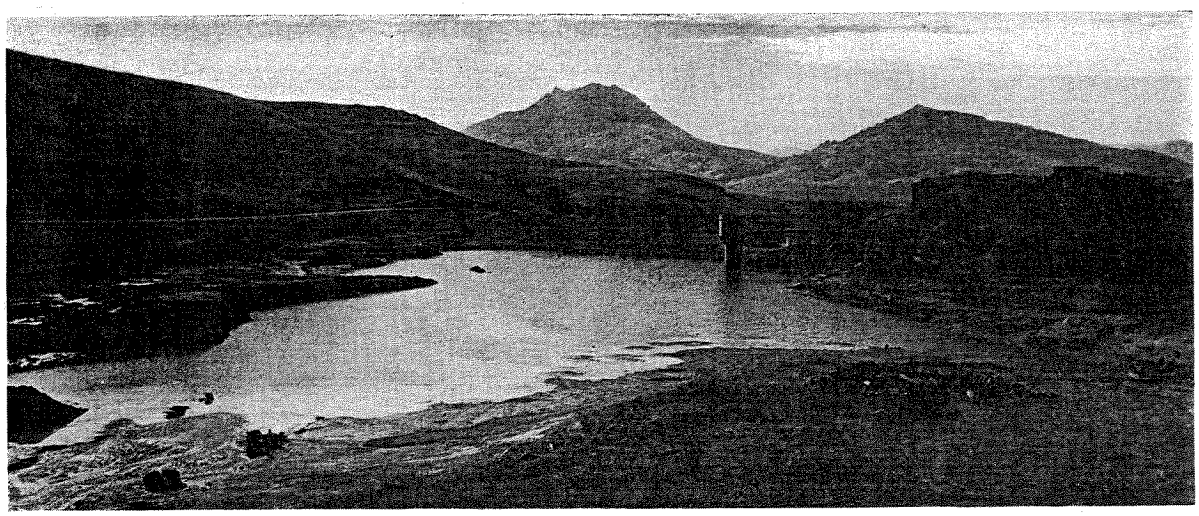
CHAPTER 6
CAMP SAN LUIS OBISPO

AFTER three months of viewing unbroken wastes of sand in the California-Arizona desert, the bloodshot eyes of the weary Red Star men rested with joy on the brilliant green hills of San Luis Obispo. Only four miles from the city, along a four-lane concrete highway that invited frequent trips to town, was Camp San Luis Obispo, unquestionably the most picturesque home of the Sightseers. The camp was surrounded by rolling grassy hills. The air was kept clear and cool by breezes from the blue Pacific, only a few miles away. Salt-water swimming and fishing could be enjoyed on free time, and the community of San Luis Obispo was particularly hospitable. Red Star men, after the mud of Louisiana, the cold of Tennessee and the heat of the desert, felt that luck—in the form of California climate and settings—was with them.

Living quarters on the post were different from any the Division had previously used. Frame and tarpaper huts, warmed by a welcome oil burner, were assigned to each group of six men. Recreation halls and messhalls for each company helped provide some of the comforts of the last prepared area to be occupied by the entire Division for the remainder of the war. PXs and service clubs providing refreshments, libraries, billiards, table tennis and frequent dances contributed to the pleasures of garrison duty.

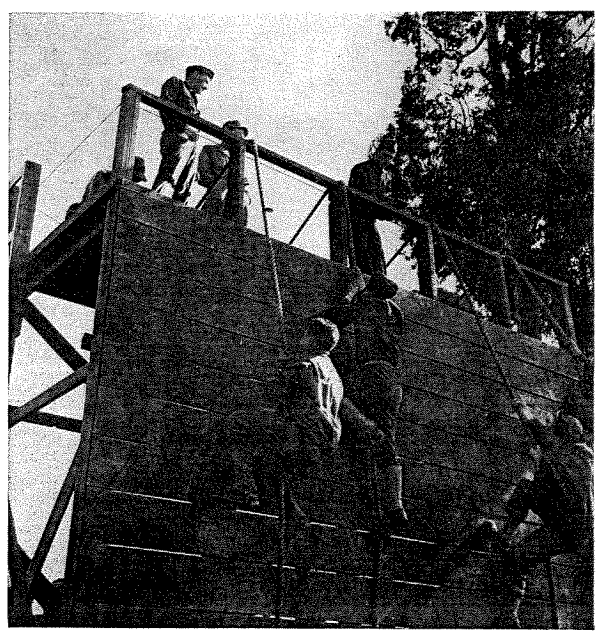
While Div Arty fired thousands of rounds of live ammunition across the California hills and the engineers continued their training in construction and demolition, the demotorized doughfeet went in for small-unit infantry training. Range work was stressed, from full qualification courses in all weapons on the known distance ranges, through the transition range in which the doughs fired at jumping targets in a designated area, to the close combat runs where targets might be expected at every unexpected point. Stress was laid on assault firing, quick reaction courses and other phases of fast, close combat which later proved so advantageous in the jungles of New Guinea and on the wooded slopes of Luzon. The infantry battalion problems on the pine-covered Hunter Liggett Reservation involved the use of live ammo, mortars, smoke pots, bangalores and supporting artillery fire over terrain which the officers and noncoms had not previously seen, thus adding to the verisimilitude of the training problems. The only flaw in the operations was the presence on the reservation of a very persistent type of poison oak, the greatest casualty-producer at Camp San Luis. The field artillery battalions also had their problems and tests on the Hunter Liggett hills, though frequently the artillerymen had to spend more time putting out grass and forest fires than they did firing. On one occasion the men of the 53d Battalion stopped one raging forest fire at the very last firebreak, beyond which the fire would have rushed to the coast, twenty miles away.

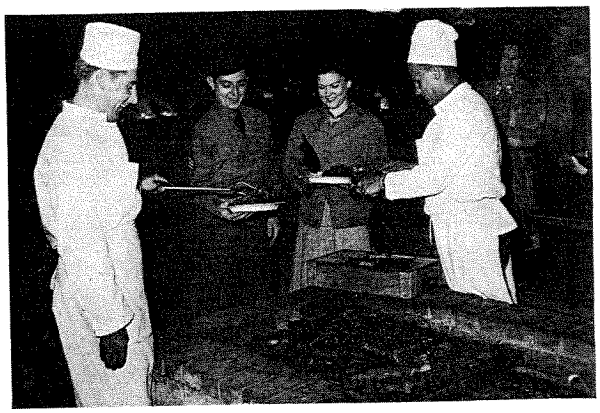


The physical fitness program was almost as strenuous as the small-unit training that the officers and men went through. Judo classes, timed forced marches, push-ups, foot races, and infiltration and obstacle courses that had to be run with combat pack and rifle, stripped excess poundage from the men in record time. The entire training schedule was intensified by the institution of the "Gymkhana," a competitive program designed to select the best small unit in each phase of Division operations, whether a rifle squad, mortar section, battery of 105's, engineer demolition squad or a team of litter bearers. The intense competitive spirit within the battalions and regiments was exceeded only when the regimental winners fought it out for the Division championship.

In addition to the training, one regimental combat team was alerted each week for momentary movement to defend the California coast in the event of an enemy invasion attempt. With the Jap Navy too busily occupied in other parts of the Pacific, the net results of the alert were a week's confinement to the post, a motor march on Saturday, and a review on Sunday. The motor marches were masterpieces of timing. When a convoy was scheduled to enter town X at 1032 hours, it invariably arrived there between 1031:50 and 1032:10; when a break was planned for a definite time at some predetermined point, it was held at that time and place. The schedule was not affected by ordinary considerations, not even the unpredictable California weather, for when the men in the convoy were scheduled to remove their overcoats at 1200, the coats were removed at that moment, come hail or high water; and on several hot afternoons that belied the weatherman's predictions, local civilians were amazed to see truckloads of sweltering infantrymen buttoned up in their OD overcoats, looking anxiously at their watches.

Diversions at Camp San Luis Obispo were plentiful. In addition to the post facilities, places like Morro Bay and Pismo Beach provided excellent swimming and fishing opportunities. Occasionally shows at the camp would provide hours of laughs, as did Bob Hope when he broadcast his weekly radio program from the stage of the San Luis Theater. The small but well stocked bars in town remained





open until 2300, and the sea-food restaurants that dotted the coast were always a good source of gastronomic pleasure. The Red Star was apparently well received in private homes in and around San Luis Obispo, for Army chaplains and local clergymen were kept busy performing marriages for Sixth Division men, many of whom spent two years overseas before seeing the resulting offspring.

Early in May the Division received its alert order for overseas shipment. Furloughs and leaves, the last given in any number to members of the Sixth, were granted. In July 1943 Division headquarters and the 63d Regimental Combat Team entrained for Camp Stoneman, where clothing checks and obstacle courses kept the men occupied until they sailed for Hawaii. Within two months, in several echelons, the Sixth completed its move to the Division's new home—Oahu.

