



HISTORY

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BELVEDERE

In May 1944, while the [100th Infantry Battalion](#) fought from [Anzio](#) to Rome, the [442nd Regimental Combat Team](#) sailed from the United States to Italy. The 442nd landed at the bombed-out harbor of Naples and then sailed north to Anzio. On June 10, the 442nd joined up with the 100th at Civitavecchia, a coastal town 40 miles northwest of Rome.

The men of the 442nd had heard about the 100th Battalion and their excellent combat record. Because the 442nd had one of the best training records back in the states, the newcomers were anxious to prove themselves in battle. On June 26, 1944, they got their chance. Their objective was the town of Belvedere. A crack SS motorized battalion held the high ground and dominated the vital road to Sassetta. The 100th Battalion was kept in reserve, and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions moved out.

Due to communication problems, F Company attacked an hour earlier than the rest of the companies. Suddenly, boom! A German tiger tank, mounted with an 88 gun, fired on the men. The 88s were powerful. They could blast an airplane or follow a single soldier across a field and nail him. The *Nisei* sought cover as best they could but the 88 wounded many of their buddies.

[Private Kiyoshi Muranaga](#) and his platoon were in an exposed position on a hill. Manning a 60 mm mortar alone, Muranaga produced such accurate fire that the tank withdrew. He was killed in action, but his bravery saved many F Company men. He was awarded a [Distinguished Service Cross](#), which was later upgraded (June 2000) to a [Medal of Honor](#).

The Germans also pinned down E, G and L Companies for most of the day. I and K Companies were in trouble, too. The 442nd's Service and Cannon Companies came under heavy fire, however the Cannon Company was able to destroy two German tanks.

Like Muranaga, the men fought with valor and survived on instinct. Their "book" learning back in the states could not prepare them for the harsh battle realities in Europe. They quickly learned to distinguish the sounds of enemy weapons. The German machine guns were faster and their rifles were higher pitched. The *Nisei* knew to watch out for booby traps when they took over a German trench. The battle-hardened men of the 100th had given them these and other tips in the two weeks before the battle.

That afternoon, the 100th went into action. The 100th quickly developed an efficient plan. The men circled wide to the north of Belvedere. C Company blocked the entrance to the town. A Company blocked the exit. B Company was on the high ground, above the Germans who were blasting the 2nd Battalion. B Company launched a surprise attack on the German's exposed east flank. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions were freed. The speed and lethal efficiency of the 100th's drive disrupted the entire German battalion. As the Germans fled in disorder, C Company drove them toward A Company's trap.

In three hours, the men in the 100th seized a town, and destroyed an entire SS Battalion. They killed 178 enemy soldiers, wounded 20, captured 73; while suffering only four dead and seven wounded. They captured 19 jeeps, 13 motorcycles, two amphibious jeeps, eight trucks, two tanks and some artillery pieces. For this, the 100th Battalion earned a [Presidential Unit Citation](#), an award given a unit that accomplishes its mission with the same heroism as an individual who earns a Distinguished Service Cross.

In the months to come, the 100th would earn more Presidential Unit Citations. But now, it was part of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, an all-Japanese-American unit lead primarily by Caucasian officers. The team included a field artillery battalion (the [522nd](#)) a combat engineer company (the [232nd](#)), an antitank company, a cannon company, a medical detachment, a service company, headquarters companies, the Army ground force band (206th) and three infantry battalions, (the 100th, 2nd and 3rd). In recognition of its outstanding record, General Ryder allowed the 100th Battalion to retain its numerical designation, instead of becoming the 1st Battalion in the 442nd.

All the *Nisei*, both 100th and 442nd, together were forming the unit that would later become the most decorated in U.S. military history for its size and length of service.

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