



“...ZAI! BANZAI! BANZAI!”

Shots Fired in Anger

A Rifleman's-Eye View of the activities on the Island of Guadalcanal, in the Solomons, during the elimination of the Japanese Forces there by the American Army under General Patch whose troops included the 132nd Infantry of the Illinois National Guard, a combat unit of the Americal Division—in which organization the Author served while encountering the experiences described herein

by

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APOLOGY

To the men of our Navy, who shot the Japanese out of the water, and who escorted our transports safely through the Islands, I humbly kneel. To the flyers who contributed so much to victory in Europe, and who forced the surrender of Japan before a single Doughboy set foot on Honshu, I do the same. To the supply troops who kept us from starving, I offer my sincere thanks. To the Ordnance Department, who sent us into the field better armed than our enemy, I owe my very life.

The men who served in all of the above-enumerated agencies deserve an explanation of some of the quotations and views expressed in this text; without such an explanation, I am afraid much of what I have written would seem unreasonable. And, as a brother gun-nut, I would like to qualify my writings to other members of the clan who, fortunately or otherwise, had to fight the war in organizations other than Infantry Combat Units.

This book is a partial account of the early overseas experiences of a rifleman-soldier in World War II. It is intended to present the viewpoint of the Doughboy or Doughboy Officer who has just finished his first period of combat. I have made no attempt, in the writing, to modify or change this narrow angle of approach. The Infantryman in combat looks at the rest of the world with hyper-critical vision; he is inclined, to a certain extent, towards a universal feeling of contempt for men who fight a less dangerous or more comfortable war than he.

He envies the Artilleryman, a thousand yards to his rear, the additional safety and comforts back there. He growls at the sight of Air Corps installations, where men are usually sure of a cot to sleep on and warm food to eat. He hates the Quartermaster Corps, who always seem to feed and clothe their own troops better than the combat units for whose supplying they are responsible. Every supply shortage, each failure of artillery or air support, the Doughboy takes as a personal affront, seldom considering the force of circumstance which could have made it impossible for the QM or the Air Corps to do their part of the job. The individual Infantryman is concerned with nothing but results and he will accept no excuses. And because results in war are seldom gratifying,

and because supply shortages are frequent, it is not unusual for the front line Infantryman, who himself must atone for all of the mistakes along the line, to despise his service troops, his high command, and his home front only slightly less than the enemy.

This attitude of prejudice and narrow intolerance remains with the Infantryman for a long time. It is only after years of service or after extensive observation of the non-combatant elements, that he finally develops a rationalizing attitude, so that he takes his own hard knocks for granted, and ceases to begrudge the rear-area troops their greater comforts and security. Only through such observation can a Doughboy fully appreciate the importance of the other services, combat and non-combatant.

If the Doughboy in question happens to be an officer, and is later transferred to high-echelon staff jobs, he will obtain an opportunity to look at the “big picture” and be able to make sense of the confused and chaotic pattern of large-scale military operations. And he will in time come to realize that the trials facing the front line soldier, the heart-breaking disappointments, the privations, the inordinate casualty rates, even the appearances of stupidity from above, are generally unavoidable.

So, if I wanted, I could take the sting out of much that you will read in this book. I could look back on the old months of bitter annoyance and apparently pointless tragedy through the rose-tinted glasses of an Army Group or a Theater staff officer, and I could paint for you a precise picture of the overall conduct of the Guadalcanal fight, making it seem to be a well-organized and coordinated triphibious invasion.

But this book is written mainly for my rifle-enthusiast and gun-owning friends. Their interest will probably be in the grooved-barrel weapons and the men who used them. The viewpoints and ideas they will want to hear are those of the riflemen—not the staff officers. The Doughboy who fires a rifle and his immediate associates, his non-coms and officers, are, in their own minds, the only people who really *fight* wars. On the battlefield, where emotion often governs, where hysteria replaces contemplation, there is little chance for a soldier to see the non-combatants' side of things. A Doughboy's weapon is broken or worn out—so the Ordnance is no good; he is short of food—so the QM is a bunch of fat-butted, useless deadheads; his head is tight and buzzing with fever, so the Medical Corps—other than his own Infantry medics—is an aggregation of military drones. The soldier sees himself the victim of a huge conspiracy, with the enemy, the elements, and even his own countrymen allied against him. If he lives through his ordeal of combat without becoming a confirmed cynic, he is lucky.

So this book is written as it would have been written in 1943, when I was an Infantry lieutenant. The personal bias and sympathies portrayed were real—my standard attitude at the time. If I had not been “bitter” in 1943, if I had not been hopping mad, ready to take a pot-shot at the Ordnance repair man who botched up my machine guns, or the QM sergeant who failed to deliver our rations, I would not have been an Infantryman. In fact, I would not have been human!

So here is the story of a large part of my rifle-shooting life. It has been fun to relate it to my beer-drinking companions in the Chicago Rifle Club, and it has been fun—albeit laborious—for me to write this story. The writing is not good, but that does not keep me from hoping that the Shooting Fraternity will enjoy the tales I have to tell.

