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SPECIAL REPORT—MORALE OF 100TH INFANTRY BATTALION IN ITALY

The 100th Infantry Battalion was the first of the Japanese-Hawaiian combat teams to be organized. Trained at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, they left there late in the summer of 1943, and embarked for North Africa. Transferred to Italy, they are there now on active service.

Much publicity has followed the movements of this colorful battalion. Their eagerness to meet the enemy, heroism in battle, pride in the United States Army and in themselves as soldiers—these have been often reported by the press. However, in the interval since their departure from Shelby there has been no opportunity at CHMO to study their mail to determine their personal reactions to the long-awaited overseas duty.

On January 17-18, 56 letters were received from the 100th Infantry in Italy to friends and relatives in Hawaii. One letter in Japanese was transferred to San Francisco. Careful notes taken on each of the 55 remaining have been compiled into a brief report of 100th Infantry morale. This outfit, it will be remembered, has been regarded even by the man (they often term themselves "guinea pigs") as a test group. Their conduct and morale under battle conditions might serve as a criterion for behavior of similar units now in training at Shelby.

This correspondence was written between December 28-30 when the 100th Infantry, celebrating Christmas, was temporarily behind the front line. The soldiers give graphic accounts of Christmas (for many the second away from home)—an unparalleled feast of turkey, a real Christmas tree, and, unexpectedly, sunshine to brighten the drab Italian winter. One says: "Christmas day for us couldn't be any better than it's been so far. We really had a grand time thanks to our Lt. Today we for the first time closed for business and taking things easy." They feel themselves lucky "in spending a very peaceful Christmas behind the front lines," and are unstinting in their praise of the Red Cross, "who made it (Christmas dinner) possible and they deserve all the credit for their work to make things merry & happy for every soldier over here." As a final touch to the festivities, the soldiers were entertained by a U. S. O. show featuring Humphrey Bogart. Most letters mention the event. One soldier writes to a friend: "Wish you were here to see a movie actor come all the way from Hollywood to Italy to meet the fighting men."

The 100th men have a healthy respect for their adversaries, the Germans, whom they consider not unconquerable, but tough. Yet they are fully confident of victory. A sergeant says: "Although we have talked with the best of Herman Goering's and Rommel's boys—I don't think Jerry is invincible. I wouldn't say Jerry is a pushover either. We have been held up by Jerry & by the rotten, cold, damp, muddy weather for days and weeks till it seems like years. This is not an easy war—it is a battle of the artillery and yet the tough boy is the one who takes a lot of punishment." Another: "Jerry is a tough old scoundrel but somehow we will find a way to put an end to all this mass murder. If it won't be us it will be those coming after us."

The strong self-pride, always characteristic, has increased since the 100th Infantry, tried in battle, proved worthy. They represent those of Japanese ancestry in Hawaii and fight to vindicate their people. "They are doing wonderful," a sergeant says, "Plenty of guts and I'm telling you I'm proud of them." Another, of a soldier killed in battle: "He died valiantly—all the

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- ASV -VF
- JAG -ADC
- AFD -AMF
- OPD -CDC
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- FNG -ED
- QM -ADM
- SGO -BSC
- ASD -PCB
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boys who have been taken away by the hand of fate died valiantly." There is some bragging: "I imagine you folks saw the newsreel picture about us fighting in the Waikiki theatre. How was it? Also in the Star Bulletin which we receive nowadays we read quite a lot about us. I see some people are even squawking saying that we are receiving too much publicity. Some people are jealous!!

In contrast, some feel that they have been made a publicity instrument: "You have probably been reading about the glorious 100th—well, don't believe all you read in the papers—we are a very much overpublicized bunch of guinea pigs." There is evidence, too, that the 100th dislikes being lumped with the A.J.A.'s and prefers to maintain its separate identity. "I have very little respect for anyone who keeps calling us AJA's instead of the 100th Inf. Bn."

The impulsive Japanese-Hawaiians have struck up a ready friendship with the Italian people. Language is no obstacle to them. They combine a few easily learned Italian words with proficient use of sign language. The interpreters comment on exorbitant prices—25¢ for a fried egg, \$12 (after much haggling) for a fish. A few, more serious than the rest, express concern over Italy's wretched economic plight. "There is very little grain around here. I often wonder what the peasants live on. I don't see any livestock that amounts to anything." "The people use very little fuel-oil and practically no coal. Most of the towns & villages are wrecked. Jerry blows up almost every bridge. The reconstruction of Italy will take centuries. Italy is a lost empire."

Italy's cooking especially interests the Japanese-Hawaiians, but they turn up disdainful noses at famed Italian spaghetti. The natives are termed "specialists in gyping" whose tricks include selling watered wine to the soldiers. The Japanese-Hawaiians confess themselves inferior musically to the Italians. One explains: "I tried my dimes worth of croaking but those Italians put me to shame. It seems that everyone of them is a direct descendent of Caruso or sumpin."

On Christmas passes they excitedly toured Italian cities and were impressed by the magnificent architecture, art, and music. But many treasures have been destroyed, many cities desecrated. It is impossible, even for a few days, to forget the war. One Japanese-Hawaiian says: "This country is so full of history, culture, art, women, wine, music—should say, this country was—most of Italy's glory is past, faded and gone. I have seen some nice paintings. I have heard some good music, I have heard peasant girls sing beautifully, but it isn't all romantic—there is too much of the ugly reality of war all around us."

The 100th Infantry's bitterest enemy, excluding Jerry, is the Italian weather. Life is rugged. A private complains: "the weather here is cold like hell, snow is on the nearby hills. Gee! gosh. The feet is too cold hell." "Ghee! The feet is sure cold there's no place to keep it warm but under the blanket." But joyous as children, the soldiers forget inclement weather during brief moments of pleasure. A picture show soon sets them laughing, unmindful of their frozen feet.

Like most men who fight in the front lines, the Japanese-Hawaiians have come to feel a greater need for faith in God. It comforts them to have in possession the tangible symbols of their religious creeds. They say: "We attend every church service we can and you be surprise the attendance that

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attend the service we have here; so don't be surprise when the boys return home you find them going to church on Sunday." "I received the money, appreciate it very much. Faith is a good thing to have out here, we can see the effects of it out here." "I received a package from James & he sent me a golden cross to hang around my neck. Now I have more confidence in myself." "You know the bible was the best thing anybody could get out here."

Especially at Christmas the soldiers are lonely for home. "As for Italy, its all right" says one, "but no place on earth can touch good old Hawaii." Another: "Give me the states and good old Hawaii and I'll be happy." A third: "I miss the island climate very much. Tho it's quite long since we left, it's still in me. That is, the Hawaiian in me. No matter how long one stays away from the islands you just can't forget the warm Hawaiian weather." But there is little complaining. "Things out here are pretty tough, I'll admit but still we are doing alright I think and I sincerely hope that we'll be back there with victory in our hand by next year." And, "We are sweating out our New Year—and hoping like hell that 1944 will bring about a brighter outlook on everything—everywhere. This war is pretty rugged—there's no denying about it—but we're managing somehow." "We hope that tough though the days may be that we will have the courage to fight through storm and tempest."

The 10th Infantry does not intend to return until war is ended. They are seasoned soldiers soon to go back to front line action. The letters reflect their grave sense of responsibility and determination to finish the business in hand.

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