

Chapter 9 OCCUPATION OF JAPAN 1948-1950



During their first month in Japan, members of the Polar Bear regiment constantly packed, unpacked, and repacked duffle bags as they shuttled ever farther north. They first moved from Camp Drake near Tokyo to Camp Haugen near the northern end of Honshu. Finally, while the 1st Battalion remained on Honshu to help reconstitute the 32nd Infantry, the rest of the 31st moved further north to Camp Crawford on Hokkaido, replacing a regiment of the 11th Airborne Division.¹ When the 31st reached Camp Crawford, it numbered only 70 officers and 1800 enlisted men.²

To Hokkaido's north and northeast are Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. Northern Sakhalin had long been Russian but the island's southern half had belonged to Japan. A four-power agreement near the end of World War II gave the Soviet Union the remainder of Sakhalin and the Kuriles but denied it the right to occupy Hokkaido, frustrating Josef Stalin's grander aims. Occupation of Hokkaido, one of Japan's home islands, would have given the Soviets an opportunity to establish a puppet government there and convert the island to a springboard for threatening Honshu, Japan's main island. In the winter,

¹ Soon after the 7th Infantry Division arrived in Japan, the 11th Airborne Division departed for Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The 31st Infantry shared Camp Crawford with the 7th Infantry Division's Headquarters Company, 7th Signal Company, 7th Military Police Company, 7th Reconnaissance Company, and 57th Field Artillery Battalion.

² *Unit History, 31st Infantry, Japan, Jan-Dec. 1949*, 2; RG 500: Records of U.S. Army Commands, 1940- ; Unit Records (A): Infantry Divisions 1940-1967, Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II.

Russian troops could be seen patrolling the shores of nearby islands whose Japanese population was evicted when the Soviets took charge.

The 7th Infantry Division's other regiments, the 17th and 32nd, were based on Honshu. The separation accentuated a psychological distance between the 31st, which had not yet served with the 7th Division in combat, and its sister regiments which had served with the division through four campaigns of World War II. The 31st therefore had the same "bastard" relationship with the 7th Division that it had with the Philippine Division before World War II. The regiment's polar bear insignia seemed particularly fitting for a unit stationed in Japan's cold north. Some called Hokkaido "the rock", like Alcatraz, a place to get sent if a soldier screwed up elsewhere.



Aerial View of Camp Crawford

The pentagonal building at the center of the picture was Headquarters 7th Infantry Division. The Field House (gym) is the large dark-roofed building at lower center. Red brick platoon-size barracks predominate in the left half of the post. Family housing is below the ridgeline at the upper right.



Post Theater



Post Chapel

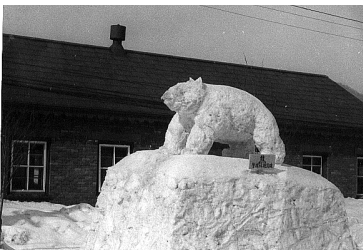
Camp Crawford had brick single-story platoon barracks for about 4500 troops, officer and NCO clubs, a large Service club for junior enlisted men, a field house (gym), chapel, theater, PX, commissary, quartermaster laundry, quartermaster bakery, steam plant, bowling lanes, and a large family housing area with an all-grades school. The Army hospital was in downtown Sapporo. Mount Eniwa, an extinct volcano, loomed over the post and the adjacent village of Makomanai. To the north and west were miles of steep, forested hills inhabited by more black bears than people. Because Hokkaido was sparsely populated, training land was more plentiful than on Japan's other islands. The most popular bivouac site for field maneuvers was a scenic mountain meadow overlooking Sapporo, Hokkaido's largest city. The site was used by Japanese farmers for grazing sheep and therefore had its unpleasant side as well. Eighteen miles deeper in the mountains was Shimamatsu Training Area, near the village of Eniwa. Firing ranges for heavy weapons were 25 miles away at Chitose. Japan's raid on Pearl Harbor was planned at Building 5 on Chitose airfield.



Family Housing Area

Winds from Siberia bring Hokkaido its first snowfall in early November and snow generally stays on the ground until late May. In mid-winter, snow depth averages 5 feet and drifts may exceed 15 feet.

