



The old-timers of this 34th Division outfit have sweated it out longer than any other infantrymen in Europe—three years overseas with 350 days spent in the front lines of Tunisia and Italy.

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Pfc. Henke in Ireland, 1942

WITH THE FIFTH ARMY IN ITALY—Most of us were still waiting for our first notice from the draft board on the day that Pfc. Milburn H. Henke of Hutchinson, Minn., walked down the gangplank at Belfast, Northern Ireland, in a 1918 helmet, blouse, necktie, full field pack, M1, gas mask and canvas leggings, and posed on the dock, smiling, for pictures that later appeared in practically every newspaper in the States. That was Jan. 26, 1942. Henke was the center of all that attention because he was the first American soldier in this war to set foot in the European theater.

Henke is back in the States now, reclassified as limited service, with an excellent combat record in Tunisia where he served as communications sergeant in a rifle company and won the Silver Star. But his old outfit, the 1st Battalion of the 133d Infantry in the veteran 34th (Red Bull) Division, is still here, finishing its third year overseas and sweating out its third straight winter in the front lines.

Only a few of the original GIs who landed with Henke in Belfast are left now—fewer than 60 out of the whole battalion. In Henke's old company (Baker Company) there are seven. They have more overseas time than any other infantrymen in Europe today, because the 1st Battalion arrived in Belfast a couple of weeks ahead of the other early Infantry units in that first American Expeditionary Force. If you showed them the pictures taken on the dock, they would have a hard time recognizing themselves. They have almost forgotten what blouses, neckties, gas masks and canvas leggings look like.

Few, if any, infantrymen in any theater of operations have seen more combat than they have in the last two years. The battalion fought the whole Tunisian campaign, including Hill 609, and it has been in the line in Italy since late September 1943, with only one rest period that lasted more than a month.

You can get some idea of the terrific physical and mental strain of the Italian campaign by comparing the time this battalion has been able to rest in the last 15 months with the time it has spent under fire in the same period.

The battalion landed at Salerno two weeks after D-Day and took over a sector from the 45th Division on Sept. 27, 1943. Its men did not get a chance to relax from that day until the day after Thanksgiving, when they were relieved by the French and brought back to Castelnuovo for two weeks' rest. During those two months of combat, which included two bloody crossings of the Volturno and the taking of Ashcan Hill at San Mario de Oliveto, they had only one week out of the line—in an area under German artillery fire.

They moved up front on Dec. 11 and stayed there more than two months, during which they made five attempts to cross the Rapido River in bitter winter weather. Then, on Feb. 22, they were pulled out of the Cassino sector and got 21 days off to prepare for a move to Anzio. The battalion landed at Anzio on Mar. 25. It did not get another rest until June 8, soon after the battalion had advanced on Tarquinia, 18 miles ahead of the rest of the Fifth Army, with no flank protection, and had wiped out a German bicycle battalion.

"We made our first contact with the Germans a little after midnight," says Pfc. John F. Weidler of Wichita Falls, Tex., one of the battalion headquarters men. "By 4 o'clock the next afternoon it was all over. That next night every man in our battalion had a bicycle of his own."

The 1st Battalion was relieved 24 hours later by a battalion of a division fresh from the States.

"I think that was the only time I ever saw a whole outfit with fixed bayonets." S/Sgt. Ned Levinson of the Bronx, N. Y., says. "There wasn't a German within miles of us. But these guys came up at night in trucks, with every one of them carrying his rifle at port arms and the bayonets fixed on every gun. And not a German within miles. Damnedest sight I ever seen."

A little more than two weeks later, June 25, the battalion was back in the line again at San Vincenzo. Then came the tough battles at Cecina and Mount Maggiore. At the end of July, the battalion went on the first real vacation it has enjoyed in Italy—six weeks at a beach resort on the Mediterranean coast below Leghorn.

