

Getting Ready



"Kanek" - Kenneth Kaneko



*New Friends
Raymond Taomae and a barefooted "Huck Finn"*

Camp McCoy

There was no fanfare. No leis, no friends, no Royal Hawaiian Band to welcome the newly-arrived Japanese American soldiers with a warm "Aloha." They were met instead by armed troops, guarding the harbor areas of San Francisco Bay. The converted troopship, the *S.S. Maui*, had just docked in Oakland, California on June 12, 1942, about a week after the 100th's departure from Honolulu on June 5, 1942.

During the voyage, the troops were crammed in the ship's hold, an extremely stuffy area where the stale air made many soldiers nauseous. Most of the men spent countless hours on the decks or along the open gangways, taking it easy or actively participating in card and crap games. Thousands of dollars exchanged hands each day. Some were big winners, but most were losers. At night, some of the more hardy men squeezed into multi-level bunk beds that offered little room for movement. Through it all, there was no respite from KP or latrine duties. The arrival in Oakland was just the beginning of an extraordinary period in the lives of the 100th soldiers.

The men went from the *S.S. Maui* directly to trains waiting near the gangplanks. Packed to capacity, the sleeper trains chugged across the country via three different routes. One of the first orders issued on the trains was, "Keep the window shutters down." This, the men were told, was done to prevent the possibility of panic by people along the route who might become distressed or confused at seeing Asian soldiers on troop trains.

An outlandish assumption, but the order to keep the blinds down was carried out at least in the beginning. After several hours, however, the shutters were slowly lifted; the soldiers were anxious to view the open countryside, a new experience for most.

The train ride was monotonous and tiring, but the memories remain striking. There were no bathing facilities, and only a single no-flush restroom per coach. Meals aboard the troop train were strictly GI fare, without the luxuries of PX beer, soft drinks and pupus. Card games, crap shoots and bull sessions prevailed from morning till the wee hours of the night. The black porter assigned to the car was very accommodating and wise, and everyone got along well. At the end of the journey, the men remembered the porter with an envelope stuffed with money and a thank-you note.

The men did not know of their destination until a day or two before reaching Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. There were rumors about the existence of a Japanese POW camp at McCoy, which fueled speculation that the 100th was to be assigned the role of guarding such prisoners.

There was no train station at Camp McCoy, only a siding from which the troops disembarked and marched directly to an area of tents, designated as living quarters – four soldiers to a tent – and supplied with a bunk bed, blanket, towels and backpack for starters.

After a few days of adapting to tent life, the soldiers were assigned to various units: Companies A through E, Headquarters Company, Medics, Motor Pool, Battalion Supply and so on. Meanwhile, the troops began intense training – building physical stamina, improving marksmanship, learning military tactics and more.

Several months after arrival at Camp McCoy, the troops were assigned to permanent barracks, a great improvement over the tents which lacked such comforts as indoor plumbing and a central heating system for the bitter Wisconsin winter. The barracks,





"Shooting Up"

*L-R standing: Seiso Kamishita
Henry Fujii, George Nakamura,
H. Scott Wise. Firing machine
gun is Ronald Hamamura,
coached by Ken Yoshimoto*



"Sheiking Up"

*L-R standing: Seiso Kamishita
Migi Hasegawa. L-R front:
Kenneth Higa, Robert Kapumiai*



"Chowing Up"

*L-R: Yukio Takaki, Henry H. Nakai,
Yoshio K. Okimoto*

thank goodness, offered these appreciated amenities. In addition, a PX and movie theater were nearby, which proved popular during and after duty hours, especially with beer selling for 15 cents a bottle.

Passes did not come easily or frequently, but the men earned these "privileges" through such traits as good behavior, neatness and an absence of demerits. With passes in hand, the troops visited the nearby towns of Sparta, Tomah and La Crosse and got to know the town's people. Many of the boys made new friends, some of which resulted in lasting friendships and a number of marriages.

As autumn approached, the milk cows grazing contentedly over gentle, rolling hills provided a picturesque background. The leaves of the non-conifers were turning into colors of brilliant red-orange hues, while the evergreens remained unaffected by winter.

One of the more memorable experiences for the Hawaii soldiers was the thrill and novelty of frolicking in the snow for the first time in their lives. There were sleigh rides, snowball fights and Christmas caroling. The snowman's eyes and nose were marked with pieces of furnace coal taken from the coal supply bin. The soldiers listened to Bing Crosby's soft, inspiring version of "White Christmas," a song that brought pleasant memories for the men spending their first Yuletide season away from friends and families back home.

