

DEVILS IN BAGGY PANTS

Military Through the Ages
Jamestown Settlement
March 21-22, 2011

ITEM COMPANY, 3/504th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT
OPERATION SHINGLE, JANUARY 1944
ANZIO, ITALY



Why interpret Item Company, 3/504th PIR?

The story of 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) is compelling. Few other units served in as many theaters or campaigns as the 504th. In North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, Holland, Belgium and Germany they seemed to be everywhere throughout the war. They were trained as airborne troops, but often arrived on the battlefield not via parachute, but by landing craft, diesel trucks and sometimes in flimsy canvas boats.

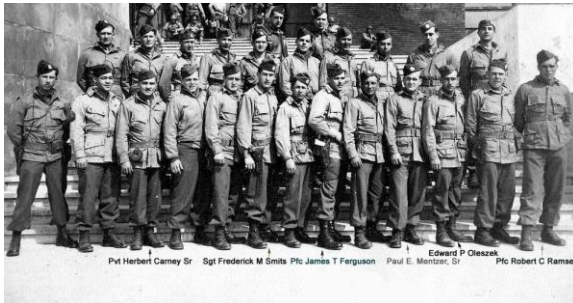


Photo of 3/504th troopers taken in Naples just after Operation Shingle

From their birth on 1 May 1942 in Fort Benning, Georgia they served with distinction and by war's end, they were the first American troops into Berlin as a peace time occupation force.

In 1974 Cornelius Ryan would immortalize 3/504th in his book *"A Bridge too Far"* as the unit that used canvas boats with rifles as oars to capture the Waal River Bridge, but our focus will be nine months earlier, before the Allies had a foothold in Europe, when the Axis forces still had momentum and when the outcome of the war was far from certain.

Our focus for 2011 Military Through the Ages (MTA) will be Item Company, 3/504th PIR during the Battle for Anzio or "Operation Shingle". It is our goal to honor all the veterans of the Battle for Anzio by telling their story through interpretation, hand-on learning and dynamic presentations based around this single company.

What does "Devils in Baggy Pants" mean?

The nickname "The Devils in Baggy Pants" has its roots in the Battle of Anzio. During the heavy fighting along the Mussolini Canal, troopers came across the body of a German officer whose unit had been in a fierce firefight with the 504th. While going through his effects, they noted the following entry found in the entry in the soldier's diary:

"American parachutists...devils in baggy pants...are less than 100 meters from my outpost line. I can't sleep at night; they pop up from nowhere and we never know when or how they will strike next. Seems like the black-hearted devils are everywhere..."

The knick name quickly spread and was adopted by the troopers as sign of honor. "Devils in Baggy Pants" nickname is still used by the 504th PIR till this day.



The jacket patch pictured here was worn by some 504th members by the end of the World War II and is an illustrated depiction of the unit's nickname.

Research Methodology

Despite only having 17 men reporting for duty at the end of Operation Shingle, Item Company has a remarkably high percentage of memoirs, photographs and official documentation associated with it. This company, out of all others serving with the 504th lends itself to being reproduced accurately without conjecture or presumption.

Primary resources for our research were drawn from 504th veteran memoirs, interviews, photographs, War Dept Correspondence, official reports, films and extant artifacts directly related to the 504th.

Research was categorized using a 3 tier process with the 1st tier being the optimal source for documentation, and only when the 1st tier yielded no results, did we consult 2nd



Pvt George A. Baxter Item Co., 3/504th, killed at Anzio, Italy on 23 Jan 1944

and 3rd tier sources. The tiers are as follows:

1st Documentation Tier:

- Resources related to the 3/504th PIR at the Battle of Anzio.

2nd Documentation Tier:

- Resources related to 3/504th PIR in the months prior to Anzio
- Resources related to 1/504th and 2/504th at Anzio.

3rd Documentation Tier:

- Resources related to 504th up to a year before Anzio
- 2) Resource related to other U.S. forces at Anzio
- 3) Resources related to other 82nd Airborne units fighting in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations (MTO) prior to January 1944.

At the end of this document, we've included a bibliography and a list of suggested museums to visit to learn more about the 504th PIR and the Battle of Anzio.

504th in Operation Shingle

By January 1944, the German Army had set up three defensive lines along central Italy which were formidable and difficult to penetrate. To outflank the German defenses along the Gustav Line, an amphibious invasion was planned north of those defenses at Anzio, Italy. Operation Shingle as it would be called would call for land crafts to bring troops right onto the beachhead with the navy guns supporting as suppressing fire.



