

## CHAPTER 3

### POM

66 **B**EWARE THE IDES OF MARCH" could certainly be applied in the case of the 442d Combat Team. March 15 saw officers and noncoms rushing around like so many mad hatters looking for all available regulations on "POM," preparation for overseas movement. First came the initial regulations, then the first clarification, then the clarification of the clarification. At this point the regimental and battalion staffs were considering the advantages of opium. Finally the Combat Team was furnished with a new set of instructions which rescinded all previous instructions, and everybody rushed down to the post utilities office to secure the grease, waterproof paper, crates, and the numerous other items which the regulations firmly stated were necessary to the packing and crating of supplies and equipment. However, post utilities laughed rather hysterically and said that there were several other units leaving right then with higher priorities, but

that maybe they could furnish us with lumber to build our own crates. Later on, they would have the rest of the stuff.

Lieutenant Charles I. Wanbaugh was designated regimental packing and crating officer. Gathering up a power saw and a crew, Lieutenant Wanbaugh set up a box factory in the regimental motor pool, put his crew on three eight-hour shifts, and went to work making crates of all sizes, some small enough for a watch and some big enough to house a couple of jeeps.

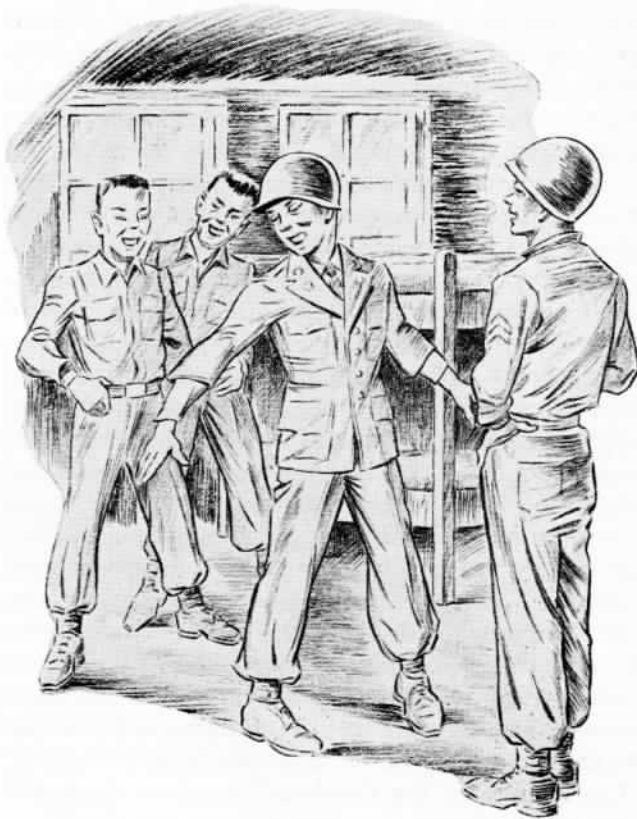
While this was going on the few men who had not completed their combat courses were taken out and qualified. Inspectors from the 69th Division lined the men up and inspected their clothing and equipment.

Clothing which was in any way defective or worn had to be turned in and new clothing drawn. However, the original clothing had been specially tailored to fit the men, many of whom wore extremely small or irregular sizes. The new issue was in normal sizes. The personnel officer scoured the regiment for tailors. Every man who had ever been a tailor or hoped to be one was hustled into the regimental supply building and put to work.

Some of the results were astonishing: one man got his blouse back à la Little Lord Fauntleroy, with elbow-length sleeves. Most of the stuff fitted pretty well, however, considering the speed with which it was made over.

It was also necessary to draw new rifles, machine guns, and mortars. The men to whom they were assigned took them out on the range, zeroed them in, and made sure that they functioned perfectly. Teams from the Inspector General's office came around checking on administrative files and supply records, deciding which records could be destroyed and which must be packed and taken with the Combat Team. Company, battalion, and regimental designations were obliterated from all equipment and the shipment number stenciled on in their places.

To top all this off, the Combat Team was directed to furnish ten more officers and 155 enlisted men as additional replacements for the 100th Infantry Battalion. The 442d CT was therefore ordered overseas with two rifle battalions, leaving a



One man got his blouse back à la Little Lord Fauntleroy

skeleton 1st Battalion behind, in command of Major Sherman L. Watts. Enough officers and men were transferred to the 2d and 3d Battalions to bring them up to combat strength and the work went on. In the midst of the 3d Battalion's preparations, Lieutenant Colonel Sherwood Dixon, who had taken the men through all the trials and tribulations of training, was called to Washington to serve in the Office of the Chief of Staff. Major Emmet L. O'Connor took over the battalion and Captain Ivan F. Kovac was transferred in as Executive Officer.

