

CHAPTER 5

ON THE FRENCH-ITALIAN BORDER

*** MOVING SOUTH ***

During the first week in November, my platoon loaded on a duece-and-a-half truck and convoyed south, away from the Bruyeres-Biffontaine area where we had been fighting for the past month. It was not a fun trip. It was cold riding in those trucks and the food was cold. At certain times the convoy would stop, everyone would jump out, go to the bathroom along side the road, eat some cold C rations, and jump back in the truck for the next leg of the trip. The hash in the C rations was bad and even worse when it was cold. I hate hash! At least we felt good because we would soon be going back to the States.

What we didn't know at that time was that trains carrying nearly 3,000 Nisei replacements in "forty or eight" railroad cars had left Le Havre in northeastern France. "Forty or eight" cars were old World War I vintage railroad cars designed to carry forty men or eight horses back in the days of the horse cavalry. These trains were heading for Marseille in southern France, somewhat west of where we were heading. Those 3,000 replacements would drastically change our plans!

After a two-and-a half day motor road march, we survivors of the Lost Battalion fight found ourselves traveling in southeastern France. We were told that we were going to replace the 1st Special Service Force along the French-Italian border.

We were still north of Nice when we turned and headed north-eastward to the mountainous town of Isola, some 35 miles north of the coast and situated in the Alpes Maritimes about five miles west of the Italian frontier. Here we would stay for about a week. By now we had a new platoon leader. He was Lieutenant Deluka, a young Italian fellow. He acted like he was just one of the guys and was easy going. We all got along fine with him. It was now early in November of 1944.

***** DEFENDING THE FRENCH-ITALIAN BORDER *****

Isola was a small town in the bottom of a valley. The Germans occupied the high mountain ridges five or six miles east of town but weren't actively trying to take the low lands. Most of the people had gone somewhere else so each squad took over a house to live in. It certainly beat sleeping outside. Sometimes we were sent up the valley on patrol, but we never went much further than about three miles. There was plenty of snow in the valley and as you went higher up, the more whiteout conditions you experienced. A whiteout is a situation where everything seems to blend together and you can't see very far. Of course the Germans up on the high ground could see us through their binoculars so we usually went just so far and came back.

Every now and then the S-2 would want some prisoners to interrogate in order to find out what the Germans were up to. When this happened, a squad would be sent out on a contact patrol, but my squad was never selected for one of these missions. Around the village of Isola, there are many little creeks full of trout. One day when a contact patrol was out, they captured three or four Germans while they were trying to catch trout with their hands. They hadn't expected any Americans to be around so they had stacked their rifles and packs on the banks of the stream and couldn't get to them before the American seized them. Instead of trout for supper, they probably had C rations.

On one other patrol, our guys surprised several Germans and surrounded them in a farm house. This time the Germans fought, but they suffered some wounded and finally surrendered. None of our troops were hurt.

While we were patrolling this mountainous area, the replacements were arriving in Marseille where they would be trained and designated as replacements for specified units.

From Isola, we were ordered south to Menton, a coastal town practically on the French-Italian border. There were two areas that I served in. One was along the road that ran inland from Menton. About one or one-and-a-half miles inland was a check point with a large bunker. Sometimes guys from our squad manned this check point. Tons and tons of dynamite had been laid under the road so if the Germans had ever broken through our lines and were driving on Menton, we could have blown the road up before they got there.

The second area I was at was way up on a ridge. Shortly after arriving in Menton, some of us were sent up to the ridge of the mountain overlooking Italy to replace a unit that was securing the high ground. We took over the down-filled sleeping bags the troops before us had, and moved into their dugouts. These dugouts had been dug by the troops before us. They had no tops but there was canvas that could be pulled across the top if it rained, but mostly the weather was nice, although it could be cool at night. We were so far up in the mountains that the supplies were brought to us by mule train. There were Germans across the border, but the sector was basically quiet.

Christmas came and went, but it wasn't anymore memorable than the one in 1943. It was just another day on the front.

