

Battalion by Maj. Paul Woodward. After only 31 days of intensive infantry training, the regiment was committed in a defensive role on the night of 15 February on the right of the 92nd Division. It was attached to Task Force 45, under the Command of IV Corps. Two days later, on 17 February, Col. William P. Yarborough relieved Colonel Cronk who was assigned to Fifth Army Headquarters.

Following the 92nd Division's failure to capture Massa in early February, General Almond began to search for ways to increase the combat effectiveness of his infantry units. Further, General Clark, who continued to search for ways to make up for the loss of five divisions, was of the opinion that it was vital for the success of the capture of Bologna for Fifth Army to maintain an offensive attitude on the west coast and to be capable of capturing La Spezia. This led to a series of discussions and letters between Generals Marshall, Clark, Truscott, Crittenberger, and Almond. Finally General Marshall proposed that the most reliable elements of the three infantry regiments of the 92nd Division be combined into one regiment and that the 473rd (white) and 442nd (Japanese-American) Infantry Regiments be attached as the other two regiments of the division.

Accordingly, over a three-week period, from 24 February to 17 March, 70 officers and 1,359 enlisted men holding decorations and/or Combat Infantryman Badges were transferred into the 370th Infantry from the 365th and 371st Infantry, and 52 officers and 1,264 enlisted men were transferred out. The 473rd Infantry was attached to the 92nd Division on 24 February and directed to move into the Serchio River Valley. By 28 February, the regiment relieved the 365th and 366th Infantry and was conducting an active defense of its new sector.

Following its relief on 28 February, the 365th Infantry moved to the east and assumed responsibility for the Cutigliano sector under IV Corps. The 366th Infantry moved to the Division Training Area south of Viareggio. There it turned in all of its infantry equipment. On 29 March, the regiment was relieved of Division control, and moved to the vicinity of Bottinoccio. There it was converted into two general service engineer regiments, less one battalion. At that time, Fifth Army had a vital need for additional engineers. In addition to employing Italian engineers and a wide use of civilians for engineer purposes, it had converted several anti-aircraft units to engineers. On his return to the United States from the meeting of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin at Yalta on the Black Sea, General Marshall visited the 92nd Division on 28 February to observe its operations and give his final approval to its reorganization. He visited Infantry, Engineer, and other combat and supporting units.

The Bronze Star was the lowest decoration that could be awarded for valor. General Marshall believed the courage and valor displayed by every Infantry-

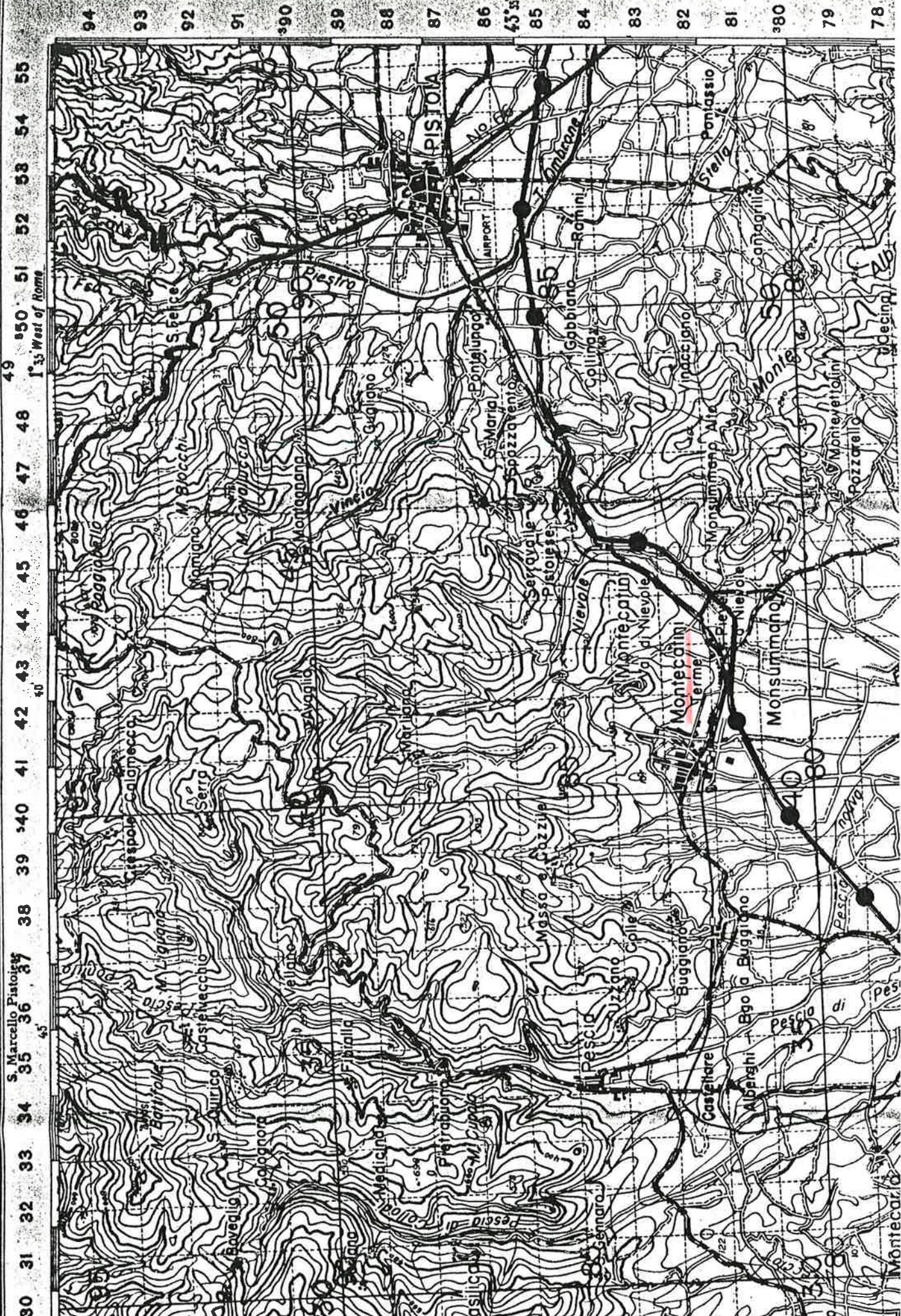
Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, Gen. of the Army George C. Marshall, Maj. Gen. Edward M. Almond, Col. Raymond G. Sherman, Sergeant Parks, Maj. Gen. Willis D. Crittenberger, and Lt. Col. Thomas St. J. Arnold during General Marshall's visit to the Italian campaign, 1945.



