

# **History of the Colored Troops of Camp Croft**

By **CORPORAL ROBERT G. WASHINGTON**

With San Juan Hill as our inspiration, the American Eagle as our flight patrol, and the "Star Spangled Banner" as our song of victory, we activated the 50th Infantry Training Battalion on February 20, 1941, as the first step in our march against force in the cadence of our heritage from the 24th Infantry.

From Crispus Attucks to Robert Brooks, from the Boston Massacre to Pearl Harbor, we can point with pride to our services with the armed forces of the United States of America. We have always been in the vanguard.

And it is no wonder that we found inspiration in looking back. For we faced then, and still do, a challenge unprecedented in the history of the American people. Not only was it our task to teach men how to preserve the American heritage, but also how to make the world safe from international outlawlessness.

The initial organization of the 50th Battalion, Ninth Infantry Training Regiment, was accomplished under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John C. Newton, with Lieutenant Colonel Charles M. Walton as Executive Officer; (then Second Lieutenant) Captain Charles M. Everhart as Adjutant, and Second Lieutenant. William M. Shy, who faced the supply problems as Supply Officer. Other officers assisting in the preliminary organization were Captains George C. Martin, Jr., and W. W. Hatten, First Lieutenant Clyde P. Younger, First Lieutenant James H. Riddle, (then Second Lieutenant) First Lieutenant Claude M. Lyke, and Second Lieutenants Vincent G. McKee, John H. Nolen, Samuel R. Spencer, Jr., Philip S. Watson and Robert A. Willis, Jr.

Among the enlisted men who helped in this task were (then Private First Class) First Sergeant James M. Bradford, (then Staff Sergeant) Eugene Davis, a soldier with many years service not only in the United States but also in Mexico and the Philippines; (then Sergeant) First Sergeant Ceola O. Swinton; (then Sergeant) First Sergeant Roosevelt Johnson; (then Corporal) First Sergeant Robert First Sergeant Robert L. Cunningham; (then Sergeant) Herbert Brown, who has also seen service in Mexico and the Philippines; (then Corporal) Technical Sergeant Robert F. Amos, who has made a record for himself as assistant to the supply officer and is scheduled to attend Officers Candidate School, Fort Benning, Georgia.; former Sergeant Major Eddie J. Lee, an outstanding soldier already attending the same Officers' Candidate School; and (then Private) Sergeant Major Walker L. Walters, who succeeded Technical Sergeant Lee.

Upon our arrival housing and messing accommodations were provided by Captain Hatten and the soldiers of Company A. Facilities were very limited as the camp was still in the process of construction. The first battalion special orders were printed with a portable typewriter, and the typist, Captain Everhart sat at an improvised desk on a nail

keg. Mud stuck to our shoes. Sometimes we slipped. It was a lot of fun, a lot of adventure and a lot of serious business.

Our first efforts were to build ourselves a home. We built well. We are proud of our efforts changed from builders of facilities to builders of men.

## **BASIC MILITARY TRAINING**

On March 27, 1941, we received our first group of selectees. These men came from Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Ohio and other Northern states and were a very intelligent group who really constituted a challenge to the best within us. They were assigned to Companies A, B, C and D, then commanded by Captains William W. Hatten, George C. Martin, Jr., First Lieutenant Robert L. O'Brien, Jr., and Captain Admiral D. Sanders, respectively. Companies B, C and D are now commanded by Captains Charles M. Everhart, John W. Erb and Joseph Rockis in the order named.

With the housing of these men came our first problems in training—the problems of sanitation, respect for the rights of others, military courtesy, discipline, morale and many others. The men had to know the importance of their being in the Army; the utmost effort had to be put forward to weld the group into a chain with no weak links; the care and the use of their weapons had to be taught and the Basic Field Manuals thoroughly explained.

The men progressed rapidly. Many possessed outstanding talent from whom were selected orchestra and band members and cadre for other organizations. A number of our men were later placed on the cadre which we sent to Fort McClellan, Alabama.

