



Burning 'em out. The tank shoots its tongue of flame into an Okinawa cave where Japs are holed up. If they emerge, the crouching rifleman gets them.



The Alley Fighters of the 96th

By ORLANDO DAVIDSON

AFTER the First War, when air and armored power were flexing their young muscles, military experts joined in an international wake over that outmoded instrument of warfare, the infantry. One pallbearer was Liddell Hart, the British military pundit, who wrote in 1923 that infantry forces of the future would be small, highly specialized, and "transported in protected vehicles to consolidate territory won from an enemy."

Among the several million young infantrymen who, twenty years later, found this a decidedly cloudy forecast of their duties, few were more emphatically disillusioned than the men of our 96th Infantry Division. They were rarely transported in

So modern warfare isn't what it was in the days of Mad Anthony Wayne? Maybe not, but out in the South Pacific a typical Johnny-come-lately outfit discovered some disconcerting similarities.

vehicles, never protected, and the only territory they ever got to consolidate was what they won for themselves. Winning it cost some 2000 of them their lives.

Those 2000 men may be the last - as they were the first - to die under the colors of the 96th Infantry Division. In the cold atomic light of 1947, it seems likely that the prophets of the '20's erred only in writing off the infantry one war too soon.

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Even old-line traditionalists now concede that ground forces of the future will be largely, if not wholly, airborne. Military radicals see no place at all for infantry troops in a war of nuclear and bacteriological attack. Thus, like a few other Johnny-come-lately infantry divisions, the 96th very possibly ran its entire race on the bloody homestretch of World War II.

Even before the day at Hiroshima in 1945 when Buck Rogers assumed complete sway, the crawling, creeping infantrymen of such outfits as the 96th were like warriors out of another century. The trucks and jeeps, the flame throwers and the infrared "snooper-scopes" were new, but the tactics were pure Mad Anthony Wayne and Sam Houston. It was the ancient pattern of men dashing across open ground in short rushes, belying up on unwary outposts, circling to get in the enemy's rear. On one eerie morning, amidst the boulders of an Okinawa ridge, Company F, of the division's 381st Infantry Regiment, fought a battle that a War Department historian described as "straight Western-movie stuff," complete with shots from the hip and close-in knife play.

By such primitive individual combat, plus some very unprimitive armor and artillery, the Deadeyes of the 96th Division fulfilled their anachronistic destiny in a twentieth-century war. One observer on Okinawa swore when he returned to Washington that they were "the finest exponents of alley fighting in modern war." On second thought, he eliminated the "modern." The Deadeyes, he averred, were "the best bunch of fighters since the Alamo." In fact, he added, the 96th was "the perfect infantry division."

He would get an argument on that from several dozen other Army and Marine divisions, but it is at least clear that the Deadeyes were death on Japs. As their division newspaper put it, they made "Good Japs" - dead ones—out of 7600 Nips on Leyte, and 31,700 more on Okinawa. The Okinawa harvest was reaped with a professional smartness which twice brought the division extra-special kudos from the high command.

It wasn't always that way. The 96th was one of the original sad-sack all-draftee divisions. In August, 1942, when it commenced training at Camp Adair, Oregon, few of the bewildered young men who filled its ranks had even an inkling of how to

go about saving their country. Except for a ninety-day whirl through OCS, most of the officers had an equally unblemished amateur standing. At the center, however, was a hard core of Regular Army officers and NCO's. As in other divisions, they brought off one of those miracles on which Americans count to save their hides in time of war.

The senior magician was a husky, middle-aged man from Missouri, Maj. Gen. James Lester Bradley. Jim Bradley was not a unique individual. There were other professionals like him - just enough - to build and operate the Army of the United States. Jim Bradley had an intimate approach to his troops, and a deep feeling for their ordeals. But his story, undramatic, unspectacular, was essentially the same as that of some dozens of other top commanders. It was, to a larger extent than most of us have ever acknowledged, the story of how we won the war.

Bradley entered West Point at nineteen. He was duly commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1914, and not until 1935 did he make lieutenant colonel. There was little enough money, and even less glory. But Jim Bradley stuck to it. It was the old Army round: Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. Fort Missoula, Montana. The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia. The Command and General Staff School, and the Army War College.

Suddenly it was 1941, and the remote game of war became desperately serious. Our resources of manpower and industry wouldn't win without men at the top who knew what to do with them. We had those men; they were the Jim Bradleys, who had been keeping themselves ready for this since 1918, at Missoula and Benning and the Presidio. They knew what to do, and they did it.