LT. COL. JOHN B. GEORGE
Military Intelligence Section
General Staff, Far East Command
Tokyo, Japan
May, 1947

July 25, 1947

In 1942-43, during the Battle of Guadalcanal, John B. George, now a Lieutenant Colonel, served as a junior officer in the Second Battalion of the 132nd Infantry Regiment. As commanding officer of that battalion I came to know him well.

Johnny George is a fine officer and an able Infantryman. As a leader he was always capable and aggressive; as an individual rifleman he never lost an opportunity to kill or harass the enemy.

COLONEL GEORGE F. FERRY
Commanding Officer
132nd Infantry Regiment

I. RIFLE RANGE DAYS

“... As the possession of this last village was important to our future operations ... I directed that it might be occupied by a detachment consisting of four companies of *riflemen*...”

THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON
August 16, 1808

A HOBBY

My fondness for rifle shooting began at the age of seven, when I was first allowed to borrow my brother's rifles and go out from our house, on the outskirts of a small midwestern town, to shoot squirrels. Squirrel shooting, I know, is a sport that rates very highly with me to this day, because I have at this writing just returned from a squirrel hunt on the reservation here at Camp Blanding, Florida. It was a great pleasure to find that the sniping and rifle shooting experiences of a war, and the killing of many head of big game, had in no way dimmed my appreciation of that delightful woodland pastime. My pulse quickened in the same old way each time I cracked down on one of the seven fat grays I bagged; and my mouth waters now as I anticipate a supper of fried young gray squirrel.

Competitive rifle shooting began for me on the 50-foot gallery in the basement of the Lake View High School, in Chicago, Illinois. My family had moved to the city while I was still of grammar school age, taking me away from my cherished Missouri hills and woodlands. From that time on, my hunting in the States was held to short trips and visits to relatives in the country. But I found the sport of punching holes in paper targets almost made up for the loss. I became involved in all sorts of small-bore rifle competitions, shooting on both indoor and outdoor club and state teams before my eighteenth birthday. The big-bore bug also took hold about that time, and I had obtained a National Match rifle when I was fifteen, and had dryfired and practiced with the enthusiasm only a school boy can enjoy.

In due time, I enlisted in the Illinois National Guard, shooting my way onto the State Rifle Team each year that I was able to attend the National Rifle Matches at Camp Perry, Ohio. The Chicago Rifle Club—affectionately and otherwise known as “The S.O.B's” by neighboring organizations, afforded an excellent medium for competitive rifle shooting in and around Chicago, and it was a pleasure to be able to fire on their .30 caliber team. This Chicago Rifle Club had a decided aversion to small-bore shooting. So I also became a member of the Winnetka Rifle Club, in order to participate in .22 caliber shooting too.

It kept me very busy getting around to all the necessary shoots—but it paid great dividends in pleasure. By the time I was inducted as a second lieutenant in the newly federalized 132nd Infantry in March, 1941, I had become thoroughly wrapped up in rifle shooting.

At odd times during our rifle matches, the inevitable conversations concerning the possible military application of our marksmanship schooling would come up among the small groups of club members formed behind the firing line. As a patriotic youngster, I was incapable of seeing eye to eye with some of my fellow competitors, who failed to connect civilian rifle competition in any way with national defense or preparedness. I seemed to see, in what we were doing, a sport made more enjoyable because it did have a definite end and purpose.

To me it seems that there is something a little noble about the use of modern weapons in sport—a quality not found today in any hobby not associated with the handling of firearms. The tiltyard and the archery ranges traditional in British history are gone as a recreational adjunct to military training and a means of making a people able to defend their nation and their ideals. However, our modern writers still give these sites of ancient competitive sports more color and glamour than is ever accredited to the rifle and pistol ranges which have replaced them. When rifle shooting as a national defense measure is discussed in writing by a layman, it is nearly always in reference to the exploits of Daniel Boone or David Crockett—as though the days of rifle shooting had become a thing of the past.

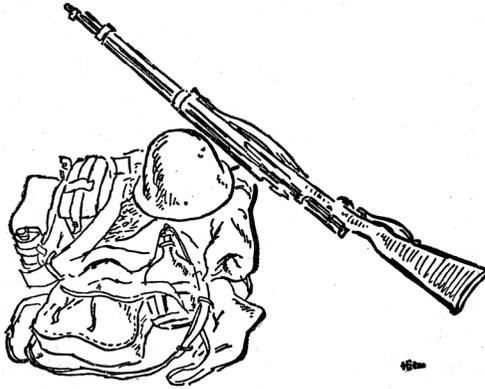
Actually, more men carried rifles in this war just past than in any war before. Their experiences in the primitive jungles of the Pacific—and in many other areas—have surpassed anything which has been honestly recorded in the early history of our continent's settlement. These men knew the same great dangers that faced our early settlers: savage enemies, disease, starvation, isolation, and death by torture; and, in addition, the soldiers of our recent war have had to suffer the nerve-racking and maiming blast of weapons which men fighting during the 18th Century were never called upon to endure.