504th Paratroopers arriving via boat on the Anzio Beachhead 22 January 1944

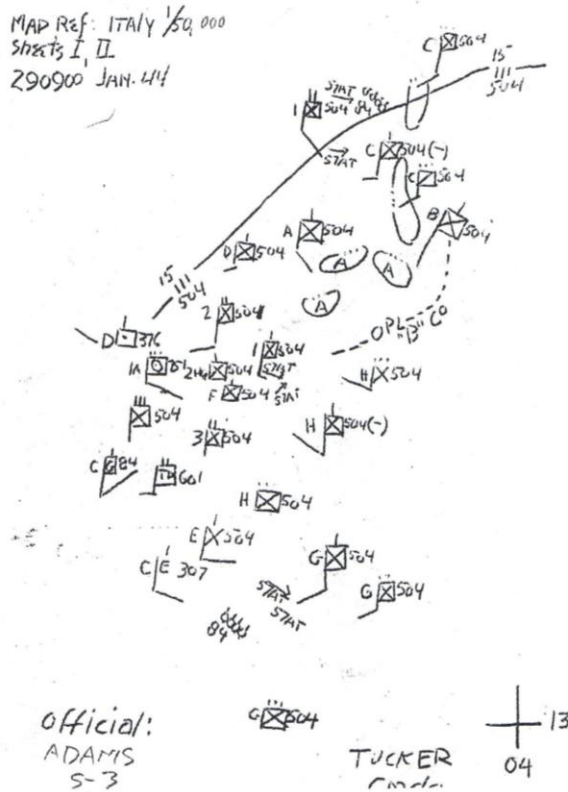
The original plan called for a veteran airborne unit to drop in behind German lines. The 504th was the veteran unit chosen. However, just 48 hours before the invasion, orders were changed and the 504th was not to arrive on the battlefield under a parachute canopy, but via Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) to fight as 'leg infantry'.

Former high school teacher, now an Item Company officer, Lieutenant Moffat Burriss would later remember "After listening to the briefing, we figured Anzio would be a little rougher than Sicily, but nothing we couldn't handle. We were totally unprepared for the carnage that followed".

Thirteen LCIs were to take the 504th to a beach designated as Red Beach. The initial landings went well on January 22nd and the 504th was scheduled to arrive in the second wave of assault troopers, but by then German artillery had zeroed in on the incoming LCIs and George Company's LCI took a direct hit blowing 504th troopers off the deck.

As Item Company's craft neared the beach and the ship's crew told them the water was 3' deep. The lowered and first off was Lt. Rosie Rosenthal who at

5' 2" tall disappeared into the water which was way deeper than 3', he reemerged and next off was Private Frank McLane who was a bazooka man for Item Company. McLane too ended up submerged as well and later stated "I did an un-Christlike walk on the bottom of until my head came to the surface".



Hand drawn map detailing all the Company and Platoon positions of the 504th along the Mussolini Canal in January 1944.

Sgt. Carter S. Ross also found himself submerged and only by using a guide rope was he able to get to shore; "We clomped down the ramp, grabbed the rope with one hand and committed ourselves to the sea, loaded with mortars, machine guns, bedrolls and other equipment. The water was eight or ten feet deep and as icy as a spinster's heart."

"I jumped in the water and it was over my head. I was a good swimmer and I managed to get the sand bar, I lost my helmet and my rifle, but when I got ashore I picked up a discarded rifle"

-Sergeant Zimmerman

Once on the beach, the troopers found no artillery support and few mortars. The only weapons the men of Item Company had to fight off the Panzer tanks and penetrate the beach defenses were rifles, bazookas and hand grenades. The German artillery,

including the 240mm rail road gun known as 'Anzio Annie' also began to pummel the 504th position.

"Wet, cold, miserable, mad disgusted and laughing. We crossed a level of space into a wood, hung our clothing on the bushes and began to get settled for a brief stay. Several pictures of wives and sweethearts were ignominiously hung on the bushes to dry alongside thousand-lira and small change. The water filled the holes and we scooped in the swampy soil as fast as we dug them. Soon a plane swung low to strafe us and we splashed into them like a bunch of frogs"

-Sgt. Ross

There was no safe haven at Anzio. All farm building and structures were targets for the German artillery. The roads and natural geographical features were also zeroed in. Even the hospitals on the beachhead were immediately named Hell's Half Acre because they had been shredded by artillery fire. The only option for the men of Item Company was to move inland and as Lt. Magellas put it "Surrender was never an option".

The 504th was soon split with 1/504th and 2/504th were assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division while 3/504th including Item Company was assigned to the 1st Armored Division to execute small unit infiltrating patrols across the German lines along the Mussolini Canal. Once on the canal Lt. Magellas noted that the "the Germans we fought at Anzio were highly trained, combat-hardened, disciplined, and well-led." Indeed some of these troops had served on the Ostfront, Poland, North Africa, Sicily and Italy affording many of the Germans several years of combat experience.

The fighting along the canal was akin to the trench warfare of the World War. Sniping by the enemy kept soldiers in small fox holes all day and at night soldiers sent out raiding parties trying to capture POWs for intelligence. Until the end of March 1944 the men of Item Company fought along the banks of the canal preventing the Germans from reinforcing removing land mines and knocking out tanks.

Item Company had 8 officers and 119 men on January 22nd when they landed at Anzio, within eight weeks only 4 officers and 13 men answered the morning roll call. At 86% casualties, this was certainly one of the most tragic campaigns fought by any company of US troops in the war. Because of the high casualty rate in Item Company and across the 504th, they were relieved of duty on 22 March 1944 and ordered to England to rejoin the rest of the 82nd Airborne Division in preparation

for the Normandy Invasion. (A lack of replacements prevented the 504th from participating in the invasion, so only a few dozen 504th troopers were used as pathfinders.)

It is interesting in hindsight to note that The invasion plan originally assigned the 504th to make a parachute assault near Aprilia, eight miles north of Anzio, which would have placed it in position for an early capture of the key road junction at Campoleone, which was not taken until late May 1944. However these plans were scrapped on 20 January before the invasion.

For its outstanding performance from 8 to 12 February 1944, the battalion was presented one of the first Presidential Unit Citations awarded in the European Theater of Operations. The 504th would receive 4 such citations during the war.