Under General Bradley, the miracle of the 96th was built up, over a two-and-a-half-year period, through two winters of garrison training in Oregon, three months of maneuvering on the Central Oregon desert, capsuled courses in amphibious and jungle warfare and, finally, a rugged introduction to Mr. Moto on Leyte. It all crystallized on Okinawa, where the Deadeyes, three times called upon to break the backbone of the Japanese defenses, hurled themselves on the entrenched enemy with such mass valor that even when they failed - as once they did - they came back as drenched with glory as they were with blood. A modest measure

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of the glory splashed over on their unassuming boss. General Bradley was one of the few World War II troop commanders to direct a division continuously from birth to deactivation. The 96th was strictly his baby. No parent was ever more surprised than Bradley when, a few months before Okinawa, he found his fledgling outfit headed for a premature baptism of fire at Leyte.

The presence of the pea-green 96th among the veteran divisions which spearheaded the return to the Philippines was definitely not "according to plan." When Maj. Gen. John R. Hodge's new XXIV Corps, composed of the Deadeyes and the seasoned 7th Division, left Pearl Harbor in September, 1944, its destination was Yap.

Meanwhile, however, Bull Halsey radioed back from the far Pacific that the Philippines were prematurely ripe for a knockout. From Quebec, where Roosevelt and Churchill were meeting, authorization was flashed for a one-two punch - first Leyte, then Luzon. Yap was deleted from the XXIV Corps sailing orders, planning staffs went on a twenty-four-hour workday, and on October twentieth, the Corps hit Central Leyte.

On that pivotal island, the Deadeyes initially distinguished themselves as swamp angels. Their first job was to drive inland from the beaches, but they immediately discovered that there were not only no roads or trails inland but no land - only a sucking swamp. Nevertheless, Col. Edwin T. May, an ex-enlisted man of the breed who holds that orders are meant to be followed, led his 383rd Infantry Regiment straight into the morass - always knee-deep, often hip-deep. In three days he had outdistanced his supplies. General MacArthur visited the 96th Division command post the third day, was shown May's location and all but called General Bradley a liar.

"No man could get through those swamps," he said.

The Japanese, it would seem, had thought likewise, for they had left them undefended. By the third night May's regiment had split their defenses.

The Deadeyes' 382nd Regiment crawled inland through similarly unpleasant terrain, also against a minimum of resistance, until it reached the barrio of Tabontabon. There it fought a spectacular battle with Japs stationed under, inside and on top of every building in town. Col. Macey L. Dill dashed

across a bridge into the town at the head of his troops, and they did the rest.

Back on the coast, Col. Michael E. (Screamin' Mike) Halloran's 381st Regiment attacked Catmon Hill, the ominous promontory which dominated the entire corps beachhead. Already flanked by the 383rd and hammered by incessant artillery fire, it fell quickly. By October twenty-eighth, the beachhead was secure.

That was only the beginning for the 96th Division. Three hundred and eighty men were dead and 1300 wounded by Christmas. Most of the battles were patrol-scale actions—small, but vicious skirmishes, often against an unseen enemy. As usual in the Pacific, the Jap was frequently less of a problem than the disease-ridden jungle.

The Deadeyes' principal mission was to defend and expand the beachhead while other units crossed the island to meet Jap reinforcements. This was a grueling job, but not the kind that makes headlines. It did, however, make heroes - such staunch men as 1st Sgt. Francis H. Thompson of the 382nd Regiment, who took over two companies when every officer in both was wounded, and directed them so magnificently that a Distinguished Service Cross award followed inevitably.

Eight other Deadeyes won the DSC on Leyte, but four of them died winning it. Then there was Pvt. Ova Allen Kelley, of Norwood, Missouri, a sturdy, dark-haired boy whose job was packing ammunition on his back. One morning in December he started throwing lead instead of carrying it. When he was through, his company had retrieved an airfield from the Japs; and Kelley, who had stalked forward alone and wiped out half the enemy before anyone else knew what was happening, was in line for the division's first Medal of Honor. Five minutes later a sniper cut him down.

Even while the 96th was still fighting in the hills of Leyte, planning was underway for an operation oddly known as "Iceberg." On Easter Sunday in 1945, the American 10th Army poured across the ancient seawall guarding the island of Okinawa. This time it was no accident. that the 96th Division was there — and on the flank nearest the enemy. By dusk of the fourth day, the vehicle-mounted cavalymen of the division's reconnaissance troop had found the Jap. In the outposts of what was to become known as the Shuri Line,

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he was waiting for them.

The Shuri Line was really a ring - a rock and concrete maze of interlocking hills, caves and pillboxes. It was not to fall for fifty-seven days - and then only under the combined assault of four Army and Marine divisions - but for two weeks the 96th and the 7th hammered it alone.

