



Pvt Tomotsu Shimizu : a soldier of valor

The 100th's First Experience in Combat

The Fifth Army stormed the beach at Salerno on September 9, and the plan was to have the 34th Division join it at Naples 21 days after the invasion. However, the heavy resistance by the Germans contained the Allied forces along the beachhead and caused a change in plans. So the 34th left Oran for Salerno earlier – on September 19. There was much anxiety and fear among the men during the short trip, as they headed into the unknown for the first time. One observer among the men noted that a prayer service for the 100th was well attended even though many were of the Buddhist faith. The service had a calming effect on the men. The observer personally found solace and comfort after he joined in singing the well known Christian hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross".

By 8 a.m., September 22, 1943, the convoy reached its destination. Two hours later, the men of the 100th down the netting into landing crafts for the mile ride to the beach south of the town of Salerno. Almost all of the LCTs landed their troops right on the beach, but one that did not make the beach carried Maj. Lovell as an occupant. The coxswain hung this barge on a reef. He backed off and tried to go over the reef twice more but failed.

The coxswain apparently decided that this was as far as his craft was going. He dropped the ramp and Maj. Lovell led the way out. Sgt. Ben Tamashiro of Eleele, Kauai, was right behind Lovell. "When he stepped out into the water, he submerged completely," Tamashiro recalled. "But he surfaced and made his way to a point where he could stand." Tamashiro, who was more than a head shorter than the Major, figured it would be worse for him. In addition, he had his full pack and his rifle. But he had no time to think of such matters when the men were pushing to get off that barge. So he just followed the

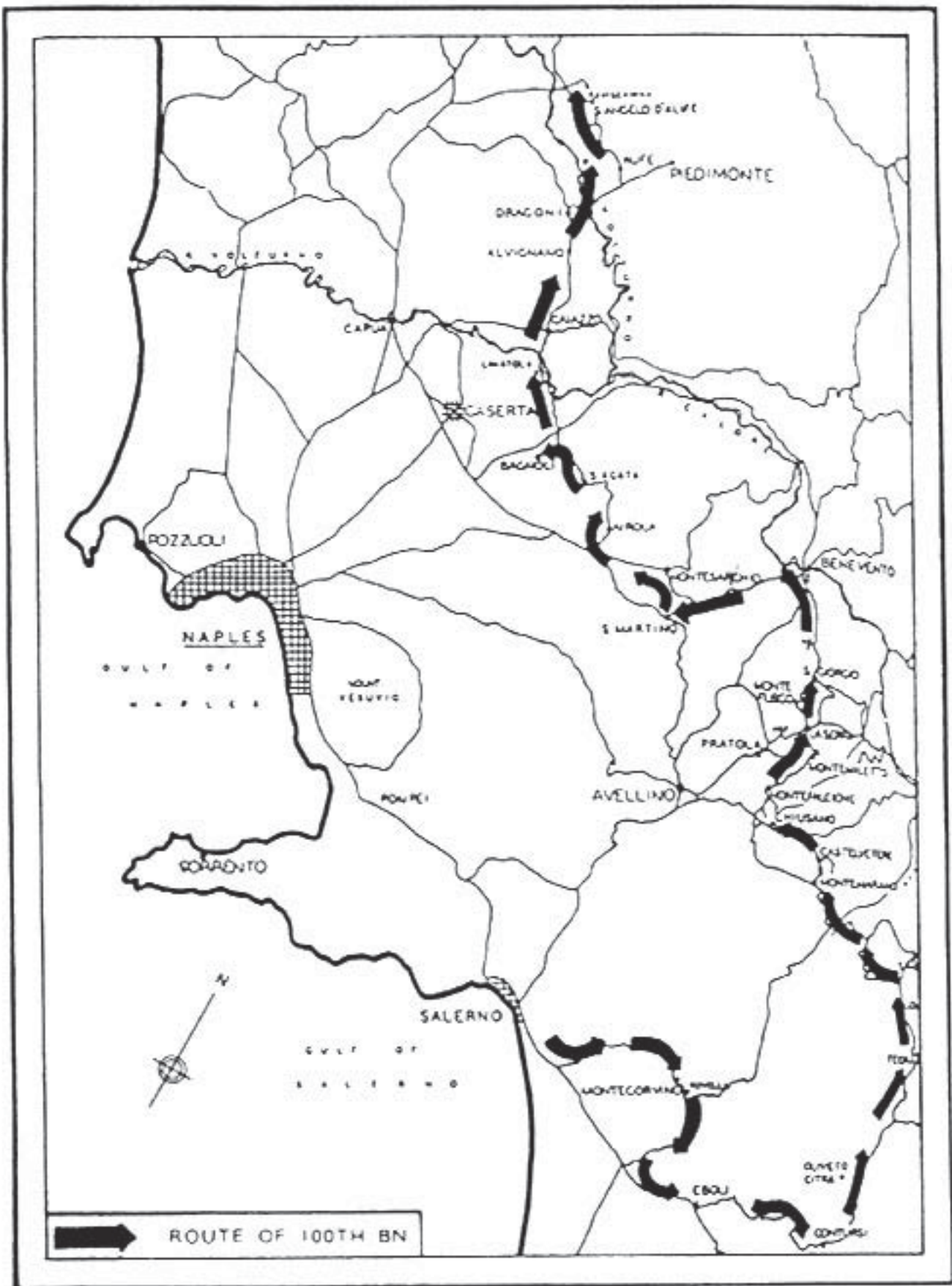
Major by jumping off the ramp into the water and when he touched bottom, he kicked hard and was able to surface. He paddled to shallower water.

