

BARRACUDAS

THE FIRST OUTFIT OF NEGRO MARINES
IS ITCHING FOR ACTION.



A platoon of tough Barracuda Leathernecks comes to port arms during drill session on board ship.

By Sgt. ROBERT RYAN

YANK Staff Correspondent

A PACIFIC PORT—The Negro construction crew pushed on, cutting a road through Alabama's rural region that day last February. Howard Kimble of Gadsden, Ala., scrambled up a hill to set an explosive charge. Then, with the crew removed to a safe distance, Kimble blew the hill to smithereens.

"Working with TNT every day," said Kimble, "made me think I had my own private little war with Mother Nature, helping to push roads through tough spots. When I heard about the new outfit the Marines were forming, I decided to join up and help them push some roads through to Tokyo."

Now Kimble is a corporal in the Barracuda Leathernecks, the something new that has been added to the Marine Corps. The men in this Negro outfit, commanded by white officers and trained by veteran white noncoms, know the traditions of the Marine Corps from Tripoli to Tarawa. They aim to add their own chapter to the annals of the Corps.

And Lt. James T. Wilson of Jacksonville, Fla., one of the Barracuda officers, is confident of the results. "In the short time they've been in the service," he said, "these men have been trained as thoroughly in combat principles as any outfit. They're damned good jungle fighters. We've taken them on tactical problems in the jungle, and they've shown that they are bushmasters when it comes to camouflage, stealth and patience. They can lie in wait for hours without getting restless. That is their outstanding combat efficiency and one that will stand them in good stead if they should meet the Jap jungle fighter."

The average Barracuda Leatherneck is 19 years old, weighs 155 pounds and is 5 feet 10 inches tall. He is tough, too, usually with a couple of years behind him at some job that has given him broad shoulders and a solid physique.

Take Charley Nesbitt, for example. He was light heavyweight champion in the Golden Gloves tournament held at Memphis, Tenn., his home town, in 1941 and 1942. Between bouts,

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BARRACUDAS

Gunnery Sgt. Felix Daniels, veteran of six years in Marines, conducts a class in nomenclature of the M1.

Nesbitt made his living as an electric welder. So he had a head start when he volunteered for the Marines last June. Now he's in even better shape, and acts and talks like the marine he is.

"I liked the glory behind the Marine Corps," said Nesbitt. "They've tackled some tough assignments and put them across. I thought I'd like to fight the Japs, and this is the best outfit to do it in. This service training is a lot more rugged than my ring experience, but we're certainly in great shape now, and when we go into action, watch some Jap blood flow."

Frederick E. Gartrille was driving a truck around Detroit, Mich., when he saw a pal passing on the sidewalk and screeched to a stop. "He told me about some of our boys joining the Marines," Gartrille said. "I thought, since it was a new outfit, I'd like to be a part of it, so the next day I quit my job and enlisted." Gartrille is now a platoon sergeant and helped train the boys who joined up later.

"Every phase of training interested me," Fred said, "and I'd like to put some of it to use in the real McCoy against the Japs."

But not all the Barracuda Leathernecks were construction crewmen, prize fighters or truck drivers. Pierre A. Clarke of Chicago, Ill., was an accomplished violinist, majoring in music at the University of Chicago, when he quit last March to join the Marines. Pvt. Clarke has added 10 pounds to his sound frame since he enlisted.

The men come from many states. There's a large Southern delegation, including Pvts. Jim Grigg of Darlington, S. C.; Carl Sharperson of Orangeburg, S. C.; Joe Griffin and Roosevelt Williams of Fort Worth, Tex.; Carl Adams Jr. of Granger, Tex.; Louis A. Shelton of Memphis; David C. Moody of Bessemer, Ala.; Matthew Hall of Monroe, La., and James R. Jordan of Richmond, Va. But New York City is represented by Pvt. Herbert G. Davis, Chicago by Pvt. Andrew C. Walker, Detroit by Pvt. M. Gerald Taylor and Denver, Colo., by Pfc. Thomas C. Robinson.

Before they were sent overseas, these men and all the other Barracuda Leathernecks were given boot training at Mountford Point Camp, Camp Lejeune, New River, N. C.

They were taught the basic principles of attack and defense, with special emphasis on the bayonet, the knife, street fighting, jujitsu and dirty wrestling, so they'll be able to come out on top in the toughest kind of personal combat.

Then Gunnery Sgt. Felix Daniels of Fayette City, Pa., a white marine with six years of service, gave the Barracudas the lowdown on the care and firing of combat weapons. "These men grasp instruction readily and rapidly," Daniels said. "Their work is conspicuously outstanding."

As for close-order drill, 1st Sgt. Olin V. Carey

BARRACUDAS

of Wilmar, Ark., a white marine with 10 years in the Corps, said: "There's only one outfit I can think of that shapes up better at drilling than this outfit, and they were a picked group on exhibition at the World's Fair." The Barracuda Leathernecks are particularly hot on fancy drill steps involving timing and rhythm.

Lt. Wilson is all for giving the men Good Conduct ribbons without waiting for the usual three years. Here's the way he put it: "These men have exhibited the best of conduct. The shore patrol has commended the men on their deportment every place we've been. All our boys are thoroughly disciplined."

It's this discipline, coupled with the fine physical condition and training of the Barracuda Leathernecks, that enables the men to do 22 miles in a little better than four hours, said the lieutenant. "If we wanted to take the governor off and let them go all out. I'm sure they could break any existing records for forced marches. I've seen some of the best outfits and they can stop them cold."

One of these days, the Japs may have some additional testimony to give on that subject.

YANK

PAGE 7

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