

we were readier than any other unit. We were sent to Liberia in early 1942 to construct an airfield and be a possible base of operations for combat in North Africa.

The day after we sailed from Charleston for our 10-day trip to Liberia, Colonel Wood opened up his secret instructions. They were in the form of a 20-page letter of instructions and five volumes of detailed plans. Colonel Wood assembled the officers in his cabin and read aloud the letter of instructions. He then asked me-1 was then the operations officer-to open the porthole. I thought it was to let in some fresh air. To the astonishment of all of us, Wood got up on a chair and tossed the five volumes out to sea.

“These damned bureaucrats in Washington don’t know how to assign mission-type orders,” he said. “The letter of instructions is all we need.” And at that he instructed us to draw up detailed plans to carry out the instructions.

To this day, I don’t know whether the detailed plans we threw away were any good. But it gave us something to do for the next nine days at sea, and we had no one to blame but ourselves for how the instructions were carried out. In retrospect, I think we did pretty well. The planning exercise forced us to think through what needed to be done.

Later in 1942, Colonel Wood was promoted to brigadier general. He returned to the U.S. to establish the cadre for the 92d Division. He had me come back to work for him. General Wood had a lot to do with initiating basic reforms in the Army. He was ahead of the times in developing concepts to promote military efficiency.

92d Infantry Division, Fort Huachuca

Q: Where was the cadre for the 92d Division located?

A: The division cadre was divided among four locations. The headquarters and division artillery were at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Each of the three regiments was located in a different state, one at Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, a second in Anniston, Alabama, and the third in Fort Donaldson, Tennessee. The Army was afraid to put more than one regiment in any one state in the South. In 1943 we assembled the entire division at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, replacing the 93d Division which had been sent to the Pacific Theater.

Q: Tell me something about the organization of the division. Did you have white or black NCOs? And how about the officers, were they white or black?

A: We started out with all black NCOs and no black officers, only white officers. Gradually, the white officers were replaced by black ones. I originally had 27 white officers in my engineer battalion. By the time we arrived in Italy in the spring of 1944, my unit contained 24 black officers and 3 white ones besides myself.

Q: What jobs did you hold during the training of the division?

A: I started out as a company commander, and later became assistant G-3. When we assembled the entire division at Fort Huachuca, I became the division engineer and the commander of the engineer battalion.

Q: What kind of training did you do at Huachuca?

A: My engineer battalion conducted normal engineer training. We built Bailey bridges and various types of floating bridges. We trained in demolitions, mine-laying, and mine-clearing. We also learned how to build roads and airfields. This was in addition to our training as combat engineers. Very often during maneuvers my engineer battalion was thrown into the fray in a combat role.

Q: Can you tell me something about the type of individuals you had in the 92d? Were they poorly educated or highly educated?

A: By the time our division was formed, most of the better men had volunteered or been drafted. Although there were a few exceptions, most of our men were in the lowest 20 percent profile, both intellectually and physically. None of our men had been to college and only two or three had finished high school.

Q: How about your cadre?

A: The division cadre was excellent. Many of the noncommissioned officers had been in the 9th and 10th Cavalry which were black units. The NCOs were all seasoned soldiers with 20 to 25 years of service. They did a good job as trainers, but by the time we went into combat they were too old to stand the rigors of fighting and were either retired or put into labor battalions.

Q: Where did you get your black officers?

A: We originally started with all white officers. Washington decreed that we would replace all our white officers with black officers by the time we were committed to battle. We didn't achieve this goal. We went into combat with nine out of ten black officers. While we were training at Fort Huachuca, we sent our smarter enlisted men to officer's training school. Many of these soldiers, after finishing OCS [Officer Candidate School], came back to the same units they had left. This was, in my opinion, a mistake. Although they had higher IQs, they were seldom among the better soldiers. The men they commanded didn't respect them. The units were commanded largely by the NCOs.

92d Infantry Division, Italy

Q: After you arrived in Italy in 1944, what kind of work did your battalion do?

A: My engineer combat battalion spent most of its time clearing minefields. The area was heavily mined. We tried different ways of clearing minefields, for example, snakes, cordite, and flails. In the end, we wound up with the old reliable method; probing with bayonets. We were out in the front lines, clearing the way for the infantry and armor as they inched along. I'm certain you've seen the famous cartoon: A long line of tanks behind a single engineer soldier probing for mines with his bayonet. We had only partial success. Quite often vehicles were blown up trying to traverse a "cleared area." It was a messy business. We also maintained roads and built bridges. On one occasion there was a flash flood which took out a bridge across the Serchio River. We had to put in a bridge in a hurry, because the Serchio separated a regiment from the remainder of the division.