On April ninth, on an obscene little ridge named Kakazu, the Deadeyes' 383rd Regiment went to its Calvary. Of six companies that attacked, only three made the crest. Two of these immediately found themselves in impossible positions, raked by Jap fire from three sides, and had to get back as best they could. About half the men who had charged up the hill ultimately were saved. Pfc. Ed Moskala, of Chicago, the last man down, learned that a wounded buddy was still on the hill. He went back and got him out. Twice more he went back into the inferno, and the final time he did not come out. His pals, those who survived, say he killed twenty-five or thirty Japs during that retreat. They also figure that he earned his Medal of Honor.

Farther down the ridge, Company L, of the same regiment, had fought its way to a shallow saddle that afforded some slight degree of protection. This company was commanded by a remarkable officer from the Deep South one Willard F. (Hoss) Mitchell.

The hill was crawling with Japs. All morning a fiery conflict raged. About noon the Nips apparently sensed how small the American force was, and hurled the first of a vicious series of counterattacks. Four times they struck, charging wildly through their own mortar fire; four times the outnumbered Yanks turned them back.

By four o'clock Mitchell knew that his men - most of them wounded - could not withstand another attack. He called for smoke and began a withdrawal. Of the eighty-nine men who had made the assault, exactly three got back unscratched. Seventeen were dead or missing, thirty-seven more had to be carried from the hill. Later, 165 Jap bodies were found where the company had stood. Company L had qualified for its Unit Citation award recommendation - the first on Okinawa.

The 383rd Regiment as a whole suffered 326 casualties that black day. On April tenth what was

left of the regiment teamed up with the 381st and attacked again. One battalion of the 381st seized and held a toehold where Mitchell's band had fought, but that was as far as anyone could go. Later another division attacked Kakazu, but only when the enemy evacuated it during a general withdrawal did that notorious ridge finally fall.

Meanwhile the 382nd Regiment had been suffering farther inland on a hill appropriately named Tombstone. It was the same general story. Colonel Dill's first battalion had stormed to the crest, then immediately become a target for every weapon in the catalogue. Rifle companies were riddled and one machine-gun section wiped out before the battalion wearily made its way back to positions 200 yards behind its jump-off point. The



Instead of being flushed with triumph, the victors often look like this when the battle is over. Deadeyes succumbed to exhaustion after taking "Big Apple Hill" Okinawa.

rest of the regiment was stopped less bloodily, but equally decisively.

It was at this desperate point, a Japanese staff officer later revealed, that the enemy seriously considered throwing his major counterattack of the campaign. "Such an attack," commented a 10th Army intelligence report, "would have had some chance of momentary success, as the 96th Division would initially have taken the brunt alone." This was a classic understatement. Bradley's 96th Division lines by this time were paper-

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thin.

Happily, the Japs waited a month to make their major effort, but on April sixteenth they did throw a violent local attack against the Deadeyes' 381st Regiment, still crouched in the shadow of Kakazu. A young man named Beauford T. (Snuffy) Anderson won himself a Medal of Honor that night by turning back an entire company without assistance. His method was unique and effective – he used mortar shells as hand grenades,

By now it was obvious that two divisions could never break the Japanese line, and the fresh 27th Division was readied for action. On April nineteenth, behind the most pulverizing artillery preparation of the Pacific war, the three divisions jumped off in a coordinated attack. It seemed inconceivable that anything could live where the big shells had fallen, but the burrowing enemy simply took to his caves. When the doughs moved out, sudden death still waited for them.

But the Japs, too, had taken a frightful beating, and now they began to bend. In two days the 382nd Regiment of the 96th overran its old nemesis, Tombstone Ridge. On the night of April 23rd, the Nips silently evacuated the entire Kakazu-Nishibaru ridge line, and two days later the Deadeyes drove to the crest of the Maeda Escarpment, a weird stone formation which the infantry called Hacksaw Ridge. Here the 381st Regiment found itself squatting on the lid of a vast fortress hollowed into the rock and faced with concrete. Thus any Deadeye who moved beyond the crest came under fire from inside the ridge as well as around it. Each night Japs poured in counterattacks from innumerable caves within the ridge. Here Capt. Bill Bollinger's F Company fought the Wild West battle mentioned earlier; here Sgt. Bill Reeder, a professional baseball player, threw the handsomest strikes - with grenades - of his career.