Finally, all "non-TAT" equipment, the items the combat team would not see again until it reached the final port of destination, was loaded on boxcars. The vehicles were turned in, the property which belonged to Camp Shelby was inventoried and turned over to the post authorities, and the men were nervously waiting to go. When the last board had been nailed across the last latrine door on April 22, 1944, the Combat Team boarded trucks and rolled down to the mixed assortment of Pullmans and coaches waiting to take them to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia. The trip was uneventful, except for large quantities of folding money which changed hands en route. Staggering wearily off the trains at the staging area, officers and men were greeted by a barrage of instructions from a loudspeaker mounted on the station platform. Quickly they formed ranks and marched to their assigned barracks.

When the men left Shelby they were told that all the things not available in the Post Exchange there could be bought in the staging area Post Exchange. Accordingly everyone made a beeline for the PX, only to be told that the stuff wasn't available there either; it was all being sent to the Post Exchanges overseas.

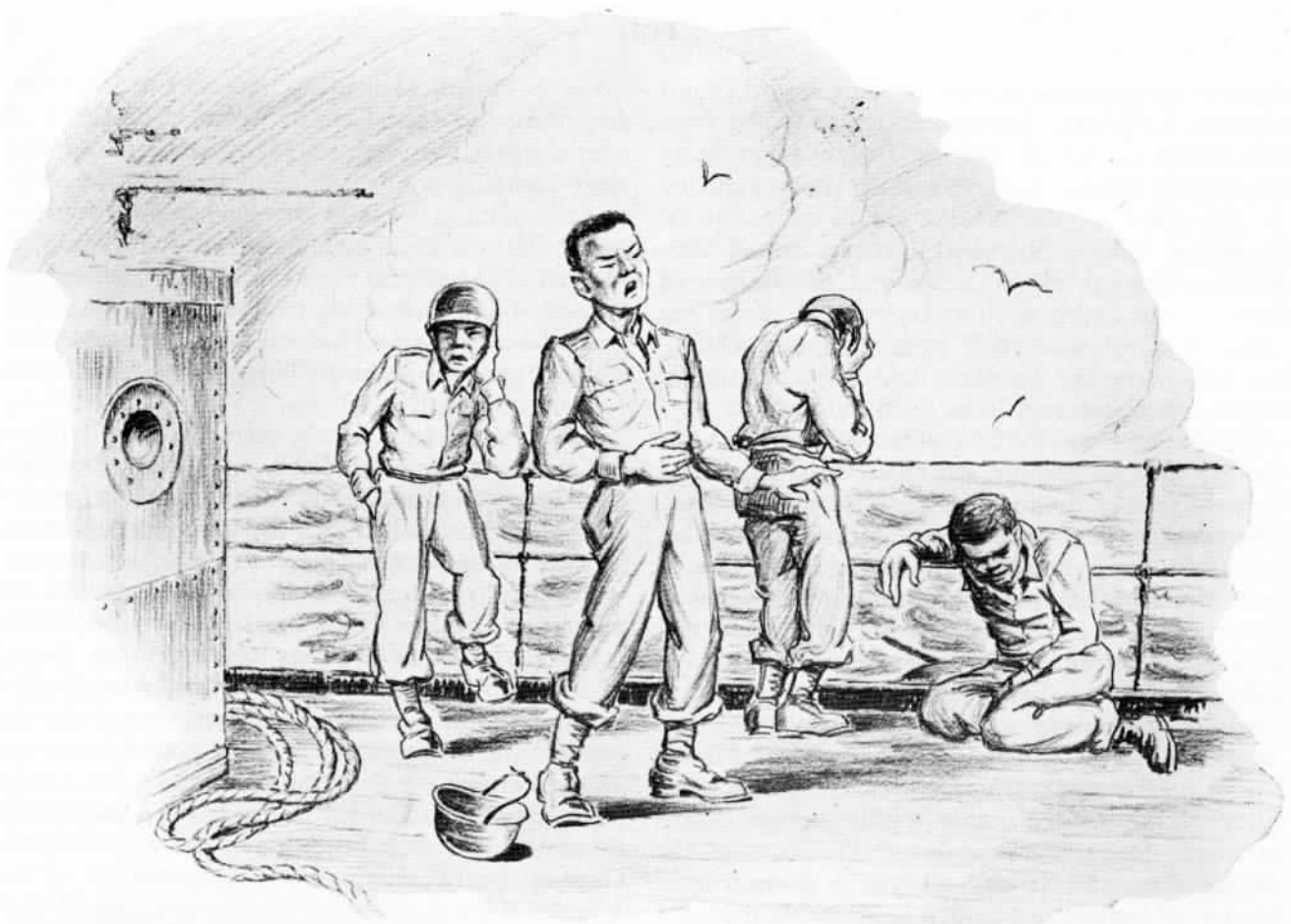
Processing at the staging area was in the nature of going through an assembly line. Men and officers stood in line for everything from final shots and a very brief physical checkup to shoe polish and razor blades. One of the greatest things the Army ever did for its men was the long-distance telephone service from the staging area to anywhere in the United States. There were no six-hour delays, even though you had to wait in line a while before you could put in your call. Once your call was placed with the clerks at the desk, it was usually only a matter of minutes until you were talking to the folks at home. And if you talked a little over your five minutes, the operators and the other GIs in the line were strangely patient with you.