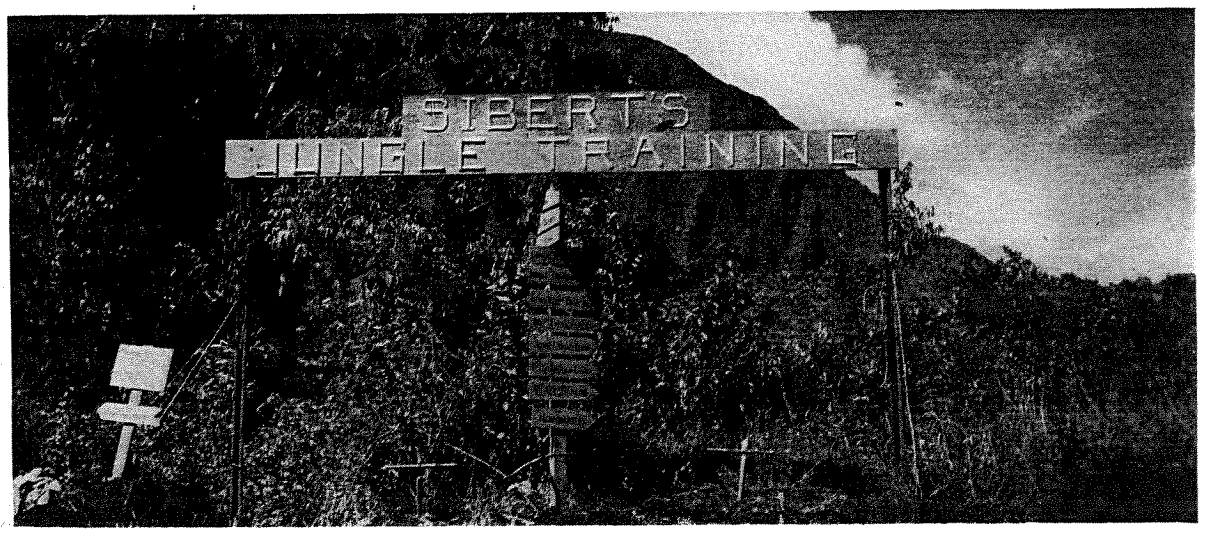
CHAPTER 7
HAWAII

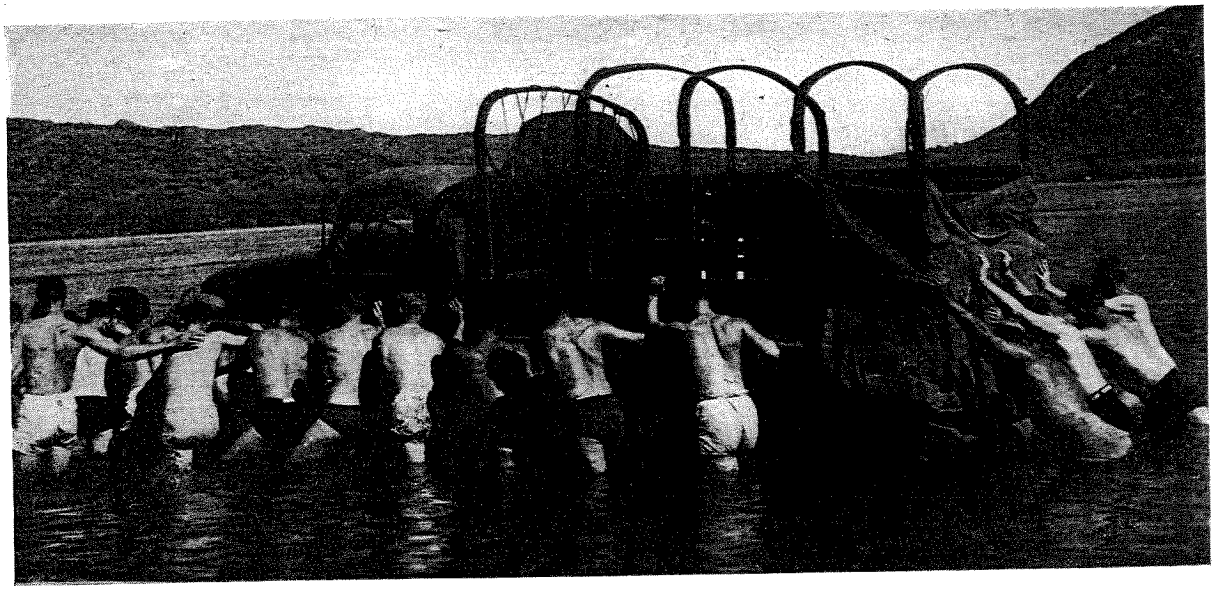
WHILE summer zephyrs caressed a palm-fringed shore and carried the soft strains of "Aloha Oe" to the crowded decks of the transports, the Sixth sailed into beautiful Honolulu Harbor to begin its first overseas assignment. This land of soft nights, sweet music, pineapple groves, hula skirts and Doris Duke was to provide many hours of excellent training and better diversions for the Red Star men before they faced the grimmer aspects of war.

The primary mission of the Division was, of course, the ground defense of Oahu. The rapid recovery of the Navy after hitting the canvas in the first round had minimized the possibility of a major enemy amphibious assault against Schofield Barracks, Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor, though that possibility still remained. Of a more urgent nature was the active patrolling of beach areas as a defense against submarine attacks and the landing of small parties trained for espionage and sabotage. Major General Franklin C. Sibert, commanding the Sixth, overhauled the ground defense plan, streamlining patrol, communication and guard activities so that two regiments could adequately defend the area formerly requiring two divisions. For his masterful plan, the commanding general was awarded the Legion of Merit by a grateful Hawaiian Department and won the gratitude of all men of the Sixth by thus reducing competition in Honolulu for the limited forms of recreation available.

The daylight hours that were not devoted to patrolling or to maintaining platoon and company strongpoints were spent on rugged training for amphibious and jungle warfare. Sibert's Jungle Training Center and the Hawaiian Department's Jungle Center were probably the toughest, with the Amphibious Training School running a close second. Scouting and patrolling under what approximated jungle conditions, movement of artillery pieces over trackless woodlands, assault landings on reef-ridden shores, and the annoying but vital sanitary discipline, along with a liberal sprinkling of field expedients learned by General Sibert in the jungles of Burma, all prepared the officers and men for the trials to come. In one of the jungle schools, fifty-eight hours of training over ten rugged combat courses were crowded into one week. Frequent body-thumping judo classes resulted in many sore backs and wrenched muscles, but helped build the bodies that were later to withstand successfully sleepless nights and endless marches under combat conditions.

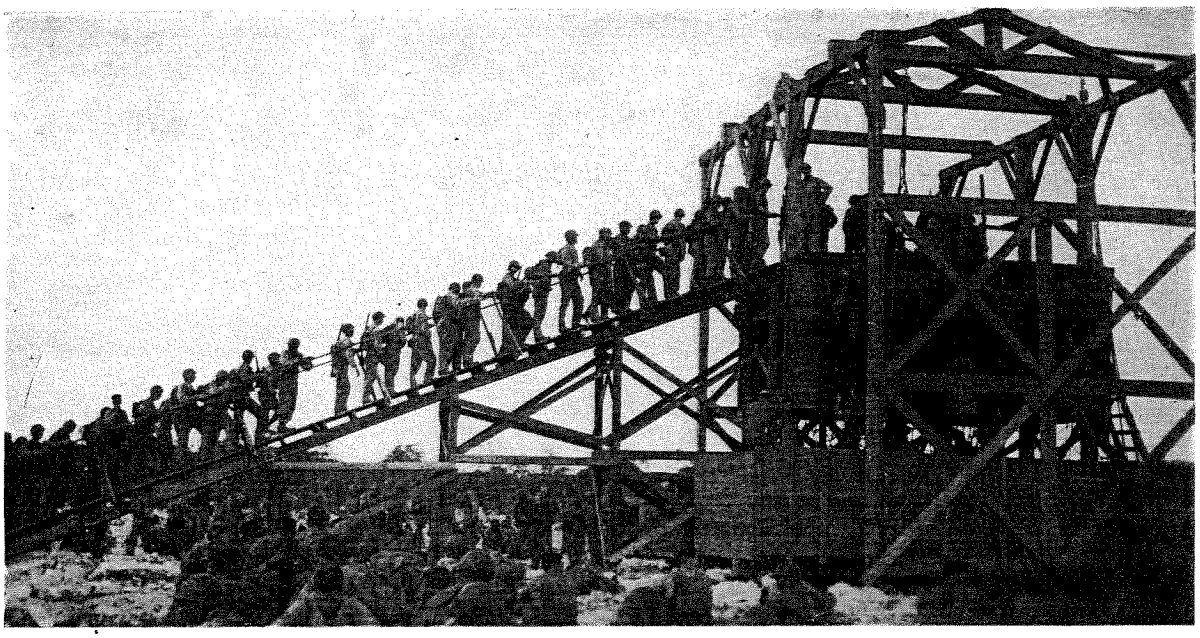
The weeks of amphibious training inured the men to the hazards of landing nets and the ever present *mal de mer,* and assault landings became an almost daily occurrence. Frequently the Red Star men charged ashore through a pounding surf to find





barbed wire concertinas and other beach obstacles impeding their progress toward the first objective, while concealed explosive charges would force them to bite the sand every few yards. The training was rough—it had to be rough, to prepare the men for the most exhausting and nerve-wracking type of warfare ever devised.

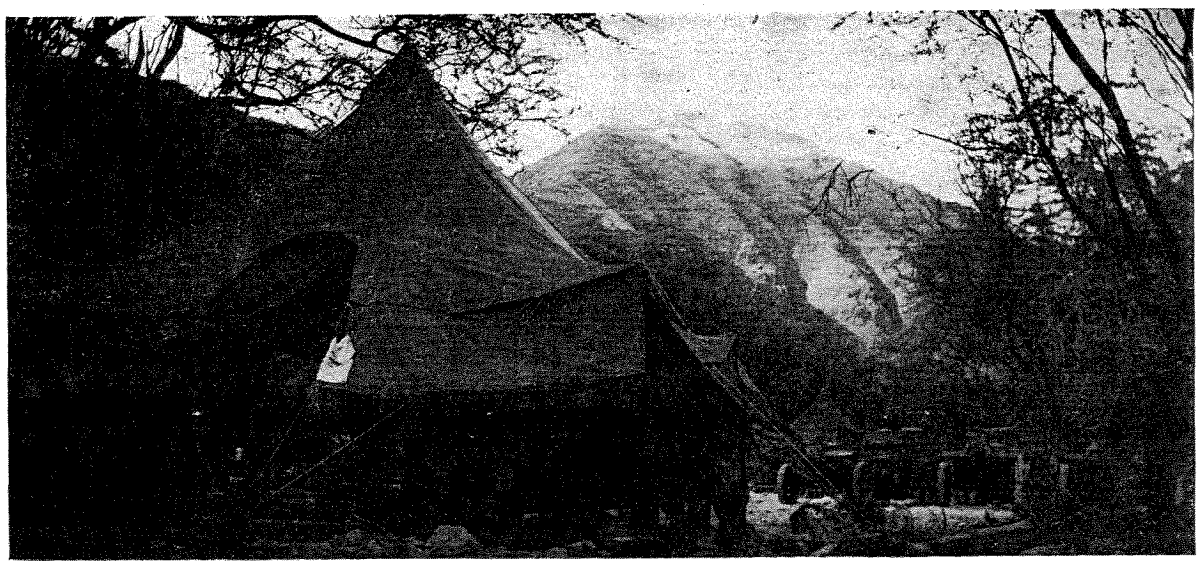
The jungle courses that exacted so much toil and sweat from the Sightseers were not restricted to infantrymen. Brigadier General Charles E. Hurdis, Commanding General of Division Artillery, set up an artillery jungle range at Kawaialea on the northeastern end of Oahu to teach artillerymen the difficulties of observation and displacement under jungle conditions. In a huge forest preserve the crews practiced cutting their gun positions out of dense rain forests, often using jeeps in tandem to pull their guns along muddy jungle trails that were too narrow for the usual prime movers. In the Forward Observers' Course, Red Star artillerymen learned to make adjustments by sound when the growth was too thick to permit direct observation. Booby traps were used copiously along the few trails to the OPs, and frequently dynamite or TNT

