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History - 3rd Bn - 331st Inf Regt

Jun-Dec 44

1944

H E A D Q U A R T E R S
Third Battalion, 331st Infantry
APO 83, U.S. Army

BATTALION HISTORY

FOREWORD

On D plus twelve the Third Battalion, 331st Infantry after a fast hectic time in a marshalling area, near South Hampton, England, boarded ship enroute to France. During this trip, the channal was extremely rough and the ships were forced to lay off Omaha beach until D plus 19 before we could disembark. It was quite a relief to get back on land. However, it gave us our first realization of war as we marched off the beach and saw the large cemetery that was started just eighteen days before. We assembled in a large field near the beach and then marched to an area one half mile south of Bricqueville. After spending the night in this location we moved south of Carentan near Meautis to relieve the 101st Airborne Division. The relief was accomplished by 1830 on 27 June 1944. The day by day history of the organization follows.

27 June - During the remainder of the night the troops remained fairly quiet. A few German patrols were seen and the enemy sent up a few flares. Some of the boys became a little trigger happy, but aside from that, nothing eventful took place.

28 June - The Germans no doubt realized that they were faced with green troops, so they began sending out numerous combat patrols to feel us out. At exactly 1433 the first German was reported shot about 25 yards in front of the OPL of L Company. He was brought in and died while enroute to the Aid Station. Throughout the day we received quite a few rounds of enemy artillery. They finally got "zeroed in" on a church steeple we were using for an C.P. No casualties were suffered but the C.P. was moved to another position. During the whole day of fighting the entire battalion had seven casualties, the first one being an aid man out of L company.

29 June - As we had some enemy activity behind our OPL last night it was thought advisable to evacuate all civilians from the area to eliminate any possibility of their participating or aiding the enemy. During the day we accomplished the evacuation but in doing so L company discovered a young lady who had been killed by enemy mortar fire. Her family would not leave until they saw her buried, so Chaplain Cossette gave the last rites for the family in the Battalion C.P. The girls body was buried in the family plot by civilians and the C.I.C.

The first big accident accured today then K Company was passing out ammunition to a platoon that was going to occupy the OPL. A rifle grenade was accidentally dropped wounding 13 men, seven of which were evacuated. Throughout the day we were kept on the alert and the enemy fired mortars and artillery to let us know they were still present. One lesson learned in the days action when a sentry on post heard movement toward his position and being green, as we all were, shouted a challenge. This was answered by a burst of fire from a machine pistol, hitting him in the back and killing him.

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29 June (cont'd. This incident was told to all personnel so that everyone would profit by this experience. They began to realize that if they remained in the shadows and remained quiet that they had a distinct advantage over anyone approaching their position.

30 June - Today was payday, but the men had very little interest in receiving their pay. Their minds were occupied with the task before them. However the agents finance began paying and some of the men again had money in their pockets. The tactical situation remained somewhat the same as the previous day.

) Battalion History, 3rd Bn., 331st Infantry, continued)

1st, 2nd and 3rd July - During these days, practically the same things took place. We sent out patrols and so did the enemy. Our patrols were not very successful, but we were gaining very important experience. Also plans were being made for a large scale attack.

4 July - This was the day battalion put on their first attack. A terrific artillery barrage was laid down at 0425. It was the first time any of us had heard anything of its equal. This barrage was lifted at 0435 and the attack was launched with L Company on the right and K Company on the left, I Company in reserve. Fog and smoke from the artillery barrage was hanging low, observation of the enemy was poor and for the first hour and a half the advance was quite rapid. However at 0525 the fog lifted and the enemy started laying in everything they had, pinning Company L and K down. The cooks and bakers and butchers occupying the enemy positions inflicted heavy casualties on both companies. At 0800 the tanks arrived and the attack was again launched only to be stopped the second time. Colonel Shuster was wounded at 0937 and by VOOO Regiment, command by Colonel Long after the death of Colonel Barndollar, Major Brown assumed command. At 1100 following another artillery barrage, preparations were made and the attack launched with Company I following light tanks, passing through Company L and Company K on the left. Company L to return to Battalion Reserve. This attack also stopped short and the battalion was told to hold positions now occupied and await further orders. Casualties during the day were heavy.