Q: What type of men did you have in your battalion in Italy? Were they good engineers? Did they respond to their training?

A: Our men were rather good so long as we kept them back of the front lines and away from enemy fire. Under fire, it was a different story. You should remember that my battalion, as was our division, consisted of marginal soldiers. All the better Negroes had either volunteered or been drafted earlier. Most of our men were substandard physically and had low IQ scores. They did reasonably well on engineering tasks so long as the jobs did not entail actual combat. In combat, the troops didn't do very well.

Q: After you were there with the 92d Division for a while, you became an infantry task force commander. Can you tell me how this came about?

A: Our commander, General Almond, like General Wood, the assistant division commander, subscribed to the theory that there were no good units and no poor units; only good commanders and poor commanders. They set very high standards. They insisted that we be assigned the finest white officers in the Army because, they maintained, it took good officers to lead poor soldiers. Because Generals Almond and Wood insisted on results, we lost a lot of good white battalion commanders. Seven out of the division's nine infantry battalion commanders were either wounded or killed in one week. As a result, there was a critical shortage of infantry officers in the division. Since I had a very good executive officer in my engineer battalion to whom I could turn over the command, I was assigned the command of an infantry battalion.

Q: Do you remember your executive officer's name?

A: Yes. Major Alvin Wilder, a very good man. Wilder later worked for me in X Corps in Korea. I had two other white officers. One was Captain Creston Alexander. The other was Captain Nicholas Piccione, who was born in Italy. This was helpful because he organized large numbers of Italians-those too old or too young to fight-to repair roads and do other work in rear areas.

Q: As commander of the infantry task force, what operation were you involved in?

A: After I'd commanded the infantry battalion for several weeks, the corps commander got together with our division commander and came up with a highly ingenious plan. I would lead a task force composed of an infantry battalion, a company of engineers, a company of tanks, a signal platoon, and a platoon of medics and move into the enemy's rear. The plan was to have us wade in shallow water along the beach when the tide was out. We were then to cross a sand bar where the Cinquale Canal exited into the sea. The plan was to have us march inland about a kilometer and a half along the beach and then turn 90 degrees and march another kilometer. The idea was that we would move into the enemy's rear while attacked along the high ground. My job was to get the German reserve to attack my task force. This would allow our division to take its objective without the Germans having the benefit of their reserves. In other words, my task force was to act as a decoy and lure the enemy's reserve into attacking us.

We started out fine, but when we got on the sand bar at the front line, my lead tank hit a mine. We were then heavily shelled by mortar and artillery fire. One

shell hit in the middle of my command group. Of the nine people who were with me, seven were killed or wounded. Only three of us were spared. We tried to outflank the disabled tank with another tank further out in the water, but it drowned out. We then tried to clear a path through the mines on the land side. This tank also hit a mine. We had it pulled back by a tank retriever and moved in the tank's tracks with another tank. With a great deal of difficulty we moved up along the beach and then moved into the enemy's rear, encountering only light resistance. We captured a German battalion command post which was located at the spot where we were to dig in. This took all day. That night, as we had expected, we were attacked. We lost quite a few people. Some were killed and some were wounded.

The next day, we had to repel two additional attacks. Meanwhile, we were in communication with the division which had attempted to attack along the high ground. But the division's attack didn't get beyond the front line. The next night, we were attacked again. By this time, out of the 1,250 men in my task force, only 120 to 125 were left.

The following morning, Colonel William McCaffrey, the division G-3, fought his way to my position with a platoon of men. He came up to survey the situation and asked if I wanted to pull back. I said I was there to t&e orders, and I would do whatever I was ordered to do.

When McCaffrey returned to the division command post, the division commander ordered a regiment to attack up along the coast. The regiment met only light resistance but did strike the Germans who had surrounded my outfit. We then fought a rear guard action back to our original front line. This had been the latest of four division attacks, all of which had ended in failure. It was the last attack the division, as such, would undertake.

Q: I understand that the 92d Division was reorganized after this failure and you picked up the 442d Nisei Regiment.