We did have one home town boy killed one night, but not by the Germans. This guy was coming back to his dugout from playing poker most of the night and he kicked one of our own hand grenades. It exploded and killed him. A really stupid way to die!

Speaking of death, let me tell you how lucky I was one day. There was an ammunition area where cases of bullets and hand grenade were stored out among the boulders and tree stumps. There were two guys in our platoon that smoked pipes. These guys were old-timers and should have known better. Well they go out there in the ammo area smoking their pipes and then knock the ashes out of their pipes onto the cases of ammunition. For some reason, the ashes from the pipes got inside the ammo cases and caused a fire. I was in a dugout and the next thing I hear is "Pow, Pow-Whing-Pow, Pow" and I said, "What the hell is going on?" The next thing I heard was these guys yelling, "Shimizu! Shimizu!" I ran out and here was black smoke pouring over the ridge toward the Italian side and ammunition going off. Nobody dared move. I grabbed a jerry can full of water and a can and started running from boulder-to-boulder and stump-to-stump. I got close enough to see the black smoke pouring out and all these things going up. I started pouring water on these cases and luckily put the fires out. I never got scratched. If that isn't a miracle, there's no such thing!

After I got the fire out I went over and really chewed on those two guys. One then said, "It's no skin off my ____." After that, I lost all respect for them and wouldn't have anything to do with them. It was interesting, however, that one of them got hit with schrapnel after we got back to Italy.

One of the funny things that happened while we were up on the ridge had to do with a French artillery unit down in the val-

ley. They had an old World War I gun with big steel wheels. Every once in a while, the Frenchmen would decide to shell the Germans on the other side of the ridge so they'd crank the gun tube up to maximum elevation and start firing. Well the rounds would start landing about 300 yards below us on the side of the mountain. We'd grab whatever we could and start waving it and we'd all yell, "Knock it off!" The French soldiers would stop, then in another couple of days, try it again, and we'd have to wave and yell at them one more time.

The shore line by Menton was interesting as it was curved and right across the Italian border it hooked out a little just before it got to the Italian town of Ventimiglia. The Germans had a big artillery gun over there. I think it must have been on hydraulics as it would fire and then disappear. It never seemed to fire at our position in the ridge, but it did lob a round sometimes into Menton or even Monte Carlo in Monaco located on the coast between Menton and Nice. We could often see Allied fighters, dive bombers and fighter-bombers going after the position but to no avail. Sometimes the navy's battleships or destroyers would try to knock that gun out, but they didn't have any more success than the airplanes.

Sometimes we could get off the ridge and come into Menton. I always looked for a bakery and I found one and made friends with the woman that owned it. It was only she and her husband who ran the store. Part of the GI rations was a meal that came in a bunch of cans called a 10-in-1 ration. We'd had enough of that stuff so we often threw a lot of the cans of food away. Well, these French people had so little, I'd gather up all the 10-in-1s we didn't want and take them down to the woman in the bakery and give them to her for her family. In return, I always got some fresh french bread that was really good.

While we were holding the ridge, the unit started giving us overnight passes to go into Menton and relax. There was a really nice hotel known as *The Princess Isena* and it was conveniently located in the middle of town. The Army paid for it and it didn't cost us anything to stay there. Each room had a nice clean bed with white sheets and the hotel had a pleasant restaurant in which to eat. The Army had also hired the cooks so all we had to do was go sit down and be served good, hot food. Certainly beat living up on the ridge. We heard the Germans had found out that the American GIs were staying at the hotel and occasionally fired a shell over that way just to harass the soldiers. I know one German shell hit the roof of the hotel giving everyone a scare.

It wasn't hard for the German gunners to locate as it was the tallest building in town.

We also found out that the town had public baths. We always made sure we stopped by for a good hot bath. It really beat trying to bathe out of a steel helmet up on the ridge.

