



Italy - again

Cracking the Gothic Line

It was a big surprise for the 100th and the 442nd to learn they were returning to Italy. Following the delightful but too brief Champagne Campaign in Southern France, the men boarded LSTs in Marseille without their equipment and departed on March 23, 1945 "for an unknown destination." They were told on the third day that the landing ships would arrive in Leghorn the following day.

Only then was it apparent that they were going to do more fighting in Northern Italy. The Fifth Army had not made much progress for five months along the Gothic Line, the last great defensive position the German Army had built to protect the Po Valley. The 92nd Division, operating along the Ligurian coast, had been rebuffed by the enemy and could not make any headway.

Gen. Mark Clark negotiated with Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, for the return of the 100th and the 442nd to help in the final stages of the Italian campaign. Gen. Eisenhower was planning to use the 442nd for the Battle of the Bulge, but acceded to Clark's request. However, he kept the 522nd FA Bn. for the allied drive into Germany. When Gen. Clark finally received approval, he decided to use the Nisei outfit as a secret weapon on the left flank where the 92nd needed some help. But Gen. Clark wanted to surprise the enemy. This was the reason for the secrecy surrounding the return of the 442nd to rejoin the Fifth Army. When they landed in Leghorn on March 27, the men had to remove all identification from their uniforms and helmets.

The Nisei units were transported to a staging area near Pisa where they were issued new rifles, machine guns, mortars and vehicles because their equipment had been left behind in France. Still maintaining the secrecy, the Nisei regiment – on the evening of March 28 – moved to an assembly area

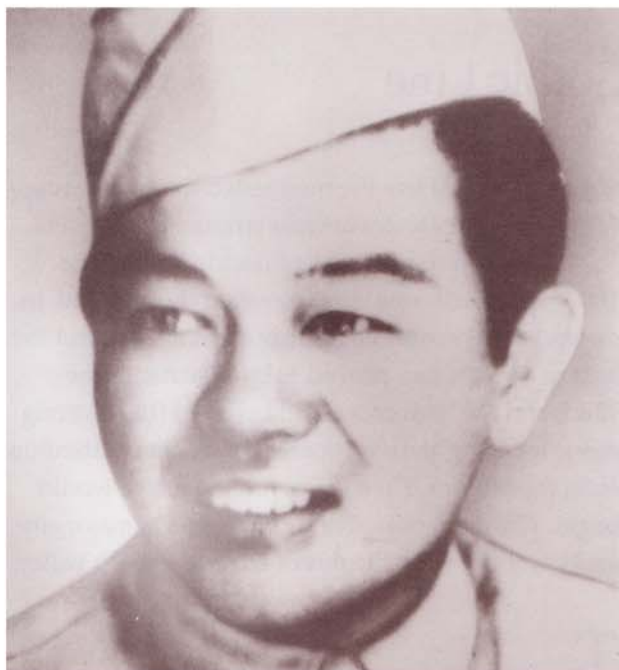
north of Lucca. Here the men tested their new weapons, trained replacements and studied battle plans.

The high command had decided to use the 100/442 for a diversionary move on the left flank to distract the enemy. The narrow coastal plain and the hills to the east had proved to be a barrier to the 92nd, and the high command believed that a strong move here might divert some of the enemy attention from the interior. Then the spring offensive would begin. The main objective was Bologna, a major city and key junction in the interior, leading to Po Valley.

To surprise the enemy, the plan called for the 100th, 2nd and 3rd Battalions to climb Georgia Hill at night for a dawn attack on that and several other highly fortified heights. The 100th would attack frontally and the other two battalions would hit the enemy with a pincer movement. It was a perilous climb in the dark up this steep mountain that was 3,000 feet in elevation. But the three units were in place by 5 a.m. the next morning when the attack began with an artillery barrage. Missouri-raised T/Sgt. Chester Tanaka, S3 Section, 3rd Bn. of the 442nd, author of "Go For Broke – A Pictorial History of the Japanese American 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team," describes the diversionary attack by the 100th as follows:

"During the first few hundred yards of advance, eight mines were blown, heavy machine-gun fire was encountered, and as the 100th closed in on the enemy, grenades rained down --- from elevated positions. In spite of the murderous fire, the 100th took the heat, drew the enemy's attention, and accomplished its diversionary mission. The 2nd and 3rd battalions' surprise attack while the Germans were occupied with the 100th was a

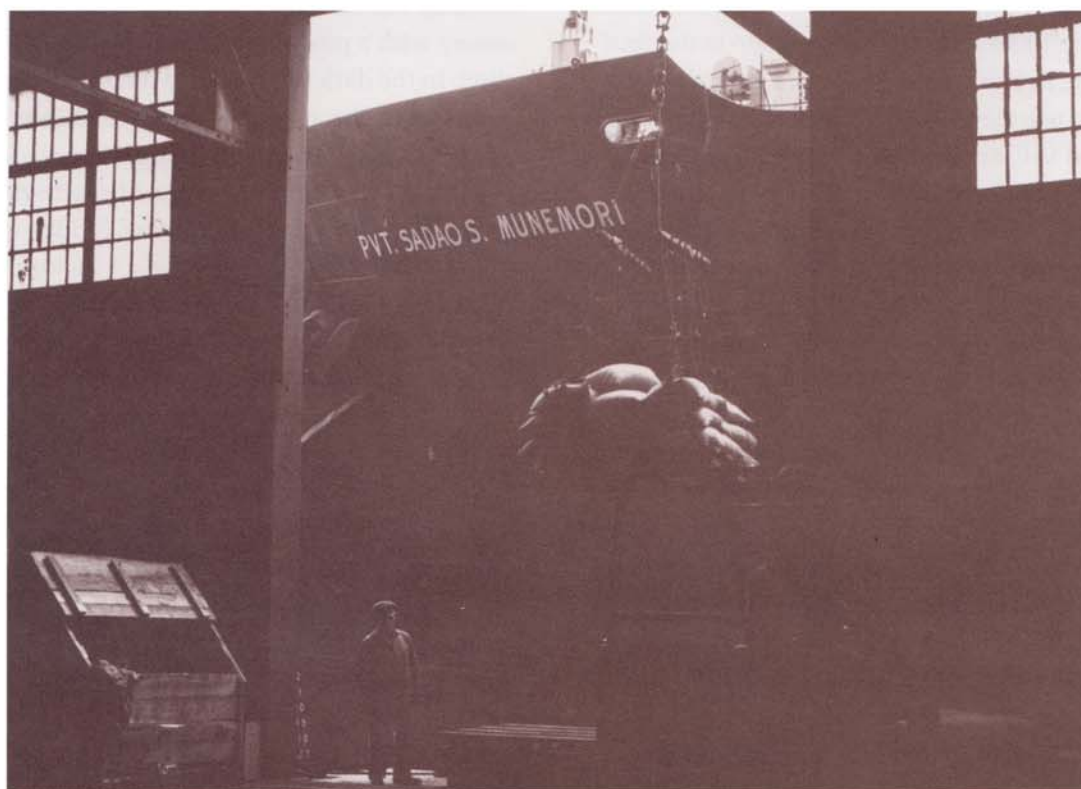




*Sadao Munemori
Medal of Honor recipient*



*Hiroshi Miyamura
Medal of Honor recipient, Korea*



S.S. Munemori

complete success. In a remarkable 32 minutes, by 0532, the 100/442 had cracked the Gothic Line."

Tanaka details the heroic actions of two men of the 100th – Pfc Henry Y. Arao of A Co. and Pfc Sadao S. Munemori, of Los Angeles, an assistant squad leader also of A Co.

Early in the drive, Arao gave first aid to his wounded squad leader, reorganized the squad and led them forward with an enemy machine gun nest as the objective. In the face of heavy enemy fire, he halted the squad, and crept ahead alone. Tanaka wrote:

"Crawling through a thick minefield, Arao used what little cover that existed to advance toward the machine-gun nest. With steady aim, he tossed a hand grenade in the midst of the enemy gunners. Charging the next, he shot one of the still-moving gunners and took the other as prisoner. When a second machine gun opened fire, Pfc Arao again advanced alone, threw another grenade and killed both gunners. The rest of the enemy fled in confusion."