Ainu Indians, akin to the Aleuts and Eskimos of North America, inhabit parts of Hokkaido. Hot springs dot the island, which has seven active volcanoes. Jozankei and Noboribetsu were particularly popular recreation sites for GIs because bathing at indoor hot springs was strictly in the nude and there were no separate facilities for men and women. The same was true of public toilets, a shock to most Americans. Sapporo had a university, as well as a thriving red light district and bars aplenty to transform a GI's pay into a hangover or worse. MP patrols kept order downtown since Japan's police had no jurisdiction over Americans during the occupation era.



Arriving in Japan at the beginning of winter in 1948, the 7th Division established a Ski Cadre Instructors' School at Nagano to train selected members on cold weather operations.³ Graduates returned to their units to provide instruction on winter cross-country movements and outdoor survival. Initial training was hampered by equipment shortages, but in February 1949, all rifle companies of the 2nd Battalion conducted snowshoe marches near Camp Crawford.⁴ In March, both battalions conducted overnight bivouacs during which troops honed land navigation skills while officers conducted a tactical exercise without troops, walking the layout of a defensive position.⁵

In April, inspectors from IX Corps' G-3 Section tested every enlisted man in the regiment, using the Army's newly-standardized Mobilization Training Plan. The results demonstrated a near-universal challenge facing commanders throughout the post-war Army. Soldiers generally did well at hands-on proficiency tests but scored poorly on the exam's written portion. According to the regiment's annual history, the disparity could be "directly attributed to the fact that the average grade completed in school by the men of the regiment was 8.23 years."⁶ In response, the 7th Division's first training memorandum published in Japan mandated a minimum of four hours' instruction each week during the duty day for any soldier unable to read and write at fifth grade level.⁷

By the end of April, the Regimental S-3, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph E. Leighton, announced that, "The 31st Infantry Regiment, during the last month has passed the boundary marker. No longer is it a group of individuals wearing as part of their uniforms the crest of a regiment. It is a team. The change has been slow in coming; now that it is here, we are prepared and are ready for any tactical mission that may come."⁸ It was an exaggeration but marked the regiment's entry to a new phase of training. The Polar Bears began weapons proficiency training in April with snow still on the ground.

The regiment received 800 new soldiers as it began its new training phase. Around 500 were first-term enlisted men, transferred from the 1st Cavalry Division.⁹ As with most such mass transfers, the sending unit rarely sends its best, giving Camp Crawford a reputation as a place to send cast-offs. The other 300 were new recruits who had just completed eight weeks of basic training in the US. Rather than further diffuse his scarce cadre of NCOs to provide the new men advanced individual training, Colonel John D. Miller, the 31st's new commander, established two provisional training

³ *Unit History, 31st Infantry, Japan, Jan-Dec. 1949, op. cit., 3.*

⁴ Operations Narrative, 7th Division Historical Report, February 1949, "31st Infantry Regiment," 7th Infantry Division Historical Reports; RG 500: Records of U.S. Army Commands, 1940- ; Unit Records (A): Infantry Divisions 1940-1967, Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II.

⁵ 31st Infantry Regiment Monthly Historic Report, March 1949; 7th Infantry Division Historical Reports; RG 500: Records of U.S. Army Commands, 1940- ; Unit Records (A): Infantry Divisions 1940-1967, Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II [hereafter noted only as monthly reports.]

⁶ *Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, Jan-Dec 1949, 7.*

⁷ Headquarters, 7th Infantry Division, Training Memorandum Number 1, "17 January 1949 – 30 April 1949," 11 January 1949; Decimal File 353.1, G-3 Correspondence Files; Army-AG Command Reports, 1949-1954: Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II.

⁸ "Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, 1-30 April 1949."

⁹ *Ibid., 3, 5.*

companies. Although contravening 7th Division guidance, putting the new men in separate units made the best use of limited trainers while still allowing the bulk of the regiment to progress in its training.¹⁰ It also fostered a sense of unity and cohesion among the new men.