Off to one side, a Jap-held concrete barracks was giving the Americans a very bad time. Lt. Col. Danny Nolan, who commanded the third battalion, sent his K Company to take it out. At this point, K Company consisted of precisely thirty-six men. Soon it was down to twenty-four. In the midst of the struggle, Nolan called Capt. Albert Strand, the company commander, and asked how things were going. Strand replied, "I can see more Japs to my front than I have men, but I think I can

advance."

The Deadeye 381st Regiment never got beyond the crest of Hacksaw. On April twenty-ninth the 307th Infantry, of the 77th Division, inherited the ridge, and in five days all but leveled it. Still it held. Finally, on the sixth, it was taken. Everyone of its defenders was dead or sealed within it.

In the meantime, the division's 383rd Regiment, now heavily dependent on 660 young replacements, had paced the attack of the entire 10th Army and punched a salient to within 1000 yards of the fortress of Shuri, core of the Japanese defense. The enemy, as always, was making the nights hideous, but losing a lot of men in doing it.

On April thirtieth, the battered 96th Division was relieved. At a press conference back at 10th Army headquarters, Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, the Army commander, singled out the weary Deadeyes for praise. The 96th, he said, had shown "superb spirit." Simultaneously he paid the division an even higher, but grim, compliment: it would return to the line in ten days.

In its rifle companies the 96th was now virtually a new division. Thirty-six hundred replacements, most of them nineteen-year-old boys, had taken the places of those who had fallen.

The Deadeyes were now on the left flank of a four-division front, and on May thirteenth, they brought off one of the decisive strokes of the Okinawa campaign. Looming before their 383rd Infantry was Conical Hill, eastern anchor of the Shuri Line. After two days of maneuvering, Colonel May's second battalion was poised to strike directly up the hill's northeast flank. Back in ancient Nakagusuku Castle, General Hodge, the corps commander, looked at his situation map and called the 96th's General Bradley.

"Jim," he said, "that second battalion of May's looks pretty good up there at Conical. Do you think he can push them up tomorrow? Bradley replied that if anyone could, Eddie May was the man.

"If he can make it," Hodge told his chief of staff, "we'll have the key to the Shuri Line."

Thanks largely to the initiative of two platoon sergeants of Company F, May's men did not let him down. Tech. Sgts. Guy J. Dale and Dennis O. Duniphin had led their platoons halfway up the hill when they lost contact with their company com-

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mander. Sensing that they had found a weak spot which might be closed in another ten minutes, Dale and Duniphin raced their platoons to the crest. It was none too soon, for as they reached the top and began digging in, the Japs attacked. At this point Company E came charging up from behind. It was touch and go whether the two companies could hold. Then a Cub plane, droning overhead, spotted their plight and sent back word to the 921st Field Artillery to get busy, but quick. Just as it appeared that the Americans might be driven off, an overwhelming concentration of artillery landed twenty yards beyond the crest - too close for comfort - and that counterattack dissolved.

Conical Hill was not yet won - the 383rd Regiment still had only a foothold - but the all-important first brick had been laid in a wall behind which the 7th Division would sprint down the coast and flank the Shuri Line.

The fall of Shuri, however, was seventeen days away - the most dreadful seventeen days on Okinawa. All along the front, the 10th Army was now enmeshed in the inner spokes of the Japanese defense ring, where every enemy hill was covered by half a dozen others. A painful example was a grubby little hill which the codebook called Charlie. Here May's first battalion, which had taken a shattering beating on Kakazu, underwent the same thing all over again. Day after day, the Deadeye infantrymen attempted to push over or around the crest; day after day they were sent reeling back. The artillery pounded the hill incessantly, and Capt. Red Hymers, who was serving as the infantry eye for a squadron of Marine dive bombers, even led an air strike against it backwards—in the direction of our troops. It all came to nothing.

Dill's 382nd Regiment meanwhile was fighting on the direct approaches to Shuri. Here Capt. Seymour Terry, one of the many sons of Arkansas who sparked the 96th Division, single-handedly cleaned out a whole network of caves and trenches. His Medal of Honor was posthumous; three days later, he and thirteen of his men were killed by a single flurry of Jap artillery. Here the doughs of Company E charged up the slopes of murderous Dick Hill and held it with a gallantry that was to win them a Unit Citation. Here Pfc. John MacKenis, of C Company coolly assumed command of a platoon when there were no officers



"It became a continuous torrent. Movement grew impossible..." This is what the rain did to a fair Okinawa road.

or NCO's left. Here the entire regiment was engaged in fighting of such savagery that when the casualty lists were totted up at the end of the campaign, the 382nd Infantry, of all the Army regiments on Okinawa, proved the hardest hit.