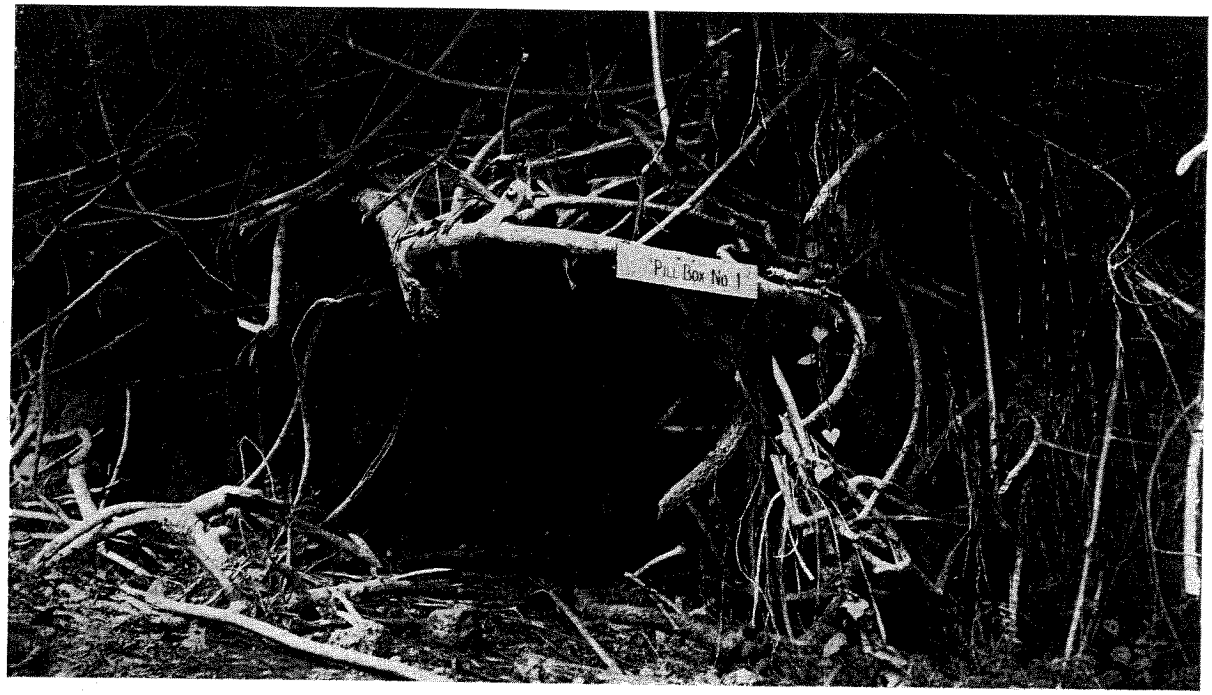


charges were set off behind the observer just as the round he was to observe hit the ground. Wild boars went scurrying through the heavy brush around the battery positions, while Div Arty men practiced over and over again the proper methods for setting perimeter guards—training that was to be used to good advantage when perimeter guards and roadblocks fought off a column of Jap tanks at the battle of Muñoz.

The greatest weakness in the training program was the ideal weather. The absence of daily rains, hub-deep mud and enervating heat made the otherwise rugged training courses too pleasant by comparison with conditions soon to be encountered in New Guinea and the Philippines. The setting in Oahu was too perfect. Many a dough on an all-night march took his ten-minute break bathed in soft moonlight filtered through the broad leaves of graceful palm trees while the fragrance of hibiscus blossoms soothed his jangled nerves. The setting also contributed to the more romantic episodes of life on Oahu, but details of this phase of training are lacking.

While one regimental combat team was engaged



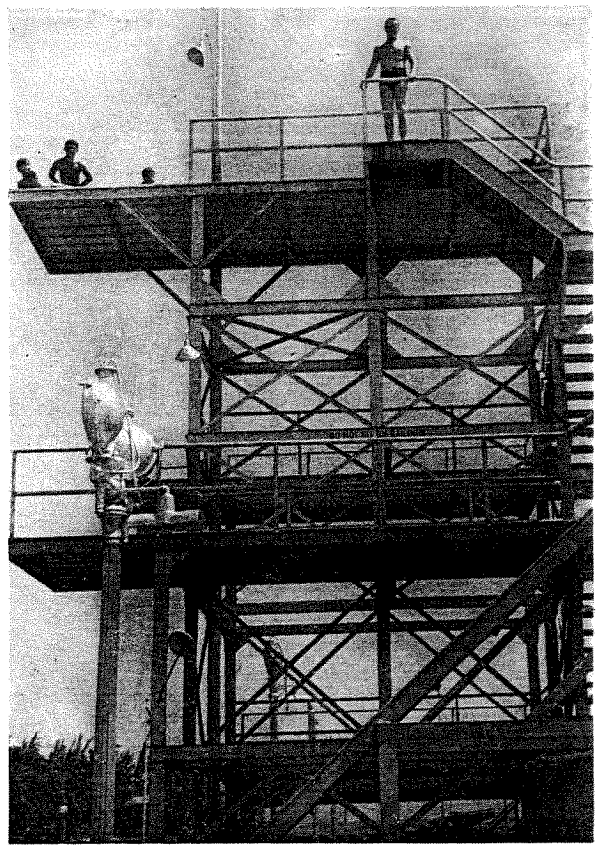


in the various training programs, the other two were kept on their toes patrolling the extensive beach areas and keeping a watchful eye open for enemy submarines and Hawaiian Department inspectors. Which of these two constituted the greater menace to safety and morale has never been finally determined. Frequently an inspector would steal into a beach position, alert the unit, inform the commanding officer that all communication lines with the regimental and battalion command posts had been cut, then stand by complacently watching the ensuing scramble. These defense problems constituted excellent training, but were often hard on the nerves. On one occasion, the commanding officer of a beach strongpoint was informed by an excited major that a platoon stationed on a near-by peninsula had been wiped out by a small force of invading Nips. The commanding officer, not quite sure whether this was another problem or the real thing, dispatched a scout to reconnoiter the peninsula. When the scout failed to return in the allotted time, he ordered his machine guns, mortars and antitank guns to lay on the peninsula, and sent another scout with a written message: "If the bearer of this note is not back in twenty minutes, we're going to open up with everything we have. Sincerely, ..." The second scout was escorted back to the command post in record time, carrying the respects of a very worried platoon leader and Hawaiian Department inspector.

The units that manned the beach positions were kept constantly on the move, often traveling across the entire island to take up a new position for a

week and then returning. For some reason never adequately explained, the moves were almost invariably made on the week-ends, a policy that was never very popular with pleasure-seeking GIs. Before each move it was customary to have a showdown inspection to recover the sector property that had found its way into the barracks bags and crates of the unit. Most frequently recovered items were generators and light bulbs, although the complete list read like a mail-order catalogue, including even dogs, cats and other local pets. Motor casualties on the cross-country trips were high, the great majority of the breakdowns occurring, strangely enough, in the vicinity of roadside pineapple fields whose fruit it was forbidden to pick.

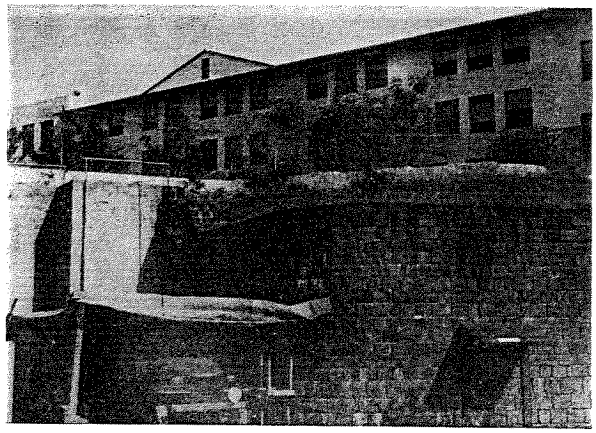
The platoon and company strongpoints and the beach patrols always operated under blackout condition, even the hidden glow of a cigarette bringing down the wrath of the commanding officer on the head of the offender. This elicited many GI comments, most of them censorable, because only a few miles away the vital installations which the Division



was pledged to defend, including Pearl Harbor, Hickam Field and other excellent military targets, were bathed in artificial sunlight rivalling that of Times Square.

The most sought-after assignment in the defense set-up was Honolulu. The Red Star became a familiar sight at the famed Moana and Royal Hawaiian Hotels, and many doughs spent their afternoons patrolling much-publicized Waikiki Beach. During their stay in the city enlisted men were quartered at large, comfortable and modern Roosevelt High, while the officers stayed at the Judo Temple. The men stationed at Schofield Barracks enjoyed for the first and last time in this war the privileges of a Regular Army post. The PXs, recreation halls, libraries, movies and service clubs played a large part in maintaining the morale of the tired trainees and were to play an even larger part in later foxhole discussions of the joys of Oahu.

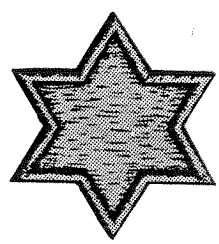
The big city pleasures of war-time Honolulu were disappointing. The leading obstacles to the pursuit



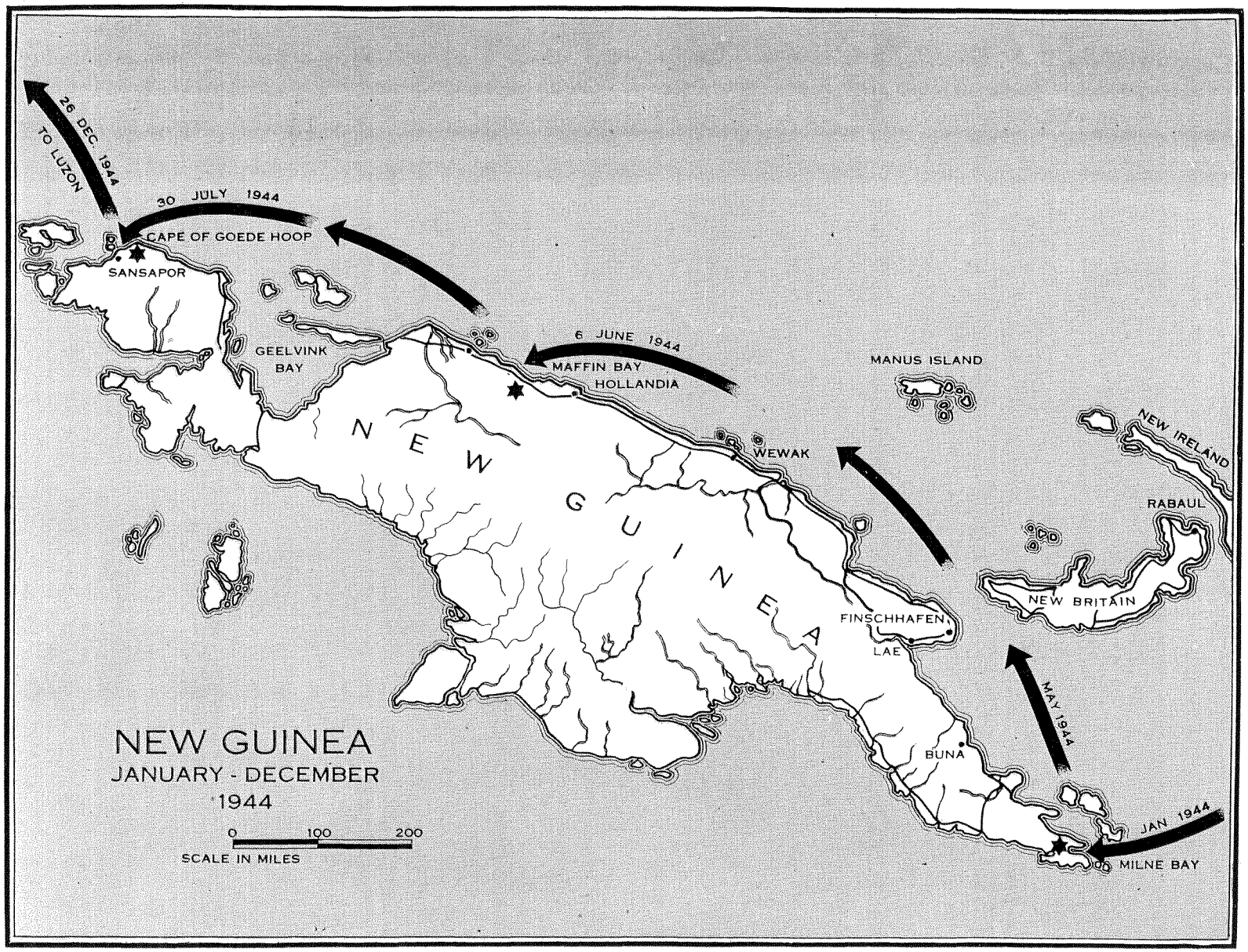
of happiness were transportation and curfews. The narrow-gauge "Pineapple Express," though picturesque, was hardly adequate for the throngs that besieged the city each night, and the bus lines that terminated at the Army-Navy Y.M.C.A. gave the Sightseers their first opportunities for application of the principles learned in the judo classes. The curfew regulations were fairly complete—all shops closed at 1730, all night clubs at 2100, and all military personnel had to be off the streets by 2200. Imitation whiskey, shortage of women, scarcity of dances, and magnificent theaters showing five-year old pictures and holding crowds that would dismay a bulldozer all added to the troubles of the doughfoot on pass. The joy of finding no rationing and shops amply stocked with silk stockings and similar coveted articles was tempered by the dismaying news that none of it could be sent home to mothers, wives, and/or sweethearts. In the three and one half hours that remained after the closing of the shops, GIs could fight their way into some of the better hotels and bars featuring steaks and zombies, where half a month's pay could guarantee an enjoyable evening.