Sergeants are supposed to teach soldiers how to shoot but the 31st Infantry had a shortage of capable NCOs. In response, battalions conducted preliminary marksmanship instruction in large groups using lectures and demonstrations, poor substitutes for hands-on training under experienced sergeants. Range firing began in late May, using .22-caliber rifles, a cost-saving measure, to reinforce the four fundamentals of marksmanship prior to firing military rifles. New soldiers in the two training companies fired the M1 rifle, .45 caliber pistol, and Browning automatic rifle for familiarization, and conducted record firing with carbines.¹¹

Major General William F. Dean, commanding general of the 7th Infantry Division during and since the move from Korea to Japan, recognized that the NCO shortage posed a potentially crippling problem for the division's reconstitution.¹² In Training Memo #1 he urged subordinates to foster and develop junior leaders. "There is a singular opportunity for all ranks to display and exercise sound progressive leadership, not only in the accomplishment of the occupational mission, but in the training mission as well. The outstanding leader will be exemplified by the well trained squad, platoon, company and battalion for which he is responsible."¹³

While acting as the regimental commander, Lieutenant Colonel Marion W. Schewe established the Regimental Leadership School at Camp Crawford in February 1949. All but three of the first 34 candidates completed the course.¹⁴ Expectations that the new school's output would resolve the regiment's NCO shortfall proved illusory. The program of instruction soon shifted from general leadership instruction to squad leader duties and responsibilities. The school began accepting fewer candidates, hoping for better results by concentrating only on those who demonstrate leadership potential. Over 25% of enrollees were relieved from the fourth class because they were unable to perform as squad leaders.¹⁵

¹⁰ Headquarters, 7th Infantry Division, Training Memorandum Number 13, "Training of Replacements," 21 March 1949; Decimal File 353.1, G-3 Correspondence Files; Army-AG Command Reports, 1949-1954, Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II. Paragraph 3c of this memo specifically forbade the formation of "separate or provisional companies."

¹¹ "Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, 1 May-31 May 1949."

¹² Major General William F. Dean may have commanded more divisions than any other US officer in history. He commanded the 44th Infantry Division in combat in Europe during World War II, commanded the 7th Infantry Division in Japan, and commanded the 24th Infantry Division in combat in Korea, where he became the highest ranking US officer in modern history to be captured by the enemy.

¹³ Major General Dean to All Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers, 7th Infantry Division, "Letter of Transmittal, Training Memorandum Number 1," 11 January 1949, 1; Decimal File 353, G-3 Correspondence Files; Army-AG Command Reports, 1949-1954: Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II.

¹⁴ "Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, 1-28 February 1949," and "Division Historical Report, March 1949;" RG 500: Records of U.S. Army Commands, 1940- ; Unit Records (A): Infantry Divisions 1940-1967, Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II.

¹⁵ "Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, 1-31 July 1949."

Graduating fewer men from the Leadership School slowed progress in the regiment's overall training program. The scarcity of trained NCOs and the diversion of the best NCOs to serve as cadre for the Leadership School forced commanders to acknowledge that in many cases sergeants conducting unit training "did not have the least idea of what they were supposed to do as squad leaders, or that they knew any tactics at all."¹⁶ Battalions implemented their own squad leader training programs to augment instruction at the Leadership School, but success was minimal.

NCO leadership was sapped by other demands as well. Many NCOs were diverted from leadership positions to fill garrison roles not addressed by Army manpower authorizations. Forcing units to keep diverted NCOs on their rolls further inhibited the attainment of combat readiness. Worse, NCOs with the highest aptitude scores were skimmed off at every level, sending the least capable down to infantry battalions. The situation became so bad that Lieutenant General Almond felt compelled to intervene. Noting that "the subordinate commands are extremely short of individuals with high mental qualifications and overburdened with those possessing the lowest potential," he prohibited GHQ's staff sections from screening projected replacements and directed that they accept personnel without prior consideration of GCT score or civilian skill.¹⁷

In June 1949, the provisional basic training companies were broken up and their members were distributed throughout the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. At that point, a new challenge arose. Men who had rotated with the regiment from Korea were completing their tours and began to rotate home.¹⁸ As a result, graduates of the regiment's Leadership School began departing in numbers sufficient to threaten the regiment's training program. The situation was mitigated only slightly by reducing rifle squads from twelve men to nine, making sergeants' jobs easier.¹⁹

In August 1949, rifle squads practiced combat firing at Shimamatsu. Both battalions established bivouacs there under field conditions. Problems identified by evaluators included poor control of movement, ignorance of how to use terrain effectively during movement, and leaders' failure to inform soldiers of the situation and their mission. A series of company-size alerts trained company and battalion commanders on their roles in the Eighth Army's plan for the defense of Japan. The regimental S-3 expressed satisfaction with the companies' ability to execute their missions once they arrived at a designated location, but found the coordination of transportation a concern.²⁰ By the end of August, all rifle squads had passed their combat firing tests—a minor miracle given the shortage of available NCOs.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers and Far East Command, Staff Memorandum Number 7, "Enlisted Replacements," 6 February 1950; Decimal File 220.3, Chief of Staff's Correspondence Files, Records of GHQ FEC/SCAP/UNC, NARA II.