On Sept. 10, the battalion moved north from Florence and plunged into hard fighting over the most difficult terrain the men have been up against overseas. Slugging their way up the steep ridges of the Gothic Line, they found an enemy who was resisting as strongly as he did at Cassino and Anzio. They had six days out of the line at the end of the month. Then they went back for six more weeks. Early in November, when the advance had slowed to a stop in the rain and mud before Bologna, the battalion hiked out of the mountains at night, climbed into trucks and drove to a rest town west of Florence for 10 days.

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When you figure it out, the battalion has had about 16 weeks of rest in the last 15 months.

Adding this long stretch of Italian combat to the battalion's time on the Tunisian front, you get something around 350 days of line service. And 76 Bronze Stars, 64 Silver Stars, nine Legions of Merit and 17 Distinguished Service Crosses. (When the Fifth Army announced on the first anniversary of Salerno that it had awarded 201 DSCs, the battalion had 16 of them.) The battalion also has one Medal of Honor, awarded posthumously to Pvt. Robert D. Booker of Callaway, Nebr., killed Apr. 9, 1943, at Fondouk while attacking single-handedly two enemy machine guns and a mortar position across 200 yards of open ground.

THE 34th Division was an Iowa-Minnesota-Dakota National Guard outfit when it went into active duty at Camp Claiborne, La., in February 1941. Later that year, while the Army was still wearing dark-blue fatigues and old shallow helmets of the first World War, the 34th was streamlined from a four-regiment square division to a three-regiment triangular one. The Dakota regiment, the 164th Infantry, was lopped off and sent first to the West Coast and then to the South Pacific, where it later became famous at Guadalcanal and Bougainville as a part of the Americal Division. That left the 34th almost exclusively a division of soldiers from Iowa and Minnesota. Two of the regiments, the 133d and the 168th Infantries, were Iowa National Guard outfits. The other regiment, the 135th Infantry, was from Minnesota. Two of the divisional artillery battalions were from Minnesota, the other from Iowa.

In the 1st Battalion of the 133d, A Company was a National Guard unit from Dubuque and most of the boys in Baker and Dog Companies were from Waterloo. Charlie Company was composed of men from Cedar Rapids. After they moved away from home to start their training at Claiborne, these National Guardsmen began to worry about the Selective Service System. They were afraid it might send them a lot of draftees from the East or South who would make the battalion lose its Hawkeye flavor. Their fears were groundless. More than 75 percent of the draftees assigned to the battalion were from Iowa.

The battalion was still an Iowa outfit in Ireland, in North Africa and in Italy until it moved into the Cassino sector. Then it began to change. The familiar Iowa faces of the original National Guardsmen and the early draftees started to disappear. A lot of them were killed; others, with what the boys enviously called "million-dollar wounds," didn't come back from the hospital. When the battalion embarked for Anzio, it was almost a new outfit. And later when it pushed north from Rome, most of the remaining old men went home to Iowa on rotation or TD.

The few GIs left now who have been with the battalion since the beginning are mostly clerks, cooks, truck drivers and cannon-company men—the soldiers in the Infantry who get the low priority on rotation because, compared with the riflemen and machine gunners, they have a somewhat lower priority on death. But most of the cooks, truck drivers and cannon-company men in this battalion have Purple Hearts. When it gets rough, they work up forward as litter-bearers.

Probably because rotation and TD are worked on an alphabetical basis, most of the remaining "Jan. 26" men in the battalion seem to have last names beginning with "S" or letters farther on. There is, for instance, S/Sgt. Everall Schonbrich of Casey, Iowa, from the Dog Company mortar platoon; S/Sgt. Jerry Snoble of Hazleton, Iowa, supply sergeant of Charlie Company who served in a rifle platoon until he was wounded in Tunisia; S/Sgt. Stanley Setka of Riceville, Iowa, an antitank squad leader, and T-5 Raymond E. Sonksen of Grundy Center, Iowa, acting mess sergeant in Baker Company. There were 22 men from Grundy Center in Baker Company back at Claiborne. Sonksen is the only one left.



T-5 Raymond Sonksen is the only remaining GI from Grundy Center, Iowa, in Baker Company. Originally there were 22. Sonksen is acting mess sergeant.