Before the war, I had an idea that we did not have adequate appreciation of our chosen sport and hobby, and I often voiced that belief to other “gun-nuts” during friendly readyline conversations. In the light of my experiences in the war I have become certain that our sport suffers that moral defect, and that our country's national defense potential is lessened incalculably thereby.

As riflemen, should we look only into the past for the thrill of war-like achievement? Why can't we make ourselves see its existence in the present—before our very eyes? To enjoy his sport to the fullest, the

rifleman should know—as he stands with sling tight on his arm, waiting for the targets to rise from the pit—that his own sport has the same glamour that is conceded by history to the medieval archer drawing his long bow, or to Daniel Boone taking aim with his groove-barrelled flintlock at a painted savage. If an attractive presentation of the spirit of military rifle shooting could be given to the public through newspaper, radio and screen publicity, with particular emphasis on the element of national defense—it could make rifle shooting a national pastime. At the same time it would do patriotism a great service, gain for our sport the recognition it truly deserves and would get a lot more people out-of-doors in the pursuit of the most enjoyable hobby in the world. I have been at this hobby for more than fifteen years, and I hope to keep up this enthusiastic pursuit until the day I die.

For many months I was to utilize the knowledge and skill acquired during pleasant days spent in rifle practice and competition, in the direct and terrible business of killing people. I hope now that I shall never again be forced to apply this deadly knowledge; but, should my freedom and my life ever again be placed in jeopardy by aggressors, my rifle is hanging ready on the wall.



FORT SHERIDAN, JULY '38

It was a typical July Sunday on the range at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. It was one of those sun-boiling days when onlooking laymen come to regard the rifle enthusiast as a damn, stupid fool. Some 200 big-bore riflemen were shooting out the final day for the Illinois State Championships and a berth on the State Civilian Team. Remarks along the line indicated that if the competition itself wasn't hot, the damn weather more than made up for it.

I felt uncomfortably happy that day. I was uncomfortable because I could never get into a bearable prone position without wearing a sweatshirt beneath my shooting jacket to pad my poorly-fleshed ribs. On this account I was faced with a choice of either roasting alive or suffering another torture of the damned—that of having my spare midriff and pectoral surfaces lacerated by the tough northern sod. Because the laceration would aversely affect my score as well as my health, I chose to wear the sweatshirt (certainly an appropriately-named garment) and endure the roasting, which I believed would affect only my health.

I was happy because through the early stages I had been getting reasonably good scores—nothing phenomenal, but the long run of not-too-bad performances which leads toward a good total in the grand aggregate.

The matches were being fired on two Sundays in July and all of the separate stages comprised the equivalent of twice across the National Match service rifle course, less 10 shots at 1,000. The first Sunday's firing had found me far down on the list. At the end of that day the championship had looked like a cinch for a National Guard team mate of mine, Captain Aurand E. Linker. But the Captain had suffered bad luck early in the second day's firing the short ranges, and he was now well out of the running. The match was now nip and tuck among several members of the famous (and infamous) Chicago Rifle Club. Ralph Izard, veteran .30 caliber shot and 1929 winner of the Wimbledon Cup, was in the lead when we wearily picked up our kits at the 600-yard line and trudged back through the heat to the 1,000-yard point. As we made this walk, carrying our heavy loads of shooting kit and

weapons, we were stared at in open-mouthed amazement by people sitting in parked convertibles on the sidelines. They were waiting for us to get the match finished to permit them the use of the range, which was also the polo field. On observing their somewhat understandable consternation, I thought of the cliché concerning a rifle shooter's mental qualifications—"You don't have to be crazy, but it sure as hell helps!"

We got back to the 1,000-yard mark and regained our breath while the range sergeant spent the usual amount of breath directing stentorian profanity at the field telephone and Alexander Graham Bell. After much cranking and some splicing of wire he managed to get through to the pits so that the first relay, already on the line, could be permitted to commence firing. In about twenty minutes I heard the catastrophic news of a 94 by Ralph Izard, which gave him an aggregate score to be reckoned with—to say the least. Inwardly, I conceded my small chances of winning to him.

When I moved up on the line in the third relay, I was lucky enough to get a target with a good, fast operator. (Being a nervous character, I have always been prone to die a separate death after each thousand-yard shot I fire until I see the spotter or paddle.) It is a great help to have an operator who is not apparently suffering from sleeping sickness. I fired the first shot after carefully checking my sight setting and muttered the familiar 1,000-yard first-shot-prayer: "Please, Lord, let it be on the target—and let the damn man in the pits find it soon, before the suspense kills me."

My prayer was moderately answered and it was just above the butts—on for a sad four at six o'clock. I yanked out the old O'Hare micrometer and put on a minute—not trusting my hold enough to make a full correction. The second shot gave me another four which hit the very spotter of the first. My scorer tried his best to keep a straight face as I cursingly reapplied the mike and added a healthy two minutes. What the hell had happened to the zero of that weapon? As I aimed the second shot, I mumbled about the advisability of wrapping my pet National Match rifle around a nearby tree if the third shot should be wide at twelve. The setting was a full minute higher than I had ever used on that rifle—my pet silk-smooth National Match.