A: Yes. The 100th Nisei Battalion had been expanded into the 442d Nisei Regiment. The 473d regiment, a white regiment, also joined us. It had been an anti-aircraft unit which was retrained as infantry. It was commanded by Colonel William Yarborough, a truly outstanding officer who later commanded the Army's elite troops, the Green Berets.

We took the best Negroes from the three regiments of the 92d Division and placed them in the 370th Regiment. The remainder were sent back to the rear and organized into labor battalions.

Q: Was this when you became the division G-3?

A: Yes. Colonel McCaffrey, who had been the division G-3, became the division chief of staff and I took his place. Our newly formed division worked like a charm. The 442d, a crack outfit, would lead the attack and cut through the Germans like a hot knife through butter. The 473d would back up the 442d, and the 370th would bring up the rear. Our artillery had always been pretty good, but we didn't have good forward observers. Once the 442d and 473d joined us, we drew our forward observers from their ranks. From then on we enjoyed good artillery support.

The real stars, the true professionals, were the Japanese-Americans. They fought incredibly well. They scaled hills and otherwise got in behind the Germans by coming from directions where the Germans didn't expect them. Normally they would pin Germans down by fire in the front and move around one or both flanks.

Q: When you were G-3 was there any particular action or event that you recall?

A: **Yes, I** do recall one event. We were moving up the west coast of Italy rapidly. One of the battalions of the 473d Regiment didn't pay enough attention to security. Instead of making a careful reconnaissance, the entire battalion entered a long tunnel. The Germans blew up both ends of the tunnel and trapped the battalion inside. It was a massive carnage. But it taught us a useful lesson. After that, instead of going through a tunnel, we would send scouts over the high ground to make sure the far end of the tunnel was secured before we marched a unit into it. Since that part of the Italian coastline was one long series of tunnels, we moved rather slowly. Fortunately we met only light resistance from Massa to Genoa. The Italian partisans had already taken Genoa and we didn't have to fight for it. Our only actions were against scattered German units which had been cut off.

A humorous incident occurred when we entered Genoa. There was a huge banner across the road with the "N's" backwards. It said: "Welcome Americans. One of our boys discovered your country."

I remember another humorous incident. After we'd taken Genoa, several German units surrendered en masse. To guard them more easily, we put them into a cemetery surrounded by a wall and placed sentries on top of the wall. The partisans were still burying members of their unit who had been killed taking Genoa. When they fired a grave-site salute, our guards thought the German prisoners were shooting at them, and they ran away. However, the German

soldiers were glad to have the war over with and stayed in place, sentries or no sentries.

From Genoa, we continued along the coast until we got to the town of Savona on the Italian-French border. The French moved their troops south of the town behind us. They were trying to establish a new border several kilometers to the south of the original border. Our maps indicated that Savona was in Italy; the French claimed it belonged to France. Rather than fight our allies, we took the matter up in diplomatic channels. President Truman responded immediately. He cut off the petroleum supply for the entire French armed forces. Within 48 hours, the French got the message and moved their troops back. It was my first experience at international negotiations. I learned that there was no substitute for a bold, decisive leader in charge at the top.

Q: How long after the war was over did you stay before coming back to the States?

A: Less than 24 hours. On the afternoon of VE Day, General Almond, my division commander, called me into his van, opened the safe, and took out a message. He said: "For some months I have had these orders. You are to return to Washington to take part in planning the final invasion of Japan. I told them I wouldn't let you go until VE Day. Well, it's VE Day, and you're now released. Good luck." The next **day** I caught a plane and returned to Washington. Two days later I reported for duty in the Pentagon.

Staff Officer, War Department General Staff

Q: Where were you assigned in the Pentagon?

A: I was assigned to the Strategic Plans Section of the Operations Division: OPD. You will recall that OPD was a "kitchen cabinet" that General Marshall had assembled to run the war, allowing the rest of the War Department to stay intact. However, the Operations Division made the operational plans and the top-level policy recommendations to the chief of staff. The remainder of the War Department implemented the instructions and provided the logistical support.

The Strategic Plans Section, a stable of highly qualified officers, only had 12 officers in it. Half a dozen of them were Rhodes scholars: men like Tick Bonesteel, Abe Lincoln, Larry Lincoln, Hank Byroade, John McCormick, and Dean Rusk. Bonesteel rose to become the commander of the Eighth **Army**. Abe Lincoln became the Army planner. Hank Byroade went with General Marshall to the State Department and later became ambassador to India. McCormick went on