

CHAPTER 3

COMBAT IN ITALY

*** GOING OVERSEAS ***

As we were getting close to the end of Basic, a bunch of us were selected to be sent overseas as replacements for the 100th Battalion. That battalion had taken really heavy casualties and needed a lot of replacements, and I was one of those picked. Everyone was pretty excited about finally being able to go overseas. We were first sent to Camp Mead, Maryland, pretty near Baltimore. The Army kept us there about a week and then moved us to Camp Patrick Henry at Norfolk, Virginia. Somewhere we were all issued our own M-1 rifle to go overseas with. We spent six or seven days at Camp Patrick Henry which was a temporary base for embarkation to Europe. Finally they put us on a little ship called a Liberty Ship. I think it held only about 250 men--it was awfully small. Our ship joined a convoy for the voyage to Italy. I counted 125 ships in that convoy, and they went from horizon to horizon as we crossed the Atlantic Ocean. There were also navy destroyers that went round and round looking for German submarines. There were a couple nights on the way to Italy that the destroyers started to drop depth charges meaning that there were some subs close by.

It took 29 days to go from Virginia to Naples, Italy. We didn't get seasick as the ocean wasn't too rough, but it was a very long, boring trip! We were really stacked in the ship. There were about five stacks of hammocks on each level and the hold of the ship was jammed packed. If you slept on your back, the person above you was practically touching your nose. There wasn't much to do on the ship. We had to do calisthenics every day and sometimes there were boxing matches or some other entertainment, but all in all it was boring!!

We were served meals twice a day, mostly sandwiches. I remember they once gave us sliced tongue sandwiches and the tongue hadn't been peeled so it was all green around the outer edge and you just couldn't eat it. It was awful!

I have been asked where I was on Christmas 1943. I can't remember. It must have been somewhere between Camp Shelby and Italy but there wasn't anything special about it to remember.

***** LOOKING FOR THE 100TH BATTALION *****

After we landed at Naples, we were taken inland about 40 miles to a replacement camp. There was also a small hospital there in case anyone got sick or hurt. The camp was all by itself out in the countryside. At night we couldn't hear the boom of the artillery going off, but we could see the tracers so we knew about where the fighting was and it was far away. Once in awhile, German bombers came over at night, but they never dropped any bombs near us.

We stayed at this camp for about a week and then one morning they told us we were heading for Anzio Beach. The American troops at Anzio were down low on the beach and sort of trapped. The Germans had the high ground and their snipers and artillery would shoot at anything that moved. We were going down to try to help.

It was still pretty dark as it was early in the morning when we fell into formation. My platoon sergeant came up to me and said, "What you got on your face?" "Nothing," I answered. He didn't believe me so he said, "You better get to the dispensary and see what it is. Get it taken care of, whatever is on your face, and get right back." So I went to the dispensary and the medics looked at me. As it turned out, I had German measles so I got stuck in the hospital for two weeks. There were a couple of other guys with measles, and I found out that there were three other boys with mumps, and they were in bad shape because the disease got to their testicles so that they had to wear diapers. Nobody was really suffering, and we had a good time in the hospital. Everybody treated us real good. We didn't have to stay in bed much, so we just walked around. The nurses were very nice and would always say, "Come on in and have some coffee." The hospital wasn't very fancy. It had wooden sides up about four feet and was then canvas from there up. After we were all well, the medics sent us back to the replacement camp to wait for orders to ship out.

For some reason, the replacement center wouldn't ship us to our outfits so we were stuck there for three or four weeks. It was very dull being there. Lots of the time we just wandered into some of the small Italian villages nearby to just look around or we'd walk out into the countryside. By now, we were picking up a few words of Italian so we could talk a little to the people we met. We came across a farm family while we were strolling around out in the country, and we got to be friends with

them. We'd take them soap, candy, and cigarettes for the family. Before we left, the woman gave us a photograph of her son who was in a fascist unit and told us that if we ever saw her son to tell him to come home right away. Of course with all the troops from so many countries in Italy, we never saw him, but I still have the photograph as a keepsake.

We didn't do anything military all day, and then after supper we would have to go on a six mile road march. That was boring! If we'd gone to a rifle range and shot, it might have been interesting, but we didn't. We Nisei got sick and tired of this so as we zigzagged through the camp on the way to the road march, we'd jump behind a building and go back to the barracks. We could do that because the sergeants didn't care where you fell in the formation so we'd always fall in on the end of the column. Well we finally got caught, and the sergeant made us lead the march. We said, "OK but you have to keep up." We were all in really good shape and we marched fast and double timed some of the way. After a few days of that, even the sergeants were whining and complaining, so they told us, "OK. You're in shape. Why don't you hitchhike up north and find your units?" We said, "Fine with us."