¹⁸ "Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, 1-30 June 1949."

¹⁹ Headquarters, 7th Infantry Division, *Training Memorandum Number 9*, 15 February 1949; Decimal File 353, G-3 General Correspondence Files; Army-AG Command Reports, 1949-1954: Seventh Division; NARA II.

²⁰ "Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, 1-31 August 1949."

The Polar Bears stood down for three days to celebrate their first Organization Day since 1941. Colonel Miller designated “America’s Foreign Legion” as the official theme of the 33rd anniversary celebration, emphasizing that the Polar Bears were the only regulars never to have served in the United States. He sought to further enhance unit pride by erroneously claiming the title, “First American Unit in Tokyo,” as a result of the regiment’s humanitarian deployment to that city from Manila following the 1923 earthquake (the earthquake was actually in Nagasaki). He further highlighted the 31st Infantry Regiment’s possession of the only “peacetime” award ever presented up to that time—the “Yangtze” campaign streamer affixed to the regiment’s colors for service in Shanghai in 1932.²¹

Colonel Miller authorized the establishment of an “Honor Company” plaque, to be awarded monthly “to the company with the best record for the month, based on the lowest number of Courts-Martial, Venereal Disease, and Delinquency Reports, plus the best showing in parades and inspections.”²² For the Polar Bears, such measures were timely and appropriate. Incidents of indiscipline had risen sharply in June and July. The number of soldiers reported AWOL during that period rose from 74 to 96. Similarly, soldiers tried by Summary Courts-Martial (typically conducted at the company level) rose from 21 to 34, and Special Courts-Martial (for serious or violent crimes) doubled from 5 to 10. Finally, the number of soldiers who contracted a venereal disease increased 63% to 30 confirmed cases in July.²³

Although the division summary for July contains no analysis of the sudden increase, two contributing factors can be assumed. First, the sudden influx of first-term enlistees as replacements, typically still teenagers with money in their pockets and away from home for the first time. Second, the shortage of NCOs meant that many of these young men lacked the supervision to keep them in line on and off duty. Soldiers had little exposure to military justice in Basic Training so they encountered military regulations and military justice only after having committed a punishable offense at their first duty station.

Athletic competitions provided an outlet for pent-up energies. The 31st Infantry Regiment did particularly well in identifying soldiers with sports experience or athletic potential and motivating them to perform. As a result, Polar Bear teams won seven of eight regimental-level competitions conducted by the 7th Infantry Division in 1949.²⁴ In Small Arms Competition, Lieutenant Colonel Bolland, the 2nd Battalion commander, won individual first place for both M1 rifle and M1911A1 pistol competitions.²⁵ In the 7th

²¹ “Foreign Legion,” *Regimental Day* (Camp Crawford, Japan: August 13, 1949); Unit History File, 31st Infantry Regiment; Unit Reports—7th Infantry Division, 1949; Army—AG Command Reports, 1949-1954: 7th Infantry Division; NARA II.

²² *Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, Jan-Dec 1949*, 8.

²³ “Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, 1-31 July 1949.”

²⁴ *Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, Jan-Dec 1949*, 8; *Division Artillery Annual Unit History 1949*, 2; RG 500: Records of U.S. Army Commands, 1940- ; Unit Records (A): Infantry Divisions 1940-1967, Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II.

²⁵ “Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, 1-30 August 1949.”

