

## THE BATTLE OF BELVEDERE

In this Tuscany town, a battalion of Storm Troopers found it was no match for the Fifth Army's crack Japanese-American soldiers.

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With the Fifth Army in Italy--There are three outfits that will remember the little Tuscany town of Belvedere for a long while to come. Two of them are the American 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442d Combat Team, now spearheading the drive to the north. The other is a German SS battalion, the remnants of which are now spearheading a drive toward Naples and the nearest PW camp.

Both the 100th Battalion and the 442d Combat Team are composed of Japanese-Americans, many of them from Hawaii. The 442d is a recent arrival in Italy, but the 100th has been here a long, long time. The men of the 100th went in at Salerno and have since fought through almost every major action from the Volturno to Rome. In a battalion of 1,300 men they have more than 1,000 Purple Hearts.

The story of Belvedere really began after Rome fell, when the 100th was pulled out of the line and sent to bivouac in the pleasant countryside just north of the city. There it joined the 442d. It was a happy day for both outfits; most of the 100th's younger brothers, cousins and friends were in the 442d and they hadn't seen each other since shortly after Pearl Harbor, when the 100th left Hawaii for combat training in the U.S. For three days the brass hats left the two outfits alone. The kids of the 442d plied their older brothers with questions of war. The older brothers, like all combat men, dodged these questions and asked questions of their own about Hawaii and their families and girls. Together the outfits visited Rome, buying souvenirs and baffling the Romans, who decided they must be Japanese prisoners. It was impossible for them to believe that these were tough, loyal Americans.

After the three days the two outfits went to work. Now the men of the 100th began to answer those questions; for 14 days they drilled the 442d, sweating with the kids from morning to night, cursing and pushing and ridiculing and encouraging them, giving the final polish that makes a man as much of a combat soldier as he can be before combat. And in the evenings they would sit around together and drink vino and sing their soft Hawaiian songs.

Then on the seventeenth day after the fall of Rome the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442d Combat Team were pulled into the line, and two days later they headed for the beautiful little hilltop town of Belvedere.

The 100th was the first to go into the line. Its objective was a small town about seven miles below Belvedere. The German strategy since Rome had been to fight in pockets on each sector of the front, and the mission of the 100th was to clean up one of these rear guard pockets. The men of the 100th did it in two days, chasing the Germans up the inland road toward Florence and meeting little resistance until they neared the valley directly before Belvedere. There they were stopped by a brace of 150-mm cannon and several self-propelled guns. The German artillery was also holding up a battalion to the right of the 100th. This battalion was trying to use a crossroad, but the Germans had it zeroed in. Division sent orders for the 100th to stop while division artillery tried to clear out the Germans. When the barrage was over, the 100th was pulled out and the 442d was sent in to assault the German positions.



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It didn't work. The 442d made an initial breakthrough, but that was all. The Germans counterattacked against the 442d's left flank, throwing in a mess of mortars. They pushed the 442d out of the valley and pinned the outfit down in an exposed and highly uncomfortable position in a wheatfield. Meanwhile the German artillery had moved back and was still stopping the battalion on the right of the 442d.

Back in their bivouac areas, the men of the 100th heard what was happening to the 442d and began to get itchy. The enlisted men unconsciously began to clean and oil their guns; the officers brought out their maps and began to think. Finally they held a semiofficial meeting and delegated Capt. Sakae Takahashi of B Company to go to the brass hats and tell them the outfit wanted to do something. When the captain got to the colonel and started to speak, he was cut short. "Save your breath," the colonel said. "We're hitting the road."

The 100th had orders and a mission.

The mission was simple. All the battalion had to do was to infiltrate the German positions in the valley, the hill that Belvedere was on and the town itself; to encircle and capture the town, and cut off the main road out of Belvedere that runs north to Sasseta and Florence. That was all. Division intelligence said the position was being held by an SS battalion, which had an OP in the town directing artillery and mortar fire on the 442d and the battalion on its right.