The replacement camp commander agreed that five of us Nisei could hitchhike all the way up north and catch up with our troops in the 100th Battalion. The 442nd RCT had come over to Italy and everyone in the 442nd and the 100th were beyond Leghorn by the time we caught up.

I forgot how many days it took hitchhiking our way up north. We left the replacement camp with our rifles and packs and C rations and headed north on the main highway. I think we were wearing khaki uniforms as it wasn't too cold and fatigues were too sloppy looking. We followed the main inland route to Caserta, north to just west of Cassino where the big battle of Monte Cassino had taken place, through Frascati, and then bypassed Rome on a highway east of the city. The driver of the truck we were riding in said, "Look over there. That's Rome." We weren't interested in stopping to sightsee. We were anxious to catch up with our unit. When we passed Rome, we were just about half way to where we would finally make contact with the 100th Battalion.

There were always Army vehicles as well as French or English trucks on the road so it was no trouble catching a ride. As we traveled north, we'd stop about dusk and head for the nearest Army camp. We'd eat in the mess hall and sleep there, and early the next morning we'd eat in the mess hall and then hit the road

again. We went through a lot of really smashed up towns and saw lots of downed planes, mostly Italian. They were so smashed, you could hardly tell what they were.

After passing by Rome, we continued north along the main coastal highway as that was the route taken by the 100th Battalion on its way north. We traveled through Civitavecchia on the way to Grosseto and Leghorn. We finally found our unit a little north of Leghorn and south of of the Arno River.

*** LEARNING ABOUT COMBAT ***

At last we caught up with our unit. It didn't know we were coming since only the replacement camp commander knew we had left Naples. When we arrived at the 442nd RCT area, we stayed at the cook's camp of the 100th Battalion; we called that the rear echelon. That was where the cooks stayed and where they got the mail and took care of clothes and rations. Here we got out of our khakis and into our wool O.D. shirts and pants. That was the uniform we usually wore in combat, both in Italy and France.

Someone assigned me to C Company, 100th Battalion. It functioned as the first battalion in the 442nd RCT. Since it had been overseas before the 442nd, it was allowed to keep its original battalion number rather than changing it to the 1st Battalion. When I got to C Company, the commander put me in the 2nd Platoon. At this time, I was a M-1 riflemen. There were very, very few of the original boys from the 100th left by the time I joined it. Probably ninety percent had been wounded or killed in all that fighting in Africa and Italy. My squad of about 12 men only had three of the original bunch left. The old-timers received us new guys well and taught us plenty that had never been taught in Basic.

At the time I was assigned to the 100th Battalion, it was holding the left flank of the line occupied by the 442nd. The right flank was clear over to Florence in the east. After I had been there a few days, the regiment got a rest from fighting for a couple of weeks. It pulled back to a place south of Leghorn called Rosignano Maritimo, a town that was built a few hundred yards inland from the shores of the Ligurian Sea. For short, we called it just Rosignano. There was a beach a couple hundred yards west of the town itself. It was a beautiful place, but there were so many land mines there, it was dangerous to walk out

there. Some of the guys used to probe for mines with bayonets. The only time I was on the beach was when I talked some local fisherman into taking me out in their boat while they fished. I guess I spent half a day out there with them. When we returned, I talked them into selling me the only lobster they had caught and they did, but at a huge price. It cost me \$5.00 and that was a lot of money for a Pfc. Anyway, I bought the lobster and took it back to the tent and cooked it in a big old can for me and Johnny Akimoto. He was already a bit sick with pain in his stomach but was able to eat a little of the lobster.

We had to keep a few men up north at Leghorn for security reasons. A few of us took turns patrolling the city of Leghorn. From way up north the Germans were shooting what was called Big Bertha which was a big railroad gun. Its shell must have weighed a ton because when they used to shoot it from miles away, we could hear it coming down like a freight train. When it hit the city of Leghorn, that shell plowed through blocks of brick buildings and sounded like a freight train. It was scary!

After patrolling for awhile in Leghorn, we went back to Rosignano and took it easy. In the mornings, we went on hikes to stay in shape and then just fooled around the rest of the day.