Munemori also took charge after his squad leader was wounded. Tanaka's account says that "Pfc Munemori made a frontal, one-man attack on two machine-gun nests and knocked out both with hand grenades. Withdrawing under murderous fire and a shower of enemy grenades, he had nearly reached the safety of a shell hole when an unexploded grenade bounced off his helmet and tumbled toward two of his comrades. Rising amidst the withering fire, he dove on top of the live grenade and smothered the blast with his body. He was killed instantly, but his comrades were spared."

For their uncommon valor, Arao earned the DSC, and Munemori was awarded posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor, the only member of the 100th to win the nation's highest military award. Later, a tanker was named in his honor, the first U.S. military ship to bear a Japanese-American name.

With the successful diversionary tactics and breakthrough by the 100th/442nd, the Allied forces began their massive offensive all along the Gothic Line which spelled the beginning of the end for the German Army in Italy. The 100th/442nd led the way up the coast; within a week, Massa and Carrara fell to the Allied forces.

The strategic objective now on the left flank was the vital road hub at Aulla. Tanaka describes the situation: "Should Aulla fall, the escape route that led from La Spezia and Genoa would be cut off. The Germans knew this and so did the 100th/442nd. When the enemy 'blew' their heavy coastal guns and installations at Punta Bianca and La Spezia, it became evident the Germans would make a run to escape through the Aulla hub."

The fighting intensified. There was Mt. Nebbione blocking the way to Aulla. The 100th took their objectives, Marciaso and Posterla, as well as a hill overlooking Viano, but the 2nd and 3rd Bns. could not dislodge the enemy from Nebbione.

"Finally, on April 23, Task Force Fukuda was formed. This special 'commando' unit was made up of Co. B of the 100th, Co. F of the 2nd Bn., and a platoon from the Anti-tank Co. Maj. Mits Fukuda of the 100th commanded. In a concerted military drive, the 100th/442nd cleared Mt. Nebbione, Mt. Carbolo and San Terenzo. Task Force Fukuda and the 2nd Bn. drove in on Aulla from the south and east. By the 25th, they took Aulla from the now fleeing German Army. The roof had caved in on the enemy."

Following the taking of Aulla, the 100th/442nd spent a week chasing the enemy off the Ligurian coast toward Turin and Milan, large cities in the Po Valley. By now, the enemy had been thoroughly routed and the war was coming to an end.

Tanaka describes the final action in Italy this way:

"The 100th took Busalla. The 2nd moved on through to Alessandra and to Asti, the champagne center. There, they took 1,000 prisoners and an equal number of bottles of champagne into custody. The





Still pushing



Germans: Final days of desperation

I and R (Intelligence and Reconnaissance) Platoon raced ahead in their halftracks to claim Turin along with the Partisans."

By May 2, 1945, the war was over in Italy, and nine days later the war in Europe was officially over. The 100th/442nd was pulled back to the Novi Liguri bivouac area and later was moved around for various duties, including rest and recreation in the north lake country. Based on a point system, the men of the 100th were headed home by this time, most of them to Hawaii.

For its part in the Gothic Line campaign, the 100th received its third Presidential Unit Citation. The 100th had become so proficient in battle that it was awarded the highest unit award consecutively for its last three campaigns. The latest citation reads, in part:

"The (100th)/442nd Regimental Combat Team ... is cited for outstanding accomplishment in combat ... by executing a diversionary attack on the Ligurian Coast ... a daring and flanking attack on the positions

which formed the western anchors of the formidable Gothic Line. In four days, the attack destroyed positions that had withstood assaults ... for five months. The (100th)/442nd drove forward despite heavy casualties ... allowing the enemy no time for rest or reorganization ... liberated the city of Carrara, seized the heights beyond ... and opened the way for advances on the key road centers and ports of La Spezia and Genoa ... The successful accomplishment turned a diversionary action into a full-scale and victorious offensive ... an important part in the final destruction of the German armies in Italy."

The citation was issued from the office of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, by then Chief of Staff back at the Pentagon.

The 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry, was officially inactivated on August 15, 1946, in Honolulu, a little more than four years since the provisional battalion left Honolulu in June, 1942, on its history-making expedition.

Shurei Hirozawa



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