## **QUARTERMASTER AND SERVICE DETACHMENTS**

Quartermaster and Service Detachments (Colored) were organized on the 31st of March, 1941, with First Lieutenant Clyde P. Younger, present sales commissary officer, in command. The enlisted cadre was supplied from the 50th Battalion, with First Sergeant John Spruell, Staff Sergeants Bernard S. Williams and Robert L. Gilbert in the key positions.

Additional men for these organizations came from Camp Blanding, Florida, and Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

The function of these units is to provide the permanent overhead of the camp, such as firemen, Quartermaster installations, men on duty at Post Headquarters and the Colored Military Police Detachment, the latter unit being under the leadership of Sergeant Humphrey Bryant.

Having this mission, these detachments come under the general supervision of the Camp Quartermaster, Colonel Stanley G. Backman, and have as their immediate commander, First Lieutenant Joseph E. Hines, with Sergeant Humphrey Bryant responsible for the Military Police force.

## **COMPANIES E AND F**

In order to provide opportunities for Colored soldiers to become more proficient in all phases of combat duty, the specialist companies, E and F, 27th Infantry Training Battalion, Eighth Training Regiment, were organized in May and June, 1941, respectively. Upon the completion of their basic training with the 50th Battalion, the specialist training of the men in these units is under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Don M. Holmes, who is responsible for the specialist training of the white and Colored organizations of that Battalion.

Company E men are trained to be chauffeurs and mechanics, while Company F men are trained to be cooks, clerks, buglers, armorer-artificers and pioneers. These units are commanded at the present time by Captain William M. Allen and First Lieutenant John J. Calamari, respectively. However, when first activated, Company E was commanded by Captain (then First Lieutenant) John L. Marshall, Jr., while Company F was commanded by First Lieutenant Morris G. Carley, Sr.

## **PROVISIONAL COMPANIES**

November, 1941, brought us our first tent area with the organization of Provisional Companies A-1 and D-1, commanded by Captain Charles M. Everhart and First Lieutenant Landus J. Smith, who were then First and Second Lieutenants, respectively. Although these companies were inactivated after the soldier-surplus was absorbed they were reactivated recently, with C-1 being added.

Group organization is now in effect. The usual administrative duties come under control of Group A while Groups B and C, headed by Lieutenant Colonels George L. Dewey and Preston B. Waterbury, respectively, are bringing about more effective training.

## **ORGANIZATION DAY**

In commemoration of the successful execution of the mission of training Colored soldiers during the previous twelve months period, the 50th Infantry Training Battalion held an Organization Day on February 20, 1942. On this day visual evidence was given of the excellence of the training of Camp Croft's Colored troops. During the preceding twelve months, the 50th's scrupulous observance of its motto - Courtesy, Efficiency and Leadership-has given the satisfaction of seeing tangible results produced. Over 3,500 soldiers have received their basic training here and have now joined their combat units where they are functioning with credit to themselves and their instructors at Camp Croft. A splendid feeling of mutual respect and cooperation has engendered with the neighboring community of Spartanburg. The city officials in all respects have been most helpful and understanding.

Organization Day climaxed a year's training with a program of eleven events scheduled to test the physical stamina and military proficiency of the individual soldiers.

The program was under the direction of Captain Jack G. Parsons, Special Services Officer, and included such outstanding events as the 100-yard dash, dress and undress race, and individual competition in the proper execution of the military crawl. The team events included tug-of-war, pushball, tent-pitching, squad rush, and a 2,500-yard relay race wherein each team was composed of fifty runners. Honored guests of the day were Brigadier General Clarence R. Huebner, Commanding General of Camp Croft at that time, and Colonel J. F. Butler, then Commanding Officer of the Ninth Regiment. Company D, commanded by Captain Joseph Rockis, won the events of the day.