The third shot was in the groove—and the next and the next. It was great stuff. The group got to "swimming" in the V ring and I stopped scribbling my scorebook to get into the rhythm of the thing. Without giving myself time for a thought of the enormity of the accomplishment, I blazed away the remaining cartridges, running up a ranking 98 to win the Grand Aggregate, which was the state .30 caliber championship (Carlos E. Black Trophy). Along with it went the Tribune Trophy

Match, which was the long range championship of Illinois—and sundry lesser trophies and medals.

At this moment, nine years later, I can still feel the keen joy I experienced and my boyish thrill at becoming the youngest .30 caliber state champ that Illinois had ever had. It was a feeling which subsequent shooting experiences never did more than equal.

The Chicago Rifle Club convened that evening at Bob Lovell's and Pat Fahrney's place for small talk, beer, and hamburgers—and the gang all made much of referring to me as the "Champ." The only words Ken Smith uttered that evening, so far as I can remember, formed themselves—perhaps with no intent on Ken's part—into another one of his "two-cents-worths" which so often seem to deserve a place in the records.

"George," he said, looking musingly at me over a glass of ale, "you held nearly everything out there awfully tight, today—kept your bullets hitting within two minutes of angle on those paper targets. Think you could do as well on targets that shoot back?" Before I could answer, he shifted his gaze to the wall and added in a half jocular, half serious tone, "I sure as hell hope that you and about a million other guys can shoot good in the next few years to come. A lot may depend on just that."



CAMP PERRY, SEPTEMBER '39

A group of spectators had gathered on the assembly line behind the Marine Corps Herrick Trophy team which had “gone clean” with but one pair left to fire—20 shots per man at 1,000 yards with no sighters. A new record was in the offing.

The conversation within the group was hushed, to avoid possible disturbance of the two anchor men who had taken over the bull guns and assumed the characteristically low prone position of the Marine team. If my memory serves me well, the members of the last pair were Sergeant Kravatz and Private First Class Wolters—the latter the holder of the new Wimbledon record, established a few days before.

In the Illinois contingent of assembly-line observers, Bill Otis, the one-man bull gun team from Moline; Ken Smith, the dry-humored president of the Chicago Rifle Club, and I sat on our canvas folding seats. Our conversation ran something like this:

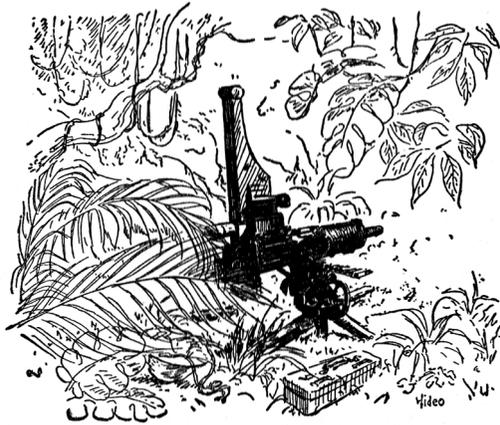
“Bill,” said I, “You’re going to be a doctor by this time next war—and the damn Medics don’t use anything but scalpels and fountain pens. You won’t have the least bit of use for those gilt-edged sporters and magnums you now keep to decorate your den. They’ll just gather dust in the rack waiting for you to come home. Why don’t you agree to lend them to me? I’ll be able to put ’em to good use when they send me across in this coming war.”

“Okay,” said Bill, without shifting his eyes from the scoreboard, which was having another “V” marked up to add to a run of some eight or nine, “I’ll get ’em packed and ready to ship to you when you get your overseas orders. Hope those good guns don’t rust away on the bottom of some sub-infested ocean.”

While the two of us were laughing at the intended silliness of our talk the last two shots of the Marine team were fired. Kravatz held his with considerable effort, resting several times before getting it off. He was forced once to remove a round that had been in the chamber too long and replace it with a fresh one. Obviously considering his chances of getting off a bad one to spoil the perfect team run, he was doing his best to make sure of the hold. Instead of calling the shot, he shook his

head grimly toward the coach. Everyone waited anxiously for the target to rise from the pit. After an interminable length of time the target appeared with a white spotter showing a plain five, not well centered—but good. Before anyone could find time to worry about the last shot, to be fired by the other member of the pair on the line, it rang out. All of the onlookers sprang to their feet, fearing that the score of the team had been ruined by an accidental discharge; but such was not the case. Wolters had aimed quickly as the target rose and had gotten off his shot with the easy confidence which had characterized his 27 V run in the Wimbledon. The target was drawn quickly and it soon reappeared with a pinwheel spotter. A wild cheer arose from the crowd and the pair returned to the coaching line for a royal back-slapping.

As a big figure “800” was chalked on the board and we turned away from the crowd, the taciturn Kenneth Smith stopped chewing on a blade of grass long enough to speak another one of his quotables: “You know,” he said, “they ought to roll that damn target up and send it to Hitler.”



II. THE SAD BEGINNING

“No military unit in the history of warfare has ever been adequately trained, nor the individual soldiers and officers who comprised it. Fighting teams and their members can never be properly graded in degrees of sufficiency for the tasks they must perform; but rather in the nearness they achieve toward the utterly impossible goal of military perfection.”