Many Red Star men spent their free hours on deep-sea fishing trips off the west coast of the island, where the marlin are as fine as anywhere in the world. Others charmed their way into the homes of old-time residents to find pleasant friends and delightful local customs, particularly the luau (Hawaiian feast) where the variety of deliciously prepared dishes was as limitless as the blue Pacific in the background. On excursions through the scenic beauties of the island, officers and men discovered the grandeur of Pali Pass, the unbelievable upside-down waterfall, and the majestic Diamond Head that guards the entrance to Honolulu Harbor. Kialua Beach on the east coast provided excellent swimming facilities, with the USO building on the beach taking care of the non-swimming requirements. At Honolulu Stadium the GIs enjoyed many hours of football played by both army and civilian teams, where the line-up of local players shamed even the tongue-twisters of the Fighting Irish. The kicking exhibitions of the Barefoot League—Hawaiians who played football in their bare feet—earned many loud cheers from the khaki-covered stands.

Oahu, though posing many problems to Division personnel, was nonetheless too good to last. In January 1944 the Sightseeing Sixth waved its farewell to Hawaii and sailed into the setting sun, with destination unknown to most of the men. No leis hung from the necks of the departing GIs and no band speeded the grey transports on their way, but there were many Red Star men who held—and still hold—a soft spot in their hearts for Oahu, the Paradise of the Pacific.



PART TWO
RED STAR IN COMBAT

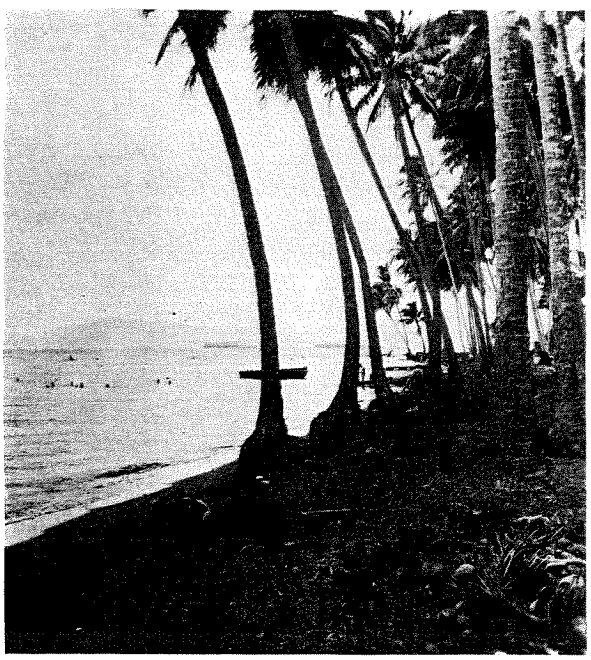

26 DEC. 1944
TO LUZON
30 JULY 1944
CAPE OF GOEDE HOOP
SANSAPOR
GEELVINK
BAY
6 JUNE 1944
MAFFIN BAY
HOLLANDIA
WEWAK
MANUS ISLAND
NEW IRELAND
RABAUL
NEW BRITAIN
FINSCHHAFEN
LAE
MAY 1944
BUNA
JAN 1944
MILNE BAY
NEW GUINEA
NEW GUINEA
JANUARY - DECEMBER
1944
0
100
200
SCALE IN MILES

CHAPTER 8
MILNE BAY

WHILE the slate-grey transports snaked their way through the tortuous channels that led to the inner harbor of Milne Bay, New Guinea, Red Star men crowded the decks to catch their first glimpse of the strange, forbidding land that was to be their home for almost a year. Those who remembered the motion picture travelogues and *National Geographic* articles recalled the vivid descriptions of the island of New Guinea—strange land of mystery peopled by headhunters, cannibals, death adders, man-eating crocodiles, and dusky maidens in grass skirts; unconquerable jungles that begrudged the white man even the few miles of coastal land he dominated; myriads of insects that carried the deadly germs of scrub typhus, dengue, malaria, yellow fever and elephantiasis; scattered missionaries whose untiring work made only small inroads on the paganism of the natives; plantations of graceful palms that yielded huge quantities of copra and coconut oil; and savage tribes whose ranks were decimated by plague, leprosy, yaws, jungle rot, cholera and tropical ulcers. This was New Guinea, and many were the disturbing thoughts that filled the minds of the men as they neared its shores.

One of the more popular stories on New Guinea dealt with a war correspondent who asked a mission-educated native who were the best jungle fighters. "The Aussies," the native replied. "What's wrong with the Americans?" the correspondent inquired. The native answered, "The Americans are good fighters but they are not jungle fighters. When they come to a jungle they bring many machines and many big men with tools to tear down the jungle. Then, when the jungle is no more, they do their fighting."

The Sixth learned early what tearing down a jungle meant in terms of sweat, unending labor and more sweat. Through alternate periods of intense heat and incredible rains all Division personnel fought the unbelievable tangles of vegetation that covered the camp areas. Giant vine-clad mahoganies were uprooted, mazes of sago palm and banyan roots were cleared, and the luxuriant undergrowth that reappeared almost daily despite all efforts to clear the ground caused many cases of backache and housemaid's knee. Slowly the camps took shape, with Aussie-supervised native workmen constructing coconut frameworks and thatched roofs for some of the CP buildings, while GIs entered into a "rat race"

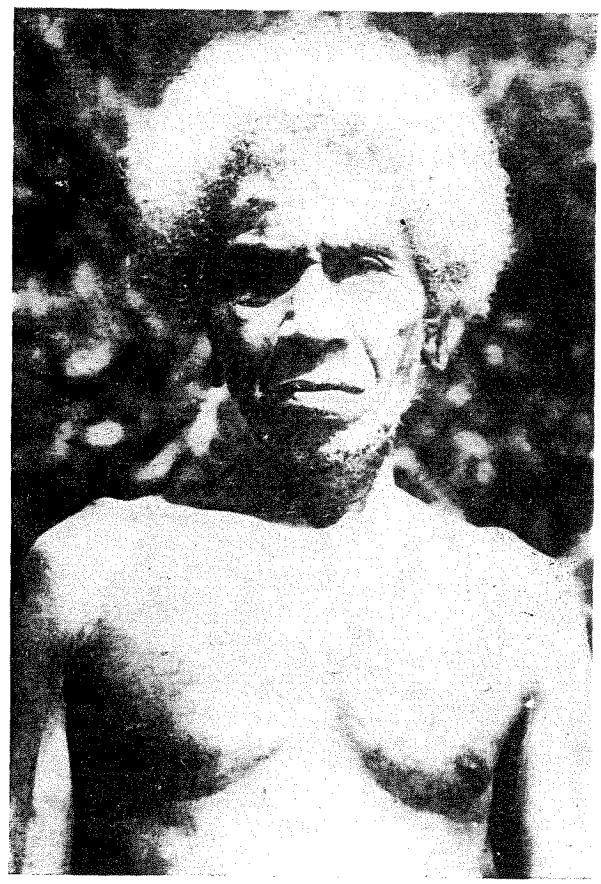


for lumber to comply with the requirement that all tent floors be raised at least two feet above the ground. Still more slowly the road network began to rise out of the mire, a herculean task that required in one short sector of the Base A road more than twenty thousand coconut logs as a road base.

As the construction activities became less demanding, combat training again occupied the greater part of the days and frequently of the nights. Few Red Star men who stood guard when a night problem had taken their units deep into the hills will forget the sudden blackness that engulfs the jungle almost before the sun has set, or the short-lived clammy stillness that follows, or the shrill cry of the cockatoo that seems to act as a signal for the countless insects, birds and lizards that fill the night with their cacophony.

Small-unit training in jungle warfare, this time with all the accompanying discomforts, alternated with additional amphibious training. On the two- and three-day problems doughs became accustomed to carrying jungle packs loaded down with hammocks, ponchos and miscellaneous equipment designed to produce at least a minimum of comfort in the steaming jungles. The J rations that were taken into the field made even the unrelieved camp diet of salmon and Aussie stew seem tasty by comparison.

