

## BELVEDERE AND SASSETTA

The 100th Infantry received its first Presidential Unit Citation (It's a medal presented to the entire unit) for outstanding performance of duty in action at the time that the recently arrived 442nd was entering combat for the first time in the vicinity of the Italian towns of Belvedere and Sassetta. Many enemy soldiers were killed or captured with a relatively small loss of our own men killed and wounded. Quantities of vehicles and heavy arms were captured, as described in Murphy's book.

For me and some others, however, the entire action was uneventful. At one point we could see a column of Germans walking on a roadway, but they were too far away for us to shoot effectively with rifles. We moved to and from various points quickly, but I did not come under fire, nor did I get to shoot at any Jerries. "Jerries" was the term that we generally used to refer to the Germans.

Two of us accompanied an officer who was checking the whereabouts and status of the other squads in our platoon. As we walked across the slope of a low hill, a Jerry stepped out of the bushes, arms upraised in surrender. He was not armed. As we approached closer, he started talking with a lot of emotion. We gathered he was telling us he was not German. Dramatically, he ripped off the German insignia above the breast pocket of his uniform, spat on it, threw it down, and ground it under his boots. From what he said, he was a Pole who had been forced into the German army.

We checked out a farmhouse on a hill and found it occupied by our boys. Outside was a German "jeep" and a motorcycle and some other stuff. The vehicles were undamaged.

At same point we could hear our machine guns firing but could not see what they were shooting at. Earlier we had passed their set-up positions and I had a brief reunion with an old friend, Vic Yamashita, who led one of the gun crews.

The platoon then advanced along a road in single file. There were quite a few ahead of me, but as I approached a clump of hay or straw seemingly just lying in the roadside ditch, I detected some movement. I walked over to the clump and with the muzzle of my rifle pushed the hay aside and found a German hiding. I turned the prisoner over to the next officer that came along, and presumably the prisoner was escorted to wherever all captured enemy were being held.

Further along the road we passed some enemy vehicles which had been shot up by our machine gunners and which had overturned or crashed alongside the road as they had tried to escape.

We were now fairly close to the town of Sassetta and were approaching it via a winding road. As we rounded a curve and came to a straight portion of road, there was some enemy machine gun fire ahead and also to one side of us. They didn't appear to be shooting at us, but we took cover, anyway. After a while the platoon sergeant, Noboru Mezurashi, calmly got up and walked straight ahead down the road, and the rest of us followed.

Any Germans defending the hillside town must have fled or been chased out by other 100th or 442nd men, as we met no resistance while advancing cautiously through the town. Surprisingly, we came across a well-stocked liquor shop. How long we stayed I can't recall, but it was too much for our own "drinker." When we left, we had to carry his stuff and half-carry, half-drag him along.

Near the edge of the town was a huge, burned-out German tank. Though it was out of commission, it still looked very formidable.

Beyond the town we passed the body of a dead German sitting on the road side leaning back against a tree, minus the head. Several tubes protruded from the top of the neck and you could peer down the throat. A little further down the side of the road was a pile of dirt, and we wondered if someone had covered the severed head there.

It was now getting dark and we slept that night in a small farmhouse. For all the action that had taken place the past two days, most of our squad had not been directly involved in any fighting.

The next evening and into the night, we were on a long, fast-paced march. Then and much of the time, we did not know what was going on and what we were supposed to be doing. When we finally stopped, it was so dark we couldn't tell what kind of terrain we were in, but we were so tired that except for those posted to guard duty, the rest of us just lay down on the side of the road and slept.