504th Troopers along the banks of the Mussolini Canal

Uniforms of Item Company, 3/504th PIR

In the weeks leading up to Operation Shingle, 504th troopers requisitioned clothing which would help them cope with the environmental conditions they would face along the “Winter Line” in Anzio, Italy.

The German artillery had the roads at Anzio zeroed in and supply trucks had a hard enough time getting essentials like food, medical supplies and ammunition to the troops. Clothing was far down on the list of priorities. Lt. Moffat Burriss’ described how their clothes at the conclusion of the Anzio campaign were filthy beyond laundering and everything had to be replaced including clothes, weapons and gear.



Two frigid 504th troopers wring out their clothing after wading to shore at Anzio beach on 22 January 1944.

Jackets

Three types of jackets are being seen worn by 504th Troopers just before, during or after Operation Shingle. The M1942 Parachutists Jacket (M42 Jacket), the Winter Combat jacket (Tanker Jacket) and the M1941 Field Jacket, with the former two

options being most widely evidenced in images. The main reason for troopers opting to depart from their standard M42 jackets was that the tanker jackets were lined with heavy wool similar to those found in blankets which would offer a warmer option than the M42 jacket or the M41 field jacket. A survey of 504th photographs during the Operation Shingle campaign yielded the following results:

Jackets Viewed-64
 Winter Combat Jackets-27
 M1942 Parachute Jackets-25
 M1941 Field Jackets-5
 Can't be Identified-7



*Arnold Gustafson's
 M42 Jumpsuit
 3/504th PIR*

Trousers

As with the jackets, several types of pants were worn during time period also. Images show the M1942 Parachutists Trousers (M42 trousers) and the Winter Combat Trousers (Tanker Overalls). Both of these trouser variations were designed to be worn over M1937 wool trousers and while not seen directly in images from Operation Shingle, we can see by the ‘baggy’ look of the M42 trousers and tanker overalls



that we seen in images, coupled with the temperatures seen at Anzio, we assume the wool pants were worn under both these outer garments.

Paratroopers were originally issued M42 trousers which had two outside cargo pockets. Although not designed with outer pockets, (as we can see from the original pair of tanker trousers pictured here), some troopers chose to alter the issued garment by adding 'rigger' pockets to the outside of the overalls to store ammunition, hand grenades, extra clothing or a few piece of chocolate.



Two 504th Troopers are seen here wearing tanker trousers altered with rigger pockets ala the M42 pants.

Shirts

M1937 wool shirts can be seen in a few images from this campaign, and unlike their time in Sicily, the 504th troopers were now in a more temperate climate and they would be happy to have this garment on as the temperatures dipped below freezing at night.

Insignia

While Shoulder Sleeve Insignia (SSI) meaning divisional patches and NCO chevrons is visible on some trooper's uniform in the pictures, it seems to be the exception, not the norm to wear it. The only real constant with insignia is that the vast majority

of officer helmets display rank insignia on the front and the officer 'bar' on the rear.

Helmets

Although the troopers arrived on the battlefield in land crafts and not with parachutes the troopers still wore their M2 Parachutist helmet. Images suggest that some were painted OD and some were painted in a Vesicant camouflage pattern.

Boots

There is no other boot seen in images or written accounts than the Corcoran Paratrooper boot. This boot more than any other item was a source of pride for the troopers as evidenced by this quote from Lt. Magellas after he was wounded at Anzio: *"I was rushed into a large tent and placed on an operating slab. Instead of trying to take off my dam, muddy combat clothes, and orderly cut them off and threw them into a garbage heap. I objected to my paratrooper boots being cut off, but I was in no position to resist. I had a special attachment to my boots because they were a distinguishing feature and a source of pride"*

Undergarments

While only a few images illustrate underclothing, several accounts describe the men wearing several pairs of heavy socks, long underdrawers and cotton shirts under their wool shirts, all this in an effort to maintain some warmth during the campaign.



Another image of 504th troopers illustrating tanker overalls along with a variety of jackets, knit caps, scarves and wool shirts to battle the "Winter Line"

Weapons of Item Company, 3/504th PIR

The table of organization and equipment (TO&E) for a paratrooper rifle squad was as follows:

Rifle Squad:

Sergeant, Rifle Squad Leader, M1 Rifle

Corporal, Assist Squad Leader, M28 Thompson

Private, Machine Gunner, M1911(A1) Pistol

Private, Assistant Machine Gunner, M1 Rifle

Private, Ammunition Bearer, M1 Rifle

Private, Rifleman, M1 Rifle

Private, Rifleman, M1 Rifle

Private, Rifleman, M1 Rifle

Private, Rifleman, M1 Rifle

Private, Rifleman, M1 Rifle

Private, Rifleman, M1 Rifle

Private, Rifleman, M1 Rifle

Unit Weapons:

M1919 Browning LMG*

*In addition to this list, one M1A1 Rocket Launcher (Bazooka) in was to be manned by squad rifleman.

Bazookas

Since there are several accounts of bazookas being utilized by Item Company troopes at Anzio, below is an expanded description of how they were used in combat during WWII.

5 Bazookas were issued per Rifle Company (A unit of about 200 men). A Bazooka team consisted of 2 men, a gunner and a loader.