The landing area was flat with little vegetation. The plains of Salerno up ahead were used mainly for crops. Although the beachhead had been established earlier by the Fifth Army, the area, particularly the airfield and ships in the harbor, was under intermittent attack by German planes. By then the Germans had retreated northeast to higher ground. The 100th's A,B,C,D, and HQ Cos. moved six miles inland, leaving E and F Cos. to guard the supply depot and the temporary airfield used by P-40 fighters, which were still vulnerable to enemy paratroop attack.

The following day, September 23, the Allied war machine began its push across the plains of Salerno, in pursuit of the retreating enemy. The Fifth Army moved out of the beachhead on the 25th with the 34th Division in the middle, the 3rd Division on the left flank and the 45th Division on the right. Fighting its way northward on the extreme right was the British Eighth Army.

The 34th Division's 133rd Regt. – the 100th was one of its three battalions – was ordered to move to Montecorvino and the neighboring village of Rovella. It was at this point that officers of Fifth Army units received this message: "There has recently arrived in this theater a battalion of American soldiers of Japanese ancestry. These troops take particular pride in their American origin. Your command should be so informed in order that during the stress and confusion of combat, cases of mistaken identity may be avoided." From here, the 133rd was ordered to move on to Oliveto Citra. This was in the 45th Division's sector, the right flank of the Fifth Army's battle line.





*Salerno to S. Angelo d'Alife
First Volturno Crossing Limatola Vicinity*

Gen. Ryder chose the 133rd to operate as a combat team under his personal direction. Its objective: push north and cut the main road leading from Avellino northward to Benevento. This was the key retreat route of the enemy back to the Volturno River line. The plan was to have the 133rd secure the road that ran west from Montemarano up ahead to Avellino, and then move north to cut the Avellino-Benevento road.

The 100th was prepared to go into battle for the first time on the night of September 26. The troops had traveled 106 miles by truck on a narrow mountain road past a village called Lioni and on to the San Angelo-Montemarano road. That night the men received their initiation sleeping in pup tents in the mud. The autumn rains had begun.

The men were to find out that the constant rain and mud, accompanied later by the cold and snow, were the common denominator during the Italian campaign. The next morning the battalion continued on foot to push its way up the road toward the next big objective – Montemarano. Half way to that key town, the men had to wade across the Calore River where a bridge was blown up. The Calore was a tributary that flowed north to the Volturno River. The men continued on foot until a temporary bridge was erected and the transport caught up with them. Under the leadership of Lt. Masao Koga, the 100th's pioneer platoon had the task of making sure that the way ahead was safe by spotting and clearing the mines.