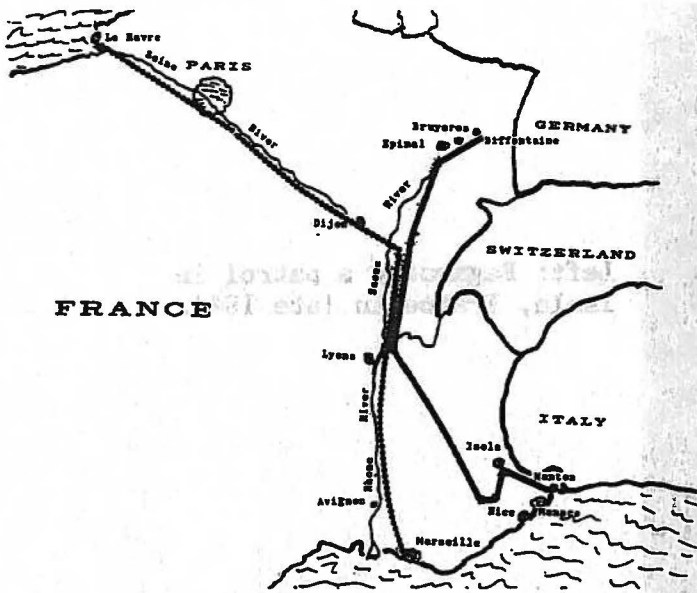
If you could get a pass, you could go over to Nice. It was a good size town and you could get away from the front over there. There were lots of hotels and young females, but most of them were "business girls". Sometimes they'd wake you up while you were trying to sleep in the hotels by knocking on the doors. They could be a real pain sometimes.

In March of 1945, we moved again, this time to Marseille where the replacements were ready to be integrated into what was left of our units. We arrived and pitched our pup tents to live in until we moved again. My buddy, Masao Nakano, shared a tent with me. He was a Hilo boy, and we had gone through Basic together and had also been patients together in the hospital at Naples. I had measles and he had mumps. Buddies to the last.

The regiment stayed at Marseille for a few days before shipping out. Among the replacements I met Tom Fuji, a home town boy from Hawaii. He recognized me immediately and came right over and spoke to me. It was always nice to see somebody from home. I never saw him again in the combat zone but did after the war.

I also had time to go downtown and look for a bakery where I could make friends with the owners and maybe get some special pastry treats.

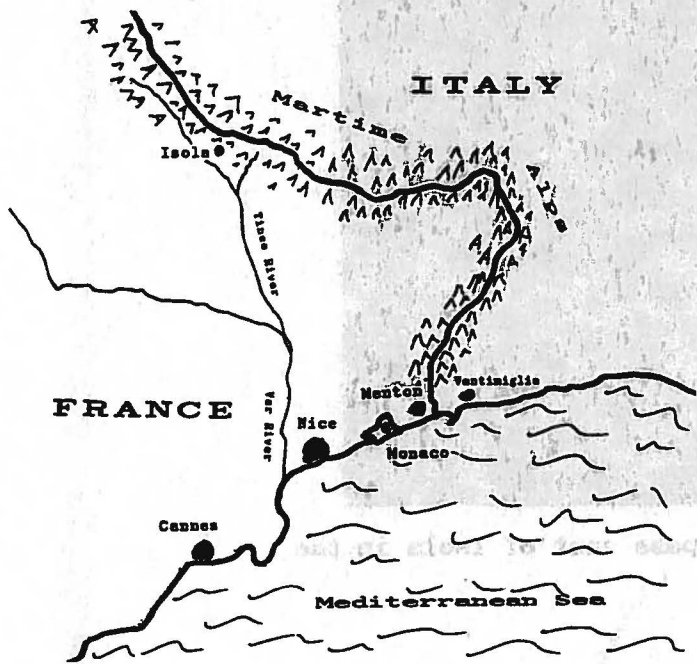
At last the 100th Battalion and the 442nd RCT was back to full strength. They weren't many of us left of the group that came to France from Italy six months before.