After being with the 442nd RCT for a short time, I learned that all the Army chaplains were Christians even though most of us were brought up as Buddhists. The Army didn't have any Buddhist chaplains. There were both Nisei and white Chaplains. Masao Yamada and Hiro Higuchi were the two Nisei chaplains. We had had Chaplain West with us in Basic, and he went overseas with us. Now we used to talk to the merchant marine sailors on the ship and they told us Chaplain West was telling them he really didn't like us. When we got to Italy, no one would go to his service so he asked for and was given a transfer to another unit. Later Chaplain Israel Yost was our 100th Battalion Chaplain, and he was a real nice fellow so everyone would go to his services. Even though most of us were Buddhist, we'd go the Christian services by our Chaplains and sometimes go to the Italian churches in the towns. There are always churches nearby in Italy. In spite of not being Buddhist, I guess we felt something spiritual about going to the Christian services.

While we in the regimental rest area, there was a really sad incident. My friend Johnny Akimoto, and I were sharing a pup tent. Johnny's big brother, Victor, was a platoon sergeant in another company and he and his platoon were up in Leghorn involved in some patrolling actions. Johnny wasn't feeling well so

he went to see the doctor at the aid station. All the doctor gave him for his stomach pains was aspirin. The pains kept up and Johnny went back to the aid station and again all the doctor did was give him some more aspirin. Johnny was really getting fed up with this doctor for not doing anything for him. After about four or five days, he was hurting so bad he could hardly move or eat. One morning, I had to go out on a field training problem and I told Johnny he just had to go back to the doctor, but he refused because the doctor wasn't doing anything for him except giving him aspirin which didn't cure the problem. When I got back that afternoon, Johnny wasn't there so I asked the cooks if they knew where he was. One of the cooks said Johnny hadn't come to breakfast and was so bad they had called for an ambulance which had come and taken him to the aid station. I don't remember how I found out that Johnny had died but maybe one of the cooks knew. Because of bad care by that doctor, Johnny's appendix had ruptured and he died. Everyone was really upset over that! As soon as I found out, I left the area and hitchhiked about 25 miles up to Leghorn to tell Victor about his brother's death. Obviously he was very upset over the whole matter.

Each infantry squad had a BAR man. BAR stands for Browning Automatic Rifle. It is a semiautomatic weapon that had 15 rounds in a magazine. It could be fired single shot or if you flipped a lever you could shoot it like a machine gun. It weighed 22 pounds and was very, very accurate. You couldn't miss with this weapon. The BAR man was the heavy firepower for the squad. Nagao was our BAR gunner. He was another Hilo boy. He was supposed to have an ammunition helper, but he didn't. One day he said, "Hey Shimizu, how about becoming the assistant gunner so you can stick by me all the time?" "Fine," I said. Well, he taught me how to take the BAR apart and clean it and how to fire it. They didn't teach us that in Basic.

After the regimental rest was over, it moved up to the Arno River which was a wide and shallow river in northern Italy. We were on the south side of the levee. Every night some men went across the river on a combat patrol. One soldier named Kiyoshi Sawada was an original member of the 100th Battalion, and he went on a combat patrol every night. He wouldn't take any new or green soldier along so he went out alone. He'd cross the river, raise hell, and come on back. His little brother had been killed and he'd been wounded three times but he wouldn't stop fighting. It was like revenge for him as well as for fighting for the Japanese people. The medics wanted to send him home because he had a piece

