Eight". The cars were admittedly cattle cars, easily attested to by the scent of previous occupants still perceptible in the interior.

As the train and motor convoy moved toward a rendezvous at the front, feelings were mixed. The optimistic believed the war was coming to a quick end; the pessimistic pointed to the German drive then under way, rushing South at a speed and effectiveness that threatened to split the Allied line wide open. Immediately prior to entraining for the front, the war took on a personal aspect with the issuance of two bandoleers of cartridges and a full cartridge belt.

As the train approached the front, the grimmer facets of the war became evident. Dead Germans were seen--huddled heaps of clothing, burned out tanks, American and German, and innumerable fox-holes. Little sobering influences occurred continuously. At one point the troop train was side-tracked, to be by-passed by a hospital train, impressively clean and white and sanitary through the glass coach windows. Someone honestly remarked later, "It gave me a funny feeling inside, watching that train go by."

In the desolate chill of early morning on 26 December 1944, the 1st Battalion detrained at Brumath, France and were spoken to shortly by Lt Col Pierce. As Lt Col Pierce told the assembled men that in less than forty-eight hours they would be on the front, an almost tangible quickening of pulses could be felt. Here the 1st Battalion, 275th Infantry began the nomadic life of part of a task force attached to another division (the 45th).

On 28 December 1944, the battalion having moved to Goudersheim and Hoerdt since detraining at Brumath, the 1st Battalion received its mild initiation to the front. After a short stay at Hoerdt, the battalion was moved to Reichshoffen, then to Wiresheim.

On 2 January 1945, considerably cockier than when it detrained at Brumath, the 1st Battalion moved into Phillipsbourg, France to attack the German positions to the North of the town. The battalion OP was established in Phillipsbourg, and A and B Companies went on to the North edge of the town, to attack the enemy in the hills to the North. Company C was in reserve, dug in on the high ground to the West of, and immediately adjacent to the town. A remnant of Company D and practically all of Hq Company were situated within the town. The mild initiation to the front received by the battalion at Hoerdt had a lulling effect on the men of the battalion. A lone sniper in the woods to the West proved to be more of a diversion than a threat. Shooting at impossibly long range, he failed to score any hits, and the personnel remaining in the town lined the long single street of Phillipsbourg as if watching a comedy. As a 57 mm gun and a little later 105 HE shells slammed into the woods near his position, he beat a hasty retreat.

During the night of 2-3 January 1945, the town was subjected to sporadic artillery fire, varying in intensity. In the early morning hours the artillery barrage increased in intensity and then died completely. In the OP, plans were being formulated to continue the attack. A and B Companies had attacked,

and the reserve company, Company C, was to be committed. Receiving last minute instructions from Lt Col Pierce, Capt Grothser, commanding Company C, saluted and turned toward the door. As he did so, a single rifle shot shattered the early morning quiet. It was followed by several more, then by the hrrrrrrr of a German machine pistol, and the battle for possession of Phillipsbourg had begun.

The enemy struck most heavily from a generally southwestern direction, and swung toward the North. The attack was launched at 0735. The German force was obviously numerically superior to the American, and an attempt was made to recall Companies A and B to defend the town. All attempts at communication failed, and the defense of the town rested with the personnel remaining there. The German forces attacked repeatedly, but each attempt was unsuccessful. All available personnel were pressed into combat service, and it was not unusual to find a mechanic, a driver and an office worker firing from windows of the same house. In the afternoon the enemy shifted his attack to drive from the northern edge of the town. In the early afternoon, communication was destroyed with the rear installations, and the battalion was cut off from all support. The outlook became increasingly bleak during the afternoon, as the enemy worked his way South toward the edge of the town. The climax of the engagement came abruptly with a shouted warning relayed down the street. "Enemy tanks and infantry coming down the street." As the battalion prepared itself for a last-ditch stand, a platoon of American tanks, with accompanying infantry, under the command of Lt Col Malloy, came up from the South, effectively checking the German advance.

The battle for Phillipsbourg raged four days. Runners, sent out to locate A and B Companies during lulls in the action, were unable to locate them. A Company was later found to have been cut off and surrounded, but infiltrated back to the regimental area. Company B, it was learned later, had been cut off and surrounded. After making an heroic stand, with no food or drinking water other than that made by melting snow, with some killed and several badly wounded men, the company was surrendered on, it is believed, 8 January 1945.