Division there was no policy of excusing team members from training in order to practice their sports. All athletic activities—including competitions—were conducted after the conclusion of the duty day.²⁶

Given the requirement to complete battalion-level certification by the end of the year and the certainty that winter weather would hamper training, the IX Corps G-3 accelerated the testing schedule for all units. All maneuver training unit tests were to be completed by December 3.²⁷ Colonel Miller ordered battalions to maximize their time in the field to avoid wasting time moving to and from training areas and firing ranges.²⁸ Combat units discontinued their occupation duties in August, allowing commanders to focus solely on combat training.²⁹ In the infantry regiments, the increased OPTEMPO delivered not just better training—no distractions or breaks meant that soldiers retained instruction better—but also improved morale and discipline. As Major Lester K. Olson, the regimental S-3, noted in his training summary for September, “...with an increased workload, the men of the regiment have maintained themselves with an even higher morale and ‘esprit-de-corps.’”³⁰

The intensified training period began with the Army’s five-event Physical Fitness Test. Battalions then moved to local training areas to conduct platoon-level training and testing. Rifle platoons were measured against the standards of Army Field Forces Training Test 7-2. This graded exercise required platoons to attack a prepared defensive position. Specific performance measures included the platoon leader’s field order, movement of the platoon to the assault position, emplacement of supporting fires, conduct of the assault, and consolidation and reorganization of the platoon on seizure of the enemy position. Of eighteen rifle platoons in the 31st Infantry at the time, four failed the test. Fire discipline among both assault and support elements, level of detail and specificity of squad leaders’ orders, and knowledge and use of terrain to conceal movement were the most often-cited reasons for failure. After a week of additional training, the four weak platoons were retested and earned a passing score.³¹

Other testing included day and night evaluations of the Intelligence & Reconnaissance Platoon, and machine gun and 81-mm mortar tests for the battalions’ heavy weapons companies. Personnel turbulence began to seriously affect training proficiency. Much of the benefit of training conducted between May and September was lost due to rotations. Moreover, the accelerated training and testing schedule forced

²⁶ *Training Memorandum Number 15, op. cit.*, 4, paragraph i(2).

²⁷ Headquarters, IX Corps, *Training Memorandum Number 12*, 23 August 1949; copy in Decimal File 333.5, G3 Correspondence Files, 7th Infantry Division; Army-AG Command Reports, 1949-1954: Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II.

²⁸ *Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, Jan-Dec 1949*, 9-10.

²⁹ *Annual Historical Report of the 31st Field Artillery Battalion, 1949*, 4; RG 500: Records of U.S. Army Commands, 1940-; Unit Records (A): Infantry Divisions 1940-1967, Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II.

³⁰ “Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, Month of September 1949.”

³¹ *Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, Jan-Dec 1949*, 10; “Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, Month of September 1949,” *op. cit.*; *Army Field Forces Training Test 7-2*, 27 September 1948, and *Army Field Forces Training Test 7-25*, 18 December 1951, Decimal File 352, General Correspondence Files, Office of the Chief, Army Field Forces; Records of Headquarters Army Ground Forces/Army Field Forces, NARA II.

Colonel Miller to shut down the Regimental Leadership School and return the cadre to their platoons and companies. Few replacements received in the Far East up to October 1949 received more than eight weeks of basic training. The regiment forecast that by the end of 1949, training would have to return to basic unit training to accommodate the large number of replacements.³² The regiment's monthly summaries showed that leader proficiency did not improve enough to permit platoon, company, and battalion-level training until late 1949.

In keeping with General MacArthur's desire to build combined arms experience at every level, September concluded with a combined arms live fire exercise (CALFEX) conducted jointly by the 31st Infantry Regiment and the 31st Field Artillery Battalion. This firepower demonstration served two purposes. First, it gave replacements a clearer impression of the firepower available to an infantry regiment. Second, it helped both units prepare for battalion-level testing. In addition to the CALFEX, the 31st FAB fired two live immediate suppression missions in support of company-level maneuvers. In all, the 31st FAB fired over 800 rounds of standard 155mm high explosive ammunition during September's training.³³

While the regiment supported its battalions' tests, Colonel Miller also trained his headquarters and support elements. When his battalions conducted a week-long bivouac at Shimamatsu, the regiment's Headquarters, Medical, and Service Companies also deployed to support them. This first field deployment of the entire regiment quickly revealed some potentially crippling basic equipment shortages. Without sufficient lister bags for potable water storage, the regiment was forced to transport five-gallon cans to and from Camp Crawford daily. Given the conditions of roads in rural Japan in 1949, this significantly increased the maintenance requirements for the regiment's truck fleet and consumed fuel that the regiment could ill afford. The Regimental S-4, Captain Theodore S. Staiger, reported that the 1948 Table of Organization & Equipment didn't provide enough tents even for the reduced strength of the regiment. Commanders were forced to choose between protecting the health of their soldiers or the serviceability of their equipment and supplies.