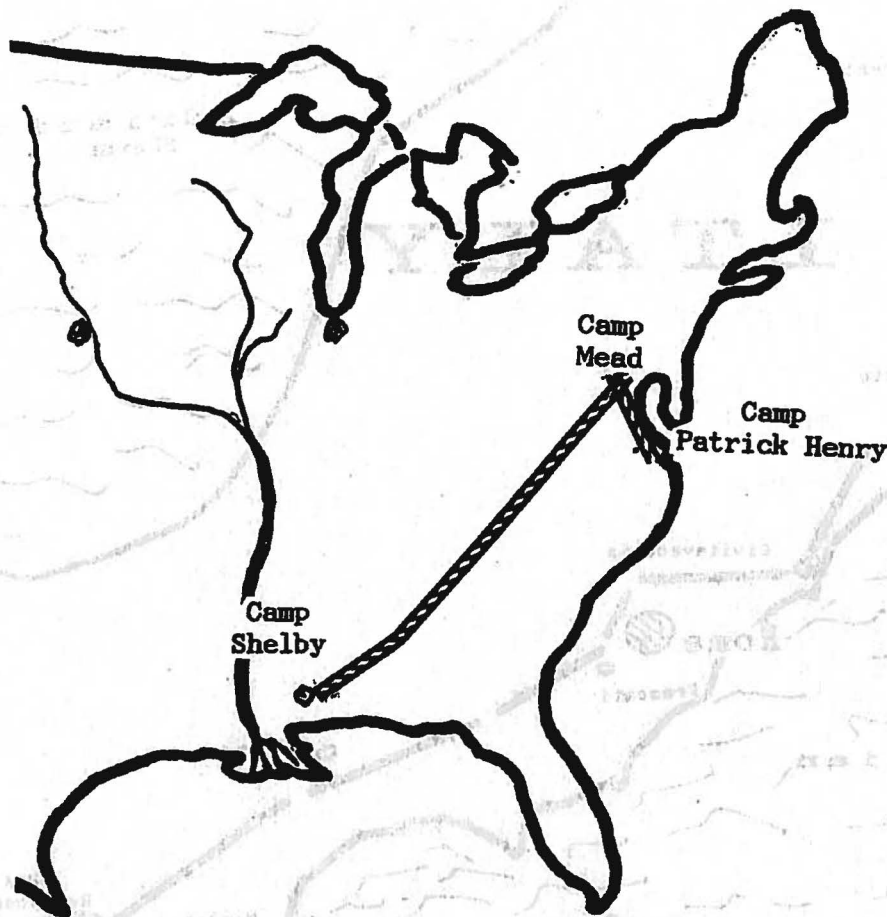
of shrapnel near his heart, but he wouldn't go. He finally got hit in the arm with bullets from a German machine gun pistol and it really tore his arm up. That was his fifth Purple Heart. This time the medics evacuated him back to the States.

Sawada, I think, is the reason I survived and am alive today. He gave me time to learn things like when the bullets get close to you, that someone is shooting at you. He taught me the way bullets sounds like when it whines or cracks, then you know someone is shooting at you. In about a month, I learned that by listening to the artillery shells you could tell whether they were going to hit near us or hit way off somewhere else.

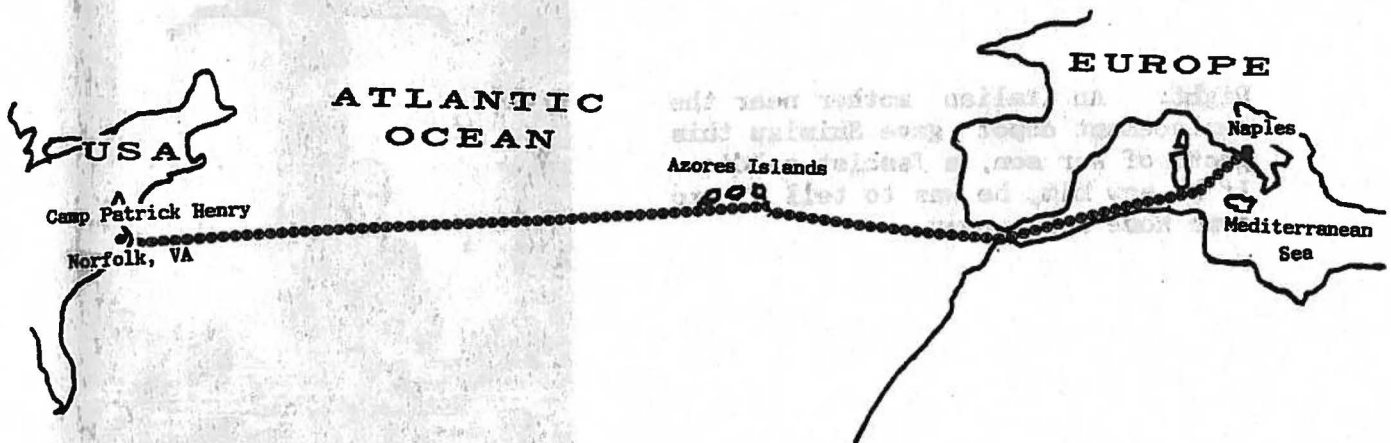
While still on the south side of the Arno River, Nagao, his younger brother whom we called "Bambino" which is Italian for baby, and I were staying in a farm house just at the base of the levee. We were all in the same squad. That levee was as tall as the house, about 20 feet high. We'd just gotten back from an all night watch when a German sniper starting shooting from across the river. He'd shoot, maybe every two minutes. It'd go "Pow" and then it'd be quiet for two minutes and then it'd go "Pow" again. Two minutes later the same thing. That got my buddy's curiosity even though he was an old-timer and one of the original 100th guys. He went outside and stuck his head up over the top of the levee to see what was going on. When he did, that German sniper shot him right in the head. The German must have known about where Nagao was going to poke his head up because as soon as he did, he was shot. It wasn't long before Bambino started yelling, "Somethings happened to my brother!" He ran out and found Nagao laying on the ground dying. Bambino held his brother in his arms until he died. It didn't take long.