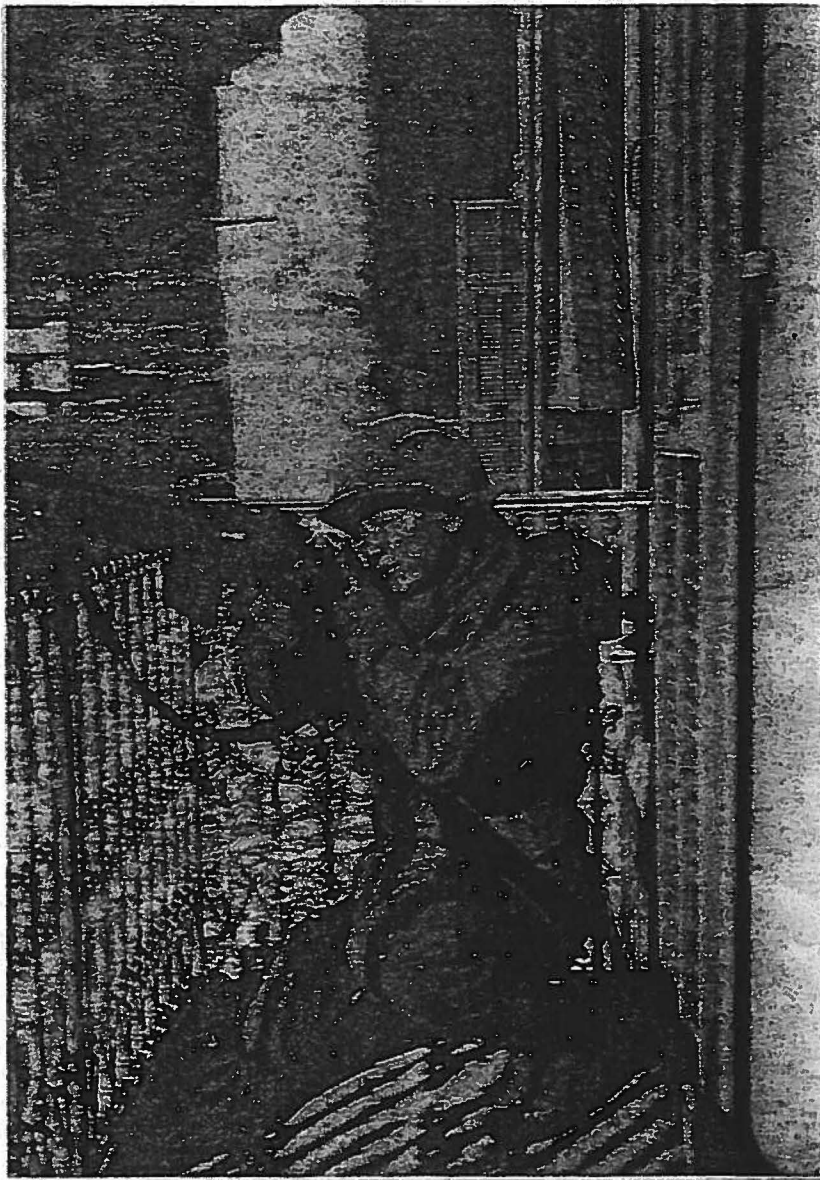
Left: Survivors of the Battle of the Lost Battalion were trucked south to the Isola-Menton area at the same time replacements were being moved by train from Le Havre to Marseille.



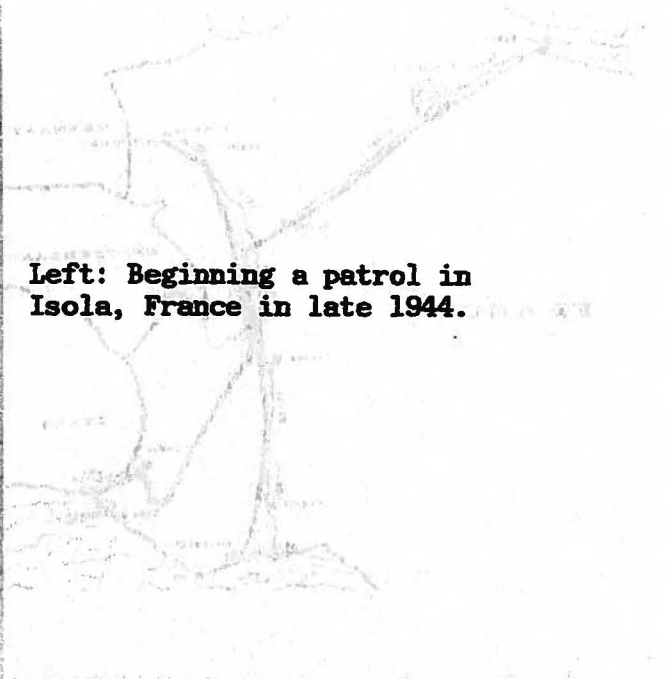
Below: A short meal break of cold C rations when on the way south to Isola and Menton.