By the end of September, no replacement boots in the most common sizes could be found anywhere in the division, and the two pair of fatigues issued to each soldier proved insufficient to provide clean and dry uniforms at the end of the training day. These shortfalls were partially remedied by the end of October with the issue of an additional fatigue uniform to each soldier, but boot repair and replacement remained a problem well into the opening weeks of the Korean War.³⁴

In early October 1949, Colonel F.M. Harris and a detachment of officers and senior NCOs from the Office of the Commander of Army Field Forces (OCAFF)

³² "Unit History Narrative, 31st Infantry Regiment, October 1949."

³³ *Annual Historical Report of the 31st Field Artillery Battalion, 1949*, 4; "7th Division Artillery Monthly History, September 1949;" RG 500: Records of U.S. Army Commands, 1940- ; Unit Records (A): Infantry Divisions 1940-1967, Seventh Infantry Division, NARA II.

³⁴ "Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, Month of September 1949."

inspected training throughout the 7th Infantry Division. OCAFF's reports provide insight into the progress of training around the Army and the general attitude toward training among the Army's senior leaders. Interspersed with comments on units' tactical skills is what soldiers call "chicken shit". For example, inspectors who visited the 31st Infantry faulted it for "a general lack of smartness on the part of individuals" and "laxness in saluting during off-duty hours." On the whole, however, the regiment earned high marks for its training and administration and received an overall rating of "very satisfactory."³⁵

The 2nd Battalion was in the middle of practicing attack problems for upcoming tests when the inspectors arrived at Shimamatsu. Commenting on a battalion-level approach march movement to contact, inspectors found the problem well-planned and satisfactorily executed. The next day, F Company conducted a live-fire attack supported by a battery of 105-mm howitzers from the 57th Field Artillery Battalion, an exercise the inspectors termed "excellent" in its planning and execution. Of particular note, inspectors praised the company commander and battalion staff for their conduct of a post-exercise critique. Significantly, deficiencies noted during execution resulted primarily from leadership failures at company and platoon level (e.g., unclear company order, disoriented platoon leaders) and not from errors by NCOs. Other elements of the regiment also earned high marks. The I&R Platoon's training on patrolling and observation post procedures was "well prepared and effectively presented" and the Medical Company's training on field expedient first aid rated "excellent" for being both "interesting and effective."³⁶ No unit in the regiment earned less than a "satisfactory" rating.

Both battalions executed Reinforced Battalion Combat Firing Tests in November 1949, supported by the 57th Field Artillery Battalion. To add realism, F-80 "Shooting Stars" from the 49th Fighter Wing flew close-air support sorties for each battalion. Having earned a "very satisfactory" rating from the IX Corps evaluators, 3rd Battalion returned to Camp Crawford where it conducted an emergency deployment readiness exercise. Alerted on November 21, the battalion moved by rail to Chitose's abandoned airfield. There, the battalion established a defensive perimeter to defend against a notional attack by Soviet paratroops. The 2nd Battalion, having failed its graded exercise, conducted a seven-day review of all training from squad to battalion level. Returning to Shimamatsu on November 30, the IX Corps staff certified the battalion as combat ready. Despite Siberian weather, Heavy Mortar Company passed its training test on December 15, and all replacements that had arrived since the late summer fired their weapons for record in deep snow the week before Christmas.³⁷

³⁵ *Report of Training Inspection of the United States Army, FECOM*, by Col. F.M. Harris and Party, Tab P, "7th Infantry Division," 5; Decimal File 333.11, Army Field Forces Headquarters, Adjutant General's Section, Communications & Records Division, Secret Decimal File 1949-1950; RG 337: Records of Headquarters Army Ground Forces/Army Field Forces, NARA II.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷ "7th Division Monthly Historical Report, November 1949;" *Unit History, 31st Infantry Regiment, Jan-Dec 1949*, 12; *Unit History, 31st Infantry, Month of November 1949*; *Unit History, 31st Infantry, Month of December, 1*.