S/Sgt. Max Shepherd is the other Waterloo (Iowa) man who has stayed with the outfit.



Pvt. Ralph Loy is one of two Waterloo (Iowa) men from the original outfit. He has more stars on his ribbons than anyone else in the battalion.

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And only two of the Waterloo men who formed almost two full companies of the original National Guard battalion are still here. They are S/Sgt. Max Shepherd, whose father, Maj. Lloyd H. Shepherd, used to be battalion commander, and Pvt. Ralph Loy, a character who has one more of those important combat stars on his theater ribbon than anybody else in the battalion. Loy was transferred to the 3d Division after Tunisia, went through the Sicilian campaign and then managed to get back into his old Iowa battalion when it was leaving for Italy. "The adjutant fixed me up," he says. "He and I were old friends. He court-martialed me once in Ireland."

Although the battalion is now composed of soldiers from practically every state in the Union, the old Iowa men still have a great pride in their outfit. They will argue for hours to prove that their battalion entered a certain town last July three hours ahead of one of the other 133d Infantry battalions. They are still sore because the recent official Fifth Army account of the advance to Rome gives the 1st Special Service Force credit for taking Highway 7 and the railroad line during the break-through from Anzio. "We passed through the Special Service Force there on the night of May 24 and attacked the next morning," they say. "Charlie Company did most of the job and cleaned it up in two hours."

Just as they think their battalion is the best in the regiment, they also consider the 133d the best regiment in the division. They have a deep respect for the 3d and the 45th Divisions, which shared their hardships in Italy before moving on to southern France, but they don't feel that any other division can quite measure up to the 34th.

In a rest town recently, one of their officers noticed a GI, loaded with cognac, passing out on the street in front of his CP. He asked a couple of his men to pick up the soldier and put him under cover. When they started to lift him from the sidewalk, one of them noticed that he was wearing the shoulder patch of another division. Without a moment's hesitation, they dropped him back on the sidewalk and walked away, dusting their hands. It took the officer quite a while to convince them it was their duty to take care of the drunk, even if he wasn't in the 34th.

THIS pride in the outfit and the personal pride of each man, who knows the silent contempt that veteran GIs feel for men who turn into stragglers or AWOLs without good reason, keep the battalion going at times when the demands made upon it seem to be more than a human being can take. Those demands are made often here.

When you talk with the men in the battalion about the war in Italy and ask them why it has been so slow and tough, they give you straight and simple answers that make more sense than most of the profound comments that military experts have written on the subject.

"Listen," they say, "the Jerry has got all that stuff piled up here. He can't take it with him and he doesn't want to leave it for us. So he is staying here until he uses it up, just like any smart guy would do. You can tell that's the way he's thinking from the amount of artillery he's throwing at us. It's as bad as Anzio."

They feel that GIs in the rear echelon and the people at home do not understand the numbers of Germans they are facing. "This may be a forgotten front and all that," they say, "but we had 10 battalions against our division last month. It may be forgotten by us but it's not forgotten by the Germans. We captured a Jerry pay roll that showed a division with a strength of 10,300 men."

The terrain? "Miles on the map here don't mean anything. You may be told to advance to a point three miles away. But by the time you get there, up and down ridges and around chasms, zig-zagging up the sides of mountains, you'll have covered eight or nine miles. The squad on your right may be within talking distance. But there is a canyon dropping down between you and them."

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The older men in the battalion and the veteran officers, like Capt. Richard Wilkinson of Toano, Va., who missed only 15 days of Charlie Company's combat until he was transferred recently to battalion headquarters, have seen a lot of changes in Army methods—mostly for the better, they say—in their two years of action.

All the men in the battalion say they are eating much better food now than they had earlier in the Italian campaign and in Tunisia. "The 10-in-one rations are damned good," Sonksen says. "We're getting fresh meat and bread more often. Back in Tunisia we used to go without bread for weeks. The boys had it so seldom that when they did get it they used to eat it for dessert, like cake. Somebody ought to tell somebody to give us more coffee and lay off the bouillon and lemon powder and cocoa. And speaking of coffee, the Coleman stove is one of the great inventions of the war."

