

To the finest fighting  
unit I ever knew  
Charles W. Ryder  
my Lt.



Major General Charles W. Ryder

## The 100th Goes Overseas

The troop train carrying the men of the 100th Infantry Bn. reached Camp Kilmer, New Jersey on August 13, 1943, two days after leaving Camp Shelby, Mississippi. At midnight on August 20, LTC Farrant L. Turner, battalion commander, received embarkation orders. The men boarded the train early that morning for Brooklyn from where they were ferried at 5 a.m. to Staten Island. They immediately boarded the troopship *James Parker*, a hastily converted former banana and tourist ship. Many other units followed aboard and the ship was filled to capacity. At dusk the *Parker* left port to join a large convoy which was protected by U. S. Navy ships during the perilous journey across the Atlantic.

Men of the 100th carried their weapons, packs and two barrack bags each. There were not enough bunks so the troops had to sleep in shifts. Meals were served twice a day. The men passed their time with card games, dice, movies and other recreation or writing to family and friends. It was an uneventful trip with no sightings of enemy planes or submarines.

Some were not even aware that the ship was headed for Oran, Algeria, in North Africa. Many men lined the deck when the ship approached the Rock of Gibraltar. The Rock was impressive. "Just like the Prudential ad," one said.

On September 2, 12 days after leaving Staten Island, the convoy docked at Mers El Kebir, the port for Oran. It was a nondescript little harbor, with most of the ships anchoring offshore for lack of docking space. Fortunately, the *James Parker* docked right in the harbor and troops walked off the ship to waiting trucks for the ride to their designated bivouac area. The 100th was trucked out of Oran through wheat fields, citrus groves and vineyards to Feurus, dubbed Goat Hill by previous occupants due to its hot, dusty, windy terrain and a few wandering goats.

The next day, the 100th was assigned to the 34th Division, made up of national guard units from Iowa, Minnesota, North and South Dakota. This was the first time that the men received assurance that they would be in actual combat and not be given less meaningful duties. The 34th Division was nicknamed the "Red Bull Division" and possessed a proud military history. Its shoulder patch was a bleached buffalo skull colored red and superimposed on a background shaped like an Indian jar. The 34th was the first American unit to arrive in Europe after the war started, and it took part in the North African invasion and the campaign against the Afrika Korps of Gen. Erwin Rommel, the Desert Fox. The 34th was now getting ready to make another amphibious landing as part of the Fifth Army, this time in Italy.

LTC Turner and his executive officer, Maj. James W. Lovell, were summoned to a meeting on September 3 by Maj. Gen. Charles W. Ryder, commander of the 34th Division.

Ryder asked Turner about the caliber of his Nisei soldiers, and Turner assured him that they were as good as any of the other troops. This pleased Ryder whose division's motto was "Attack, attack, attack." Then he told Turner and Lovell that the 100th would replace the 2nd Bn. of the 133rd Regt, since the 2nd was already serving as special military guard at Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's headquarters in Algiers for an indefinite period.

On September 5, the 100th moved into the 34th Division's bivouac area. Col. Ray Fountain, commander of the 133rd Regt., had the band out to greet the Nisei soldiers when they arrived. He had been briefed by Gen. Ryder about the 100th's background and Col. Fountain, in turn, told his officers about the Nisei soldiers. That night the men of the 133rd came over to meet the soldiers from Hawaii.