Camp Patrick Henry was probably a long time forgetting the 442d Combat Team. The GIs took over the Post Exchanges, drank more beer, and sang their Hawaiian songs. This time though, the songs weren't quite so lively as they had been. Hawaiian music fits most any mood, and the mood was changing now. The officers went down and took over the Officers' Club, lock, stock, and barrel; some of them headed for the Camp Hospital and the nurses; some of them spent a good many long hours writing letters and staring into space.

Came time to head for the ships. On May 1, 1944, the Combat Team boarded a collection of coaches that most of the men felt had probably carried troops in the Civil War. The trains carried them straight to the piers at Hampton Roads, where there was a band playing "Over There" and some of the other old favorites from the last war. Red Cross ladies passed out doughnuts while the men waited to board ship. Finally, the long lines were formed in alphabetical order and the men moved up the gangplanks, singing out their first names in answer as the checker on the pier called their last names from his roster. The smaller men were very nearly invisible under their heavy packs and steel helmets. Once on board, merchant marine personnel of the Liberty ships took over, leading the men below decks to the compartments where they would live for the next twenty-eight days in bunks stacked five high.

The night of May 1 and all the next day the ships rode at anchor inside the harbor, slipping out into the Chesapeake Bay to join the convoy the night of May 2. Little destroyer-escort vessels flashed here and there in the long lanes of ships, shepherding each one to its place as it arrived. Others patrolled the perimeter, for submarines had been known to strike at convoys within sight of American shores. Finally the ships weighed anchor and slipped silently off in one of the largest convoys ever to leave Hampton Roads.

Once at sea, sealed orders were opened. Before long everyone had contrived to find out that the eventual destination was Italy. Although no one would say so in so many words, it was also fairly conclusive that the ships would dock at Naples, since the Liberties were not making the Anzio run with troops at that time. Inevitably, many of the men and many of the officers were seasick, even though the weather was nearly perfect during the entire crossing. One company commander, Captain Ralph J.



*Inevitably, many men were seasick*

Graham, was stretched out on his bunk talking to one of his lieutenants between periods of wondering whether he was going to live or die when a terrific explosion shook the ship, followed by a series of smaller shocks and the rattle of 20mm-gun fire. The lieutenant rushed on deck and discovered that the ship had only dropped out of convoy for gunnery practice. When he came back, however, he reported to his captain that the explosion had been a torpedo hit and that the ship's guns were even then fighting off an enemy sub. The captain rolled over with his face to the wall and muttered, "Good, I hope they sink the damned tub."

After a few days nearly everyone had gotten used to the motion of the ship and the officers went to work organizing what little exercise was possible in the cramped quarters. Calisthenics before breakfast and boxing bouts now and then were about all that could be done. Almost all of the deck space aft of the superstructure on most of the ships was taken up by trucks and bulldozers on their way to war.

Consequently the men spent long lazy days on deck, sunbathing, leaning over the rail staring at nothing, or occasionally watching a school of porpoises chase each other through the ranks of ships. There were work details, but not nearly enough to keep everyone busy.

