

## **History 28th Infantry Training Battalion (ANTITANK)**

This battalion, the 28th, one of the 16 Infantry Training Battalions at Camp Croft, South Carolina, is an antitank training battalion. Since there are four Infantry Replacement Training Centers, the others being located at Camp Wheeler (Macon), Georgia, Camp Wolters (Mineral Wells), Texas, and Camp Roberts (San Miguel), California, each was assigned a block of numbers. The 26th to 40th inclusive, and the 50th (Colored) at Camp Croft.

The actual construction of the battalion area began early in the spring of 1941 shortly after the activation of the camp on February 17, 1941. In record time the ground was cleared and leveled, barracks, mess halls and other administrative buildings were erected and equipment installed.

This battalion was officially activated on May 6th, 1941, with Lieutenant Colonel Hardin C. Sweeney, Infantry, as first battalion commander, with a cadre of officers from many places. The enlisted men came from the 94th Antitank Battalion, Fort Benning, Georgia.

The period from May 6, 1941 to June 23, 1941, might easily be called "organizational." It included assessment of officers and cadre, procurement of clothing and equipment, building and laying duck boards, house cleaning and a number of other necessary details. Everything possible was done to make the reception of incoming trainees compare with the highest standards of the Army.

During the week of June 23rd, troop trains from the various reception centers brought the first group (880) of men to be trained. These men were bedded, equipped, and made ready for the first training cycle (13 weeks). The first week of training began on June 30, 1941. For six weeks the men received basic training. Then came the period of wooden guns, beer-can sights, Fourth dimensional range and many other improvised training aids. The men were told about the 37 mm. antitank gun. Every man in the battalion looked forward to the day when this weapon would arrive.

Finally, one Saturday morning in August, the battalion was ushered into the theater for the great showing. The curtain was pulled, and with a great burst of applause the men welcomed the first 37-mm gun to be received.

On September 6, 1941, the battalion Officers Club invited General Oscar W. Griswold, the former Commanding General, as their honored guest, to the formal opening of their Officers Club. It was on this occasion that the battalion motto and insignia received its baptism. Lieutenant Colonel Sweeney, the Battalion Commanding Officer, gave his toast

to all antitank men - quote "To the antitank men, the quick and the dead." From then on, the battalion motto was to be "The Quick and the Dead."

This first training cycle was completed about October 1, 1941. The men were now ready for duty with combat troops. They were different soldiers now; well disciplined, qualified in all the weapons, toughened to outdoor life, accustomed to night work in the field, experienced in marching, and above all proud of their membership in the battalion. When the time came for leaving, officers and men felt the friendship which had been built up between them. These men are today serving their country on the many far-flung battle fronts of the war.

On October 9, 1941, troop trains again brought a new battalion of men fresh from civilian life. Many had left important positions; included were lawyers, teachers, college professors, mechanics etc.

The first week of the new training cycle saw Lieutenant Colonel Sweeney leave the battalion to assume command of the Eighth Training Regiment. Major Ross C. Brackney took command of the battalion. With many new officers, the battalion started off with a bang. A new spirit and a great willingness to learn was in the men. The training was greatly improved due to the additional aids, equipment and experienced officers. The antitank range, finally completed, was complimented as the best in the country. A new type of target was designed which added to the realism in firing. The men were shooting better, creeping and crawling like old timers, and were in excellent physical shape. An AWOL was rare indeed. Not a single man dropped out on the many long marches which were taken.

The recreation hall, which from the very start was a gathering place for the men, received new furniture purchased from company and recreation funds. Everything possible was done to make the time spent at Camp Croft worthwhile. All kinds of sporting equipment was added to the existing supply. A Camp Croft football team was organized. Stage shows of all types were brought to our theater for the enjoyment of the men. The enthusiasm and spirit displayed by the men was a good answer to the problem of morale.