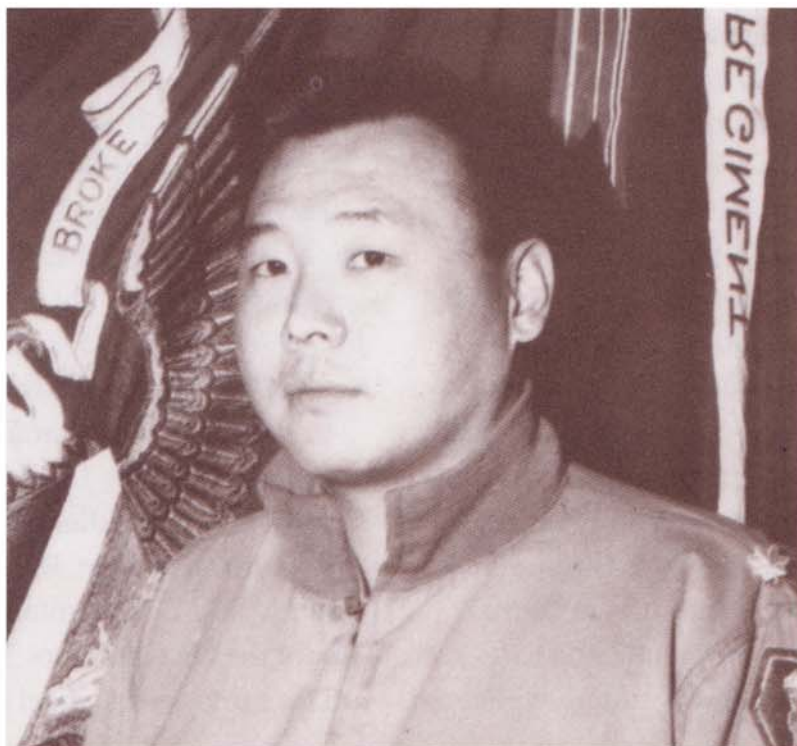




*Lt. Col. Farrant Turner*



*Maj. James Lovell*



*Mits Fukuda*

*The 100th's first Nisei Battalion Commander*

They joined in singing Hawaiian songs. Some of the men from the Midwest sang the favorite song of the Afrika Korps, "Lili Marlene," a hauntingly beautiful song which the Niseis came to love, too. They passed around the wine bottles. By the end of the night, a bond was established.

There was much work ahead to prepare for the fighting in Italy, and many of the 100th's key personnel were sent to mine training to learn first hand about German anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. The course consisted of identifying different types of mines, spotting or detecting mines and mined areas, tactics in learning to avoid mined areas, and diffusing mines.

Veterans of the 34th Division who fought in the recent Tunisian campaign identified the German mines and taught the art of diffusing them. A deadly German anti-personnel mine was the "Bouncing Betty", partly embedded in the ground and which, when tripped, bounced to shoulder height, exploded and sprayed deadly shrapnel. The picket mine, so named because of its attachment to a picket, could spray shrapnel a radius of 10 feet. The tripping device was a fine wire which could be connected to another picket mine or to a tree or grape vine. An unwary soldier could trip and trigger the firing mechanism. Then there was the Teller mine which can blow up a tank or vehicle if the track or tire rolls over the mine.

These land mines were to be a major enemy defense weapon throughout the long Italian and French campaigns. The mine identification course proved to be very valuable training for the 100th. Unfortunately, no amount of training could help the men avoid entirely the thousands of mines, some hidden from view. And there were to be many such mishaps. However, the training kept down the number of casualties by a considerable degree.

Gen. Ryder also met with the officers of the 100th to tell them about the tricks the Germans used and how his men had learned to counteract them during the North African campaign. He told them of

the grim reality of seeing their buddies killed before their very eyes, but the important thing to remember was "to keep on fighting, no matter what happens." He promised the 100th would be treated fairly about combat assignments, and that he would not play favorites. He also said the first victory is very important to a new combat team because that gives the men confidence. He promised to make every effort to see that the 100th got that first victory early in the campaign.

As sports-minded people in Hawaii knew, many of the best Nisei baseball players had been drafted into military service before Pearl Harbor and were now members of the 100th. Some had played in the Hawaii League, the top amateur division in Hawaii before the war. The 133rd regimental baseball team, hearing about this athletic resource among its ranks, "Shanghaied" a few players from the 100th, and was able to defeat the 168th Regt., a team it had not been able to beat in the past. Then the 100th formed a team of its own, played the 133rd and won 26-0.

The hard training, recreation and socializing had to come to an end. The Allied armies had invaded Sicily on July 10 with unexpectedly little resistance, but the amphibious assault landing at Salerno Beach on September 9 did not go according to plan, and the 34th Division was needed to help the Allied army fight out of the beachhead and start an offensive. Gen. Eisenhower had announced the surrender of Italy on September 8, and this was expected to make the going a little easier, but not much.

On September 19, a long convoy of trucks moved troops, including the 100th, to Oran and to the harbor where they boarded the *S.S. Frederick Funston*. This was one of four ships required to transport the 133rd and its equipment to Salerno. Early on the morning of the September 22, the convoy was offshore at Salerno.

*Shurei Hirozawa*