MAJOR GENERAL ORDE C. WINGATE
In an address to the assembled officers
of Merrill's Marauders, Deogahr, India,
1943

TRAINING DAYS

When the 132nd Infantry of the Illinois National Guard was inducted into the Army of the United States I was privileged to serve with it in the initial capacity of a second lieutenant. The induction took place in March of 1941 and the unit moved to its training location, Camp Forrest, Tennessee, in April. There we took up the job of bringing the organization into good shape. We faced many problems, in that we were short of both equipment and know-how in the lower ranks, if not along the entire chain of command. We had to simulate and improvise constantly. My service at Camp Forrest was to me, from beginning to end, a constant revelation of our nation's pathetic state of unpreparedness. But under the supervision of a few veteran civilian soldiers who had gained experience in the other war and our small allotment of Regular Army personnel, we made headway and became a workable organization in time for the Louisiana maneuvers.

Being assigned as a machine gun platoon leader in a heavy weapons company, I had little chance to keep up my rifle shooting. There was no civilian competition within driving distance of Forrest and I often went for months at a stretch without firing a shot. I did, however, have an opportunity to test the M1 Rifle to my satisfaction and I gained a good bit of respect for it, an alteration of opinion for me. At the beginning, I had decided that a semi-auto was not the thing. It seemed to me that, with the adoption of a semi-automatic, accuracy would have to be sacrificed. Most men would be inclined to blow away their ammunition too fast, and good fire discipline would become more difficult of attainment. This original opinion of mine had received its first setback at Perry in 1939, where I shot one of the weapons in the M1 School and got a 79 out of 80 at 200 yards rapid fire on the 10 "bullseye." Next, the limited firing I did at Forrest sold me on the weapon as far as its range performance was concerned. The conclusion I harbored then was that *if* using this new gun did not seriously increase the ammunition supply problem, there could be no real reason why it should not be a grand performer in combat. The latest improved M1 model with the gas port instead of the older muzzle sleeve, was actually superior in

practical accuracy to the M1903. Its better sights, stock fit, and lightened recoil made it easier for recruits to shoot. The semi-auto feature eliminated the need for long hours of bolt-manipulation exercises. But with all of this, it still seemed to me a little early to think of discarding the good old '03.

Well—a normal need for building the trimmings of Camp Forrest faced us, and we laid down our rifles to “fancy up” the place. It seemed to me that there was an unnecessary amount of emphasis placed on housekeeping while we were there. All of the time used in landscaping and beautifying had to be deducted in one way or another from training. But that was in peacetime and no one could blame an officer for building duck-walks and finishing them with mahogany stain if he knew that it would set him well with high authority—even if he had to yank the men off the ranges to do the work.

The thought of that incident—one particularly annoying memory of Camp Forrest days—brings me to mention a few things about that camp and the circumstances of our stay there.

I suppose that it was much like any other National Guard post of the period, but even in rationalizing retrospect, I cannot forgive the responsible parties for some of the serious sins of omission and error which were committed, and some of the damage which was done to the really good raw material which we got in the first levy of recruits under selective service.

These first selectees were largely volunteers, with a very high order of intelligence and physique, and they were deserving of the best possible training under fully qualified instructors. Most of them were fresh from schools or businesses, thoroughly indoctrinated with the spirit of efficiency and organization, which are inherently part of American industry. Coming into the Army, they had every reason (if not every right) to be trained as efficiently by the Army for their function in it as they had been trained for industry and business by the various branches of the American educational system.

Most of them were at least a little fired with a feeling of patriotism, and many were of a thinking sort—men who had carefully adjudged the seriousness of the international situation, and wisely decided to get into the Army early. The greater part had relatively high educational qualifications, sometimes well above those of the National Guard enlisted cadremen who were to be their instructors.

The cadre of our division was made up of men of various backgrounds and from various walks of life—but they were men who had kept an interest in the military during the years of peace. By spending a night or two out of each week at an armory where they would learn drill

and weapons training, and by going to a two weeks summer camp, they had managed to pick up a smattering of military knowledge which later proved to be worth its weight in gold. Some few, like myself, were weapons enthusiasts, and our interest in the peacetime military had been primarily one of competitive shooting with the rifle, pistol, and occasionally with the Browning Auto Rifle or machine gun. Many of us were moved to remain members of National Guard units for years, mainly for the pleasure we obtained from rifle and pistol competition, (though often we would gain an interest in tactics and weapons employment as well).

Throughout the ranks of the 33rd, as in other National Guard divisions, there were all sorts of men and officers, ranging in type from the keenly interested non-professional soldier to the yokel who had joined up for the sake of the uniform. However, the most valuable asset each division had, as far as training was concerned, was its small group of Regular Army personnel.

Those few regular soldiers and officers also varied individually, but most of them had received lengthy training and were accordingly possessed of some military knowledge. The great trouble was that they were too few in number, and almost entirely unschooled in the better methods of instructing civilian soldiers. Few of the enlisted Regular Army personnel had educational (or I.Q.) qualifications to match those of the better selectees. And few of them possessed truly specialized military knowledge.