Left: The 100th Bn/442nd RCT area of operations along the border between France and Italy.

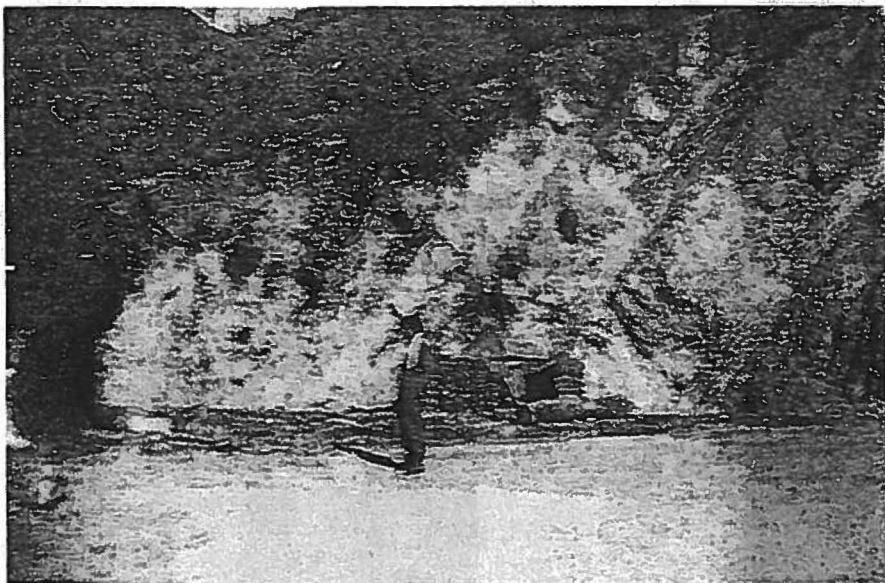


Left: Beginning a patrol in Isola, France in late 1944.



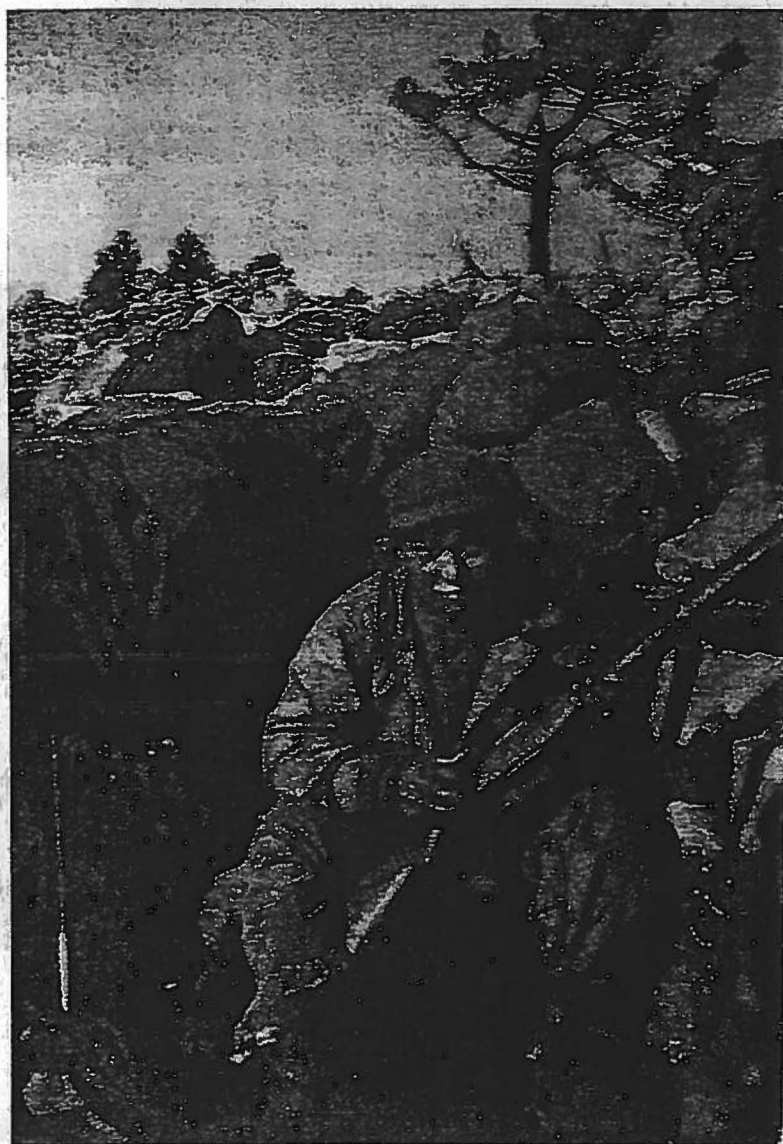
A combat patrol moves up a mountain pass east of Isola in the Maritime Alps.