The rigors of military training intensified by early 1943 – maneuvers, hiking, long marches and small arms firing practice. The men developed their stamina and were in good physical shape. As the going got tougher through constant, grueling training, the men were often involved in fights with members of the 2nd Division from Texas. Texans were physically larger and appeared tougher than their smaller counterparts in the 100th, but, like David versus Goliath, the Nisei soldiers more than held their own in scuffles. It was a great feeling to see the Nisei

boys, particularly those who excelled in martial arts, gain an upper hand over the towering GIs.

Col. Farrant Turner, the 100th's commanding officer, reminded the battalion at one of the retreats, "Don't try to take on a whole division – save your fights for the battlefields." This "chew out" had a profound effect on the 100th's troops. From that time, confrontations were significantly reduced in number and intensity.

Once, the men gathered for "Photograph Day" to commemorate the first official military post assignment of the 100th's personnel to various companies, medic groups and officer corps. All available men reported to a designated photograph area, dressed smartly in newly-laundered and starched uniforms. The only ones missing were men on furloughs, sick bay or on other essential duties.

Competition among and between companies was keen. Each vied for the largest number of expert riflemen and the best test scores. This competitive spirit spilled into athletics – baseball, boxing, wrestling, softball. And sometimes there were rough and tumble fights between the men over trivial matters such as "cutting in" on dances and dates, unintentional slurs and simply brawling for the sake of releasing pent-up emotions.

Food was usually plentiful, except on maneuvers or field training, when the men nibbled on C rations. At times, the field kitchen served "undependable food" way past mealtime because of malfunctioning equipment, non-delivery of food or screw-ups.

The initial appearance of mutton stew did not appeal to the majority of the men for several reasons – unfamiliarity, plus the overwhelming stench of the mutton as it floated around in the stew. This sharply depressed the men's appetite. When mutton was on the menu, the troops headed for hot dogs and hamburgers at the PX. The more affluent traveled to nearby eateries for steak and fries. Rice was served occasionally, but not as often as desired by the rice-eating men from Hawaii. One ranking Hawaii officer





Memories of a Wisconsin Winter

made the comment: "... Too much rice does not convey the image of an American soldier. We should restrict ourselves to potatoes and bread." The men took the lecture as a bad joke since rice continued to be the favorite staple of the 100th, including the officer who made the distasteful remark.

After months of training in Wisconsin, the men once again rode crowded troop trains and headed for Camp Shelby, Mississippi for yet another adventure.

Dr. Kenneth Otagaki

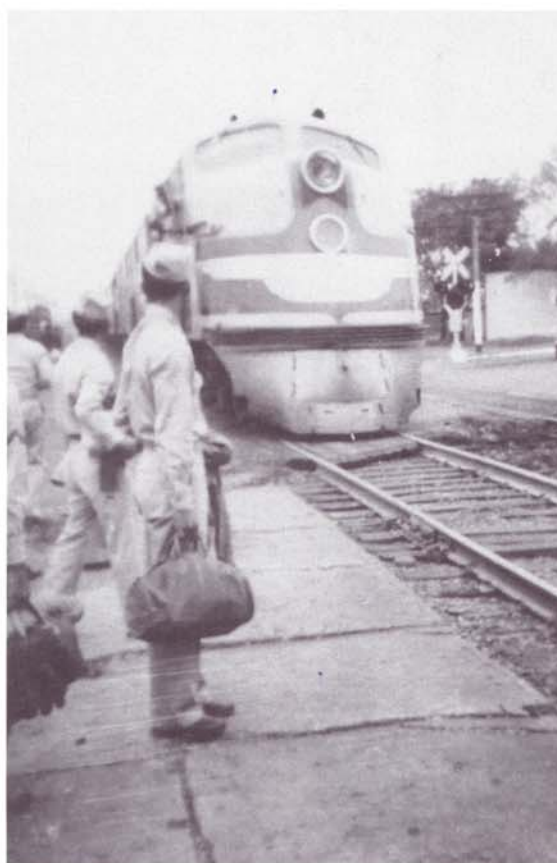


Dressed for Action

*L-R, top: Ed Ikuma, David Suzuki,
Al Nozaki; kneeling: Allan Ohata,
Wataru Kaneshima*



Guess Who?



The "Hiawatha"