Relieved, the final elements of the battalion moved from Phillipsbourg and on 7 January 1945 the remnants of the battalion were dug in on the icy expense of Wintersberg, above the town of Niederbronn. 8 January 1945 found the battalion in Niederbronn, awaiting commitment to a new area. On 9 January the battalion was placed in position near Ober Inthal, France, and an attack was launched by A and C Companies against the German positions there. Further depleted by this action, the battalion was relieved and withdrawn. On 15 January the battalion was moved to Lampertloch.

It was at Lampertloch, that the battalion received the good news--we were no longer "Task Force Herren", attached to the 45th Division, but were now a consolidated force, the 70th Division.

From Lampertloch, on 14 January 1945, the battalion moved to Nousweiler, France, area, where the stable existence as part of a division was a welcome change from the wandering existence as part of a task force.

The battalion remained in a defensive position in the Nousweiler, Badenbronn, Reuhling area, and further training was begun for the push that was to come with favorable weather. Rumor had it that the whole American line was to push on the 15th of February, and the customary sweating out of the attack began. The only action engaged in at this time were patrols sent to feel out the enemy.

History--1st Bn, 275th Inf. (Continued)

At 0630 17 February 1945, the assault to the East was begun by the 1st Battalion, with a drive into Lixing by Company A. Reorganized B Company pushed through town to continue the attack. C Company circled around the edge of town, and pushed forward with A Company. Elements of D company were attached to the attacking companies for supporting fire. Lixing was secured at 1300 that day, and the battalion pressed Eastward. It was in Lixing that Lt Col Pierce was wounded by 88 shrapnel, and the battalion came under the command of the very courageous Major Cahoon.

At 0630 20 February, C Company crossed the LD toward Alsting, with the Germans withdrawing without contesting too strongly. The attack continued unabated until reaching the Stifswald Forest, on the heights above Saarbrucken. Here the enemy turned and counterattacked savagely, with the support of tanks. The tide of battle surged forward and backward, with the heaviest attack experienced on the night of 22 February, when the German forces came perilously close to driving the battalion back into the town of Alsting. In one phase of the action, German troops were within 200 yards of the forward battalion CP.

As the action tapered off, the 1st Battalion was still in possession of the commanding terrain, although badly depleted. Here, in the Stifswald Forest, overlooking Saarbrucken, Germany, the battalion reformed itself, received fillers, and the customary sweating out of the inevitable coming attack on Saarbrucken began. Saarbrucken and the vaunted Siegfried Line gave real cause for sweating out, especially in view of the obvious river crossing to be attempted. Feeler raids were numerous, and damn rumor was rampant in the battalion. Tentative plans were actually drawn in battalion headquarters for the amphibious action.

The proposed river crossing fortunately never came to pass. The sweep of the Third Army Southward, along the rear of the Siegfried Line, threatened to cut off the German defenders of Saarbrucken, and they abandoned the position. On 15 March 1945 a patrol attempted a daylight penetration of the dragon teeth fronting our position, and sustained 93 percent casualties. Companies awaiting the attack sweated a little more.

On 20 March, with no opposition, the 1st Battalion, 275th Infantry rode into Saarbrucken. This terminated the combat career of the battalion in the European Theater of Operations. The headlong withdrawal of the German forces, left the battalion in the wake of the pursuing American armies.

The problem of occupation next fell to the battalion. The werewolf organization proved to be little more than a myth. The open hostility of the populace as the battalion entered Germany seemed to soften the deeper into Germany the battalion penetrated.

On 25 March the battalion moved into the vicinity of Bann, Germany. It was at Bann that the battalion was strafed by a prowling German Junkers JU 88 night fighter. There were no casualties. On Easter Sunday, 1 April, the battalion moved into the vicinity of Ober Hilbersheim, where the members of the battalion I and R Section confiscated an American flag, containing 45 stars, in the possession of a German family. The flag had been received from a former German immigrant, who had returned to his native land and presented the flag to the townspeople prior to the first world war.

History—1st Bn. 275th Inf. (Continued)

On 11 April 1945 the battalion moved to Frankfurt am, for a pleasant stay. It was at Frankfurt that the attitude of at least part of the populace became evident, with the cutting of some telephone wires. The culprit was not apprehended, but the act was not repeated.

On 7 May 1945, while the battalion was billeted in Frankfurt, the war was declared over.