

WORLD WAR II

ACTIVATION AND TRAINING IN THE U.S.

The 357th Infantry was reactivated at Camp Barkeley, Texas on March 25, 1942, as part of the new triangular version of the 90th Infantry Division, VIII Corps, 3rd Army. The officer cadre was obtained from the 6th Infantry Division at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and the 33rd Infantry Division at Camp Force, Tennessee. The enlisted cadre came entirely from the 6th Division. In contrast with other units which had been activated previously, the 357th Infantry was filled in almost entirely with recruits fresh from the reception centers. It was felt that men who were to live together for an indefinite length of time and who were to eventually fight together could be trained more efficiently if they were all started from “scratch” together.

The army had scrapped the idea of mobilizing all the men from one locality into a composite unit. Therefore, the blond haired, blue-eyed boys who came in from the middle west and northwest gave argument to the idea that the new 90th was a 100 per cent Texas and Oklahoma Division. The preponderance of initial recruits, however, came from the reception centers at Camp Walters, Texas, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

The Regiment’s first commander was Colonel Edwin D. Patrick. His dynamic personality, tactical knowledge, and conscientious effort had a great deal to do with the high standard of proficiency gained by the Regiment during its initial training. Colonel Patrick has never been forgotten by the original men who knew him.¹

By the end of April, the Regiment had a strength of 158 officers and 3373 enlisted men, and basic training had gotten well under way. The eager ears of the new soldiers were now turned toward the rumor factory which was putting out the hot dope that the Division would sail within four months. To most, this was World War I all over again and not many gave thought to the fact that there were no friendly shores to land on nor were there any well-defined battle lines to slide into as there were in the last war. The soldiers in this war had to have it from the word “go” and be able to hit the ground fighting. That’s why a long period of intensive training was to follow before any ideas about ships and sailing were to be given any thought.

During the period August 8th to 12th, 1942, a cadre consisting of 231 enlisted men and 25 officers was sent to Camp Adair, Oregon, to form the 104th Infantry Division.

Basic training was now over and the Regiment spent most of its time in the field. Stress was always placed on physical conditioning, and road marches with full field equipment up to 15 miles were taken in their stride by the men who were just completing their first six months in the army. Most of the men were now wearing their first army decorations – marksman,

¹Major Gen. Patrick was killed on March 16, 1945 in the Phillipines. He was commander of the 6th Infantry Division and at the time of his death was up with his troops when struck down by a Jap machine gun.

sharpshooter, and expert rifleman medals, won on the range with the new M-1 rifle. The fact that the American soldier is traditionally a good shot was substantiated. Men who had been privates just a few short weeks ago are now sporting brand new corporal's and sergeant's stripes. Things were moving along.

On 15 September, the Regiment was motorized in conformance with the Army order to convert a limited number of infantry divisions into motorized divisions. The initial glee of those who thought their walking days were over was short lived, however, for the foot work continued. First and last, the Regiment was still a "paddle foot" outfit.

Lt. Col. John W. Sheehy assumed command of the Regiment on 20 November to replace Colonel Patrick who was assigned to a higher post. Lt. Col. Sheehy's long period of command had a profound effect upon the spirit and fighting qualities which the Regiment was to display later in combat. His knowledge of human nature and the problems of the common soldier won for him the respect and admiration of every man in the Regiment.

From 13th to 19th December, 1942, the Regiment took part in a one-week maneuver at Camp Bowie, Texas, completing battalion firing tests which comprised the firing of live artillery over the heads of the men for the first time, and the use of live small arms ammunition in attacks on simulated enemy positions. The Regiment was addressed by Lt. General Dan I. Sultan, then Major General in command of the VIII Corps, who stressed the importance of artillery in command, and assured the men that artillery support would not be lacking when the real thing came. This was later proved to be absolutely correct.

During the months of the December and January, the Regiment completed the Regimental Combat Team and Divisional Unit Training phases in the wooded hills surrounding Camp Barkeley. These problems were conducted under simulated combat conditions. The weather was extremely cold at times, but fires or other comforts which a soldier in combat is denied were taboo here also. The Regiment was now living outdoors more than it was indoors. The men were in fine physical condition, each having gained an average of 10 pounds, and were beginning to feel that they knew something about soldiering.

Concurrent with the above training, the Regiment conducted basic training for newly received filler replacements, most of which came from the Atlantic seaboard states.

The men now knew their jobs, had learned to work as a team, and consequently were ready for some big scale maneuvers. On 26th January, 1943, the Regiment moved with the Division 600 miles by truck to the vicinity of Leesville, Louisiana. During the two months the Division was engaged in Third Army maneuvers against the 77th Infantry Division. The piney woods in East Texas, and densely wooded swamps along the Sabine River and in western Louisiana made an excellent battle ground and gave them an inkling of what was to be required of them. The Regiment made an excellent record during this maneuver.

The 2nd of April found the Regiment back at its permanent station at Camp Barkeley. Training was continued with stress being placed on infiltration courses, small unit firing problems, range firing, and physical conditioning. The men were able to knock off 25 miles in

less than 8 hours, carrying full field equipment. At this time, the deserving men were granted 15 day furloughs.