After awhile, our unit pushed on and crossed the Arno River and got to Pisa without having to fight. The Germans were pulling back without fighting. We stayed around there for a week or two but didn't get our picture taken by the leaning tower since no one had a camera. Even though there was no fighting, we still didn't get hot meals. We ate 10-in-1 rations. Somebody killed a pig once, but didn't know how to butcher it. Finally some boys whose families had come to Hawaii from Okinawa butchered it. Those guys from Okinawa always knew how to do a pig.

Finally, we were pulled back to Leghorn again to wait to see what headquarters was going to do with us next.



An increment of Nisei replacements for the 100th Battalion left Camp Shelby for Camp Mead and then Camp Patrick Henry.

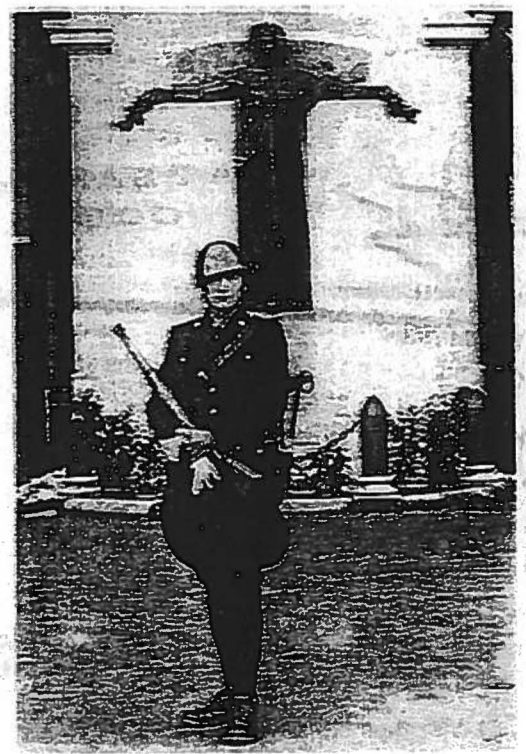


Pfc Shimizu and the other replacements were loaded aboard a troopship at Camp Patrick Henry and then transported by sea to Naples, Italy.

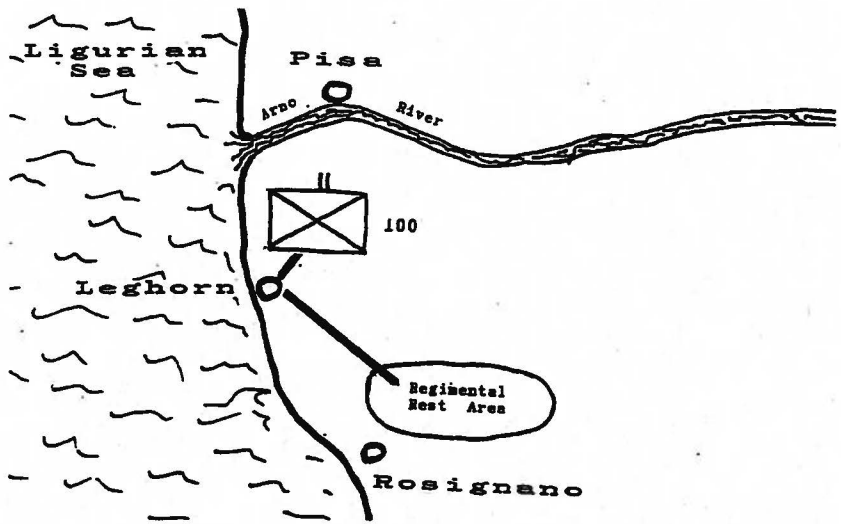


Shimizu and four other Nisei hitchhiked from the replacement depot east of Naples north to the 100th Battalion which they finally found just north of Leghorn.