2.36 INCH ROCKET LAUNCHER, M1A1



CHARACTERISTICS OF 2.36 INCH ROCKET LAUNCHER, M1A1

Weight, complete..... 13.3 lbs.
 Length overall..... 54.5 ins.
 Composition..... Smooth bore steel tube
 Ammunition: M6 Series High Explosive Anti Tank, M10 White Phosphorus

The M1 Series "Bazooka" was a very simple, yet effective anti armor weapon that gave soldiers a sorely needed anti armor capability. Consisting of little more than a steel tube, grip, trigger, buttstock, 2 C Cell Batteries and sight - it was a model rocket kit on steroids. The Bazooka had no recoil - the rocket's flash and gasses were expelled out the back of the tube, with the rocket traveling downrange to its target. Unfortunately due to the back blast, the Bazooka could not be used in buildings or confined spaces, or the operators would be severely injured. Shortly after entering service in North Africa against the Germans, the

design was copied and improved into the Panzershreck, an 88mm version of the American Bazooka and turned against US Sherman tanks in 1944.

The bazooka rockets proved to be problematic in their design, and many improvements were made throughout the war, changing warhead shapes from conical to a rounded cylinder. It was found that the standard bazooka rockets would not penetrate the thick frontal armor on most German tanks, requiring bazooka teams to attempt to hit the tank in the sides or thinly armored rear. The bazooka was most effective at close ranges, under 50 yards.

How were bazookas used during Operation Shingle by the 504th? A lieutenant in Sgt. Ross squad saw the value in bazookas, when asked why he wanted a bazooka man to come on a small patrol, the reply was simple and direct *"we're looking for trouble, any kind of trouble. We are taking a bazooka along. Maybe we'll ambush a tank or armored car."*

Bayonets and Knives

There are no images of 504th troopers carrying or using bayonets, so we can't be sure if what kind of bayonets were being carried as the US army was in transition at this point from carrying 16" M1905 Bayonet to the 10" version (M1 Bayonet). Also not seen in images were the M2 Paratrooper Knife (a switchblade carried by airborne troops)



Image of a 504th trooper with an M1918 trench Knife

So how do we know they were carrying bayonets? This account below describes a rarity for WWII battles, a bayonet charge:

"I was a platoon leader of a machine gun platoon in Headquarters Company of the 504 Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR). We'd been on the beachhead for several days, and I Company was on a defensive position; Lt. Colonel Freeman, our Battalion CO, called me over and said that I Company needs to be taken into an attack. He was sending me down there to take over I Company' I lined them up and said to them, "Here's what we are going to do." I said that Colonel Freeman had directed us to launch a diversionary counter attack on the right flank of the German position so that H Company could get out of there. Next, for the first time and only time in my battle experience, I had the men fixed bayonets.

What were the reactions of the men when you gave that order? The men pretty much looked at me blankly and put the bayonets on their guns. We were a pretty disciplined outfit and when you gave an order to paratroopers they responded."

-Lt. Roy Hanna 504th PIR

Lt. Hanna lead the company into a successful bayonet charge and pushed the Germans out of a fortified position. It's still unclear what bayonet the troopers were carrying however.



Image of a 504th trooper with an M1918 trench Knife

While the exact type of bayonet used is still a mystery, there is photographic evidence however of combat knives. At least two images showing a 504th troopers removing land mines using the

M1918 Trench "Knuckle-Duster" Knife. This knife was an extremely common "Fighting Knife" in the early US Airborne units.

Another account illustrating the use of edged weapons came a few weeks into the campaign while a small squad was on patrol; "Casey, tensely coiled like a great snake, enveloped him [German soldier] with his eleven-inch dagger and silently stretched him on the ground. "Casey's cut one's throat!", "Casey's cut one's throat!" went whispered up the line until it reach the Sergeant. The latter whispered "I always feel safer on a patrol with Casey!" We can't be sure if the 'dagger' was a M1 bayonet which measured about 10" in length, or another combat knife Casey carried.

Firearms

While some images do show troopers with M1903 bolt action rifles, M1 Carbine rifles and M1928 Machine Guns, the most commonly seen weapon among the 504th is without a doubt the M1 Garand.



The M1 Garand was the first semi-automatic rifle to be generally issued to the infantry of any nation. Called "The Greatest Battle Implement Ever Devised" by General George S. Patton, the Garand officially replaced the M1903 Springfield as the standard service rifle of the US Army in 1936 and continued to be used in large numbers until 1963 and to a lesser degree until 1966.

The M1 Garand is a full blown combat rifle with maximum range of 3,200 meters and maximum effective range of 400 meters.....or the greatest

distance at which the weapon can be expected to fire accurately to inflict casualties or damage. Fully loaded with 8-round en bloc clip, cleaning kit in butt stock, sling and with stock of dense GI issue wood the M1 weighed in at 11-1/4 lbs. The M1 uses .30-06 rifle cartridge.

As seen in the image on page 1 of this document, troopers did carry side arms. In addition to squad leaders and light machine gunners, evidence of privates in the ranks would acquire them through various means and wear them without authorization. M1911 .45 Caliber automatic pistol seems to be the most common pistol among 504th trooper.

Equipment of Item Company, 3/504th PIR

Through written accounts and images of 504th troopers both on the LCIs and on the beachhead, we can see that they were carrying heavy loads of personal gear, clothing, food, equipment, weapons and ammunition. However, there is little consistence in their choice of equipment. It seems to be left up to the personal whim of the individual soldier as to what he wanted to carry off the LCI onto the beach, as paratroopers they knew all too well that what they carried may be the only supplies they'd get for a long time and they traded the burden of a heavy load for the security of a few extra layers of clothing or rounds of ammunition.