## **RECREATION**

Recreational facilities of the Colored troops are among the best at Camp Croft. Our men excel in sports. An outstanding record has been made by the "Wildcats" - our basketball team-during the present season. Taking all comers, the Wildcats have played eleven games this season, rolling up 548 points to 339 for their opponents, losing only two games. We can boast of fine baseball teams, fifteen volley ball courts, an indoor and outdoor boxing ring, three softball diamonds, a riding ring and other recreation facilities so necessary to the rounded development of the highly trained soldier.

Just pride is due "Camp Croft Swingsters," a rollicking group of musicians who hold forth at company dances held weekly at the Service Club and at innumerable "jam sessions" for the musically minded. These talented musicians also assist the civilian organizations in providing healthful recreation for our men by playing at the Colored USO Club and the Community Center dances.

In addition to the foregoing a variety of games are offered at the Service Club and the USO Club among which are ping-pong, chess, bridge, whist, bingo, darts and many others. Free movies and other features make things interesting to the soldiers as a whole, at both places

## **CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES**

For the studious, ambitious soldier as well as the soldier who cares to read only for amusement and pleasure we have a modern library at the Service Club. Hundreds of volumes are on hand, and the men enjoy reading them. In this way they keep themselves informed and abreast of the times

It seems proper here to say something concerning our hostess, Mrs. Bessie L. Brown, who has extensive educational background and wide experience as a teacher. Mrs. Brown attended Atlanta University, did graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania, and taught nine years at Cowpens, South Carolina, looking after English and recreation. Other schools enjoyed her services, but are too numerous to mention.

It is Mrs. Brown who invites girls to attend the weekly dances, advises us and recommends good books to read. Chaplains Harvey E. Johnson and Alonzo L. Thomas, Sr., founded our first opportunity

school and have secured excellent results. Scores of men are now able to read better and to write more letters back home. The school has helped to improve the efficiency of the men and has served its aim well. This it will continue to do. Assisting Chaplain Johnson in all our cultural, educational and religious activities is Chaplain Alonzo L. Thomas, Sr. Working together these two Chaplains have been inspirers to the men.

It is presumed that many a parent wonders whether his or her son is adhering to the fireside teachings received at home. They need no longer wonder. For the soldiers of our area attend churches in Spartanburg and the Chapel here. Many times the Chapel overflows. And this is good. For it shows that we are men of the Cross as well as the Army.

Chaplains Johnson and Thomas visit us at the Station Hospital, help us in our needs and reassure our people back home.

An officer nearly always present for Chapel services is Captain John W. Erb who sets a splendid example for us to follow.

## **LOOKING BACK**

We can look back to a year of progress. We have received civilians and turned out soldiers. Thus we have made our country stronger in its day of trials. We have an NCO Club. There is a theatre for entertainment and pleasure seating over 1,000 men. We have a beautiful Chapel. Our Service Club affords us spacious dancing accommodations and otherwise provides recreation and entertainment. Our Guest House is functioning. In Spartanburg we have the USO Club.

We have filled two quotas of six men for attendance at the Officer Candidate School, Fort Benning, Georgia. Among the first to go were Sergeant Major Eddie J. Lee, Corporals Johnny W. Hamlet, Charles Gilmore and Private Elliott M. Johnson. A Battalion Parade was given in their honor.

We had the first dress parade at Camp Croft, we have the only Formal Guard Mount and we have excelled in everything except rifle marksmanship, which, with Company D qualifying 70 per cent, is on the upgrade.

## **OUR MISSION**

Our mission is to develop the individual soldier as a member of a combat team. After further training with his combat organization he will go to the battlefield. Our history is incomplete because the men who have left us are writing it. The march against force is on, and we are at the head of it. Therefore we must work upstream against the tide. And the tide must and will turn. 1942 is here. 1492 is gone. Let us rearrange the figures and rediscover America. With our creed of fair play, equality and opportunity, we will send out men competent and ready to uphold the traditions of the 24th Infantry and the honor of our Country.

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