As the month of August drew to a close, most of the men thought the time had come for them to prove themselves. They did know, however, that Uncle Sam was not sparing any expense or being rushed when it came to readying for combat one of these crack units, which he was later to depend on to win the war by whipping a tough enemy in the field. Consequently, the 1st of September found the Regiment speeding west on seven full trains to the California-Arizona maneuver area.

During the five month interim between the Louisiana and desert maneuvers, the Regiment, as part of the Division, was de-motorized and reverted back to the status of a regular infantry division. The nature of the fighting overseas had shown that motorized divisions would not be required initially and could not be employed as effectively as could regular infantry.

By 11th September, 1943, the Regiment was in place at its regular station, Camp Granite, California. This was a tent camp located some 40 miles east of Desert Center. Here rigorous training was conducted in the principles and privations of desert warfare. Although the fighting in North Africa had ended by this time, the training received in the desert was valuable from the standpoint of physical conditioning, moving and maintaining direction at night, operating efficiently with limited water and food supplies, and logistical experience.

After three weeks of Regimental Combat Team problems conducted in the vicinity of Salome, Arizona, from 21st October to 10th November, the Regiment, as part of the Division, engaged in 20 days of corps maneuvers in California against the 93rd Infantry Division. This is a division composed of colored soldiers which has since distinguished itself in action at Bougainville and during other major engagements in the Pacific. The skillful opposition offered by this unit during the maneuvers was most valuable to the Regiment in ironing out the final kinks and readying it for the tests ahead.

At the completion of the desert training period, the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Samuel T. Williams informed the troops that this was their last maneuver. Although everyone knew what this meant, they did not mind saying goodbye to the desert with its sand, sun, chilly nights, and loneliness.

It was now time for the rumor factory to produce the location of the next station for the Division. Grade "B" output had it that the next trip would be back to Texas to Camp Barkeley, but Grade "A", with judgment and common sense added, brought out the name of Fort Dix, New Jersey. It was now time for staging. The training and been long, hard, and thorough. The men were now as ready as they could ever be for battle. They had been trained in every phase of army life and combat that the Army had to offer.

After a four day train ride from 26th to 31st December clear across the country, the Regiment detrained at Fort Dix. For the first time in nearly two years of training the men lived in regular barracks with steam heat and running water. Time was now devoted to weeding out the physically unfit men, securing serviceable equipment, range firing, and most important, the

granting of final furloughs. Show-down inspections of clothing and equipment were the order the day. Replacements were received and by the 15th of March the Regiment was up to battle strength. On this day, the Regiment began moving by rail to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Here final issues of clothing and equipment were made and final physical examinations conducted. Only a very few failed to pass.

On the 22nd of March the Regiment moved to the New York port of embarkation and boarded "HMS Dominion Monarch", a 27,000 ton British ex-luxury liner which had been converted into a troop transport and turned over to the United States Army by the British government.

EMBARKATION AND TRAINING OVERSEAS

At 0545 of the 23rd of March, 1944, the Regiment sailed. To most, this was the occasion for the first goodbye to their homeland. As the convoy moved farther out, it grew until finally there were over forty ships of all classes, troop ships, tankers, aircraft carriers, destroyers, and cruisers. The 13 day voyage was without particular incident from a seaman's point of view, but many of the landlubbers spent considerable time feeding the fish, and expected to be sent to the bottom most every day by U-boats.

The Dominion Monarch docked at Mersey Docks, Liverpool, England, on the 4th of April, 1944. After de-barking at 1630, the troops loaded immediately on trains and moved to Kinlet Park (near Kidderminster, England). All elements of the Regiment were quartered here except the 1st Battalion which was quartered at Camp Gatacre nearby.

Intensive training was begun immediately with stress being placed on speed marches and on forced marches with heavy loads of weapons and ammunition. Covering 5 miles on foot in less than an hour was the way it went. This can and will be appreciated only by those readers who have walked up the steep English hills and realize that the average rate of march for foot troops is only 2 ½ miles per hour.

During the stay in Kinlet Park, the men were granted short passes to the nearby towns. The soldiers, however, were not here for fun, but for the most serious business they had ever undertaken – and they knew it. Besides, when the evening came, a few hours rest what was wanted most.

Only a few short months ago the speculators had said that the 90th Division would not see action until the initial landing units had proceeded far inland on the French mainland. They were not so sure now. Although guessing openly when D-Day would be was discouraged by authorities, each man, in his own mind, was doing quite a bit of thinking and wondering about it. The chances of guessing correctly were aided materially on the 13th of May when the Regiment moved 64 miles nearer the English Channel to Camp Race Course, Chepstow, Monmouthshire, Wales. It was here that the men had their first experience with enemy planes and bombs. Although the attack was not directed against the Regimental Camp but at a coastal city several miles away, the exploding bombs sounded as though they were falling in the next field. This occurred during the days before the advent of the flying bomb when the Germans still had a few planes left with which to harass Britain.

During the period from 14th May to 3rd June, the Regiment carried out usual physical conditioning training while making final preparations for the invasion of France. On 15th of May, Colonel Phillip Ginder assumed command of the Regiment to replace Colonel Sheehy who was attached to 90th Division Headquarters.