The 100th suffered its first casualty on the way to Montemarano on September 28. It was raining heavily. Sgt. Conrad Tsukayama of Maui, a member of D Co.'s heavy weapons platoon, remembers that he was guiding the units of the platoon to a forward assembly area. A jeep with a trailer came by and he let it through. But the right rear wheel of the trailer ran over an anti-tank mine and the impact of the explosion threw Tsukayama into the ditch on the side of the road. "My clothing was in shreds and the raincoat I was wearing was completely blown

off," he said. Fortunately, the piece of shrapnel that hit him caused only a slight wound to his face. Tsukayama became the 100th's first recipient of the Purple Heart.

The AJA unit reached Montemarano late in the day and the troops camped on the outskirts of the town for the night. Because of the rain, the men spent another night in their pup tents pitched in mud. The next day, the 100th entered Montemarano and captured its first prisoner. A resident of the area reported that a German soldier wanted to surrender. A squad from B Co. found him in a farmhouse and brought him back. The battalion remained in Montemarano all day.

It was still raining the next morning, and the 100th moved out in vehicles which were forced to push ahead in deep mud. The Nisei battalion, with the added firepower of a regimental antitank platoon, was now the advance guard for the combat team.

Co. B was designated to lead the way out of Montemarano. Instead of taking the Avellino Road going northwest, it headed north on a secondary route through the village of Castelvetere to higher ground around Chiusano. The 3rd Platoon went around a curve in the road when three German machine guns began firing. It was 10 a.m. The Germans had zeroed in on this particular spot in the road. The platoon was trapped, not only by machine guns, but by mortar and artillery fire. This was the 100th's baptism under fire.

Sgt. Joe Takata of Waialua, the platoon leader, decided to lead the way out of this obstacle. He spotted one of the German machine gun nests and worked his way cautiously toward it, then fired his automatic rifle. In the fierce fighting that followed, he was hit in the head by a piece of shrapnel from a tree burst caused by an 88mm German tank shell. One of his men was able to crawl to the mortally wounded sergeant who told him where the enemy





Joe Takata —
the 100th's First Hero

gunners were. The platoon was able to silence the German machine gun nest but a second comrade was killed in action and seven wounded in the brisk fight. Sgt. Takata was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and became the 100th's first war hero.

Nearing Chiusano, the 100th was ordered to get to that town and cover a junction which a German mechanized unit was using to retreat ahead of the U.S. 3rd Division. Despite the heavy artillery fire, units of the battalion reached high ground above Chiusano by 7 p.m., and covered the junction in a matter of a few hours.

Leaving A Co. to guard the road junction, the rest of the battalion continued its night march toward Montefalcione. The unit went down into a narrow valley and in the dark, worked its way toward the town, being careful about mines. The men got to Montefalcione about midnight without encountering any enemy fire and found the Germans had left the area and retreated north.

The 100th was to learn that the enemy was a master in delaying tactics. The Germans would pick the best terrain with a vantage point to hold the Allied attackers at bay for as long as possible, then retreat to the next strategic spot where they held the advantage. The process of extracting them from their hill positions would begin all over again causing the Allied armies to expend men, material and time. These advance and delay movements gave the enemy the needed time to build well-engineered defense lines.

Two days later, Maj. Lovell led the 100th through a much damaged Benevento in single file. Time: 1 a.m., October 1. Passing through tobacco fields, the battalion took positions on two hills from which they were able to protect the regiment's left flank and provide support fire for the 3rd Bn. The 3rd Bn. was ordered to cross the Calore River and establish a bridgehead on the north bank. The taking of Benevento was the climax of the 100th's first battle action.

The headquarters of the Army Ground Forces in Washington, D. C., sent a letter to the commanding generals of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Armies and the 4th, 13th, and 18th Corps, all in the United States, quoting a War Department memorandum on the 100th's behavior on its first battle test. The letter said, in part:

"A strong desire to be with their unit as it entered combat reduced absences due to sickness and hospitalization almost to zero. While the Japanese-American battalion was acting as the advance guard of a regimental combat team, the battalion advanced approximately fifteen miles in twenty-four hours, operating day and night in the face of strong enemy resistance and over difficult terrain. Although suffering casualties, their advance continued on schedule. All of its weapons were used with complete assurance. A Japanese-American sergeant (Joe Takata) who lost his life in this action has been recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross."

