

NAZIS DON'T LIKE GOUMS



A COLORFUL GOUM SHARPENS AN AMERICAN BAYONET.
HIS RIFLE IS ALSO AMERICAN; HIS HELMET, FRENCH.

These pigtailed French Moroccan boys don't particularly care for C rations because they would rather use their bayonets to open Germans and Italians. Tin cans make the blades dull.

By Sgt. RALPH G. MARTIN
YANK Field Correspondent

WITH U. S. FORCES IN NORTHEASTERN SICILY [By Cable] — "Those Goums don't fight fair," an English-speaking German prisoner complained. "They're crazy."

Be that as it may, these French Moroccan native troops took hill after hill here in Sicily, bringing back hundreds of German prisoners and leaving behind many more Jerries quite dead.

All the Goums have an intimate knowledge of French light machine guns, the American tommy gun and the 81-mm mortar. But give them a bayonet and a bunch of grenades, and they'll charge any position anywhere.

They were the first to see action in this northeastern pocket of hills, on the flank of U. S. troops. Their objectives were twin hills, held by two companies of well-entrenched Germans, just outside Mistretta.

The Goums took up their positions in the night, climbed the hill as quietly as mountain goats,

Goums

heaved several dozen well-aimed grenades and made a "cold steel" attack. When the Moroccans were within 50 yards of the top, the Jerries opened up with machine guns. Instead of falling flat on their faces and hunting for cover, the Goums rushed straight in for hand-to-hand fighting. They drew their 10-inch knives, known as *koumias*, which are used to cut off heads. Once this was a popular weapon with the Goum; now he only uses it when he gets very, very mad. That sometimes happens, as it did on this night, and that is why these big black boys rank so high on the Nazi list of "people we wouldn't want to be with on a desert island."

The Germans definitely don't like the Goums. As for the Italians, they're scared to death of them. In the Mateur and Bizerte sectors, where the Goums were attached to the Ninth Division, three Italian companies surrendered en masse as soon as they heard that the guys in front of them were Goums.

Unlike the Gurkhas, British Indian native troops who look like a bunch of kids but aren't, the Goums look and act as tough as they really are. And they really are tough. Back in 1912, when French troops came to Morocco and overwhelmed the place, the Goums still had very primitive ideas about fighting, torturing and killing. They were just as ready to cut off somebody's head as to tell him "Good morning."

After the French took over and tamed the Goums a little, these native soldiers were absorbed into the French fighting forces but kept as separate units. They were organized into *tabor*s, which are the approximate equivalent of our battalions, consisting of four companies with 200 Goums to a company.

Most of these native soldiers have crinkly hair, close-cropped except for a plaited pigtail. The pigtail is worn, the Goums say, so that the Lord will have something to grab hold of when He yanks them up to paradise.

The Goums, who follow the religion of Mohammed, are of Berber origin. The Berbers, not the Arabs, were the original natives of North Africa. Practically all of the Goums wear beards, because they believe that a man who hasn't seen action and has no beard is no man at all.

That was the explanation offered by 1st Lt. Bistos Hubert, the Goums' commanding officer. Hubert has been with the Goums for three years. Before that, he served with the Spahis, the French North African native cavalrymen with the red caps and the Technicolor-conscious uniforms.

"These Goums are the best fighters I've seen anywhere," the lieutenant said. "They just don't know when to quit." Besides the commanding officer, each Goum company has one other French officer and 10 French noncoms. In addition, the Goums have their own native sergeants.

They all eat the same food now—C rations—which they don't particularly like. The Goums would prefer a steady diet of bread and green tea, the national dish.

Attached to every *tabor* of Goums is a cavalry unit, in which each man owns his own horse. This unit is employed strictly for reconnaissance, since all Goums fight on foot. Several scores of mules are also attached to each section, to carry ammunition over terrain where even jeeps can't go.

The Goums, though, are crazy about jeeps. It is a terribly funny picture to see one of the Goums, wearing his wool-sack uniform, tearing along in a jeep with his pigtail streaming in the wind.

YANK

OldMagazineArticles.com