A and B Companies of the 100th were assigned to assault positions, with the rest of the battalion in reserve. The jump-off was at 1200 hours. By 1300 both companies had infiltrated completely around Belvedere and were behind the town at a farm called Po Pino. The rest of the battalion dug in among the olive groves at the edge of the valley. B Company was to initiate the attack, while A Company was to rendezvous at Po Pino. Commanding B Company was the same Capt. Takahashi who had taken the battalion's plea to the colonel. He planned the attack this way: the 1st Platoon under S/Sgt. Yeki Kobashagawa was to take the town; the 2d Platoon under Lt. James Boodry, a former Regular Army dogface from Boston, was to move on the main road leading out of town and cut it off; the 3d Platoon under Lt. Walter Johnston of New York was to cover the northern position of the company. The heavy-weapons platoon was to move with the 2d Platoon and cover the road north to Sasseta.

Sgt. Kobashagawa broke his 1st Platoon into three squads, two of which encircled Belvedere on each side while the sergeant led his squad into town. On the outskirts Kobashagawa's squad located the Jerry OP wires, which were cut by one of the point men, Pfc. Seikichi Nakayama. Then the squad moved cautiously into town. It was quiet, and the men were almost up to the modern three-story Fascist headquarters when two German machine pistols opened up on them. They ducked behind some houses and settled down to work.

Kobashagawa and two men, loaded with grenades, moved toward the big building under cover of the others. The machine pistols were located in a doctor's office on the first floor. One of the men was hit, but the sergeant and the other man got to the house next door. They tossed four grenades in the window, and the machine pistols were through. Four Germans came out of the building and the covering fire killed three and wounded one. That left about 20 Germans in the building. They started to retreat the back way and out of town toward the valley. They fought from house to house and then ducked over a ravine and down into the valley. The two squads encircling the town caught some of these Germans coming out of the ravine.

When Kobashagawa's platoon assembled again at the edge of town, it ran into machine-gun fire from a German half track located in front of one of the valley farmhouses. The platoon could also hear the noise of a battle opening up to the right. Kobashagawa decided to dig in and call for mortar support before jumping the farmhouse.



The mortar support didn't come. The heavy-weapons platoon had discovered a nice reverse slope and set up there to cover the road to Sasseta. The platoon was about to open up on some Germans trying to make a get-away when the point squad of the 2d Platoon, preceding the weapons platoon, arrived at the edge of the hill and practically ran into the four German 155s that had been firing on the 442d and its flank battalion. The Germans had just moved into this new position and were preparing to fire.

They never did. Lt. Boodry, commanding the platoon, had Cpl. Hidenobu Hiyane, communications man, get the weapons platoon on the radio. Cpl. Hiyane contacted T/Sgt. M. Nakahara and gave him the essential data. Their conversation must have sounded terrifying if any Germans were listening--it was conducted in a personal code, combining Hawaiian dialect with Japanese and American slang.

The plan worked all right. While Lt. Boodry and his platoon moved in on the German battery with carbines and M1s, the weapons platoon cut loose with its mortars. In five minutes 18 Germans had been killed and all four of the 155s were out of action.

The Germans knew they were encircled now and tried to make a break up the main road toward Sasseta. Capt. Takahashi ordered the 3d Platoon to move up and cover the flank of the 2d Platoon. He told both rifle platoons and the weapons platoon to hold their fire until the Germans made a break, which sooner or later they had to do. And they did.

Seventeen of their amphibious jeeps loaded with Jerries swung out of an olive grove and headed hell-bent for Sasseta. The three platoons let them get onto the road and then let them have it. All 17 jeeps were knocked out. Two light machine guns manned by Sgt. K. Yoshimoto and Sgt. Nakahara accounted for most of the damage, and the riflemen picked off the Germans as they ran from the jeeps.

Right after that, four German trucks filled with men broke from the olive grove and tried to swing around the knocked-out jeeps. The first two made it, but the other two were stopped. Lt. Boodry picked out one driver with his carbine, and one of the riflemen got the other. The trucks piled up in the middle of the road, blocking it effectively and preventing any further German escape. "The next half-hour", says Pvt. Henry (Slim) Nakamura, a bazookaman of the 2d Platoon, "that valley was like a big box of chocolates and us not knowing which piece to take first."