Perhaps some of the men thought about it; most of them certainly did not, but from now on they were essentially men without a country, men on the move. War does that to a man. It takes him everywhere and it takes him nowhere. Perhaps it stops him for awhile in a city or a town or a quiet country village washed over by the tide of battle. He makes a few friends, sees some famous places as a casual tourist, and moves on again. There is no place he can call home, although there are many places he might like to stay. He no longer has a will of his own; he has been caught up in the machine; he goes where it takes him; he does its bidding, even though he knows it may cost him his life. If he believes that he is fighting for a great cause, that makes



it easier. But whether he fights for his beliefs or because he has been taken thousands of miles to an alien battleground and must kill or be killed there, he is part of the machine, win, lose, or draw.

Finally the convoy passed through the Straits of Gibraltar and the men became tourists with a lot of time on their hands. As they were carried past the rocky cliffs of the North African coast they saw some of the places that had made headlines in 1943: Tunis, Bizerte, Oran, Algiers. Very shortly now they would be living those headlines instead of reading them.

For some reason unknown at the time, the ships carrying the bulk of the 2d Battalion dropped out of the convoy and steamed into Oran. This incident furnished rumor material for two days, the most prevalent one being that the Combat Team was going to be split into separate battalions and used as task forces. The explanation was that the ships had merely stopped at Oran to discharge cargo. The 2d Battalion would very shortly be loaded on other ships and sent on to Naples. Meanwhile the rest of the convoy steamed on, stopping for a day in the harbor at Palermo, Sicily. Here the men got their first glimpse of the fruits of war: sunken ships, and wrecked buildings along the waterfront. Without any further breaks, the ships made for Naples.

The Combat Team debarked and found a ruined city. The panorama of the Bay of Naples was still breath-taking, but the port itself was a shell. Demolished buildings and gutted interiors were all that was left of the waterfront. Yet for all this, Naples was busy. Hundreds of GI trucks of all sizes, shapes, and descriptions raced to and from the port. It was worth a man's life to cross a street intersection within half a mile of the waterfront. Some units marched to the railroad station, loaded aboard little interurban trains, and rattled and rocked the ten miles or so to Staging Area #4 at Bagnoli. Others moved out in trucks. Immediately everyone went to work uncrating all the equipment that had been so laboriously crated a month before at Camp Shelby. Waterproofing had to be cleaned from metal parts and weapons had to be made ready for combat. Motor personnel drew the authorized vehicles for the Combat Team and got them in operating condition. Some of the officers and men took passes to Naples, but most of them did not go back. The ruins of Pompeii were much more attractive than the ruins of Naples and much more interesting to the GIs. Consequently, many of them took the trip to

the ancient city and to the cathedral of the new Pompeii, one of the most beautiful in Italy.

On June 6 the Combat Team left Naples for Anzio aboard LSTs and LCIs, leaving Company E behind to await the arrival of the rest of the 2d Battalion from Oran. The small fleet put into Anzio harbor the morning of June 7, but not before 75 per cent of the personnel aboard had become violently ill. Ground swells were heavy and the landing craft displaced about as much water as an oversized bathtub; the effect produced was about equal to the effect a cyclone would have had on a larger ship. Debarking in the rubble of Anzio the troops marched about five miles to a bivouac outside the city, arriving in a state of collapse. Weeks at sea had gotten the men into terrible physical condition. The same night, June 7, German planes raided the supply dumps at Anzio and the men had a ringside seat to one of the biggest displays of aerial fireworks most of them had ever seen. Long red tracer streaks criss-crossed the sky, punctuated by the quick flashes of flak bursts as the gunners followed the flight of the German planes. No one in the Combat Team area was injured.

On June 9 the Combat Team began one of its most memorable convoys, better known as "The Second Battle of Rome." Moving out of Anzio late that afternoon the first march unit hit Rome in daylight and made it through with only minor deviations from course. All that night, however, serial commanders looked frantically for their reconnaissance officers and vice versa. Long columns of trucks wandered around the walls of Vatican City, looking for the road north. Most of them finally found it, but not before the officers and drivers were on the verge of hysteria. One befuddled march unit commander and his troops tried three different routes out of Rome. Each time they ended up in front of the great dome of St. Peter's. At 0330, June 11, the last elements pulled into the bivouac area at Civitavecchia and the last stray vehicle had been accounted for.

Meanwhile, June 10, the 442d Combat Team, less the 1st Battalion, 442d Infantry, was attached to the 34th Infantry Division per General Orders #44, Headquarters 34th Infantry Division. By the same order the 100th Infantry Battalion was attached to the 442d Infantry, taking the place of the absent 1st Battalion. Now began the urgent task of whipping the men back into shape for their first combat mission.