**Left: Guarding a check-
point on the road leading
north from Menton.**

**Right: Shimizu cleans his BAR
in a mountain bunker on the
French-Italian border.**





Left: Getting ready for a combat patrol on the mountain ridge overlooking Menton, France.

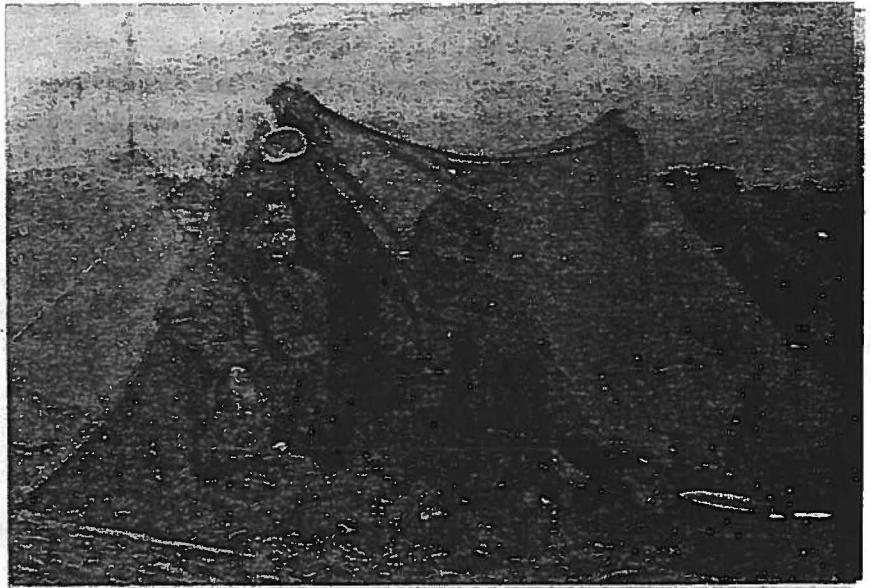
Right: Squad mates of Shimizu take a break while on the ridge-line east of Menton. Murakami holds his rifle while Terasaki looks on.





Left: The woman in the dark coat was an owner of a bakery in Menton where Shimizu would trade canned Army rations for fresh bread.

Below: Shimizu and his friend Masao Nakano relax by their pup tent when bivouaced near Marseille prior to their deployment to Italy.



Right: Shimizu and his squad stayed in the home of Renaldo Vennucci for a few days while in Carrara, Italy.



The words in the left column are
of a party in the right column
and are not to be taken for
granted.

Below: Britain and the United States
and their part in the world
prior to their departure to Italy.



Right: Britain and the United States
in the face of the world
in the days of the world.