The rest of the Germans retreated to the grove and dug in. Sgt. Kobashagawa's platoon on top of the hill picked off a few of them. The sergeant was good and sore about not getting his mortar support and kept calling for it, but the mortars were needed somewhere else. Capt. Takahashi had decided to make a frontal attack on the farmhouse with the 3d Platoon. The 1st Platoon was assigned to keep the Germans busy in the grove, while the 2d Platoon was to knock off any snipers who might have come up the road on the platoon's flank. The captain also sent a request back to battalion for more ammo. The supply was running low. When the Germans in the farmhouse saw the 3d Platoon moving toward them, they opened fire. The 3d returned the fire, aided by elements of the 1st and 2d Platoon, and moved in and around the farmhouse. There was a German half-track there, with two Germans working its machine gun. Cpl. Toshio Mizuzawa, who had plopped a rifle grenade into the back seat of a jeep earlier in the day scored another basket when he dropped one into the half-track and rendered it highly ineffective.

This was enough for the occupants of the farmhouse. They came out with their hands up. One of the prisoners spoke English and asked Lt. Johnston about his platoon: "These men are Mongolians, yes?"

"Mongolians, hell," the lieutenant said. "Hasn't Hitler told you? These are Japanese. Japan has surrendered and is fighting on our side now."



The German was a little skeptical until three of the dogfaces gathered around and solemnly intoned: "Tojo no good. Hitler no good. Roosevelt good. Banzai!" That convinced him.

Sgt. Kobashagawa had seen the Germans reforming in the olive grove and had spotted a PzKW IV tank there. He relayed this information to Capt. Takahashi, who didn't exactly relish the idea of running into a tank with so little ammo. The captain sent an urgent call for A Company and ordered the 3d Platoon back to the reverse slope to join the weapons platoon, leaving a patrol to scout the area. The patrol consisted of Sgt. A. Governagaji and Pfc. Taneyoshi Nakana, working as a BAR team, and Pvt. Nakamura with his bazooka. Snipers tried to get them but were silenced by Lt. Boodry and a squad from his platoon. Boodry shot one sniper out of a tree from 150 yards with his carbine. "He fell out of a tree and just looked at me as if he was surprised," Boodry says. "I was surprised too, I didn't think a carbine was accurate at that distance. I moved in a little closer and hit him four more times."

Then the German counterattack started. The tank rolled out of the olive grove and started up the slope. It was followed by a half-track, and behind that were some soldiers with two light machine guns and what was left of a rifle company. Sgt. Governagaji of the patrol crawled over to Pvt. Nakamura and asked him if he wanted to take a crack at the tank with his bazooka.

"Yeah," said Pvt. Nakamura, who is a man of few words.

Sgt. Governagaji nodded and started to crawl back to his position. On the way he was hit by a slug from the tank. Then the tank bounced into view about 15 yards from Nakamura. He aimed, fired and hit the tank right in the belly. He reloaded and hit it in the same place. The tank moved about 10 yards and blew up. The concussion knocked out Nakamura and killed Sgt. Governagaji who was lying about 10 feet away. Two Germans started out of the tank, but Pfc. Nakana, working the BAR alone, got both of them before they were halfway out of the turret.

The weapon platoon on the slope took care of the half-track, knocking off its tread. The 2d Platoon had run out of ammunition and withdrawn; the weapons platoon had one box of machine-gun ammo left. Now the German rifle company with the two machine guns started up the hill. The dogfaces didn't know what they were going to do, but they hadn't counted on Nakana with his BAR. Nakana waited until the Germans were within 50 yards, then knocked out the four Jerries carrying the two machine guns. The rest of the rifle company high-tailed it back to the olive grove. The counterattack was over.

After that the 100th mopped up. B Company called it a day. A Company moved through and chased the retreating Germans among the olive groves and up and down the ravines. When B Company took stock they found they had one box of ammo left in the company. It was now 1600 hours.

In the valley of Belvedere lay 84 dead Germans; headed for the rear were 32 prisoners and 29 wounded Jerries. By 1900 hours A Company had accounted for 26 more Germans dead, 18 prisoners and 9 wounded. The box score on Jerry equipment was 13 motorcycles, 19 jeeps, 7 trucks, 2 half-gracks, 1 PzKW IV tank, 1 SP gun, 2 anti-tank guns, 4 155-mm's, 1 radio CP and 1 battalion CP with 20 telephones.

The 100th lost one man and had eight wounded. The next morning the outfit was relieved. It bivouacked that day with the 442d. There was a lot of razzing between the two outfits. After a couple of days both of them went back into the line.