

# "Let us Try!" Battle Slogan Gets Good Workout in Battalion Bivouac Phase

## 51st Lives Up To CE Standard

The 51st Battalion, under command of Capt. Deon O. Elliot and company officers, moved into camp Wednesday morning after having spent seventeen consecutive days in the field.

This was the first bivouac period in the year that Camp Abbot has been training engineers in which a unit has remained away from camp for more than a week, and evidences of the prolonged life in the open, with sleeping bags in fox holes for beds, and three meals a day out of doors, were in their faces. The men looked rugged. They looked as though they had acquired an idea of what war is. In their eyes was that challenging look men get when they have proved to themselves they can take it.

The 51st had taken plenty in those seventeen days—not as hardship is reckoned in a combat zone, but plenty for men who only seventeen weeks before had been living in comfortable homes and catching buses to go to work.

On May 8, after fourteen weeks of basic and engineer training, they had marched out of camp under full packs, with a "problem" to solve that would take them on a series of marches nearly the entire distance to Bend and back and require them to build bridges before they could cross the Deschutes.

The problem had been outlined by Maj. D. H. Griswold and Capt. S. M. Johnson under the supervision of Maj. LeCompte Joslin, director of the Training Division.

In the nature of sealed orders, the problem was revealed to the men a day at a time. They moved out of camp with the mission of repelling a hypothetical enemy that shortly before had effected surprise landings at Seaside and Reedsport, Oregon, had pushed on eastward to occupy Portland, Salem, and Eugene, Oregon, and then had moved even further eastward to a line extending from Three Sisters



—Photo by Signal Corps Photo Lab.  
First regular Sunday evening religious service for a bivouacking battalion from Camp Abbot, conducted for the 51st by Chaplain Lawrence A. Leonard on May 14.

mountain to Davis Lake, passing along Bachelor Butte and the Sheridan Mountains.

It was understood that the town of Bend already had been bombed and all bridges destroyed, and that it would be necessary to build bridges across the Deschutes river to relieve the traffic on Camp Abbot bridges, which were proving inadequate for the heavy movement of supplies toward the line of resistance. The 51st battalion had the role of a supporting unit for a main defense force designated, for convenience, the "IV Corps." Theoretically, all units of Camp Abbot had been alerted in order to throw in additional troops if necessary.

At noon Tuesday, the second day out, the 51st received the order to rush construction of a bridge over which a convoy would have to pass that night at nine o'clock. At the point the bridge was to be built, the river is approximately 200 feet wide. Using seven spans of expedient bridging and six spans of steel tressel equipment, and construct-

ing four spans from dimension timber, the battalion was pounding the last nails into the dimension timber section when the convoy rolled across at nine o'clock. A second similar bridge and two foot bridges of expedient natural timber also had been constructed.

Almost before the last truck of the convoy had left the bridge, the 51st received orders to proceed to a point further north and help prepare a defensive position with barbed wire and mine fields. Stowing tools and supplies in trucks, the troops began a foot march northward, some of it cross-country through the woods, generally following the course of the Deschutes. Accomplishing this difficult march, the battalion bivouacked about dawn near the stretch of river bank to be fortified. It was then revealed that the heavy movement of troops over the bridges constructed the evening before had delayed supplies and that breakfast would consist of K rations.

On Thursday of the first week, just as laying of the mine field on the west bank of the river was completed, word arrived that the enemy had landed paratroopers ten miles eastward on the Bessie butte flight strip, and that completion of the defensive position would have to be rushed. In order to erect the barbed wire obstacles on the east bank, where the enemy might try to effect a landing of their assault boats, it was necessary to construct a ponton bridge for movement of the battalion across the river. By Friday morning the bridge had been crossed, and the stringing of barbed wire begun. By Saturday evening nine hundred yards of wire obstacles had been installed and gaping craters had been carved out of the nearby Bessie butte air strip to prevent landing of enemy aircraft.

Sunday provided the occasion for an inspection of troops and equipment by Captain Elliot and his staff.

Sunday also witnessed the first regular church service for bivouac troops from Camp Abbot. Transporting a field organ, and other ecclesiastical equipment to the bivouac area, Chap-

lain Lawrence A. Leonard conducted the service in a natural amphitheater on the side of a hill. The congregation came in sat with bared heads. Many reparkas, for it was raining, but remained after the service for communion.

The grimmer aspects of war were resumed Monday morning when the battalion received orders to improve rear installations, roads, and the municipal airport in Bend for use by the IV Corps. Under command of Lieutenant Orvedall, Company A moved out and proceeded to the municipal airport. Company B, under Lieutenant Nonemaker, started construction of a road one and two-tenths miles in length which was to establish itself as a feat even for men of the Corps of Engineers, who, under the battle cry of "Let Us Try!" work miracles with bulldozers and shovels. Utilizing more than a thousand pounds of explosives and felling trees over a hundred feet tall and several feet in diameter at the base,

Company B constructed a road twenty feet wide that the formulators of the problem had expected to require the efforts of four or five battalions. It stands a monument to the pride, skill, and brawn of the 51st Battalion, with a simple timber marker naming it, "51st Battalion Turnpike."

This accomplishment was crowned with the good news that the major part of the airborne troops that had landed at the Bessie butte air strip had been routed by the 91st Division of the IV Corps. The encouraging effect of this announcement, however, was followed on Tuesday by the information that the enemy was planning to attempt reinforcement of its airborne troops operating on the east bank of the Deschutes; that the 51st was to be pressed into combat service. The order directed the battalion to proceed to Bessie butte airport and secure it against enemy use, meanwhile building gun emplacements, air raid shelters, ammunition dumps and other allied construction, as well as repair the bridge on the main supply route.

Accomplishing the difficult maneuver of assembling his two companies from the Bend municipal airport and the bivouac area on the river, Captain Elliot led his troops into bivouac near Bessie butte. They met the enemy in combat Wednesday and Thursday and successfully defended Bessie butte airport.

At about six o'clock Thursday evening, word arrived from the Commanding General of the IV Corps that his men had been successful in holding the enemy around Bachelor butte, and that the 51st could abandon its defensive position and move back and take up the mine fields and barbed wire placed the previous week. Using a map to locate mines, the battalion completely removed the obstacles on both sides of the river during Friday and Saturday, at the same time dismantling bridges previously built and salvaging all usable materials.

Sunday again was spent in camp, with Chaplain William H. Andrew conducting the evening (Continued on Page 12)



—Photo by Signal Corps Photo Lab.  
Members of 51st battalion constructing dimension timber section of three-section bridge at about seven o'clock Tuesday evening, May 9. At nine o'clock the bridge had been completed.



—Photo by Signal Corps Photo Lab.  
Col. Chas. S. Balsh, commander of 11th Group, inspecting Lister bag in field, as member of 51st battalion draws first canteen of water.