Off to east, Halloran's 381st began building the wall around Conical Hill. Several hundred yards south of Conical lay another peak, Sugar Hill. The two were connected by a continuous ridge. If the 381st could neutralize the crest all the way south to Sugar, the hill mass would be sealed off and the 7th Division could start its end run. It took the 381st three rugged days to jockey into position, and one more to do the job. During the maneuvering, a platoon commanded by Lt. Leonard K. Warner, a Hawaiian, found itself so far up in front of the regiment that Japs were peppering it from the rear.

"Can you move onto Sugar?" Warner's company commander messaged.

"Hell, yes! " Warner answered. "The way the Japs are shooting me in the back, they'll chase me onto it! "

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The one and only happy beachhead. When the dead-eyes got back to Uncle Sugar Able, Marjorie Main, chosen as their "Occupation Girl", in the Philippines, greeted them, with the result shown above.

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For a week the normal misery of combat had been heightened by a drizzling rain. On May twenty-second, it became a continuous torrent. Movement grew impossible - even tractors bogged down - and the entire 10th Army offensive ground to a halt. The 96th Division G-3 one day summed up the Deadeyes' progress in these terms: "Those on the forward slopes slid down. Those on the reverse slopes slid back. Otherwise, no change."

To the first battalion of the 382nd Infantry, this state of affairs was not amusing. This battalion, on the eve of the great rain, had made a remarkable charge through Jap mortar fire to a point just below the crest of Oboe Hill, the highest ridge in the Shuri ring. It was a notably unhealthy position, for the Nips were snugly entrenched on the other side of the crest. All day, every day they harassed Lt. Col. Charles W. Johnson's men, who were clinging desperately to the slime covered

slopes. Then each night the Japs came boiling over the crest. Twice the Americans were driven to the base of the hill; twice they clambered back up. Johnson, who had entered the Army four years earlier as a nineteen year-old private, finally threw even his jeep drivers into the line. The line held, but by week's end the first battalion was so small that, for the balance of the campaign, it fought as a single company.

The weather broke on May thirtieth, and so did the Japs. Under the concealment of the rain, Lt. Gen. Mitsu Ushijima, a brilliant commander, had withdrawn the bulk of his shattered army. So the Yanks, for the most part, simply walked into Shuri, On Hen Hill, however, in the path of the 382nd Regiment's G Company, the enemy chose to stand. This set the stage for a Santa Ana, California, truck driver named Clarence Craft to put on a dazzling individual display. In a classic one-man charge, he killed more than twenty-five Nips with grenades, rifle and bayonet, stopping in the middle to

pick up a sword for his family. "I knew those guys behind me would have that place stripped clean of souvenirs by the time I got back," he said later. The most remarkable thing about his Medal of Honor was that he lived to receive it.

"I regard the capture of Conical Hill by the 96th Division as the most important single factor in the collapse of the Shuri Line," General Buckner told correspondents.

Ushijima had one futile ace left in his kimono - the Yaeju Dake-Yuza Dake hill mass on the southern tip of the island. He holed up there with what troops he still had, and waited. On June fifth the Americans caught up, and the 96th Division drew the two central hills. It took two weeks of stubborn fighting to clean them out. Halloran's 381st Infantry took one hill and the two other Deadeye regiments teamed to capture the other. Those last two weeks were terrific ones for the armored infantry of the 769th Tank Battalion;

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here, for the first time on Okinawa the tankers, who had taken awful losses, found the terrain suited to their kind of fighting.

The Japs went down shooting. On June third, a machine gunner picked off Colonel May, and from that moment the 383rd Infantry could never be quite the same regiment. On June eighteenth the 10th Army chief, General Buckner, was their victim. The next day, Brig. Gen. Claudius M. Easley, the 96th Division's indomitable little assistant commander, was killed while personally directing fire against a machine gun which had wounded his aide. "Spec" Easley, a sharpshooting Texan and, in General Bradley's words, the spark plug of the 96th, had been tempting death since the division's first day on Leyte. Once before he had been wounded; it was perhaps inevitable that he should

die as he did—shooting it out with the enemy at close range. Perhaps, too - in the light of what happened twenty-seven days later on the New Mexico desert - he will be the last general of the United States Army to die in that heroic tradition.

Sixteen hundred other soldiers of the 96th died no less honorably on Okinawa. Fifty-six hundred more brought wounds home with them. In the infantry regiments, one man in two had fallen. But the Deadeyes wiped out more than 30,000 Japs.

It wasn't done in the manner the prophets envisaged after the first World War, and envisaged again after this one. Perhaps they are right this time, and any future war will be conducted by men at push buttons. But it might still be handy to have some troops like the Deadeyes - brave men who will come to grips with the individual enemy and fight it out to the death.

THE END