Heavily laden 504th Troopers attempt to dry out their jump boots after wading ashore

Web gear appears to be mix of pistol belts and cartridge belts with more cartridge belts in the mix. When the cartridge belt is worn, 2-3 'rigger pouches' can be seen in use on the belt. Both types of belts are universally worn with the M1936 suspender system which also supported the M1936 Field Bag (musette bag). The standard M1924 first aid pouch and not the 'airborne' first aid pouch seems to be worn by the troopers.

Entrenching tools in images vary as well, with pick mattocks being in evidence as well as two versions of the M1910 Entrenching Tool. The first version with the longer handle is what troopers were initially issued, but we can see many 'cut down' M1910 tools in images as well. This was a cut down by

paratroopers who felt a shorter handled shovel wasn't as hazardous to the trooper on landing via parachute.



Both the long and short version of the M1910 Entrenching Tool can be seen in this image



Another image of the shortened M1910 Entrenching Tool is seen in this image, along with Shoulder Sleeve Insignia.

Aside from gear used for combat, personal items like canteens, cups, spoons, lighters, personal photographs, letters from home, religious items, money, blankets, combs, sewing kits, wool gloves, knit caps, scarves and various other tiny items would be stuffed into pockets or into the musette bag for safe keeping. Each soldier had to decide how much weight he could carry and if items non-essential to survival (food, water and ammo) would be worth the possible 'serious miscalculation' which would slow him down.

Food of Item Company, 3/504th PIR

Few subjects are written about more, or complained about with such fervor as army food. For centuries soldiers have taken quest for better quality and higher quantities of food to extreme lengths. Things are no different for the boys of the 504th during Operation Shingle. There are more quotes and remembrances about food than any other topic including battle experiences, weather, clothing and camaraderie.

The food consumed at Anzio can be categorized into three main categories:

- 1) "Issued Rations": Food items an army supplies to its own soldiers.
- 2) "Liberated Rations": Food items soldiers steal or barter from the local civilians.
- 3) "Captured Rations": Food items taken from enemy stores or soldiers.

"Issued Rations"

"We were short of water and had been without K rations for two days,"

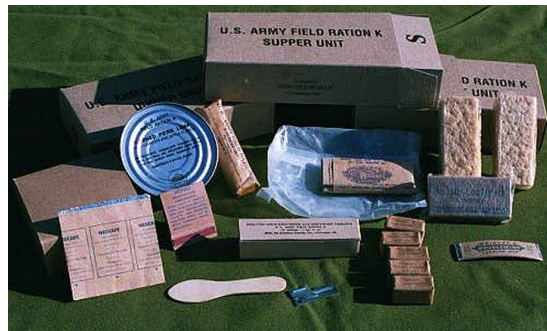
-Lt. Megellas

This quote (written in early February, 1944) typifies supply problems facing Item Company during Operation Shingle. The Germans along the Mussolini Canal had concentrated mortar and artillery fire on the roads preventing food supplies from being brought up to the front. Only rations carried by each individual soldier during the initial assault were available. Paratroopers were accustomed to being self sufficient, but since they were acting like regular infantry instead of dropping into the combat zone, many soldiers assumed they would be supplied quickly so they carried less than their normal combat load.

From most accounts K rations were most common type of ration in the early days of Operation Shingle, although C rations and 5-in-I rations were also consumed.

The **K-ration** was an individual daily combat food ration packaged in cardboard containers which was introduced by the US during WWII. It was originally intended as an individually packaged

daily ration for issue to airborne troops and other mobile forces for short durations. The K ration provided three courses; breakfast, lunch and dinner



K-Ration Supper Unit as issued to the 504th

The **C-Ration**, was an individual canned, pre-cooked, or prepared wet ration intended to be issued to U.S. military land forces when fresh food or packaged unprepared food were not available. Development began in 1938 with the first rations being field tested in 1940 and wide-scale adoption following soon after.

The **5-in-1 Ration** was developed in 1942 by the U.S. Army to fulfill a need for a pre-packaged field ration for use by small motorized combat groups. The 5-in-1 allowed small groups of soldiers cook meals without the need of complex kitchen or cooking skill.

Some of the boys from Lt. Roy Hanna's section apparently had some disagreements about how these rations were to be prepared.: *"My buddies and I decided to pool our rations. Since I had experience as a short-order cook, I was designated as the cook. Our food consisted of "C-rations" (little cans of food) and 5-in-1 rations (dehydrated food, a real luxury). Of course my friends gave the usual culinary critique of my cooking, especially Roy, ...who grew up in the mountains. Laddie and I had no problem eating, but Roy became angry with me because I refused to put bacon grease into the pot as Roy's Dad had done when he was young. Somehow, we survived despite the lack of bacon grease."*

-Sgt. Leo St. John

It seemed as though there was little consistency with ration. One day they could be feasting on big captured meals, the next day they could be cold and hungry as Sgt. Ross would write; *"It was raining and we had no raincoats; it was freezing and we had no dry clothes; we were hungry and our rations hadn't caught up with us; otherwise, we were living the 'life of Riley' – whoever the hell that much-talked-of contented bastard was"*

"When we first landed at Anzio, I thought we would be in Rome in three days as the resistance was so light, but the Germans brought in their half-tracks with the anti-aircraft guns on them. Wow, did that halt us I remember getting shot at by the Germans with a 20mm shells from those guns. I don't remember any showers, soap, toothpaste, or anything but K-rations."

