



## HISTORY

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#### "CHAMPAGNE CAMPAIGN"

In November 1944, the men of the [442nd Regimental Combat Team](#) left the cold dark forests of death in eastern France and headed south to the sunny French Riviera. Less than half its strength, the 442nd had lost so many men that it couldn't be used as a regiment-sized force. Nearly 2,000 wounded [Nisei](#) were lying in hospitals all around England, Italy and France.

The *Nisei* needed replacements, and they needed rest. Eventually 265 men recuperated from their wounds and returned to the 442nd. Another 1,214 replacements, mostly draftees from the mainland, arrived and received training.

The regiment spent the next four months in the Maritime Alps and the French Riviera. After the Vosges, this assignment seemed easy - guard a roughly 12-mile stretch of the French-Italian border and keep the enemy from breaking through to the southern coast of France.

The [100th Battalion](#) moved to Menton, a coastal town near Monaco. Soldiers from the 2nd and 3rd Battalions took up defensive positions in the nearby hills - close to the town of Sospel and the ski resort of Peira Cava. The men had to trudge across snowy slopes to remote outposts, but they stayed in dry dugouts that were much more comfortable than those in the Vosges Mountains. The men received their supplies of canned meat and other items by mule train because army vehicles couldn't make it up the steep, winding, trails. The Maritime Alps was a comparatively quiet front. Soldiers on patrol sometimes met sniper fire. The Germans shelled almost daily, and the 442nd's Cannon Company and the [522nd Field Artillery Battalion](#) returned fire.

In December, during the Battle of the Bulge, when the Germans broke through Allied defenses at Ardennes, the French-Italian border was tense. The *Nisei* were told to watch out for spies, saboteurs and German paratroopers dressed in American uniforms. Although they didn't see any paratroopers, they did capture an enemy company of 75 and a group of Italian Fascists disguised in women's clothes.

One day, a Japanese-American soldier was on guard duty in the hills overlooking the harbor at Menton. He spotted what looked like a big fish stuck near a sandbar. He called down, and some other *Nisei* investigated. Everyone was hoping for some sashimi (raw fish). Instead, the "big fish" turned out to be a one-man German submarine. The driver had mistaken Menton for a harbor five miles away in Italy. The driver motioned for the Japanese American soldier to push him off the sandbar. The *Nisei* pointed his Tommy gun and motioned for the German to surrender. Eventually the [232nd Combat Engineer Company](#) pulled the sub ashore and sent it to the Navy. It was the only time in military history that the Navy received a captured submarine from the Army.

The men called their time in Southern France "the Champagne Campaign," because of the availability of wine, women and song. They enjoyed the nightclubs, music and dancing in the nearby French towns. The men said that Nice was nice and was practically untouched by shelling. Monaco was supposed to be off-limits, but some soldiers

managed to visit the casinos. A few lucky officers secured 18-day passes to Paris.

Many French villagers invited the friendly, generous and courteous *Nisei* into their homes for dinner. They formed lasting friendships - some even turned into marriages. I Company held a Christmas party. They decorated a Christmas tree, sang carols accompanied by their guitars and ukuleles and gave candy to the children.

But even in relatively peaceful Southern France, there was still war. On November 30, three K Company men, were sunbathing in a courtyard. Suddenly, a German tank fired from the hillside on the Italian border. Two men died and the third lost both legs.

On January 20, 1945, C Company discovered enemy troops hiding in a hunting shack. Fourteen prisoners were taken; however one *Nisei* died of wounds during the raid.

Two men from G Company went through an area where previous American forces had laid mines that weren't yet cleared. They were carrying a wounded officer on a litter when they tripped a mine. Both died instantly. An L Company man was out on patrol and stepped on a mine. He lost a leg and his buddy behind him died.

For the four months from November 21, 1944 to March 17, 1945, 11 men died, two were reported missing, 96 were wounded and six others were injured in non-combat casualties.

In early March, the men heard rumors that the regiment would be moving out to a top-secret destination. Adding to the mystery were orders for the 522nd to separate from the regiment and head north to help the 7th Army with its push into Germany.

On March 23, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (minus the 522nd) sailed from the port of Marseille to an unknown destination.