This "specialized knowledge" was the most important non-physical shortage encountered in the early days. War may be a very wide scoped and general business, but Infantry training and tactics are not at all general in character. They are specialized, and, to a degree, highly scientific. No amount of common sense on the part of an officer can be substituted for the minimum requirements of technical knowledge concerning the operation of weapons and the handling of Infantry units in combat. Military rifle shooting, despite its simplicity, is one of these subjects which requires specialized knowledge; in some ways rifle know-how is just as specialized as the knowledge and experience required for the operation of complicated signal equipment.

Rifle shooting instruction in the 33rd Division at Camp Forrest was generally poor. No amount of rationalizing can alter that truth, and there are few excuses. True, we were short of equipment. We did not have M1 rifles, of course, but we had perfectly good Springfields, and an inadequate but worthwhile allowance of ball ammunition. We were also short of good instructors but no alibi is provided there, for there

was always a small number of skilled rifle shots and rifle instructors who were kept busy at “more important work.”

This was largely a matter of improper placement of training priorities, and over-emphasis upon “appearances”—a term which, in military parlance, is known as “eyewash,” and means exactly the same thing as the Oriental term “face” (and which to my mind makes about the same amount of sense). The old Infantry concept which demanded that an outfit be taught, “to shoot and to walk” ahead of everything else, had apparently been forgotten by important people somewhere at the top of our command echelons. That pragmatic, age-old, prerequisite of good, fighting, foot soldier units seemed to have few advocates at Forrest. It seemed that instead those two subjects had been deemed unimportant and had been set aside, for we were taught most everything else first. Shooting and the employment of weapons in the field were intangibles as far as many of the post inspectors were concerned; such qualities did not show up for all to see at a glance—at least not so importantly as a nicely painted mess hall or a well-appointed enlisted men’s club!

We seemed to spend endless hours on things which were obviously silly—especially the more spectacular and “showy” subjects. Hours were devoted to hand-to-hand combat instruction and drill—how to fight *without* weapons—long before we had even begun to learn to use the guns we had. It made me wonder if our higher training authorities had lost all confidence in firearms, and had decided to fight the war under slightly modified Marquis of Queensbury rules. Mass calisthenics were taken up in minute detail, with officers staying up all night sometimes to rehearse a complicated routine of commands they would have to give on the following day to a battalion of soldiers who would spend an hour or so emulating the antics of a group of chorus girls—flexing their muscles in unison. Sometimes they would be accompanied by the regimental band playing “The Band Played On.” Military courtesy and customs of the service were subjects which also kept constantly appearing on the schedules of Infantry battalions *whose men had not yet learned to shoot or to march*.

All of these other training subjects, which I have mentioned with doubtless bitterness, were not necessarily useless. All of them had definite purposes, though some must be lauded only on indirect points of value such as “hand-to-hand” combat, which, realistically, has practically no combat value. Its apologists say that it is “good for morale.” To an extent, I suppose that is true.

Military courtesy and precise close order drill were also beneficial, and their value in the interests of discipline was great. The bitterness I bear toward such training subjects does not come from any belief that

they should not be taught to soldiers, for I feel that they are all fairly important. My rancor stems from the fact that commanding officers who were supposed to have some idea of what they were doing went ahead and spent time schooling their men in such finer points of garrison life and duty before these men had learned to shoot well enough to definitely hit a standing man at 100 yards with a rifle, or to march so that their battalion could move twenty miles on a hot day without losing entirely too many of its personnel. We never got around to any properly organized rifle instruction during the whole of our stay at Forrest, except in the case of a few units which were lucky enough to have skilled instructors for their immediate officers. At Forrest, there was no spreading out or mass utilization of specialized instructional talents as far as rifle shooting was concerned, and in most battalions the same story was true of marching.

We blundered through our training period with all units struggling their utmost to look better than the next outfit. This resulted in thousands of man-training-hours being shot to hell in the execution of especially refined housekeeping activities, such as landscaping and beautifying the barracks areas, and neatly whitewashing little picket fences (often built by a company carpenter who sometimes had no time left to make training aids or range equipment). Officers kept trying to comply with training directives, to do the impossible, teaching everything listed in the book, but no one on hand had been empowered to take a look at the whole mess, scrap the entire training program for a necessary length of time, and teach the men to shoot and to walk. So when final checks were made, we were found to be much wanting in both of those abilities.

When we finally did begin to shoot, there was a more than ample measure of stupidity in our range programs. Weapons schools were organized by division and subordinate headquarters in accord with the "book"—which procedure in itself was all right. But the instructors selected were often unqualified in their respective subjects—the operations office sometimes having the weird idea that it was good practice to select an instructor uninformed on the particular subject—so that the instructor himself would "learn by instructing!" (I actually heard a division staff officer express himself along such lines.)

And there was always an element of "eyewash" shoved into each class—a thing or two in the way of decoration or show which wasted everybody's time and benefited only the company or battalion commander who had managed thereby to dazzle the eyes his senior. This "eyewash" might be in the form of flashy instructional props, or a high

instructor's platform, or even some radical departure from regulation training procedure.