-Cpl Fred J. Baldino

In my entire combat experience, I never saw a hot meal while on the line, and it was absurd to expect it. Any reports to the contrary were as accurate as the tooth fairy and conjured by our rear echelon for consumption on the home front.

-Lt. Megellas

"I bet 90 percent of us were caught eating our first five-in-one rations in many weeks. We threw on our horseshoe [bed] rolls and packs, grabbed a handful of food, and fell in line with the rest of the platoon."

-Pvt. Bill Leonard

The monotony of eating the same food 3 times a day every day, for months seemed to get to one of Sgt. Carter's friends: "The Joker gets hungrier. He is always hungry. He drags a supper ration off the shelf of his dugout. Although he knows the lettering on the box by heart, he reads it again to pass the time. He even counts the words that begin with M and then those that begin with N. He pries the end of the box with his bayonet, tears the waxed paper off the crackers, surveys the corn pork loaf with hatred, and puts the stick of stale gum and a small chocolate bar in his jacket pocket to chew on outpost that night. As he starts to eat, a bevy of shells rings his dugout and contracts his stomach. He munches the crackers slowly in his salivaless mouth and stares straight ahead with the vacant expression of a cow"

-Sgt. Carter

Snacking at times seemed to be the only way to pass the long boring hours along the Mussolini Canal: "The sergeant has been on outpost one

hour; it seems like a week. He pulls out his chocolate bar, breaks it in half and splits with his partner. They munch slowly, prolonging the action of their jaws and taste ducts. They don't want to get through too quick and have nothing to do. He then takes out a stick of gum and splits it too. Later his buddy will share his chocolate and gum"

-Sgt. Carter



Note the K ration box lying next to this 504th trooper during Operation Shingle in February 1944

"Liberated Rations"

While some members of the 504th at Anzio lived solely on issued rations that Uncle Sam provided, a few industrious and devious 504th troopers managed to eat considerably well given the setting and conditions.

Sergeant Carter's first miserable night on the beachhead gave way to a wonder continental breakfast 'compliments' of the local population; *"The night, which came rainy, windy and cold, passed without incident. The next morning we outposted some houses still occupied by Italians. They took off, leaving behind several plump chickens, tubs of lard, sides of bacon and sacks of flour, when they learned that all hell was about to break loose. Sgt. Toland prepared a breakfast of hot cakes for the boys. For lunch we had chicken and dumpling and a pot of strong coffee with fresh milk to go with it."*

Another trooper took a more persuasive stance with an Italian family to get the men in his squad a good meal: *“Duquesne summoned an old peasant still living in the house to come to the hen yard. Pulling his .45, he calmly shot the head off a fat hen and informed the stupefied old fellow that he wanted it for breakfast at eight next morning. Next he found three bushels of potatoes which had escaped detection on the first scrutiny and set his eager jokers to work peeling them for supper. Lovable Duquesne knew how to enjoy life and get the most out of any situation. But Luck could be against him.”*

“For example, while he was solemnly lecturing his satellites on the proper distribution of eggs, the correct manner in which to parboil and old hen and instructing Sokal to feed the chickens, gather the eggs and guard against chicken thieves from other squads, a basket of eggs from 88’s fell on the estate. When it was over, Sokal investigated and returned to report in a choked voice that a shell had landed in the hen yard and that but one solitary hen, with most of her feathers blown off, had survived. The old soldier’s swearing was colossal, adequate and to the point. Tears flooded his eyes as he shook his fist northward at the inconsiderate bastards who had wrecked his poultry yard.”

-Sgt. Carter

Not all liberated food was stolen, at times an opportunity presented itself thanks to enemy shelling: *“Because artillery shells were falling everywhere, a number of farm animals were killed as they ran about, frightened and disoriented. But the men didn’t allow any of the meat to spoil. They feasted on pigs, chickens, cows and maybe a horse or two.”*

-Lt. Burriss



A 504th trooper ‘enjoying’ his C Ration

“Captured Rations”

A great account of ‘captured food’ was described here by Sgt. Carter and gives us some insight into what the German soldier’s fare consisted of; *“My platoon occupied the house where the smashed anitgun was. In it, we found eighteen Krouthead rifles, machine gun ammunition, mess kits, blankets, personal equipment, chess in little metal tubes that squirted out like toothpaste, margarine, honey, a mess of cooked but still warm sausage and hamburger, dark brown bread, crackers so hard it took a bayonet to split them, and a mess of beef and potatoes still bubbling in a pot. We sat down recalling that the spoils belong to the victor and began to eat. It was a nervous meal, for the Germans were peeved and for good cause.”*

-Sgt. Carter



I Company, 3/504th PIR, ca. 1945 Captain T. Moffatt Burriss, commanding.

Camp Conditions of Item Company, 3/504th PIR

Photographs and memoirs suggest that the camp conditions of the 504th during Operation Shingle were nothing more than holes in the ground, a few sand bags for walls and flimsy canvas for roves. Yet, the troopers made this 'home sweet home' for eight weeks in the driving rain and frigid temperatures.

The troopers built shelter out of materials available. Tents, canvas truck covers, rain coats, blankets and any other item deemed suitable for 'home'.



Photograph from the Anzio beachhead illustrates that sandbags for walls and cotton canvas for a roof were the accommodations for 504th troopers.

Picks, shovels and helmets were employed daily in order to create safe havens for the men to hid from snipers, artillery shells and mortar barrages.