"The Coleman stove, the jeep and the Bailey Bridge," Shepherd says, "are winning the war. Guys with Colemans would rather move up without helmets than leave their stoves behind. We carry them in Jerry gas-mask containers. They don't make much light, either, once they get started. A hot breakfast in the morning makes all the difference in the world."

When you mention clothing, the GIs in the battalion think first of shoes and socks, the most important items in the Infantry's wardrobe. They don't know why the Army didn't give them combat boots back in 1941 instead of service shoes and leggings. They don't have a high opinion of the combat shoe with the rough side of the leather on the outside. It doesn't shed water as well as the smooth-finished boot and it takes longer to dry. They are not satisfied with the shoepac, the new type of winter boot with a rubber foot and waterproof black-leather top.

"It's a step in the right direction," Weidler says. "It's an attempt to keep the feet dry, and that's the only way to beat trenchfoot. But the shoepac gives the foot no support. If you walk a long distance in them, they kill you."

Everybody likes the issue woolen sweater, but prefers last winter's combat jacket with the zipper front and the high woolen collar and cuffs to the new green hip-length jacket. "The new jacket is not bad," one GI says, "but it acts like a shelter half in the rain. If you rub against one spot inside too much, the water comes through."

Nobody wants any part of the new sleeping bag with the zipper that pulls up from the feet to the chin. "It may be fine for the Air Forces," one of the BAR men says, "but I wouldn't get into one of those things in the line if you paid me. Suppose a Kraut found me with my arms and legs all zippered up, like I was in a strait jacket?"

The battalion has not noticed much change for the better or worse in their weapons or ammunition in the two years they have been in combat. Some of the men would like lighter weapons with more fire power; others would prefer more heavy weapons, like the BAR. They still envy the German smokeless powder as they did in Tunisia. They like the German light machine gun better than ours and they think the German machine pistol is a better weapon than our tommy gun.

THEY won't always admit it, but you can tell from talking to them that the men in the battalion get a deep satisfaction from knowing their job is the toughest one in the Army. They know that, if they come through the war safely, their own part in it will be something they will be able to look back on with pride for the rest of their lives. They know that it will be a good feeling to say at a gathering of veterans years from now: "I was with the 34th Division in Tunisia and Italy—1st Battalion of the One-Three-Three."

But that is something in the remote future. Right now they are tired, and their attitude toward the fate that put them in the Infantry, in the snow of the Apennine Mountains, instead of in some softer branch of the service, is



S/Sgt. Jerry Snoble of Hazleton, Iowa, is another veteran. He served in a platoon and was wounded in Tunisia. Now he's company supply sergeant.



S/Sgt. Everall Schonbrich of Casey, has been with the outfit from the beginning, too. He is a member of Dog Company's mortar platoon.

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one of resignation. They are accepting it, trying to make the best of it and trying to tell themselves that it could have been worse. One of the men in the battalion, describing the ordeal he had been through recently at Cecina, ended up: "I think we were the first ones to get into the town itself. Anyway, we were pulled out of there for a couple of days on July 3. On the Fourth of July we had a hot holiday meal."

Then he thought for a moment and added: "You know, that's one thing about this outfit. We've had it tough all along but, somehow or other, we've always managed to hit some place on holidays where we can have a hot meal. Christmas of 1942 we were on the boat in Liverpool, waiting to push off for North Africa. On the Fourth of July in 1943, we were back in a rest area after the Tunisian campaign. Thanksgiving Day in 1943 we had just finished the fighting at Ashcan Hill, but we had a turkey dinner right there on the side of the hill. It was raining and the Germans were shelling us, but we didn't give a damn—we had the turkey."

He smiled and shook his head. "Maybe you better not print that," he said. "Somebody at division headquarters may read it and say: 'Those guys have had it too good. We'll see that they spend their next five Thanksgivings and Christmases in the line eating K rations.'"