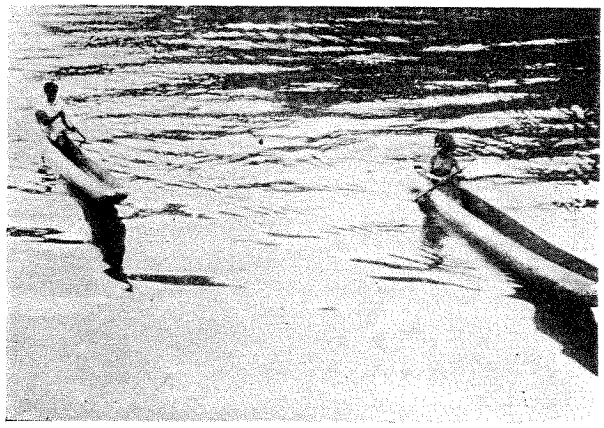
Div Arty probably remembers Milne Bay best for the long and bitter *Battle of the Pallets: Toboggan* vs. *Sled*. The decision to palletize the Red Star artillery—*i.e.*, to have all ammo and supplies not mobile-loaded placed on pallets that could be dragged off the landing vessels and snaked across beaches and through the jungle without the necessity for reloading—was made because of the absence of beach facilities and inland roads in the potential New Guinea beachhead areas. While the relative merits of the toboggan and sled types of pallet were being discussed and argued by everyone from private to general, the sawmills in the Division area were



cutting priceless mahogany and other jungle hardwoods into slats for the toboggans and runners for the sleds. Engineers and artillerymen spent long hours assembling the pallets and longer hours trying to secure such scarce items as nails and cables. Some help was obtained from nearby Seabees, but more resulted from "moonlight requisitions" that sent several transports on their homeward journey with a shortage of landing nets and steel hawsers, both of which provided wire strands suitable for pallet cables. Even telephone guide wires were appropriated to help drag the pallets through the sand and underbrush. Frequent trial runs that left the Division Artillery men sweating and cursing determined that a load of fifteen hundred pounds of ammo or rations was most effective. The final decision on the two types of pallets was never made, though by the time the Sightseers left Milne Bay artillerymen were laying six to five on the sled type over the toboggan.

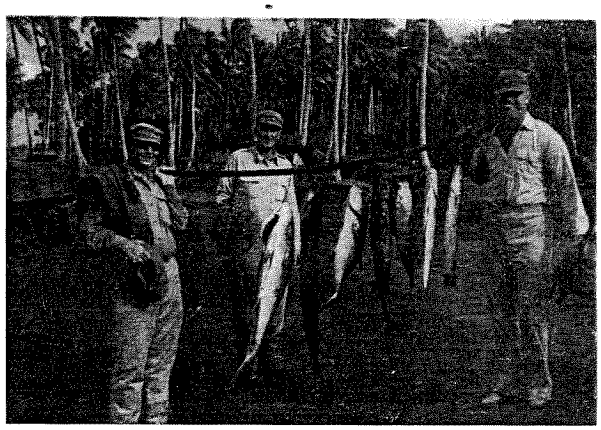
Bathing in New Guinea posed several problems, for the flukes that inhabited the streams demanded careful drying of the body, and occasional crocodiles required the posting of guards both above and below the bathing area. The precautions that attended salt-water bathing, such as off-shore shark patrols and guarding against coral cuts, did little to diminish the pleasures of swimming in the crystal waters of a coral lagoon or diving through the refreshing depths to search for cats'-eyes or gaudy shells on the ocean floor.

The unofficial phases of amphibious training reached considerable proportions when a large percentage of Division personnel rode the gentle ground swells in dugout canoes, individual belly-tank vessels, sailboats and even old-fashioned side-winders, while



the higher-ranking officers made frequent use of the cabin cruisers and crash boats in the area. Milne Bay and the adjacent waters of the Coral Sea afforded excellent opportunities for fishing, with tuna, barracuda and mackerel the most popular prey. The assorted vessels also provided transportation to the near-by islands where GIs bartered for grass skirts and hand-carved canoes while learning the rudiments of "Him fella come chop-chop" and other basic pidgin-English phrases. Lingering memories of Oahu were reflected in the surf-boards that some of the men constructed out of materials closely resembling GI mattress covers.

For filling leisure time on land the Red Star men took their leads from the Australian "diggers" stationed at Gili Gili and other near-by camps. The wide-hatted boys from Down Under made three major contributions to entertainment at Milne Bay —souvenirs, "Waltzing Matilda," and jungle juice. Sightseers soon soon became proficient in all three. In the souvenir field, P-38 ashtrays, shell bracelets,

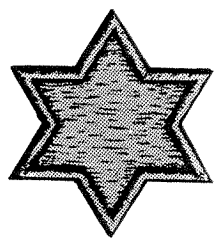


and cats'-eye necklaces were produced in numbers that rivalled the assemblyline production of the Aussies who had found gold in the souvenir-seeking GI trade. The story of the swagman who camped by a billabong under the shade of a coolibah tree was usually sung in doubtful harmony after mixed crowds of GIs and diggers had consumed samples of the multi-colored liquid fire known generically as "jungle juice." The men sang the popular song so loud and so long that they often had sore throats and aching heads on the following mornings.

War news from the SWPA assumed a new and greater importance now, for on it depended the place, time and nature of the Division's first taste of combat. To satisfy the news-hungry Red Star men, a group of enlisted men founded the *Cockatoo* as the Division's daily newspaper, named after the bird whose shrieking calls helped keep the editorial staff awake while they waited for late newscasts from San Francisco and Port Moresby. News of the landings at Talasea, Manus, Aitape and Hollandia carried with it the realization that the debut of the Sixth in battle was not far off.

In late May came the order to load—combat load.

"Well, men, this is it" became the standing joke, evoking laughter that seemed slightly forced. Letters to mothers, wives and sweethearts increased in volume and intensity. Gradually the holds filled up with ammo, antitank guns, mortar tubes and the other paraphernalia of war. Then one night early in June the blacked-out convoy moved in single file out of Milne Bay and the Red Star prepared for its baptism of fire. Now, after fifty-six months of intensive training, it was kill or be killed. This *was* it.



CHAPTER 9
MAFFIN BAY CAMPAIGN

THE tropical rain beats down relentlessly on the riflemen hugging the earth behind rotting logs or the massive roots of banyan trees, seeking protection from the .25 caliber slugs and mortar bursts that cover the area. There are no foxholes, for hand-operated shovels cannot bite into the unyielding coral of the hill. Suddenly the night air is filled with the siren wail of a Jap artillery shell and a treetop dissolves in a puff of smoke. A machine gunner grunts as a shell fragment burns into his body, then lies still behind his gun, only his fingers moving, clawing the earth in a last vain attempt to provide the cover he no longer needs. Aid men, crouching low, move up quickly to carry him away, while the assistant gunner crawls quietly into his position behind the gun.

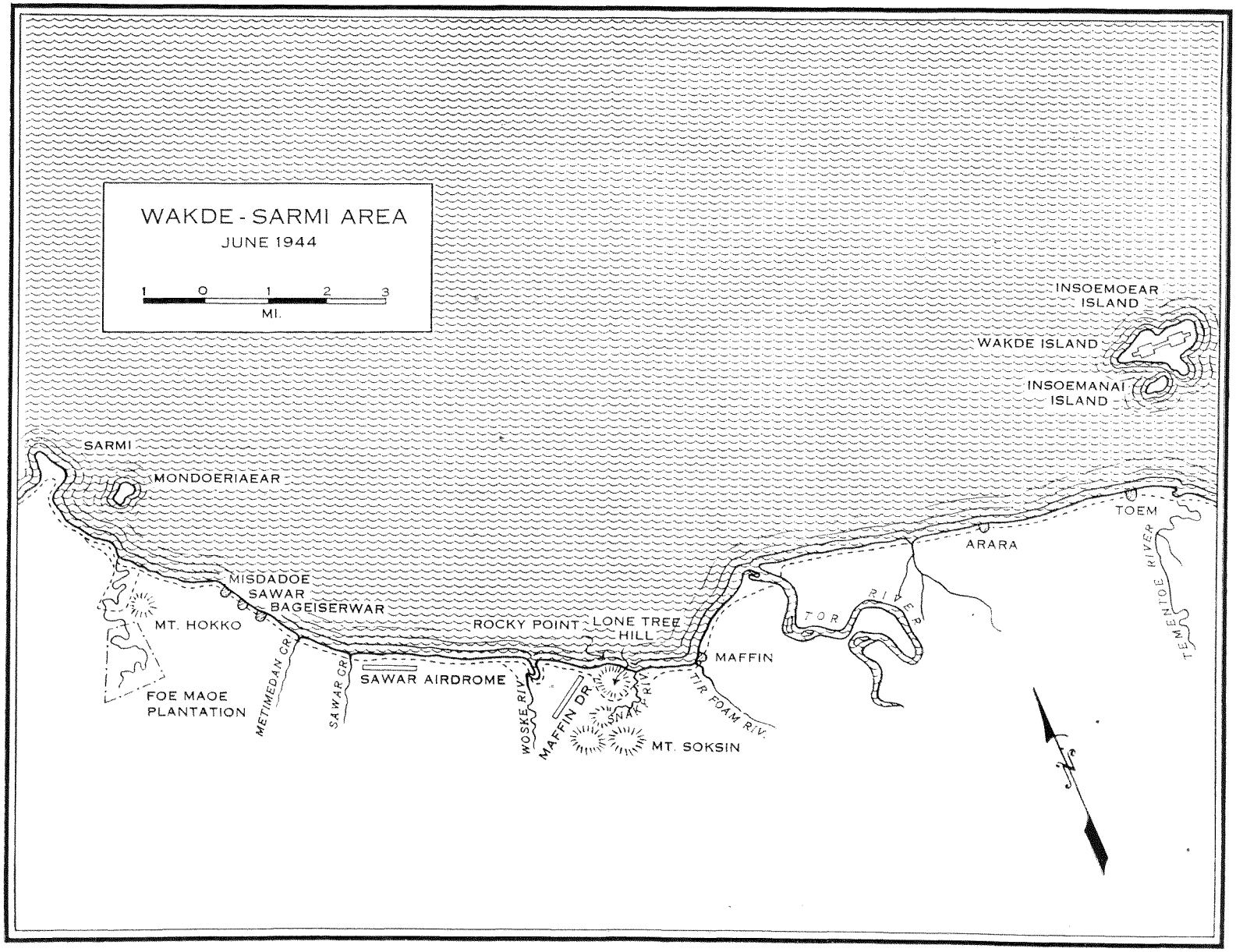
The rapid staccato of a Nambu (Jap light machine gun) cuts across the night, then a second, and a third, to be answered by the slower *rat-rat-rat* of our own light .30s and M-1s. Occasionally, between bursts, the low *pouf* of the hated knee mortar is audible from the Nip positions only a hundred yards away. Then the night is rent by frenzied yells as the jungle shadows disgorge darker shadows running towards the northern end of our circular perimeter. Tracers form interlocking patterns across the area immediately to the front of the riflemen, who methodically empty clip after clip of .30 caliber ammo into the waving, shouting forms that loom out of the night. Gradually the shouts of "Banzai" die down and the shadows return to their lairs. The groans of the Nips lying just beyond the perimeter are drowned out by the patter of the rain on the helmets of the defending doughboys, who lie in mud, loading their clips and waiting for the next attack.