5 July - During this day our positions now held were consolidated after another unsuccessful stab at the enemy. Three prisoners were taken and it was learned that they were from the Second SS Panzer Division, Das Reich, 6 Parachute Regiment.

6 July - On the 6th the First Battalion with Company L attached had launched an attack driving ahead some 1000 yards, suffered heavy casualties, and were forced back to their original positions. Colonel Whitcomb, Regimental Commander, alerted us to move to support the First Battalion. Our present position was to be taken over by Second Battalion. This relief was accomplished by approximately 1630 and the Battalion was moved to the rear of First Battalion, ready to attack. At that time only a few officers of First Battalion remained. An order was issued to attack at 2050 to retake the ground lost. The First Battalion under Lt. Moore on the right, Strength less than a company, Third Battalion consisting of Company L and Company I, together about the strength of one company, on the left, with spare parts of Company K and the First Battalion in Reserve, with what was left of Company M and Company K supporting. The attack was launched at 2015 supported by tanks and before dark the ground was retaken and consolidated. The Second Battalion was to remain in Regimental Reserve holding defensive positions that we had previously turned over.

7 July - Early this morning we received word that 22nd Infantry, 4th Division was to pass through our position and further the attack at 0835. We were to pull back into an assembly area 1000 yards north west of La Sadolterie, at the same time we were alerted to be ready to move up on line on the 4th Divisions flank, with mission of seizing St. Emy. When the 4th Division fresh from capture of Cherbourg, started up to our position many remarks were made to our men that didn't set too good, such as "Thank God for the Navy, We heard you were so hot, ect. and now we have to fight your battles".

July
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7 July (cont.) Many men of the Battalion were also let down as we had suffered heavy casualties and not gained too much ground. However, when the 4th and tanks were in position and the attack was launched it was a different story. Seconds after this, all tanks were blazing from enemy 88 fire. The 4th was pinned down and couldn't move forward. Although it was tough seeing another unit unable to move forward, confidence and pride in our own outfit was boosted a 100%. Several men remarked that a hot outfit like the 4th couldn't move forward, that we hadn't done so badly after all. Lt. Colonel Bowen from 329th Infantry assumed command 331st Regiment on this day.

8 July - The Regiment attack at 0945 on the 4th Divisions left flank Third Battalion in Regimental Reserve. Darkness found the leading unit near Oulot.

9 July - At 0839 the following morning, the attack was resumed with Third Battalion attacking on the left, Second Battalion on the right. By 0930 the initial objective was reached. Highway No. 4 leading from St Eny to Bois Grimot. The Third Battalion reached the highway but hit heavy resistance when trying to cross highway and at 1700 were held up near the cross roads at Bois Grimot and heavy casualties were received. A defensive position was taken up to hold for the night to be followed by an attack the following morning. Prisoners taken were from the 37th and 38th Panzer Grenadier Regiments. Colonel Bender assumed command of the 331st Regiment.

10 July - Somehow the attack was delayed and consolidation of defensive position was continued. At approximately 2400 the enemy launched a strong counter attack with rifle men supported by tanks. After a fierce hand grenade battle over hedgerows, the Battalion fell back to the hedgerow to the immediate rear of their positions and dug in. Lt. Colonel Faber of the Second Battalion was killed in St Eny in one of the heaviest artillery barrages yet sent over by the Germans on this day.

11 July - The Regiment again attacked with Third Battalion on the right, First Battalion on the left and second Battalion, now in St. Eny, reverting to Regimental reserve, after the 329th Infantry passes through. The Regimental mission was to capture Marcheseux. At 0930, Colonel Bender was killed when an enemy tank got a direct hit on his jeep as he was traveling east on highway No. 4, west of St. Eny. The attack was launched. The enemy well dug in, supported by tanks, was so located as to cover all avenues of approach with cross fire from machine guns. The attack bogged down after the Battalion had reached highway No. 4. Several attacks followed during the day, trying to cross the road, but each time they were stopped. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the Battalion and darkness found the MLR located on north side of road. Patrols were sent out during the night to locate enemy positions also to determine the depth of stream to the south. Although patrols sent out by us did not accomplish their mission they did locate some of the enemy positions and also found many more enemy than had previously been reported holding the position.