"The banks of the Mussolini Canal became the center of intense earth-moving operations. We tunneled holes that baffle description, and strangely enough we never did get through digging. A joker would dig five feet and be content until a mortar or 88 barrage tore holes all around. Then he would sink his hole down to six and after the next barrage to seven and so on till the artesian will stopped him. Finally he would drag up heavy timbers, cunningly erect a roof and shovel dirt on it."

-Sgt. Carter

"We felt naked and defenseless, with our lives dependant largely on luck. The soldier skills which stood us in such good stead at Salerno, Voltorno and Cassino could do little for us at Anzio. In one of his poems Victor Hugo describes the futile

efforts of Cain to escape the accusing and punishing eye of the Creator. It was equally useless for us to try to hide from the evil eyes on the Alban Hills overlooking Anzio"

-Sgt. Carter



Arial photograph of the 504th position on the Mussolini Canal. Once again, the photo illustrates the camp was little more than holes with canvas covers.

Both of the following quote talk about the same mishap Lt. Magellas encountered one night at Anzio, it seemed significant enough that both men included the passage in both of their published memoirs years after the war:

"The command post was nothing more than a glorified foxhole....Magellas made a roof or his foxhole out of two a rain parka. For a while, he thought he has solved the problem of how to stay dry, however the parka gathered rain, sagged and finally collapsed and dumped about three gallons of water on him."

-Lt. Burris

"The weather in February in Italy was fine for ducks, but little else. It was next to impossible to keep dry in a foxhole, and once wet there was no way for us to dry out in our present position. One night I covered the top of my foxhole with a canvas shelter half to keep the rain out. It kept me fairly dry, until the weight of the accumulating rain caused the stakes on the canvas to let go and a deluge of water came in on me"

-Lt. Megellas

504th Anecdotes

Below are a few interesting happenings that Item Company experienced at Anzio.

On Latrines

I took my entrenching tool and toilet paper along to respond to natures' call. When I reached the wall, dropped my pants and squatted won, an artillery shell landed in the field beside me and the earth trembled. I didn't think too much about it until the next one hit the rock wall right beside me. Startled, I looked up and saw the muzzle blast from a Tiger tank firing it's 88 at me. Pulling up my pants and moving at the same time , I gave the 'quick trots', a while new meaning. As I hobbled toward the farmhouse, I saw my first sergeant, standing in the door way, bent double with laughter. "Look at that Tiger tank trying to keep you from taking a crap, I'll be those Germans pointed at you and said: "see that guy taking a crap? Let's see if we can pick him off.""

-Lt Burriss



A life Magazine photo of 504th Troopers enjoying some musical entertainment behind the lines.

On Non-Combatants

"I was with four other men by one of the old stone houses on the front when four German fighter bombers which evidently dropped their bombs near the beach and then two came just above the treetops on both sides of the road- there were two on each side. The fellows with me jumped in their foxholes as the planes were spitting machine gun fire along both sides of the main road. I grabbed on of the M1's the fellows had there and got three shots into the plane as he passed- it was stupid. I should have jumped into my foxhole because the machine gun cut a path right beside me and up the house. One fellow who was on

the other side of the old house said later that whoever fired at one of the planes hit it and it was smoking badly. I never spoke about that then, as Chaplains are not supposed to be firing at the enemy. I still don't know why I did all that. It was the only time I fired a gun at the enemy."

-Chaplain Delbert Keuhl

NOTE: This isn't the only account of the Chaplain with a rifle. In "All American-All the way", a soldier recalls Chaplain Keuhl jumping into his foxhole with a rifle stating: "We're going to have a prayer meeting"



Chaplain Keuhl receives one of his Bronze Stars from General Mark Clark in Italy

On Looting

"For a change of pace, we would sneak over to the area of a previous battle and pick up souvenirs. I was looking for a P-38 [German Pistol], I didn't have any luck, so I brought back seven burp guns. We didn't dare fire them because of their distinctive sound."

-Pvt. McLane

504th Firsts

Below is a brief list of accomplishments the 504th troopers were proud of:

- More combat days than any other airborne regiment in the Allied armies (over 325).
- First Allied troops to enter Sicily, July 9, 1943.
- First parachute troops to jump in Italy.
- First Allied troops to enter Naples.
- First Allied troops through the German mountain strongholds north of Venafro.
- First to win a Presidential Unit Citation on the Anzio beachhead.
- First to jump in the airborne invasion of Holland, followed by the capture of the longest span bridge in Europe.
- First to make an assault crossing of the Rhine River (504th men crossed the Waal the Lower Rhine—at Nijmegen, Holland, in September 1944.
- First to stop von Rundstedt's forces in the Battle of the Bulge.
- First through the Siegfried Line in the Allies' spring offensive.



