



HISTORY

>> Historical Information

LANDING IN ITALY

AFRICA - SALERNO - VOLTURNO

The [100th Infantry Battalion](#) sailed from America and arrived in Oran, North Africa on September 2, 1943. The 100th became part of the 133rd Regiment, which was part of the 34th Division. The men in 34th welcomed the newcomers, and they trained them on the latest combat tactics. During the next few months, the Japanese American and Caucasian soldiers formed life-long friendships as they bravely fought up the boot of Italy.

On September 19, the 34th Division, including the 100th, sailed from North Africa and landed southeast of Naples.

The men of the 100th were eager to fight, puzzling many [Allied](#) commanders and war correspondents. The [Nisei](#)'s eagerness was due to their need to bring honor to their families and prove their loyalty to America. Finally, on September 29, 1943, more than 15 months after they sailed from Honolulu, the men of the 100th faced their first battle.

The War Department described their first week of combat: "While acting as advance guard...the battalion advanced 15 miles in 24 hours, operating day and night in the face of strong enemy resistance and over difficult terrain...although suffering casualties, their advance continued. . . all weapons were used with complete assurance. . . " The 100th had accomplished its first major mission, the capture of Benevento, an important rail center and road intersection.

As the Allies continued to push the enemy north, they crossed the twisting, turning Volturno River in three different places. At the crossings, the Germans always held the high ground, shooting down on the wet GIs who struggled through the swift currents, clambered up the slippery banks, and once on dry land were finally able to shoot back.

At the second Volturno River crossing, the water was over the heads of some of the shorter men. They faced minefields, fortified machine gun nests, artillery fire and "screaming meemies" - the dreaded German rocket launchers.

On November 3 the 100th crossed the Volturno River for the third time. On the ground the [Nisei](#) soldiers fought the heavily entrenched enemy. From the air the German Luftwaffe (airforce) strafed the [Nisei](#), wounding 12 men.

The next day, was the first "banzai charge." A sergeant mistakenly heard that one of the most respected officers in the battalion was wounded or captured. The sergeant ordered his platoon to fix bayonets and charge. The men yelled "banzai" and swarmed the area, a move that later in the war would be used again to rescue a [lost battalion](#).

The "banzai charge" occurred because of the men's concern for each other. The "[Buddhaheads](#)" had known each other since they were children. No other military unit had bonds this close. They never left a man behind. Never.

In the first month and half, there were many examples of bravery in combat. A private silenced an enemy machine gun and freed his pinned-down platoon. He killed the entire German crew, but was mortally wounded. A sergeant advancing on an enemy machine gun was hit by shrapnel, but he fought off death long enough to tell others of the location of the gun. Another private waited until an enemy tank was dangerously close, then he blasted it with bazooka shots and single-handedly knocked it out. These three men earned the [Distinguished Service Cross](#), the second highest honor the military bestows.

By the time they were relieved on November 11, the men of the 100th had earned 19 Silver Stars. But the casualties were high. Eighteen officers and 239 enlisted men were wounded. Three officers and 75 enlisted men died.

The 100th Battalion had earned a reputation as superb soldiers. They also learned to respect the enemy. The Germans were well-trained and well-equipped. They also built strong defenses, like the Gustav Line at [Cassino](#) - the 100th's next objective.

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