(Reprinted from PIC, Overseas Edition, June 6, 1944)

A DOUGHBOY'S DAY

(Author: HOWARD HANDLEMAN)

On the transport the men said: "It won't be so bad taking this island, but it sure would be awful if they left us to garrison the thing."

On the island they said:

"What an Army! They train us in the California desert and then ship us to these goddamned Aleutians to fight in the snow."

On the transport the men needn't have worried. On Attu they just missed the point of the whole thing.

For these men were the Army's varsity in their part of the world. Nobody was going to make garrison troops of them, and nobody was going to wait until the war worked around to a desert for them to fight in.

The desert was their training ground, but the men of the Seventh Division were not desert troops. They were something new to the Army, something the Army never really needed until it got involved in its first amphibious war. They were the Army's first specialists in island invasion, the first division the Army ever set apart as a pure striking force.

The Seventh Division is a new weapon designed for a new kind of war, the unwieldy kind of war in which armies of men are herded into tiny boats and sent onto hostile shores fighting. Traditionally it is a Marine Corps kind of war, but the Marine Corps is small, the Army big and the islands all over the Pacific. There just aren't enough Marines to take all of the islands, so the Army had to learn to fight from the small boats.

There's a lot more to that kind of fighting than just keeping your rifle dry on the way in. This army became a sea-going army and had to learn about the Navy. Commanding officers had to learn how much a ship could carry in its holds before they could begin to figure how much ammunition and food and water they could carry with their troops.

Supply officers, like Lt Bill Beeston of Iowa and Lt Bill Grisham of Texas, had to delve more deeply into the cargo situation. They had to learn how fast a ship could be unloaded, how to load cargo so the most important supplies would hit the beaches first, how to load so that when supplies hit the beach they would be ready for use.

The engineers, like Capt Oren Link of Chicago, had to learn how to unload the small boats at the beach, how to move supplies away from the beach to avoid congestion, how to meet the front line demand with a balanced flow of ammunition.

The Seventh learned as it went along. On Attu the small boats dumped their cargo on the beaches loose. Lt Col James Fish III, later killed in action, didn't like it that way. He had to load it on sleds to be hauled up a cliff by cable. Fish and Lt Col Harold K. Howell, the division engineering officer, put their heads together and on the next invasion, Kiska, the cargo came off the Higgins boats on sleds, ready to be pulled away in one piece.

The conception of the cargo sled was an important contribution to the mechanics of invasion, one of the dozens that have come from experience in this new-fangled kind of fighting. The cargo sled cut hours from the time needed to get stuff to the fighting companies, and those hours are of prime importance when men fight on islands so tiny that in one respect they never have anything but a beachhead.

Amphibious warfare is really one beachhead after another. On an atoll like Kwajalein, for instance, the Seventh jumped from one island to another, taking twenty-seven islands in six days. There was opposition on eleven islands, ranging in strength from the approximately 4000 Japs found on Kwajalein island, to the sixteen unarmed Jap sailors caught on tiny Loi.

One battalion, commanded by Lt Col Albert V. Hartl of North Dakota, took three islands in six days and had to fight on every one of them. Hartl took Ennylabegan, where the Japs had huge barracks to stage troops, on D-Day without much opposition. Then he joined Lt Col Lee Wallace, of Michigan, in the attack on the Jap seaplane base, Ebeye, where it took two days to clean out 450 Japs. The morning after Ebeye was secured Hartl led his troops to Central Gugegwe Island while Wallace went to South Gugegwe island. Hartl's troops found 73 Japs fighting from pillboxes on his island and spent the better part of an afternoon wiping them out.

Men who go through a series like that begin to get used to amphibious attacks. They learn all the little tricks. They know how to pack their gear so that cigarettes and maps and rifle ammunition have more chances to stay dry in the small boats, which ship great sheets of water.

They've been in and out of so many small boats when time was short and the chips down that they can clamber over the sides of the boats quickly-- and with all their gear.

They know about gear, too. They know they'll have to pack it on their backs, and they don't know how long. As veterans they feel they have the right of selection, too, so they take what they want, which is an absolute minimum, and discard everything else. A lot of fine new aluminum mess kits were left aboard ships for use later by the troops that went ashore on Kwajalein's islands.

The men of the Seventh are proud of their role as specialists in invasion. So proud, in fact, that there are people who are a little tired of hearing of the division. But that's all right. Their talk stems from an over-flowing esprit d'corps which helps make them the crack outfit they are.

There was Attu, three weeks of the toughest kind of fighting, three weeks in the fog and snow and rain, three weeks chasing Japs over mountains.

There was Kiska, without a Jap but with five days of misery atop a mountain in a constant cold rain.