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COMPANY G, 473rd INFANTRY REG.

The first week of January found C Btry, 532 Bn, quartered in a four story hotel in Montecatini, Italy. What a welcome relief to leave the knee to hip deep snow of the mountains. One drawback of the hotel was no heat. The town of Montecatini was a summer resort. However, it certainly was better than living in tents.

Other changes came. The 532nd was deactivated and reformed into the 2nd Bn. of the 473rd Reg. Col. Coyne left with the deactivation and assumed a command that allowed a promotion to full (bird) Col. Since his new assignment did not allow him a private jeep, I provided him with one of C Btry's "extra" ones and placed a driver on detached service with the jeep. The Col. was determined to continue living in the manner to which he had become accustomed.

The 2nd Bn., 473rd Reg., was activated 14 Jan 45 with Lt. Col. Hampton H. Lisle as commander. One of his first acts was to promote an officer's dance in the ballroom of a classie Spa. All officers were ordered to attend. Not too well received. However, to enliven the dance, a group of us contributed a bottle of their liquer as a prize to be given to the officer who brought the ugliest woman to the dance. Several of us forfeited our chances by not bringing a date. Col. Lisle brought a nice looking woman and her chaperon. A number of single Italian girls attended (with chaperon), so there was no shortage of girls to dance with. The highlight of the evening was when Capt. Bob Sharkey entered with his date (whore). She wore a wig and her face was white from powder. He won the prize by acclamation.

Capt. Frank Biskup and I were sent to infantry school together. The highpoint of the course was when he and I got lost near the end of a daytime march (hike) and enjoyed the hospitality of an Italian host whose daughters were tramping grapes (in wooden tubbs). We made pigs out of ourselves drinking wine and were late back to camp. Both of us sick, but Frank was able to throw up. I was in bad shape and couldn't.

The end of the map reading coarse was a 12 hour compass march. The inference was that if we, as a group, didn't follow the hike route as layed out on the map (by the school commandant, no less), we would miss the pickup area where the trucks were standing by to return us to camp. Well, the Bird Col. marked the compass route incorrectly, with the result that at 11:00 P.M., the hikers could only see the truck headlights in the distance. After considerable flashlight waving, the vehicles came and picked us up. The mistake was that the route layout was made using a pocket compas on the magnetic north arrow, not on the map grid line; an error of about 25 degrees. A very important point to remember when setting up mortar fire zones in populated areas.

Upon returning to Montecatini, the first order of business was to transform the Btry into a infantry company. The first step was personal interviews with each soldier. Those with a physical disability or who were over 35 years of age could be reassigned. I paid attention to each one's experience and assignment preference. Those who wished to be in the weapons platoon could form into squads with their friends and compete against other squads for weapons assignment. I wanted the most competent soldiers operating mortars and machine guns.