This was Lone Tree Hill on the night of 22 June 1944. The Red Star was getting its fill of combat under the most difficult possible conditions of terrain, weather and supply, against determined, well equipped and well supplied enemy troops protected by caves, pillboxes, and fortified emplacements that had been carefully prepared.

The original landing in this sector had been made by the Tornado Task Force. On 17 May it had secured a beachhead near Toem, and had then jumped to Wakde Island, eliminating all enemy resistance there by 20 May. The force advanced along the coast towards Sarmi to the west on 22 May, but after meeting stiff opposition in the Snaky River–Lone Tree Hill area was forced to withdraw to the Tirfoam River–Tor River area, where it maintained an active defense until the 6th Infantry Division arrived to relieve the situation.

By this time the whole of Australian-mandated New Guinea except for the isolated pockets at Rabaul and Wewak had been liberated and the Hollandia area in Dutch New Guinea had been secured. Still held by the Nips were Noemfoor, Biak and the Vogelkop Peninsula, constituting the northwestern end of the island of New Guinea. The Wakde-Toem-Maffin Bay area was to provide the air bases and staging areas from which assaults could be made on the remaining Jap-held territory on the island.

The 1st Infantry arrived on 6 June and immediately relieved the troops defending the main beachhead in the Toem area. On 11 June Division Headquarters and the 20th Infantry arrived, and General Sibert assumed command of the sector. Three days later, while the 63d Infantry, 80th Field Artillery Battalion, 6th Reconnaissance and the rest of the Division were steaming into the harbor, the 20th Infantry relieved the 158th RCT along the Tirfoam River and the 51st Field Artillery Battalion occupied gun positions on the east bank of the Tor River. Several days of active patrolling followed in which some of the Sykesmen received their baptism of fire. Private Robert W. Scrannage, after evacuating several wounded comrades from an exposed position, rode atop a tank, directing it to a position from which it could fire on enemy pillboxes. Knocked out by


WAKDE - SARMI AREA
JUNE 1944
1 0 1 2 3
MI.
INSOEMOEAR ISLAND
WAKDE ISLAND
INSOEMANAI ISLAND
SARMI
MONDOERIAEAR
TOEM
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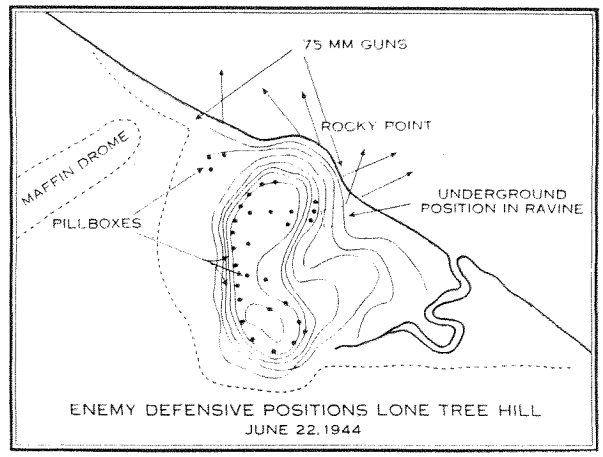
ROCKY POINT
LONE TREE HILL
MAFFIN
FOE MAOE PLANTATION
METIMEDAN GR.
SAWAR GR.
SAWAR AIRDROME
WOSKE RIV.
MAFFIN DR.
SNAKE RIV.
TIR FOAM RIV.
MT. SOKSIN

concussion, he regained consciousness, crawled to a forward position and lay for two hours between the fire of his own and enemy troops until the tanks whose fire he directed knocked out the positions. Another tank-riding doughboy was Staff Sergeant John R. Peters, who directed a steady stream of fire at enemy emplacements, despite his wounds, refusing to be evacuated until the job was done.

By 18 June, when it was relieved by the 63d, the 1st Infantry had extended the main beachhead west to the No Name River. Meanwhile the 20th had moved into assembly areas along the Tirfoam River, prepared to attack west on 21 June. The men sweated out the waiting period oiling their weapons, filling clips, stuffing grenades in their HBT pockets, and telling stories that somehow fell flat. They were scared, and the waiting only made it worse. They were almost grateful for the two or three enemy bombers that appeared overhead on their way to bomb Wakde Island, for the tracers that chased the planes across the night sky created a diversion. In the distance two destroyers could be seen pumping shells into the Jap fortifications on Lone Tree Hill. Company commanders kept dashing in and out of the Battalion CPs, and noncoms spent a great deal of time with nervous platoon leaders.

On the morning of 21 June the 1st Battalion of the 20th moved to the southeast corner of Lone Tree Hill, established positions north and south of the road and sent out patrols that silenced two enemy pillboxes and one machine gun emplacement in the defile between Hill 225 and Lone Tree Hill. On the same morning a 3d Battalion patrol sent to reconnoiter Lone Tree Hill returned with negative reports. The Jap did not show his hand until that afternoon when one company of the Sykesmen, moving up the plateau that forms the eastern approach to the hill, came under a heavy Jap mortar and 75mm artillery concentration. The company assaulted the hill, charging up the gentle slope in the face of withering machine gun and rifle fire and accurately placed fire from knee mortars. Casualties were high and the company was forced to withdraw to the battalion perimeter. Noting that the body of one officer had not been recovered, Technician Third Grade Arthur M. Renna, a medic with the 20th, dashed out far in advance of our lines, picked up the body and carried it back to safety while machine gun slugs hit the ground on all sides of him.

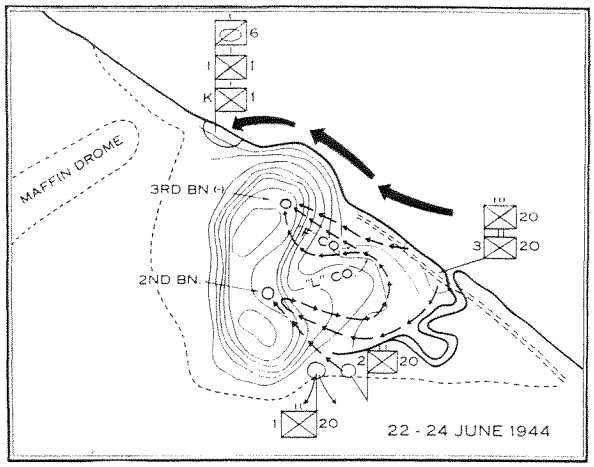
That night there was little sleep for the men of the Battalion. Deep in their foxholes while the Nips



ENEMY DEFENSIVE POSITIONS LONE TREE HILL
JUNE 22, 1944

lobbed 75mm and mortar shells at their position, the doughs eased the tension by throwing lead at the enemy during a 45-minute firefight. Then all four artillery battalions of the Division placed defensive fire on Rocky Point, supplemented by 81mm and 4.2 chemical mortars, to drive all thoughts of sleep from the doughboys' minds. At dawn eighteen P-47s dropped belly tanks on the hill and then strafed it in repeated diving attacks. Division artillery followed with a massed concentration of 105s and 155s for a period of fifteen minutes. Then the foot-sloggers moved out.

While Company L protected the south flank, Company K spearheaded the rest of the battalion up the slopes of Rocky Point. Scrambling over coral ledges and weaving in and out of the heavy underbrush, the doughs were forced to bite the dirt frequently as accurate mortar and artillery fire followed them up the hill. A Jap observation post on the north end of the ridge kept the advancing troops under constant surveillance. Five times long range snipers shot the Nip observers out of this OP, but each time a new man stepped up to direct the enemy fire. Knee mortars, machine guns and sniper fire helped teach the new-to-combat Sykesmen the advantages of moving quickly and taking full advantage of cover. Though the enemy resistance was not as great as anticipated, the men of the 3d Battalion were veterans when they reached the top of Lone Tree Hill. They had seen Lieutenant Gerald J. Kranendonk cut down by a heavy machine gun while charging the position to cover one of his BAR men who had been critically wounded only a few yards away. They remembered men like Staff Sergeant Charles W. Bloxham and Private Clarence F. Marti-



nez who were killed after leaving a covered position to aid wounded buddies; Captain Charles J. Pelletier who had a bottle of blood plasma shot out of his hands while administering the life-giving fluid to a casualty in the forward area, and promptly obtained another bottle to continue the treatment. They had seen the blood of their officers and noncoms, Captain James E. Emanuel, Lieutenant Virgil J. Giebler, Lieutenant Charles E. Hudson, Lieutenant Frank C. Merkler, Staff Sergeant Demas L. LaFebere and others, who ignored their wounds to lead their platoons and companies up the slope. When Company K reached the top of Lone Tree Hill at 1240 hours, to be followed by the rest of the battalion at 1530, it was a tempered fighting outfit.

The 2d Battalion minus Company F, which had joined Company L when it had doubled back to rejoin the 3d Battalion, had in the meantime gained the top of the ridge and set up a defensive position about five hundred yards south of the 3d Battalion perimeter. Because of the tough coral that formed the subsoil of the entire hill, both units had to rely on natural depressions in the coral and on logs as protection against the counterattacks and artillery barrages they knew were coming. They were not disappointed. The Japs had intended Lone Tree Hill as a trap, allowing the 20th to reach the top of the ridge in the hope that counterattacks and concentrated artillery and mortar fire would cut the exposed doughboys to pieces and force a withdrawal. For the next four days and nights, often without food or water and low on ammunition, the Red Star men fought off banzai attacks that brought the crazed Nip infantrymen and marines to the very edge of the closely guarded perimeters. They hugged the ground through the crashing barrages of artillery and mortar fire; they shivered in cold night rains that never brought complaints because for two days rainwater was the only source of drinking water on the hilltop; they sweated through sweltering tropical afternoons made more unbearable by the stench of dead Jap bodies lying all around the perimeter; they listened to 105s fired by the 51st Field Artillery whistle over the treetops to land in the Jap positions only fifty yards away.

There were no heroics on Lone Tree Hill; when shooting is being done by 75mm guns instead of 35mm cameras there is neither the time nor the inclination to be dramatic. The men did not want to die, but they were willing to risk their lives to help a wounded comrade, or to prove they were not as frightened as they felt, or to help end the war so that there might be peace, or to help end the battle so they might get some sleep, or just to do the job they were put there to do. The Sykesmen recall with pride the many who did their job well on Lone Tree Hill:

Lieutenant Theodore Frankel, the human dynamo, who on numerous occasions led patrols into the enemy-held caves on the hillside, personally destroyed enemy positions with rocket launchers and flame throwers despite severe burns on his hands, evacuated at least three wounded enlisted men to places of safety while under heavy fire, and walked his squads and assault teams into the ground in his eagerness to get at the Nips. . .

Captain Stephen Adams, Jr., who led patrols against strong enemy counterattacking forces, and though wounded insisted on leading his assault troops up a steep cliff to reduce an enemy position, and was killed while working his way through enemy fire to administer aid to a wounded member of his patrol. . .