12 July - Following an artillery preparation, the attack again jumped off, I Company on left, L Company on right, K Company in reserve. L Company succeeded in crossing the road but were stopped by intense MG fire from tanks as they reached the hedgerows on the south side. I Company was held up by MG fire from tanks and sent bazooka teams forward to neutralize them. However, many bazooka teams were knocked out, as they were working their way forward to get into position. The terrain was such as to make the use of TD's which were attached, and the 57mm A.T. guns of Battalion, useless. The tank platoon that was to support our

12 July (cont.) - attack that morning, a disaster as they were pulling into position. Three were knocked out by enemy 88, the other two withdrew. K Company was committed on left flank. They too ran into withering MG fire and were stopped. Approximately 1000, Lt. Colonel Cheal assumed command of the Battalion, again the attack was resumed, it was more like hitting your head on a stone wall and each attack brought heavy casualties to the Battalion.

13 July and 14 July - The attack was resumed and was progressing with Second Battalion and Third Battalion crossing the swamp south of Bois Grimot. Third Battalion reached a point about 1000 yards south of Chateau D'Auxais. As we neared our objective, the Germans launched a fierce counter attack supported by tanks. They struck at the center of the battalion front and split the battalion. Approximately 100 men and six officers including the artillery liaison officer, remained in the woods on the right flank of their previous line of departure, Chateau D'Auxais, where hasty defense was set up, using Headquarters personnel and stragglers to repulse the counter attack. Patrols were sent out by battalion in woods to gain contact, however it was discovered that the Second Battalion, on our left and the 329th on our right was stopped and unable to take their objectives, which left us completely surrounded by the enemy. Continued contact was maintained with Division by use of the artillery radio which we kept working with batteries and parts from infantry SCR 300, which we had on hand. A strong defense was set up and although we were shelled constantly by cruising tanks and enemy artillery, each attempt the Germans made to send patrols into the position was repulsed and heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy by our observer and control of artillery fire. Only 1 meal of K rations was on the individual and as water was also low, canteens were filled from a small dirty moss covered water hole. Four Halazone tablets were used in each canteen and although the water was nasty tasting at least it was wet. All attempts to bring food in were unsuccessful.

15 July - The 329th again attacked on our right flank. This time they were successful in contacting us and after two and one half days and two nights in the woods we were relieved. Seventeen casualties were inflicted on the Battalion while in the woods and no one was killed. The battalion was then placed back of Chateau D'Auszis to reorganize and to remain in Regimental Reserve. The strength of the battalion was greatly reduced, however, replacements had been joining the unit each hour.

16th, 17th, 18th and 19th July - After the First Battalion had attack La Verdi peninsula and had been driven back, suffering heavy casualties, the Third Battalion was ordered to attack. Originally it was planned to attack with Company "I" and Company "K" going south across causeway with "L" Company plus attachments and motorized, to attack the flank by moving down the Tribilian and cross the swamps on the left flank however patrols proved that the crossing was impossible without boats or bridge and the attack was made with I and K Company by fire from Company M. L Company remained in reserve in their present position. The battalion crossed the causeway only to have the bridge blown out behind them by enemy artillery fire. A strong enemy counter attack was launched against the battalion's positions, now on the first objective, about 500 yards south. Company L was alerted to move out. By the time they arrived, what was left of I and K Companies were returning to the rear and L Company supported by Division Reconnaissance Troop established a defensive position on the north bank of the peninsula. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the battalion, including Lt. Colonel Cheal listed as MIA.

16th, 17th, 18th and 19th July (Cont'd) Upon a check of the battalion on the 21st, after K and L Companies had been placed in reserve to reorganize near Chateau D'Auxais, it was found to have approximately 147 EM left, plus Major Brown, EX.O. then acting Battalion Commander, Captain Tyrrell S-3, Lt. Mussulman S-4, Lt. May S-1, Lt. Waller T.O., Lt. Halcomb Comm. O., Lt. Ungren Ex.O. of Company L. Lt. Kahapea Company L., Lt. Bradley Company L., and Lt. Dupre Company L.