Pvt Clyde C Mc Vitty
Item Company, 504th PIR
KIA 9 Feb 1944 at Anzio

504th Chronology

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ May 1, 1942- 504th PIR activated at Fort Benning, Georgia ➤ August 15, 1942- 504th PIR assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division ➤ April 29, 1943- 504th PIR embarked for ETO on the troopship GEORGE WASHINGTON ➤ May 10, 1943- 504th PIR landed at Casablanca, North Africa. Moved inland via train to base camp at Oujda, Algeria. ➤ July 9, 1943- 3rd Battalion attached to 505th PIR for first wave of assault on Sicily, Operation HUSKY I. ➤ July 10, 1943- Regiment alerted for drop in Sicily as part of Operation HUSKY II. Regiment was mobilized, outfitted and prepped in under ten hours. First and Second Battalions constituted the second wave of the airborne assault. 23 planes of the 504 flight shot down by Allied naval gunners who believed these flights were German bombers. Drop zone for surviving aircraft was Gela, Sicily. Following operations, Regiment returned to Tunisia. ➤ September 14, 1943- 504th PIR dropped at Paestrum, Italy in support of 5th Army invasion of Italian mainland at about 1:30AM. Operation AVALANCE. (Elements of 3/504 landed in amphibious assault at Salerno on 11 September). ➤ December, 1943- 504 RCT fought in mountains of Italy as regular ground troops. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ October 1, 1943- 504th PIR entered Naples. ➤ January 22, 1944- 504 RCT made amphibious landing at Anzio from LCI's. ➤ March 25, 1944- 504 RCT committed as regular ground troops on Anzio beachhead. ➤ April 10, 1944- 504th PIR embarked for England on the CAPETOWN CASTLE to rejoin the rest of the 82nd Airborne which had been pulled out of Italy to train for Operation OVERLORD. |
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- April 22, 1944- 504th PIR arrived in Liverpool, England and moved by train to base camp in Leicester.
- Early May, 1944- Due to shortage of aircraft and the necessity to train the large number of replacements for losses in Italy, 504 RCT is not committed to Operation OVERLORD and assigned

- as strategic reserve. 26 men are selected to act as security detachments for 507th and 508th PIR Pathfinder teams.
- September 17, 1944- 1st Allied Airborne Army Operation MARKET-GARDEN, Holland. 504 drop zone was at Overasselt. 1st Battalion captured bridge #7. Germans destroyed bridge #8. 2nd Battalion captured bridge over the Maas near Grave intact. 504's missions accomplished within four hours after landing.
 - September 20, 1944- 504 PIR alerted for amphibious crossing of the Waal River to capture the two vital Nijmegen bridges. 3/504 made the initial assault supported by 1/504 and regimental headquarters. Both the railroad and highway bridges captured intact.
 - November 13, 1944- Regiment relieved on the line by Canadian 8th Brigade.

- Removed to new base camp at Sissone, France.
- December 20, 1944- In response to the German offensive in the Ardennes, 504th PIR moved to Werbomont, Belgium. 1/504 proceeded from Werbomont to Cheneux. There they destroyed a battalion of the 1st SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment.
 - April 6, 1945- "A" Company ordered to cross the Rhine River to attack and occupy Hitdorf, Germany. Landing effected at 0230. Engaged enemy force estimated at regimental strength.
 - May 3, 1945- "I" Company patrol met Russian troops in town of Eldenburg, Germany.
 - May 8, 1945- Germany surrendered.
 - May 9, 1945- V-E Day.

504th Bibliography

Below is a list of suggested volumes related to the Battle for Anzio, the 504th PIR and the 82nd Airborne Division:

Breuer, William B Agony at Anzio: The Allies Most Controversial and Bizarre Operation of WW II Jove Publishing, 1989 ISBN: 0515102113

Breuer, William B Geronimo! American Paratroopers in WWII. New York: St. Martin Press, 1989 621 p. ISBN: 0-312-03350-8

Burriss, T Moffatt Strike and Hold: A Memoir of the 82nd Airborne in WW II Brassey's, Inc, 256 pp August, 2000 ISBN: 1574882589

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Crutchfield, Winston S Pathfinder: A conversation with Buck Hilton and other historical documents about Native American veterans CreateSpace, 180 pp, Aug 2009 ISBN: 1448679559

De Trez, Michel American Paratrooper Helmets: Mediterranean & European Theater of Operations June, 2010, Histoire & Collections, 272 p. ISBN: 2352501415

De Trez, Michel American Warriors: Pictorial History of the American Paratroopers Prior to Normandy July, 1998, D-Day Pub, 212 p. ISBN: 2960017609

Gavin, James M. On to Berlin : Battles of an Airborne Commander, 1943-1946 ISBN: 0670525170

Megallas , James All the Way to Berlin: A Paratrooper at War in Europe 336p., Presidio Press, March, 2003. ISBN: 0891417842



Messina , Phillip Anzio: Song of Destiny A.G.Halldin Publishing Company, 1992. ISBN: 0 935 64838 0

Nordyke , Phil All American All the Way: Combat History of the 82nd Airborne Division in World War II
Zenith Press, April 2005. 880 pgs ISBN: 0760322015

Nordyke , Phil The All Americans in World War II: A Photographic History of the 82nd Airborne Division at War
Zenith Press, May 2006. 192 pgs ISBN: 0760326177

Ospital, John We Wore Jump Boots and Baggy Pants Willow House, 1977. 118 p. ISBN: 0912450150

Ruggero, Ed Combat Jump: The Young Men who Led the Assault into Fortress Europe, July, 1943
HarperCollins, 10/21/2003. 388 p. ISBN: 0060088753

Wildman, John B All Americans 82nd Airborne. Meadowlands Militaria, 6/83 ISBN:091 208 1007

504th Places of Interest

82nd Airborne Divisional War Museum
Bldg C-6841
Ardennes Street
Fort Bragg, NC 28310
910.432.3443
<https://82ndairbornedivisionmuseum.com/>

Airborne & Special Operations Museum Found.
100 Bragg Boulevard
Fayetteville, NC 28301
910.643.2766
<http://www.asomf.org/>