Severe weather kept the troops indoors for the remainder of 1949. The 31st Infantry concentrated on cold weather training and movement with skis and snowshoes in the first three weeks of 1950, while the regimental staff conducted a command post exercise. Captain Richard J. Hertel of E Company experimented with a unique piece of improvised equipment—the “Gunboggon.” Hoping to improve the cross-country mobility of crew-served weapons in heavy snow, Captain Hertel had plywood sleds built, to which crews attached .30 caliber machine guns. The experiment exceeded expectations because the regimental S-3 recommended “Gunboggon’s use by 57-mm and 75-mm recoilless rifle crews as well.”³⁸

The Polar Bears interrupted training to welcome a new commander in February. Colonel Richard P. Ovenshine became the regiment’s third commander in eleven months. Ovenshine had experience on division staffs during World War II and briefly commanded the 165th Infantry Regiment during the initial occupation of Japan.³⁹ He concurrently became Camp Crawford’s commander. Headquarters, 7th Infantry Division moved to Sendai on northern Honshu. Departure of division headquarters and its supporting signal, replacement, and reconnaissance companies relieved crowded conditions at Camp Crawford. For the remainder of the month, training centered on winter skills, culminating in a regimental ski and snowshoe competition. The event combined land navigation, marksmanship, and first aid with winter survival and cross-country movement. In addition, the regiment conducted a two-week refresher course for platoon sergeants, emphasizing leadership principles and how to best impart instruction on tactical tasks.⁴⁰

In March 1950, warmer weather allowed the resumption of squad and crew-level training. Light machine gun and 60-mm and 81-mm mortar sections deployed to firing ranges near Camp Crawford for ten days of live-fire practice and qualification while 57mm anti-tank crews conducted familiarization firing with antiquated 2.36 inch rocket launchers.

Two other significant events occurred in March. First, cadre from the Eighth Army Air Transportability School traveled to Hokkaido to train the regiment in air movement. Regimental and battalion staff officers attended a 17-hour planner’s course to acquaint them with the basics of load planning, while enlisted soldiers and company grade officers attended a 12-hour basic proficiency course in loading and securing cargo. The second event was a two-week squad leader refresher course, patterned after the previous month’s platoon sergeant training. Again taught by the Regimental Leadership School’s cadre, the focus remained on the principles of leadership, effective instruction, and the duties and responsibilities of squad leaders in a tactical setting.⁴¹

³⁸ 31st Infantry Regiment, *Monthly Historical Summary for January 1950*.

³⁹ Edmund G. Love, *The 27th Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1949), 651.

⁴⁰ 31st Infantry Regiment, *Monthly Historical Summary for February 1950*;

⁴¹ 31st Infantry Regiment, *Monthly Historical Summary for March 1950*.

Near the end of March, the entire 31st Infantry Regimental Combat Team (RCT) moved to Shimamatsu for an RCT Firing Exercise. The event was graded by Eighth Army umpires. Included in the RCT were the 57th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm towed howitzers), a battery of the 31st Field Artillery Battalion (155mm towed howitzers), and a company each from the 13th Engineer Battalion, 7th Medical Battalion, and 77th Tank Battalion. This was the first time the entire RCT had trained together. The senior observer concluded that the 31st RCT needed to devote more attention to training as a team, not as a grouping of individual units. He rated the RCT's performance as unsatisfactory.⁴²

Reacting to that disappointing showing, Colonel Ovenshine directed that units review all subjects trained since the previous summer, beginning with basic individual tasks and progressing through all levels of collective training to include battalion maneuvers. Two RCT-level command post exercises were conducted with leaders and staff from all subordinate and supporting units to eliminate command and control problems experienced in March. When soldiers from the rifle companies were not engaged in collective training, they were constructing and using an improved rifle marksmanship range. Unlike existing static ranges, the new range employed life-size targets at unknown distances. Instead of lying prone in the open, firers on the new range had to acquire and engage targets from behind cover. The range received the division commander's praise for its combat realism.⁴³

In April, the 31st Infantry Regiment lost over 200 experienced officers, NCOs and soldiers while receiving fewer than 30 replacements. The loss could not have come at a worse time, amid preparations for the RCT exercise retest. The regiment was also forced to suspend training for two days in mid-month to receive 56 Japanese soldiers who were being repatriated from Soviet Siberia. The mission irritated the regiment's leadership, who were earnestly preparing for the retest.⁴⁴ Despite the manpower losses and unwanted distraction, the 31st RCT earned "very satisfactory" ratings on its retest. The Division G-3 observer recorded that this exercise, "showed a vast improvement over the March test, proving the results of five weeks of intensive combat team training which the 31st had undergone prior to this retest."⁴⁵

The battalion commanders offered differing views of the obstacles they faced. Lieutenant Colonel Robert R. Summers, commanding the 2nd Battalion, focused on personnel problems. In priority, he listed a shortage of officers, a shortage of competent

⁴² G-3 Monthly Historical Summary #44, March 1950, "31st Infantry," Eighth U.S. Army Military History Section, Section III (Historical Section) Monthly Summaries #43-46: February-May 1950; Historical Officers' Files, 1949-1950, RG 338: Records of the Eighth United States Army, NARA II.