It was during this cycle that the attack occurred at Pearl Harbor and the country was plunged into war. With greater zeal and with the feeling that a job was to be done, the men of the 28th Battalion tackled their training harder than ever. This was their answer to their enemies. Every man was getting ready for combat duties. During the eighth week of training, Major Ross C. Brackney received orders transferring him to Fort McClellan, Alabama, and on December 13, 1941, Captain Jean M. Gray, Battalion Executive Officer, assumed command (ad interim).

On January 14, 1942, during the final training week (13th) of the cycle, the battalion staged a "Field Day" program, under the supervision of Captain Gray and First Lieutenant John J. Sasinek, Plans and Training Officer. This program, the first of its kind to be held by any battalion at Camp Croft, consisted of competitive platoon and gun

squad drills on the parade ground near Camp Headquarters (see pictures). Brigadier General A. M. Patch, Jr., Camp Commander, and other high ranking Camp Headquarters Officers were invited guests to observe the formations and competitive drills, which were judged by Captain Samuel E. Hardwick, Jr., Regimental Plans and Training Officer, assisted by First Lieutenant George Horton, Assistant Plans and Training Officer, Eighth Regiment.

In gun drill competition the gun squad of Company A was the winner, getting the gun into action, aligned on a target, from a towed position behind its prime mover, in 26 seconds. In platoon drill, dismounted, the best platoon came from Company B.

On January 17, 1942, Lieutenant Colonel Richard W. Stephens, Infantry, arrived at Camp Croft, having been transferred from Fort Ord, California, and was assigned to, and assumed command of the battalion.

During the last week of January, 1942, the men who had completed their 13 weeks of training in combat organizations were ready for service in combat organizations, and were sent to units in widely separated posts.

In early February, 1942, the battalion began filling up with new men; it was designated as a "Receiving Battalion" and for two weeks the officers and enlisted men of the cadre were very busy processing new men for subsequent assignment to other battalions. This processing involved getting clothing and shoe sizes, having clothing and equipment issued, inoculating and vaccinating as part of the immunization against disease procedure, having all men interviewed and classified by the Camp Classification Section to determine their civilian occupational specialty so they could be assigned to units for training which would make them most useful to the military service, and giving them essential basic instruction in Sex and Personal Hygiene Military Courtesy and Customs of the Service, Articles of War, Elementary Drill, etc.

When a sufficient number of specialists were selected to fill vacancies in other battalions the battalion was filled to full strength of 250 men per company with men from New York, New Jersey and the New England States largely, and on Monday, February 23, 1942, began the third training cycle in its history, which is currently going on. This is the function of units in a Replacement Training Center, a continual 13 weeks process, getting men, training them, and sending them forth to combat units needing replacements, and too, we are constantly being called upon to furnish cadres, both officers and enlisted men needed as a nucleus for new units being formed as the Army expands.

Our history is short, but our graduates are many. These men who have completed their training in this battalion will never forget the many hours that were spent in areas 1, 2, 3, or 4, nor will they forget the days on the antitank ranges, shooting at paper targets, beer cans, and large silhouette tank targets. The gas training, estimating speeds and distances, truck driving, and many other subjects will stay with them forever.

As a training battalion, we cannot receive the glory that is paid to a combat organization. And yet our work is all important because the success or failure of a soldier depends upon his initial training. To quote an old proverb, "As the twig is bent, so the tree will grow."

Because of transfers in the ninth month of the battalion's existence, the following officers are the only ones of the original group now in the organization: Captains Wilson B. Powell, Frederick D. Ray, and First Lieutenants Evert E. Ream and John J. Sasinek. They, and all officers assigned since, endeavor to carry out the traditions already established, to wit: To train our men that they as antitank gunners will be "The quick or the Dead."

**Taken from "Historical and Pictorial Review, 28th ITB, 8th Training Regiment, Camp Croft, SC". Transcribed by Ron Crawley for the Camp Croft Home Page.**

www.CampCroft.org