21st, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th July - Company L remained on defensive while Companies I, K and M were located in Regimental Reserve, still near Chateau D'Auxais. During this time replacements were again received and trained. Colonel Dudley assumed command of the Battalion on the 24th of July. July 25th the VII Corp on our left launched a coordinated attack preceded by an estimated 1000 plane bombardment. Dropping some 3000 tons of bombs. It was the first time any of us had been seen any large scale bombing. The sight was beautiful and the morale of every man in the battalion was greatly lifted.

25 July - On the 27th the Battalion was making reconnaissance to relieve the first Battalion at the same time a reconnaissance patrol was sent across the causeway to the La Varde peninsula. It was found that the peninsula was lightly held. The information received from the patrol influenced the action of the Regiment for that night the Battalion moved back across the causeway on to the La Varde peninsula. There were not many of the original men or officers left to appreciate the victory. It was this night that the Battalion aid station was bombed. Jerry bombs wrecked the ambulance and knocked out about half of the building where the aid station was located, into a pile of dust, fortunately there were no casualties. The Battalion C.P. was established at Marches-leux, on the morning of the 28th. The Germans were falling back rapidly making it difficult to maintain contact.

28 July - On the evening of the 28th of July the new C.P. was opened in the vicinity of La Cardonniere, west of Marigny, after a long foot movement in pursuit of the enemy which was retreating rapidly to the south. From this date until 3rd of August 1944 the Battalion remained in this area. All available time was spent on resupply, training and general reorganization. During this period Jerry aircraft was more active than we had seen them at any other time. Each night he would come over, light up the sky with flares and drop a few bombs. No casualties in the Battalion but several men from other elements in the combat team were killed. On the second day of August, the Battalion saw their first special service show in France. Quite a novelty. Everyone enjoyed the show. We also had movies in a barn and opportunity to take a shower while in this area.

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H. E. A. D. Q. U. A. R. T. E. R. S.
3rd Battalion 331st Infantry
A.P.O. 83 U.S. Army

Subject: Battalion History.

3rd August- At dark the evening of the 3rd of August we closed the C.P. and started a long motor movement to the south. It was a bright moonlight night and we were able to see the havoc done by our aircraft, and armor as it cleared its path through Coutance and avaranches. Few of us realized that night how narrow a gap we went through south of Avaranches as we passed on to the Brittany Peninsula.

4th August- At 0830 on the 4th of August we established our new C.P. in the vicinity of Coruseray, just east of Pontorson. Everyone was very tired after our all nights ride and the Battalion minus necessary guards, went to sleep. At noon we woke up and prepared to move on orders to new area in vicinity of Dol-De-Bretagne. Just before dark on the 4th we opened our second C.P. of the day near Dol. Colonel Dudley, members of the staff, and the Company Commanders went up to Mont-Dol and looked over terrain to the west. In the distance lay St. Malo, and we realized what our eventual mission would be. After dark we passed elements of the 330th Infantry and went into an assembly area, prepared to jump off the next morning toward La Fresnais. A patrol from I company led by Lt. Ebright was sent to La Fresnia during the night.

5th August- The patrol reported back by radio at 0500 that La Fresnia was cleared and the Battalion jumped off at 0600. About 1100 leading elements had crossed the second canal west of La Fresnia and contact was made with the Jerries. Here the Battalion was held up all day with only a slight advance. A number of casualties were inflicted by enemy machine gun fire as we had made attempts to get the Battalion across the canal. The Germans had blown the bridge and Corps and Division engineers were unable to build the bridge across because of heavy small arms fire and mortar fire. Finally under the cover of darkness the Battalion was able to cross the canal in K company's sector. Rubber boats were used to get across the A.T ditch. Company K had jumped off in an assault on the high ground to their front and were stopped only when they jumped right into a deep A.T. ditch which had been flooded. Meanwhile the advance was continued to the important high ground to our front and we took the town of La Goussiere, Limany railway junction and St, Melvir De Ordes.

6th August- The morning of the 6th of August we established our C.P. at Limonay. In the town we experienced our first real friendly treatment by the civilians. They threw flowers at us and on our vehicles and gave us many fresh eggs. It was the first outward appreciation shown us and it was good to know that they were glad we had come. During the previous night we captured a large number of enemy after the civilians helped us by telling us where the Germans were hiding. Prior to dark on the 6th the Battalion moved north and west to a place about four miles west of St Meloir-des-Ordes. Here we established our OP. in a large chateau which was entirely filled with refugees from St. Malo, at this time the Battalion reverted to Division Reserve.