⁴³ 31st Infantry, *Monthly Historical Summary for April, 1950*; G-3 Monthly Historical Summary #45, April 1950, "31st Infantry," Eighth U.S. Army Military History Section, Section III (Historical Section) Monthly Summaries #43-46: February-May 1950; Historical Officers' Files, 1949-1950, RG 338: Records of the Eighth United States Army, NARA II.

⁴⁴ 31st Infantry, *Monthly Historical Summary for April, 1950*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; Monthly Historical Summary #45, April 1950; Eighth U.S. Army Military History Section, Section III (Historical Section) Monthly Summaries #43-46: February-May 1950; Historical Officers' Files, 1949-1950, RG 338: Records of the Eighth United States Army, NARA II.

NCOs, and constant turnover of enlisted personnel as the chief impediments to achieving and maintaining a high state of readiness. Summers' lacked one of his two authorized majors and five captains. Five of his nine rifle platoons and the battalion intelligence section had no officer. Lieutenant Colonel William R. Reilly, commanding the 3rd Battalion, attributed his battalion's shortcomings to resource shortfalls. Limited field training opportunities during the harsh winter, a shortage of winter gear for soldiers, the absence of 57mm recoilless rifles, and the advanced age of his crew-served weapons ranked as his most significant obstacles. Reilly also lacked his second field grade officer, but had more lieutenants and captains than the 2nd Battalion.

Both officers reported an almost complete lack of anti-tank capability. Like every other regiment in Japan, the 31st Infantry had 2.36-inch rocket launchers instead of 75mm and 57mm recoilless rifles. The 2nd Battalion had two recoilless rifles but they arrived without sights or mounts. Anti-tank teams had not yet received the more powerful 3.5-inch rocket launcher then in limited production. Both battalions reported every authorized vehicle as mission-capable, although they still lacked four ¼ ton trucks (jeeps).

By the summer of 1950, the 31st Infantry Regiment was no longer the loose aggregation of individuals shipped from Korea to Japan eighteen months earlier. It had developed a sense of pride and cohesion, and markedly improved the combat readiness of its individual soldiers, platoons, companies, and battalions. Unfortunately, the 31st, like the other regiments of the 7th Infantry Division, had to give up many of its trained soldiers, NCOs, and officers to fill the first three divisions to deploy to combat in Korea. When its own turn came, the 31st Infantry had to be hastily rebuilt with a mixture of new recruits and recalled reservists, augmented by over 1800 Koreans with little or no military experience in their own or anyone else's army.

The history of the 31st Infantry Regiment in occupation-era Japan is a sad testimony to the negligence of the nation's civilian leadership. Blaming Japan-based divisions' unreadiness for combat in Korea on an "occupation mentality" glossed over the harsh realities commanders faced in trying to train their units to meet even the most minimal standards of combat readiness. It soon became evident that the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Divisions sent from the US were no more combat ready than those that had been stationed in Japan. It is important that historians understand and convey the root causes of Task Force Smith's defeat at Osan and the subsequent rout and near destruction of several American divisions. It is a testament to the dedication and ability of officers like Colonel Richard P. Ovenshine that hastily rebuilt regiments were able to carry out the UN Counteroffensive of September 1950 and survive the subsequent campaign.

References

1. Interview with Logan Caterall, concerning Camp Crawford's development and training environment. He also provided pictures of Cp Crawford and Sapporo.
2. Interview with COL (Ret) George Rasula, concerning the 7th Infantry Division's winter training program.

3. Author's personal pictures of Cp Crawford, taken when he was there as the dependent son of an Army NCO from 1954 to 1956.
4. *Army Lineage Book, Volume II, Infantry*, Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1953.
5. Major Thomas E. Hanson, *America's First Cold War Army*, draft manuscript, thomas.e.hanson@us.army.mil