Private Sanford W. Boten, dashing down Lone Tree Hill across the Snaky River, evacuating casualties and bringing back supplies, narrowly missed by machine-gun slugs and knee-mortar shells, until while returning on the fourth trip he was severely wounded by a mortar burst. . .

Technical Sergeant Harry Moskovitz dashing from position to position when his platoon leader became a casualty during a strong banzai attack, continuing to direct the platoon even after being mortally wounded. . .

Sergeant Walter Renz, Jr., exposing himself to

heavy enemy fire to help direct the tactics of his squad during two counterattacks, only to lose his life while evacuating wounded from the forward area. . .

Sergeant Ervin E. Sanders charging a Jap pillbox with a heavy .30 caliber machine gun at his hip after his company had been pinned down. . .

Major William H. Dyroff, who encouraged a supply party which had been stopped by enemy fire to follow him up a steep cliff, opening the supply trail despite severe wounds in both legs. . .

Private First Class Charles R. Matthews who, when some of his buddies were wounded in a banzai attack, stood up in the face of heavy fire and killed four onrushing Nips; then, though partially blinded by grenade fragments and powder burns, forced an enemy machine gun squad into the open by the use of fragmentation grenades and killed them with automatic rifle fire. . .

Lieutenant William S. Sharpe who, after bringing down accurate mortar fire on several machine guns, engaged enemy pillboxes at point-blank range with hand grenades; during the night he repeatedly left his foxhole to carry wounded to a place of safety inside the perimeter, and thereafter made repeated trips through heavy enemy fire to evacuate casualties and carry back supplies. . .

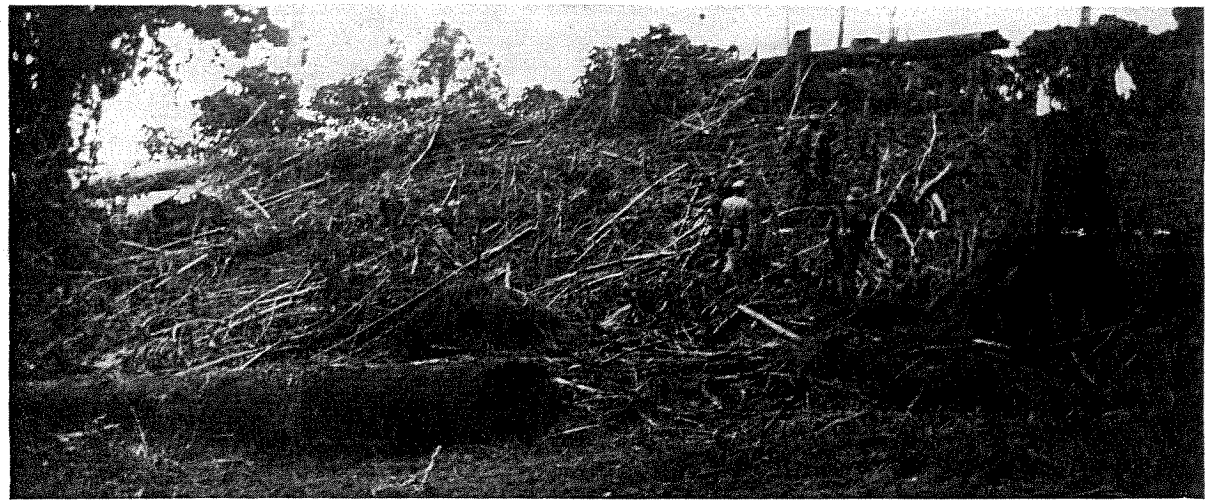
Sergeant Ernest N. Gilbertson and Lieutenant Albert T. Gladney standing up in the face of concentrated enemy fire to register direct hits on enemy emplacements with their rocket launchers. . .

Private Lorian D. Pilgrim who, volunteering to neutralize an enemy position threatening the company CP, wormed his way to the pillbox, where his flame thrower failed to function; he returned for a can of gasoline, tossed the contents into the Nips' position, ignited the gasoline train, then released the contents of the flame thrower into the pillbox, completely destroying it. . .

Lieutenant John G. Stilley, Private Eshaia J. Zaia, Private Norman D. Goff, Lieutenant James J. Harnes and Private First Class Ernest C. Warren, who used flame throwers, rocket launchers, satchel charges, grenades and automatic rifle fire to clean out numerous caves and destroy enemy artillery pieces, personnel and miscellaneous equipment hidden deep within the hillside. . .

Sergeant Fred Kulovitz who was wounded by fragments when he held his pack over two enemy grenades that landed in the coral depression shared by several members of his squad. . .

Private First Class Odus Grimsley and Corporals Joseph D. Leonard and Elmer Oss, all litter bearers who regularly carried their burdens through heavy fire and over rough terrain, Grimsley being killed in action when he tried to continue his work after his section had been pinned down. . .



Private First Class Harry L. Williams who crawled over an area swept by enemy fire to the side of a wounded comrade; mortally wounded, his dying act was to administer first aid to his buddy. . .

Staff Sergeant Edward B. Bond, Private First Class Charlie G. Mays, Corporal William G. Imler and Private First Class Harry J. Riis who lost their lives trying to evacuate the wounded. . .

Private First Class Carl E. McGuire, wounded himself, volunteering to patrol the cave-studded route used for evacuation of the wounded, and eliminating several enemy snipers hidden in almost inaccessible spots. . .

Privates First Class Robert O. LeHew and Lacy Q. Burnette, medics with the 20th, who crawled directly into the line of fire of an enemy machine gun and while under constant direct fire, saved the life of a wounded infantryman by administering blood plasma. . .

Countless others who must remain nameless here but whose names and deeds will be long remembered by the friends with whom they served.

* * *

On 23 June the 1st Infantry, which had been patrolling actively in the steaming jungles of the beachhead's main perimeter, entered the battle for Lone Tree Hill. At 0800 Company L started the difficult trail up Rocky Point carrying much-needed supplies to the Sykesmen on the ridge. To carry the maximum amount of rations and water, the Semper Primus men brought with them only their individual weapons without cartridge belts, only the BAR men carrying any extra ammunition. As soon as the company had reached the top of the ridge, they were pinned down by heavy and accurate enemy fire and a large force of Nips came out of concealment to move behind the company position, cutting the supply line. Company L's supply of ammunition, small to begin with, was soon exhausted and it ran out of water.

The beleaguered troops were preparing for several very bad hours when Private First Class Carl H. Parsiola suddenly dashed for the base of the hill, a distance of approximately two hundred yards, through concentrated enemy fire, and worked his way from cover to cover, firing constantly and moving in quick rushes until he succeeded in reaching friendly units. On his own initiative he led a relief party in blasting a path through enemy positions to carry ammunition and some supplies to the isolated troops. Then organizing a group of volunteers, he set out to reduce systematically with flame throwers, rocket launchers, hand grenades and rifles the enemy strongpoints that were preventing the advance of the company.

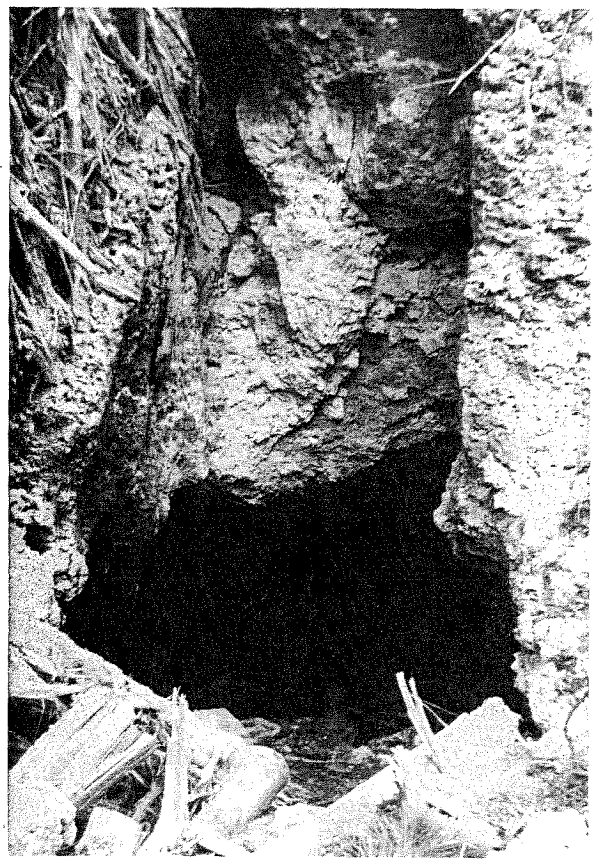
With the supply line open again, aid in the form of water, dry socks, food, medical supplies and ammo began moving to the 20th Infantry battalions on top of the ridge. The supply trains, always under heavy fire, were kept moving by men like Captain James T. Skipworth, whose automatic weapons accounted for many snipers and enemy patrols on the uphill trail and who frequently led volunteer patrols to neutralize or seal enemy-held caves; and Technical Sergeant George Kekel who repeatedly employed his reinforced platoon in maneuvers against enemy strongpoints, flanking and neutralizing Nip positions all along the supply route. Frequent use of the supply route was made by Technician Fifth Grade Carl M. Gardner, a medic of the 1st Infantry, who adminis-

tered first aid to wounded men all along the trail, evacuated casualties to the bottom of the hill, carried quantities of medical supplies on the return trips, and tirelessly continued first-aid treatments during a strong enemy counterattack until he was wounded and evacuated. Technical Sergeant Harley H. Petterson in the meantime was learning the value of long hours in training spent on assembly and disassembly of weapons. When his platoon was pinned down by enemy automatic weapons and knee mortars, he broke all training records reassembling a machine gun which had been damaged by enemy fire, turned the gun on several enemy positions and knocked out enough of the enemy to enable the platoon to continue on its mission.

During Company L's hilltop difficulties, the remainder of the 1st Infantry's 3d Battalion was preparing for an amphibious envelopment of Rocky Point designed to relieve pressure on the Sykesmen atop Lone Tree Hill and also to open the way for a drive on Maffin Airdrome to the west. On the morning of 24 June amphibious tanks of the 6th Reconnaissance Troop covered Companies K and I as they hit the narrow beach in LVTs manned by Div Arty, dismounted and dug in to escape the machine gun and artillery fire coming from concealed positions on Rocky Point. The Recon Troop's covering fire was so intense that our doughs on the northwestern slope of Lone Tree Hill had to seek cover.

When the infantrymen started moving inland, the Reconnaissance Troop was withdrawn, but not before one LVT evacuating wounded from the beach received a direct hit from one of the enemy artillery pieces and started to sink. Lieutenant Robert A. Stewart, supervising the landing operations, immediately proceeded to the spot in another LVT, dived fully clothed into the water, and with machine gun and 75mm fire hitting all around him rescued seven wounded men. At the same time Technician Fourth Grade Kenneth O. Hanson, Technician Fifth Grade Henry A. Humski, Sergeant Harold V. Leake, Private Walter L. Malmgren, Technician Fifth Grade Raymond J. Sawicki, Private First Class Louis L. Scavo and Private Royal O. Wasson, all Recon men in an amphibious tank that had received a direct hit from the Nip mountain gun, returned the fire while covering the rescue, silenced the 75mm and pulled two more of the wounded men to safety.