Aug
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7th August- About 1700 on the 7th we were given orders to prepare to move forward in the sector of the 330th Infantry and jump off on the attack against Parame, a western suburb of St. Malo. We were attached to the 330th. We made necessary reconnaissance and moved up that night, to the outskirts of Parame but were unable to jump off because of darkness. We spent a hectic night waiting for dawn. Among other things we ran extremely dense mine field and suffered a few casualties from long range M.G. fire and harrasing artillery fire which fell at intervals at night.

8th August- At 0800 on the 8th of August, the Battalion jumped off attacking I, K, and L in columns. This proved to be one of the fastest moving, most successful attacks we had made. By 0835 our leading elements had taken their initial objective with the help of a terrific artillery barrage. In the advance the bulk of K company had side-slipped to the east and ran into stiff resistance from pillboxes and dug in machine gun positions. Capt. Croft was wounded at this time attempting to work his company through these positions. On orders from the C.O. 330th we continued the attack I company toward St. Malo on the west and K company toward the ocean. Good progress was made the remainder of the day and nightfall found us with all of Parame and part of St. Malo under our control. The fighting during the day was carried on under a steady barrage of artillery coming and going. We learned fast and found it was necessary to search out every house (usually by kicking down the door and tossing a grenade inside) before we could safely say we had taken part of the town. This day the Battalion had taken more prisoners than the whole division had in all the previous days of battle. It was a tough fight but some compared with the hedgerows of Normandy and considering our success for the day our casualties were relatively light.

9th August- On the morning of the 9th, still attached to the 330th Inf., we jumped off towards St. Malo with I company on the left and K company on the right. During the night TD-S and tanks had come up in support of our attack, and they eventually proved very helpful to us, for the first time. We lost two vehicles on the mine field we had passed through the night before. The C.P. and other installations moved into Parame that morning. Good progress was made in the attack and as the front narrowed K company was pinched out and L company passed through I company to continue the attack. During the whole day a steady flow of prisoners, including many prostitutes who were traveling with the Nazis came streaming back to the P.W. cage. Time and time again the leading elements ran into pillboxes which had to be eliminated. This was done with much help from the T.D. 's. By 1700, L company reached the causeway leading to the old fortress city of St. Malo. Here operations temporarily ceased as some "mucklehead" had sent up the psychological warfare team with a loud speaker. The idea was to talk to Jerry over the loudspeaker and convince him to surrender. Now these German soldiers weren't all SS troops but there is many a man will tell you they sure fought like hell for a bunch of cooks and bakers, and as we found out, they had no intentions of surrendering yet. All the time the loud speakers were blaring and we were under strict orders not to fire, the Germans were landing boats from the isle of Cymbre. The boats were loaded with men and weapons and the Germans kept right on firing at us. Finally we couldn't stand that any longer so Lt. Potena started firing a M-9 at them and once more the war was on. Meanwhile the psychological warfare left. That night about dark the Battalion minus I company and some M company attachments, rejoined the Regiment. We entrucked after dark and moved to an assembly area south of Dinan. L company and part of M company in St. Malo were still attached to the 330th.

10 August- On the 10th of August the Battalion moved to an assembly area near the village of Plessire north of Dinard. We were gradually being jockeyed into position to carry on the attack against Dinard from where an 8th division Combat Team, 121st Infantry, had been stopped and a Battalion of their regiment reported to be cut off for five days.

11 August- On the morning of the 11th The Battalion again moved north to the vicinity of Marchandais and took up temporary defensive positions. During the afternoon the Battalion was under artillery fire and I company received five casualties. That evening we were in reserve while the 1st Battalion jumped off toward Pleuertuit.

12th August- The 1st Battalion had been held up with only small gains and we were ordered to pass through them and carry on the attack. At 0800 on the morning of the 12th we passed through the 1st Battalion and took our first objective near Tremerene at 1000. By early afternoon we had continued on and taken the barracks on the western end of Pleuertuit, down to the center of town. During this operation we passed and partially passed through the cut off Battalion of the 121st Infantry. During the advance we ran into a multi-barreled 20 caliber AA gun which gave us some difficulty. Lt. Pratt was wounded and Lt. Anderson took command of K company. That night we consolidated and reorganized in Pleuertuit prepared to jump off the next morning.