In the matter of rifle shooting, the policy was reminiscent of some critical histories I have read of the conscription and training of Civil War soldiery. Reliance on subordinate units seemed to be the rule, and the admittedly keen-minded operations and training officer (G-3) of the division apparently did not know who could instruct in rifle shooting and who could not. In any event, several rifle instructors, who almost literally did not know one end of a rifle from the other, were chosen and charged with organizing and conducting rifle qualifications. The advice of a distinguished rifleman assistant instructor was, on one occasion, disregarded by a battalion commander who had ordered his companies to remove all of their rifle bolts when the weapons were locked up. His orders further prescribed the stowing of the removed bolts in a locker, but made no provision at all for returning the bolts to the proper rifles. Fantastic as it may seem, it is true. That battalion commander—the leader of 900 soldiers—had to learn by experience that Springfield bolts are not always interchangeable!

A good look at our qualification firing would have made a civilian rifle club member laugh. On the date of record firing, officers galore were detailed into the pits to keep supplemental scores, and every shot on the targets was recorded carefully in the pits and on the line, but the identification of firers was not closely checked and in at least a few cases men succeeded in firing for each other. After these score-cards were turned in, they sometimes seemed to be changed. The shooting was on a competitive basis in only one sense—an organizational one. Each of the units wanted to score better than the others. With possession and control of the records in their own hands, there was plenty of pencil-pushing on the part of certain outfits.

This was ignorantly encouraged from above. On more than one occasion, senior officers demanded high qualifications standards from their subordinate commands, refusing to accept anything below a certain level. When a Colonel made such demands from behind his desk, without taking the time to go out and check the ranges and scoring procedures carefully, he usually got his high qualification records promptly indeed—*on paper*.

One brilliant officer (whom many of us later had the pleasure of seeing sent home from overseas before his battalion ever got into combat) organized a rifle school at Forrest as one would organize a circus. He built the highest chief range officers' platform that I have ever seen, made up numerous giant-scale training devices for demonstration purposes, huge washtub-sized markers, sighting bars ten feet long, and numerous

other gaudy props. He qualified very few men in that school—even on paper, and he thoroughly insulted the intelligence of the men who had to endure the course.

I served in a heavy weapons company, as could reasonably be expected. I had played around a good deal with heavy machine guns, was a qualified expert over the old and tough “E” course, and was very fond of Browning M-1917s. At that time, most of the men in heavy weapons companies had rifles for personal weapons. (Carbines were still in the process of design or manufacture, and pistols were issued only to a few squad members.)

Regardless of the obvious silliness of arming an already overloaded gunner or number two man with a rifle, it seemed to me that it would have one advantage. At least it would give the men an opportunity to learn how to operate and perhaps to shoot properly a shoulder weapon of some sort. I began to use every available bit of spare time to teach a few men in the company the rudiments of rifle instruction, and we made up a few training aids and selected suitable dryfiring areas close to the barracks.

In due time, our machine gun qualifications were finished. We managed pretty well at it because the company commander stole sufficient time from other subjects, and wrangled someone out of enough old 1918 ammunition to allow us to fire an extra time across the course, (after sorting out all the rounds with cracked necks). A few weeks later, we received an authorization to actually fire with the rifle 15 rounds per man for familiarization purposes—but *we had to do so within two days*.

Our heavy weapons personnel had not been officially available for rifle marksmanship training at any time previously, and their only grounding for using the rifle at all had been a little mechanical and care-and-cleaning training given in spare time. But all protests were in vain, and I was forced on this two-days notice to take the company out to the thousand-inch range and use up the ammunition; otherwise we would not get to fire at all. We had only one morning to get the job done.

It rained that day—a sort of chilly drizzle. I had selected assistant instructors the night before and “crammed” them as best I was able. On the range, I gave up the thought of teaching any positions in the very few minutes we had to spare for the purpose. We simply tried to get across the basic idea of sight picture and trigger squeeze and let each man fire his shots from prone or sitting position, using the sling if he felt like it. The shooting was at inch pasters on big expanses of target background, and the groups were generally pathetic. All of the company officers were distressed if not thoroughly disgusted, but we all felt that it would be better than no shooting at all, and did our best to coach

and encourage men who were flinching with each shot and not taking the recoil properly. It was lucky that we took this trouble, because it turned out that *those fifteen shots were the only rifle practice the men were to be allowed before overseas shipment.*

That experience was a good one for me—a grand lesson in making the most of poor training circumstances. As I continued in the next years to serve in the Army and saw training as it went on in many overseas stations, I was to become more and more certain that the key to good soldiery is not the ability to use well the proper tools of training and war, but is instead the developed knack of getting along with tools and devices at hand, or being able to make substitute tools if normal issues are not available. And when I began to work with the soldiery of other nations—Colonial French, Melanesian Islanders, Burmese, and Chinese, I began to really appreciate the need for a new set of standards to apply to the training of people of much more primitive background than the average American or Britisher. It is an unbelievable truth that it would take months of intensive training and hundreds of rounds of ammunition to teach the average Chinese peasant soldier to shoot even as well as most of the men in my company did with their first 15 rounds from a military rifle.