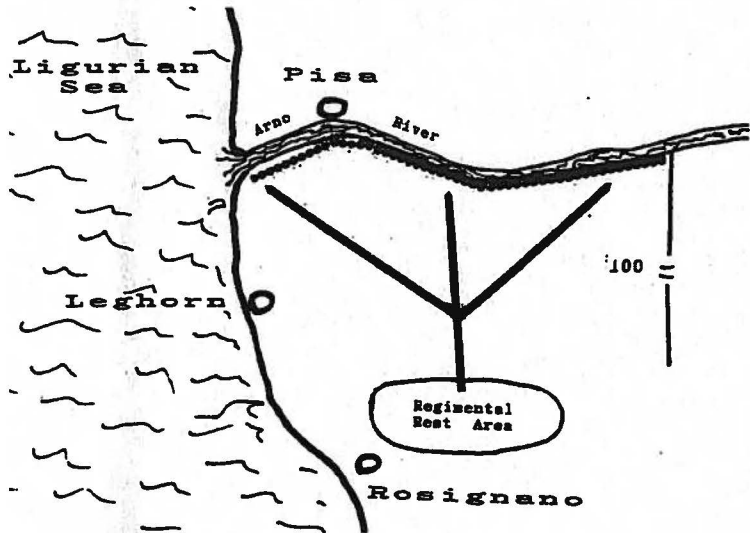
Right: An Italian mother near the replacement depot gave Shimizu this photo of her son, a fascist soldier. If he saw him, he was to tell him to come home right away.



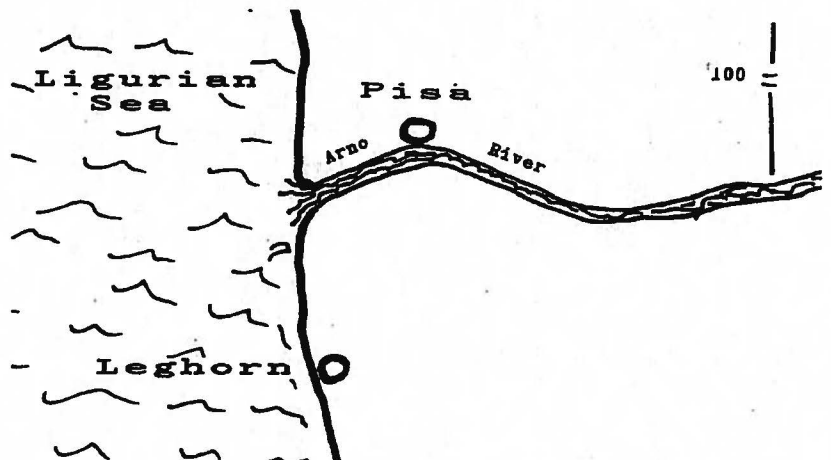
Right: Shimizu and his friends found the 100th Bn north of Leghorn. The unit later moved south to Leghorn and then to the 442nd RCT rest area.



Left: The 100th Bn moved to its assigned sector on the south bank of the Arno River.



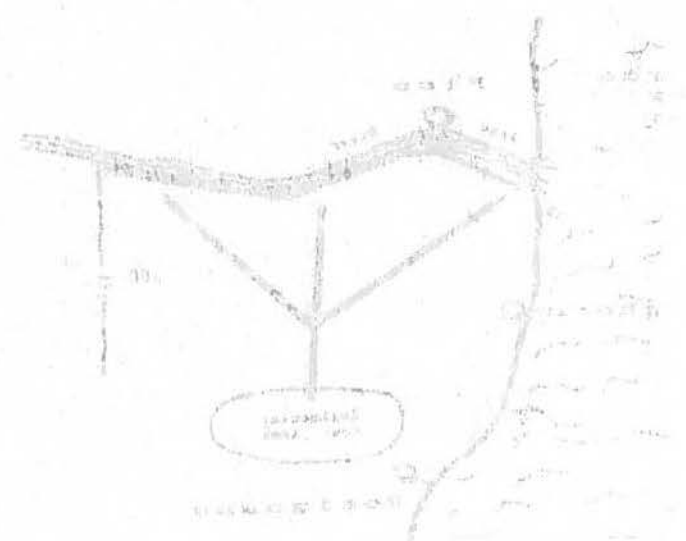
Right: After the German withdrawal from Pisa, the 100th Bn crossed the Arno River and occupied the area around Pisa.





The dam is located at the mouth of the river. The reservoir is located upstream of the dam. The dam is 100 feet high and 50 feet wide. The reservoir is 100 feet long and 50 feet wide. The dam is made of concrete and the reservoir is made of earth.

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