For almost two days the Nips' strong defensive positions restricted the assaulting troops to the use of 60 and 81mm mortars from exposed positions on the beach. Repeated attempts to storm the high clay bank that bounded the beach were stopped by intense grazing fire from machine-gun emplacements dug in at the foot of the steep cliffs of Lone Tree Hill's western side. Crowded on a beach so narrow that the rising tide licked at the feet of the men seeking shelter under the clay ledge, the 3d Battalion troops were subjected to an incessant concentration of artillery and mortar fire pinpointed



from hilltop OPs that kept the men under constant observation. Tanks were landed on the narrow beach, but found it impossible to climb the steep clay bank and were promptly withdrawn from the vulnerable spot. The doughboys remained, digging in while mortar and artillery observers braved the heavy fire to direct their weapons from the top of the fireswept ledge. On 26 June, when the battalion's mortars and supporting artillery had reduced the volume of enemy fire on the positions, the infantrymen again surged over the bank. Momentarily halted by deadly fire on their exposed ranks, Companies I and K plunged ahead in parallel drives to extend their beachhead about 150 yards into the swamp running from the base of the cliff and to establish contact with Company L, 1st Infantry, on top of the hill.

On the same day elements of the 3d Battalion of the 63d relieved the two 20th Infantry battalions that had spent four nerve-wracking days on top of Lone Tree Hill. During the next two days the 63d units cleared the top of the ridge, mopping up the snipers and occasional machine-gun positions that remained. A strongly entrenched MG position covered by numerous riflemen caused several casualties in Company L, and five rounds of enemy 75mm artillery fire on the night of the 29th hit near the battalion perimeter, but by the morning of 30 June, the battle of Lone Tree Hill was over.

During the ten days from 20-30 June, the Sightseeing Sixth had suffered over eight hundred casualties, including over 150 killed in action. A total of 942 Jap dead was counted in the area, and an estimated additional four hundred enemy were killed and buried in the caves that were sealed by infantry and engineer assault and demolition teams. The Sixth in its first taste of battle had fought through the bloodiest ten days in the entire New Guinea campaign to take a stubbornly defended hill from a determined and well entrenched enemy.

All units of the Division had participated in the hardfought campaign. In addition to the infantry, medics and reconnaissance men, the 6th Engineer Combat Battalion and the four battalions of Division Artillery had played a major role in the defeat of the Nips. Company B of the engineers had started pushing a road up to Rocky Point on 21 June, before the 20th had moved out to take the hill. Throughout the battle, the engineers continued working under constant sniper and machine-gun fire in an effort to blast a road through the coral formations that jutted into the bay at the north end of the Point. At the same time engineer demolition teams were scaling the cliffs to wipe out the enemy using caves and tunnels cut into the face of Lone Tree Hill. To eliminate a Jap field piece protected by numerous riflemen, Sergeant Joe Denton, Sergeant Glenn W. Gregg, Technician Fourth Grade Harvey J. Lohr and Corporal Charles R. Jones, Jr., worked their way to the mouth of one of the caves, pushed in a satchel charge and completely destroyed one of the guns that had been lobbing shells into our positions. Seeing another enemy cave in a sheer cliff that defied approach, they climbed to the top of the rock, used a short fuze and a long rope to lower the charge to the mouth of the cave and destroyed another Nip 75mm artillery piece.

Near the mouth of another deep cave two of the engineers found an infantryman who had been wounded by one of the many snipers hidden in the black depths. While Private Alvin Truax crawled to the dough and helped him get out of range and

back to the aid station, Private Bruce J. Ballew wormed his way deep within the tunnel-like opening with fifty pounds of explosives, lighted the fuze and wormed his way out again at a more rapid pace to watch the tons of coral bury alive the enemy riflemen who managed to survive the blast.

Division Artillery was in active support of the infantry battalions throughout the battle. Its concentrated barrages by all four battalions paved the way for the infantry assaults, and throughout the action on top of Lone Tree Hill 105s and 155s whistled over the heads of the troops. In the twenty-four hours starting at 1400 21 June, the 51st Field Artillery, firing in direct support of the Sykesmen, dropped 1032 rounds into enemy positions on Lone Tree Hill. Artillery OPs in the forward areas also caught their share of banzai attacks, depleted supplies and jungle fighting. A few of the many outstanding features of the artillerymen's contribution to the capture of Lone Tree Hill were:

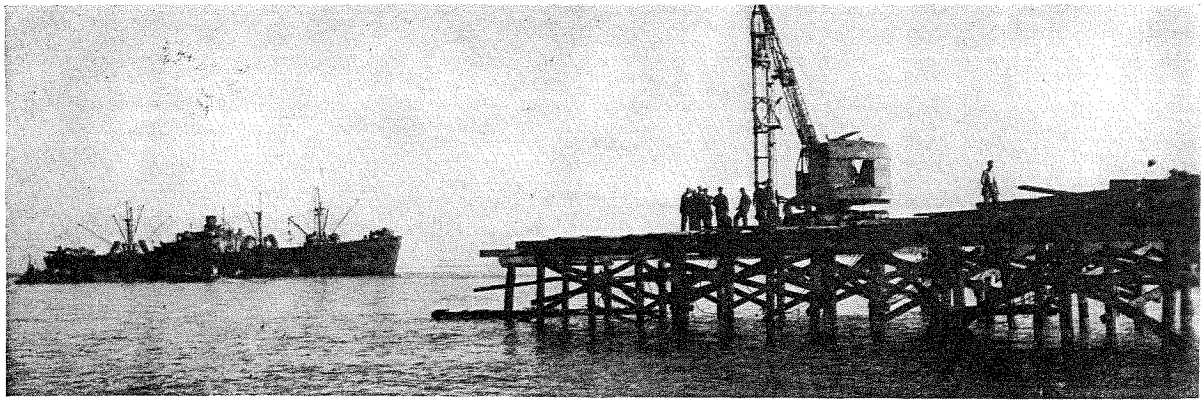
Captain Jimmie C. Smith's continued fire orders from a 51st Field Artillery Battalion OP that had been pinpointed by enemy mortars and was a constant target for Nip riflemen; when the enemy attack was halted, he remained in the area between our own and the enemy lines administering blood plasma and caring for the dead and wounded, then dashed through enemy fire to make contact with LVTs that were to evacuate the wounded from front lines . . .

The group of 53d artillerymen who volunteered to evacuate casualties by water at night from a point on an enemy-held beach, including Major Raymond W. Carraher, Staff Sergeant Daniel L. Alley of the 53d medics, Technician Fourth Grade Siebert A. McDaniel, Technician Fourth Grade John C. Giedrys, Technician Fifth Grade William W. Morris, Private First Class Richard W. Bell, Private First Class Frank J. Desutter and Private First Class Nugget F. Mayes. . .

Lieutenant Charles A. Jamieson who fired automatic weapons near the landing vessels under Major Carraher, keeping them from landing at a beach where an enemy ambush was waiting for them, then directed the laying of a smoke screen on an adjoining beach to cover the landing and evacuation. . .

Private First Class Charles W. Burks and Private First Class John R. Harlow of the 1st Field Artillery Battalion who, when a number of men, including wounded, were isolated by intense enemy fire, volunteered to neutralize the fire, advanced on the dug-in enemy positions with tommy guns, silenced the enemy guns and led the patrol to safety. . .

The LVT drivers of the 80th Field Artillery, who made repeated trips in the face of intense enemy machine gun, rifle and artillery fire, to land supplies and evacuate wounded from enemy-held shores, in-



cluding Private Carl J. Wiese, Technician Fifth Grade Raymond E. Brodeur, Private William C. Pribbernow, Technician Fifth Grade Thomas May, Private First Class Harvey J. Cole and Private First Class Edward J. Zasowski. . .

The air liaison pilots who flew a total of 781 hours directing artillery fire, dropping medical supplies, observing for the destroyers lying offshore, and by their presence in the air and the accompanying threat of counterbattery fire keeping enemy guns silent—particularly Lieutenant Telford L. Pederson of the 51st Field Artillery, who accumulated more than 129 hours of flying time during the battle. . .

The artillery forward observer parties that struggled up Lone Tree Hill carrying telephones, wires and radios, as when Private First Class James E. Heath, Private William R. Thompson and Technician Fifth Grade Lester J. Zebro moved up the slopes under heavy fire that often pinned them down, to occupy an OP from which the preceding party had been forced to withdraw after their officer observer had been killed; or when Lieutenant Eugene R. Dean worked his way up the hill to secure vital information when the infantry elements around him were pinned to the ground by the intensity of the enemy fire. . .

Lieutenant Gene O. Brodie who, though himself wounded, left his covered position to make three separate trips over great distances covered by heavy machine gun fire to assist three wounded enlisted men in reaching a place of safety. . .

The long trips made by Technician Fifth Grade George D. Rork, often at night, over jungle trails infested with snipers, using a tractor to haul essential supplies right up to the front lines and carrying casualties back over more than one and a half miles of close country to the nearest safe beach. . .

Staff Sergeant Johnny A. Muzio, who ran outside the perimeter directly in the line of enemy machine-gun fire, hoisted a wounded man to his shoulders and carried him back to safety and medical attention through a hail of MG slugs. . .

And the gunners of the 51st Field Artillery Battalion who consistently placed their 105mm shells on enemy positions atop Lone Tree Hill, often dropping them less than a hundred yards from the perimeters of the 20th Infantry, to destroy enemy pillboxes, artillery, gun emplacements and personnel with some of the most accurate firing seen in the Pacific.

The securing of Lone Tree Hill did not terminate the Division's operations in the Maffin Bay area. On 30 June our patrols moved into Maffin Airdrome, capturing large quantities of trucks, antiaircraft guns, searchlights and other equipment, some of which was repaired and put to use. Company C of the engineers, which had relieved Company B on the Rocky Point road, opened the coral highway to vehicular traffic, which eliminated the need for infantrymen hand-carrying the supplies over the ridge. With the 20th Infantry pulled back to nurse its wounds, the 1st and 63d did the fighting for the remainder of the campaign.

Our patrols operating to the south of Hill 225, Hill 265 and Mt. Saksin found that the enemy had developed a number of squad and platoon strongpoints, but did not hold the area in force. By the night of 6 July the 63d Infantry, after a series of sharp actions, captured Hill 225 and Mt. Saksin, but the 1st had run into difficulties on Hill 265. On 7 July the 63d moved up the draw between Hill 225 and Hill 265, while the 1st enveloped Hill 265 from the northwest. The fighting was stubborn, the steep cliffs on the northern and eastern slopes posed innumerable difficulties, and heavy rains on 8 July hindered all operations but those of the supporting