That fact, however, afforded no excuse for allowing only a few hours' rifle training to heavy weapons company personnel, individually armed with the rifle, and who were later to use that weapon in combat. Arguments that this training deficiency was circumstantial and no one's fault were pure hog wash. We took much time to teach hand-to-hand combat and we took more time to teach indirect fire methods with our machine guns. (The latter technique may possibly have been used to some extent in Europe, but had damn little application in the Islands and in Burma.) Nearly everyone used rifles, carbines, or submachine guns in the jungle; no one knew when he was safe without such a weapon, any place forward of a regimental command post. Pistols were never plentiful, and were used mostly at night for close in "foxhole" protection. We should have been trained better with shoulder weapons.

All of this was to come out later, and all infantrymen were later trained (or were supposed to have been trained) to shoot both the rifle and carbine. These training measures apparently were delayed—or at least were not enforced—until long after early policy had been disproved by actual combat and resultant numbers of casualties. The memories of the last war were not sufficiently poignant in 1941—and someone high up in command had run out of imagination. Every junior officer I knew at Forrest would openly deplore our lack of attention to vital training

in the use of important basic weapons. Everyone but the “wheels” saw the mistakes.

We learned enough about grenades, using the methods then prescribed in the manuals. However, most all of the throwing techniques we were taught were never put to use. The formal grenade throwing positions were artificial as could be—even the prone position, which, as it was taught, called for momentary exposure of the whole upper half of the body. Grenade throwing is an easy subject for the average baseball-grounded American, and grenade throwing technique should not attempt to reteach a man how to throw, but rather to simply give a good course in grenade safety (a lot of our men were killed with their own grenades), then give him a large amount of practice throwing at realistic targets. As large a percentage of this practice as possible should be conducted with live grenades. This was another obviously advisable type of training which was discarded in favor of more precise and formal methods. On the whole, however, grenade training in the division was more adequate than rifle training. Some of it, in fact, could have been diverted to marksmanship training.

The most wicked of all our sins at Camp Forrest was concerned with the true occupational speciality of the doughboy—walking. We left real honest-to-God marching almost entirely out of the picture, and confined the marches we did make to roads and good trails. None of the large tracts of Tennessee woods and hills were cut through and marched over by whole companies, properly loaded down with their complete equipage. Quite the other way around: in all marches, we kept ourselves continually road bound, often moving enough afoot, but traversing only the areas trafficable to motor vehicles. On that account we gained no conception of normal Infantry movement across ordinary terrain, and the rigors of such movement were later to come to us as a shock when we got overseas. Roads, we should have realized at the time, are only man-made seams of civilization, and many less civilized areas have none. Our regiment, which a few months later would be especially thankful to find a few hundred yards of cut footpath in the jungle spaces, was conducting all of its marches and movements along paved roads, with heavy weapons and ammunition going along in carriers instead of on the backs of the men. The “book” had made a statement to the effect that distances for hand-carrying heavy weapons should not *ordinarily* exceed a few hundred yards, and that motor transportation would be the *favored* means of moving machine guns. This statement was seized upon and misinterpreted by many officers who seemed unable to even think in terms of large areas without roadnets of concrete or macadam highways.

As our training program went on, we saw each day more evidence of our own military incapacities; and also terrible shortages of equipment and weapons. How little we actually had to work with! We were short of everything except a limited measure of willingness. We had no weapons, no equipment, and even worse—no knowledge.

Silly things were done in those days, because we didn't know even the right methods to use. Officers without experience in handling large numbers of troops made errors which adversely and unreasonably affected the comfort and morale of thousands. An over emphasis of safety precautions—always a bone of contention in peacetime—tended to give each tactical exercise, each firing problem, and each small unit maneuver, an unreasonable appearance of morale-sapping artificiality.

As I recall, the classic expression SNAFU (Situation Normal, All Fouled Up) came into being at that time and many of us will always associate it with Camp Forrest, where so many things seemed to go wrong.

Memories of my stay at that place put it in the definite category of an organized bore, worse even than any equivalent length combat period I have since been through. Camp Forrest to me was a chigger-infested land of petulant senior officers, who, never satisfied, were always moaning about some trivial detail. It was a place where gray-haired field officers stood on platforms and lectured in the hot sun to three hundred rifle students, telling them to squeeze the stock of a rifle with all fingers, gripping it like a lemon, to get the trigger off. It was a place where companies were busy building decorative little picket fences and whitewashing them; a place where attempts to devise true and realistic combat training methods as often as not resulted in discredit to the man who went to the trouble.

Worst of all, it was a place in which a thousand conscientious junior officers and non-coms expended months of heartbreaking effort, knowing all the while that too much of it was in the interest of "eyewash"—being totally misdirected.

Camp Forrest—our training period there—served to give proof to every thinking man in the division that we were indeed poorly prepared for war, that our country was militarily a second rate power, that the great mass of American manhood would require much physical and moral alteration before it could successfully fight against foreign armies.