They'll have a lot to tell about Kwajalein. There were Japs who attacked at night, rolling coconut logs before them as protection. Hartl's men got them, logs and all, with bazookas. There were Japs in pillboxes. The Doughboys got them with TNT, tank guns, grenades, rifles and machine guns. There was even a Jap whose gun was shot from his hands. Col Curtis D. O'Sullivan's men got him with a bit of football technique, a high-low tackle in which one soldier got the Jap's ankles, the other his neck.

After the quick Kwajalein strike the Seventh started going over fundamentals again, for more jungle training, night maneuvers, rehearsals of landings. The men will climb up and down landing nets until their hands are raw, will crawl under live machine-gun fire, sweat through bayonet drills.

Then one day there will be a definite problem. Maybe it will be on the parade ground, as it was before Kwajalein, or maybe in the hills some place. But somewhere the troops will go through a specific problem, will turn to the right or left at so many yards, dive for cover, worm along the ground, rise and charge, dig in, fight off a counter attack. It will be shadow boxing, sure, but it will be Ponape or Truk or maybe even Mindinao or Luzon or an Adriatic beachhead. The troops won't know where at the time, but they will be running through the exact motions of a specific invasion plan.

After the first rehearsal the troops will be briefed some more, will be told their mistakes, will be given further instructions on strong points they missed. Then they'll do it all over again. This time they'll go ashore in the small boats, land under cover of naval gunfire, set up their beachhead and spread out, according to plan.

The second dress rehearsal complete, they will be rushed aboard transports, ready to put their plan in action. Once the transport is underway and there no longer is a chance of a leak in information, the troops will be told where they are going. Battalion and company officers will explain that the strong point the third platoon missed on the parade grounds is the biggest blockhouse on the enemy coast. The turn to the left, 87 yards from the beach in the second rehearsal, will be made at a rise in terrain which will protect against enfilade fire. Maps, aerial photographs and clay models of the target will be brought out and everything translated in terms of the maneuver, terms with which every soldier is familiar.

Lt Col Edward P. Smith, 27-year-old West Pointer and son of a Boston fireman, explained the training program in fotball terms. Smith, slight, handsome and genial, commands a battalion for Col Wayne B. Zimmerman, West Pointer from Wadena, Minnesota.

"My main job is to train and direct the battalion," Smith said. "I run them through practice, train them in fundamentals, teach them all the tricks I know and finally put them through the maneuvers of the plan of attack.

"That's what a fotball coach does. He tries to prepare his team physically and mentally for a game. In the army we call the mental side of the thing 'morale', but it's just the same."

Smith was talking on a transport. It was D minus One, the night before the attack on Kwajalein, the night before the first Americans bulled their way onto the shores of territory that had been Japanese before the war.

"My biggest job is done," Smith continued. "Tomorrow morning it will be up to the boys, particularly to the lieutenants who are the platoon leaders. They're the guys who have to win the war, have to do the dirty work.

"I've given them all I could. After they hit the beach tomorrow they're the ones who will have to make decisions. If they make a mistake I'll try to pull them out of it somehow, with reinforcements or artillery or something. Just like a football coach sends in substitutes who can do something better than the guys who are in there for him. The coach can't carry the ball himself, or throw a block.

"All he can do is teach men to run and block and pull them out if they get in a game and don't come through. That's my job, too".

Smith didn't make any secret of his feeling about the responsibility of his junior officers. He called them all together in the black-out wardroom the night before the attack to tell them just what he thought their job was.

That's the way an infantry division works from commander on down. General Corlett of the Seventh sent his men to the transports for Kwajalein without any illusions. He told them:

"We've got a plan. I think it's a good one. I hope it is."

It's better not to try to kid men who are professionals in invasion. On the Seventh's first job, Attu, they were told they were going into a 36-hour operation. Everyone believed that; and geared himself for 36 hours of effort. It took three weeks.

Since Attu there have been no estimates of time for an operation.

"If you make it on a schedule you haven't gained anything, and if you miss you're a chump," one officer explained. "We just quit guessing about how long any show would take."

Corlett has other qualifications for leadership. He trusts his men, his staff and regimental officers. Brig Gen Archibald V. Arnold, who was All-American lineman at West Point in 1911, runs division artillery for Corlett. Arnold, who would portray kindly bankers if he worked in Hollywood, came up with the idea of artillery support for landing parties in atoll warfare.

As an amphibious division, the Seventh has had uncommonly close relations with the Navy, and its relations have been uncommonly good. The old inter-service rivalries and prejudices fade before the necessities and familiarities of joint action. The soldiers of the Seventh have seen transport sailors spend days in Higgins boats, eating, sleeping and working in them without ever getting relief, and the soldiers respect the sailors. The sailors have sneaked ashore for a peek at ground fighting often enough to know how tough a lot is the foot-slogger's, and sailors respect the soldiers.

Today's Navy no longer makes sport of the foot-slogging doughboy but accepts him as a member of the team. The sailor would be the last to deny that the "Dogface" delivers the war firsthand to the enemy.