One young soldier I interviewed had a glass eye, making him eligible for reassignment. I got told two things fast, i e no one but him was going to fight his war and he wasn't going to leave his friends. He chosen assignment was the BAR (Browning automatic rifle). The rifle was almost as big as he was. He did survive without injury and used the BAR in several fire fights.

The infantry platoon consisted of 3 twelve man sections (36 men) plus a runner, Sgt, and Lt. for a total of 39. Each section of 12 had a BAR operator with 2 support soldiers & Cpl; the rifle squad had 6 soldiers with a Cpl. & Sgt. The weapons platoon had 3 60 mm mortars and 2 machine guns plus vehicle transportation (jeep with trailer). The Co. Hdq. had the kitchen, supply, and communications sections. As I recall, the company's total was 189 including both officers and enlisted soldiers.

The basic tactic was for the rifle squad to advance while the BAR covered them, or vice-versa. The same basic tactic was used between sections. Emphasis was put on keeping squads spread apart (no bunching of soldiers).

Most soldiers could already recognize the sounds of war. Location of enemy small arms fire could be done by triangulation using the "Crack and Thump" method. The rifle bullet at 2600 feet per second breaks the sound barrier (800 fps). The bullet passing overhead makes a crack sound (like snapping your fingers) when it passes at a right angle to the ear; followed by a thump (the sound of the rifle that was fired). Two soldiers a 100 yards apart could each detect the direction of the thump, and its most likely source.

In the case of "88" fire, the projectile would precede the sound, making it very difficult to deal with. However the ammo was packaged 3 to a crate. If 1 round came in, wait for the other 2.

Other training consisted of range firing with rifles, mortars, and machine guns. Proficiency tests were given those who operated the mortars and machine guns.

One of the training jobs I personally undertook was mortar training. The firing range area we were assigned was limited to about 300 yards. Not very big for a mortar with an effective range of 1700 yards. I moved the mortar back into the base of a hill in order to get as much range (distance) as possible. For a 250 yard shot, I pulled all the powder increments on the round and set for a high trajectory. I dropped the round in the barrel and watched it go up, up and up - and thought - is that dam thing going straight up ? Evidently my class thought the same thing, for when I looked around, they were GONE. I breathed a sigh of relief when it finally arced - over and landed in the exact target area.

We procured two german bipod machine guns with ammo and used them for live firing on the range - principally to avoid the cleaning chore after firing. The first time the german gun was fired, the front end raised up in a 90 degree arc. The gun had to be heavily sandbagged to be effective. The rate of fire on the german gun was about 750 rounds per minute; the american one about half that. I thought the U.S.A. made one was the better.

During the month of training, the company developed regular hours and had a barrack's routine, i e reveille, regular meal times and training classes starting at 0800 A.M. A strange supply problem developed. Several soldiers, upon going to their bunk room in the hotel at noon, reported their blankets missing. We stationed a stairway guard after the 8:00 A.M. formation and still the blankets disappeared. There was no rear stairs or fire escape. I didn't care about the blankets disappearing occassionally, but the paper work to get replacements resulted in an inquiry from Bn. Hdq.

I contacted the Italian police and had a stake-out watch made to observe the rear of the hotel. Sure enough, the next morinig four blankets came floating down from the fourth floor. One of the G.I.'s was hanging back and jerking the blankets off beds and throwing them out of the window just before formation. I gave the culprit a summery court's marshall. I later wondered if I hadn't over-reacted. He was only supporting a drinking habit.

The last week of training we were honored with a visit from Gen. Mark Clark. It being the rainy season, the inspection area choosen was a narrow paved street. The Bn. was quite strung out. E & F companies were inspected first, with G Cp. third.

I took advantage of the delay by checking to see if pants fronts & shirt pockets were buttoned. The few machine guns & mortars that had been issued were also on display. Some inner feeling told me to check the display. Sure enough, the ordnance hadn't been cleaned. I called two soldiers out of ranks (parade rest) and heaved the dirty parts over a stone wall to the rear. There was a few faces with smiles on them; mine was not one.

Soon the inspection group headed by the General appeared. I called the CO. to attention, did an about face, and gave a smart salute. The Gen. went down the front rank of each platoon. I pointed out that we had not received a complete issue of ordnance at that time.

Gen. Clark was 6'-4" in height. Why he picked short Aids I'll never know. No one in the group was ever "in step".

About the dirty ordnance; the Armorer and the gun and mortar squads couldn't agree on who was to clean the issue. Since there was only one Armorer, I solved the argument by putting him in charge of the cleaning.

The inspection of the newly formed 473rd Reg., 2nd Bn., concluded our training. In one short month we were declared ready for combat.