13th August- On the morning of the 13th K and I companies with M Company in support, jumped off from the center of Pleuertuit north toward Dinard. The attack advanced rapidly across the airport north of Pleuertuit until the first objective, on the north side of the airport, was taken. Several hundred prisoners were taken and as soon as the mine fields were cleared our supporting tanks and TD's joined us in close support. At 1600 we again advanced to the north and took the high ground overlooking Dinard, by dark. On this high ground we occupied an excellent and elaborate system of dug in concrete observation posts. From this point we had an excellent view of all of Dinard, part of St Malo, and the entire water front including the Isle of Cyzembre. During this advance we took many more prisoners and also captured horses, bicycles, vehicles and ammunition and supply dumps.

14 August - On the morning of the 14th we jumped off in the first attack on Dinard. By noon, with excellent artillery, TD's and tank support, had taken our portion of the city of Dinard. The remainder of the day we spent mopping up in our sector and supporting by fire, the units on our right and left which had been held up. L Company was released from the 330th after doing the final work on St Malo and rejoined the Battalion about dark.

15 August - We occupied the entire city of Dinard and established our CP in a large hotel (De Parc) in the city. Much booty was taken. Practically the entire Battalion was now riding - Captured horses, bicycles and vehicles. The quantity and quality of wine and liquors was excellent. Most of the Battalion slept in beds that night, for the first time in months.

16 to 19 August - From the 16th to 19th of August the Battalion occupied an area on the outskirts of Dinard and spent as much time as possible in reorganizing and training.

20 August - On the 20th of August the Battalion moved from the Dinard area by motor into an assembly area south east of the city of Rennes. Here the CP was established in a large Chateau.

21st to 25th August - On the 21st of August the remainder of C.T. 331 moved south to take up positions along the Loire River east and west of Nantes. This Battalion remained in their assembly area near Rennes until the 25th August. During this time we were in Division reserve and spent most of our time in training which consisted mostly of range firing. In this area members of the Battalion also had an opportunity to go swimming and see movies. On the 23rd a Battalion review was held, our first in France.

25 August - The Battalion moved to a new area south of Chateaubriant. Still in Division reserve.

26 August - The S-1 and party took off again in this morning for a new area. At 0845 the battalion began moving by motor and at 1300 were closed in their new area, in the vicinity of Gaules, France. The rest of the day was spent in getting settled and preparing for the next weeks training.

27 August - Church services were held by Chaplains Cosette and Swartout. There was a good attendance at both services. The rest of the day was spent in cleaning equipment and resting. In the evening we called in a report on the signal equipment on hand.

28 August - Lt. Col. Long visited the C.P. in the morning and arranged for Colonel York to talk to the battalion at 1300. This was later postponed. The whole day was spent in training and the routine reports were forwarded to regiment.

29 August - The whole day was spent in training and preparations were made for a battalion review the next day.

30 August - Early in the morning Lt. May and Lt. Miller, S-1 and S-3 respectively, went to the improvised parade ground and laid out the parade formation. The company commanders were also there to receive an orientation on the plan for the review, which would take place shortly before noon. While we were all at this outdoor meeting, word came from regiment which transferred several officers within the battalion. Lt. May, S-1, was transferred to Service company, and was assigned as S-4 for the 3rd Battalion. Captain Schraft was transferred from M Company to the vacated S-1 position. Lt. Tubbs was moved from I company to take up the duties of executive officer of regimental headquarters company. Captain Jackson was transferred from the first battalion to M Company, as company commander. Irregardless of all the shifting of officers, the parade was still held. Colonel York was present at the review and afterwards talked to the entire battalion. Incidentally, this was the first parade that the new battalion adjutant had functioned as such. One comment about the parade that was common was the fact that the new adjutant could be heard very well. Shortly after lunch, all executive officers and first sergeants along with the sergeant major attended a regimental meeting concerning administration. Later in the afternoon a movie was shown to all companies.

31 August - The last day in the month is usually payday, and so Captain Latrobe came down from regiment and paid the entire battalion. After the day of training was completed many card games were started throughout the organization, and if one listened closely, he could hear the rattle of those "old bones".