

JANUARY 24, 1943

## Hooper's Troopers

*When they marched into Germany after winning the Croix de Guerre at the Meuse-Argonne offensive, they called this outfit "Harlem's Hellcats." Now they're a "Pineapple Army," the only all-Negro combat unit in Hawaii, where they are marking time before another march—into Japan.*

By Sgt. MERLE MILLER  
YANK Staff Writer

**S**OMEWHERE IN HAWAII—"Harlem's Hellcats," they were called then.

They were in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, in the siege of Sechault, in the slaughter that was Alsace-Lorraine. They were among the first Yanks to enter German territory.

From late 1917 until the November dawn that brought the Armistice they fought with the Fourth French Army, and when the war ended, their regiment was given the Croix de Guerre.

Fifty-five officers and men who were through it all with the original "hellcats" are on another war front now—on the Island of Oahu, waiting with fighters as tough as their predecessors to show the Japs how Harlem men fight.

"Hooper's Troopers," they are called on the islands.

Hooper is Col. Chauncey M. Hooper, who was with them in France. Sixty per cent of his "troop" are from Manhattan, and in addition to the veterans of '17 and '18, there are men who remember nights at Small's Paradise and Dick Wheaton's in Harlem when they would lift their instruments to play while the hep-cats smiled.

"Those studs put down some fine action," the cats would say.

At least a quarter of the Troopers were professional musicians; another 25 per cent played to anyone who would listen—for free.

Among the professionals are Cpl. Otis Johnson, who trumpeted for Louis Armstrong; Cpl. Rudy Williams, who clarineted for Fess Williams; Sgt. Rueben Reeves, solo trumpet for Cab Calloway; Pfc. Dick Thompson, clarinet for Claude Hopkins, and Pfc. David Alford, who was with Cab's sister Blanche.

As members of Hawaii's only all-Negro combat unit, they sit in the sugar-cane fields beside anti-aircraft guns not too far from Pearl Harbor, waiting for planes piloted by Japs.

When such planes appear, Hooper's Troopers will be plenty "tight." That means "all reet," fine as wine.

How do they like the islands?



**"Pine-Apple Army"****COL. CHAUNCEY M. HOOPER, COMMANDER.****Far From Core of the Apple**

In general, almost everything is "down with the action" (OK). Let it be understood, however, that King Street at Bishop, heart of Honolulu, in no way can compare with Lenox Avenue at 125th Street in Manhattan. The latter is, as the Troopers put it, the core of the apple.

Here there are no A trains, no Day-Break Express that lets you off near a juice joint (lavern). Here no one has heard of southern fried chicken, and G.I. grease is not nearly as edible as pork chops at Joe's Place.

Once in a while, after a week or so on the guns, it is possible to pitch the ball a little up at Midway, which refers to downtown Honolulu, not the island of the same name. But when the "duration and six months" have ended, most of Hooper's Troopers plan to "dock up to our pad" or "fall back to our dommie." In the less colorful language of those uninitiated in jive jabber, they'll be going home.

All that's in the future. Just now there is work to be done in the sugar-cane fields.

It is a job that began in January, 1941, when many of the Troopers first donned khaki and OD. After that they trained in the snow in up-state New York and in the muggy Spring weather of Massachusetts.

For four months they labored in heavy overcoats, learned how to lie with their guns in drifts 15 feet high, learned how to keep warm in below-

**A LONG WAY FROM HARLEM ARE CPL. PITTS, PVT. HENDRIX AND PFC. ROBINSON.**



### **"Pine-Apple Army"**

zero temperatures. They were slated, every guardhouse lawyer assured them, for Iceland, or perhaps Alaska.

Then they were shipped, "destination unknown," to a port on the West Coast; a few days later steamed into Honolulu.

Now they believe they know how to operate any antiaircraft gun in the U. S. Army, and they know how to clean a gun, take it apart and put it together again. What is more important, their officers believe there are few men in the outfit, with the possible exception of the ham spams who prepare the grease, who do not know how to hit a mark with their first shot.

"They're dead-eyes," says Lt. John Woodruff, who made a name for himself as an athlete at the University of Pittsburgh and in the Olympics. "And I don't mean with the galloping dominos."

Not that any of the Troopers are anything less than dexterous with the two fiery squares. "You gotta have quick fingers to handle them dice," said Pfc. Delos Flores, a professional trumpeter before the Army came along. "Same with the gun. You warm it up, seven comes eleven for you, and the Jap is left high and dry. Mighty dry."



**WITH BEATRICE ARE PFC. BROWN AND PVTS. WHITE, BENNETT, HUMPHREY AND BROWN.**

### **Jive and Hula Make History**

The Troopers' first weeks on the islands were hectic. After a day of training in the field—a day that began at 05:45 for men accustomed to rising at noon—they'd mute a horn or so and swing out with "St. Louis Blues." Native girls tried to hula to their music, and the Troopers themselves jived the "Hawaiian War Chant" and "Aloha Oe." The results made island history.

Most of the musicians were unimpressed with the Hawaiian guitar. "Why, man," explained Pfc. Augustus Cassar, of New York, "them music boxes ain't nowhere."

These days there is less time for swinging the hula; not that the sugar-cane fields are quiet at night. If the barracks are blacked out, no one much minds. A Harlem man doesn't need a light to start half a hundred of his buddies humming "Swing Low" or "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen."

Electricity isn't necessary for 60 Troopers to get out their trumpets, clarinets, basses, harmonicas, and drums, and give out with "Baby Knock Me a Kiss" and "Darktown Strutters' Ball."

And a blackout flashlight is enough for a round of "Georgia Skin," a game in which even



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a staff sergeant's monthly salary can vanish with a single shuffle of the deck.

#### **They Swim as Well as Swing**

During the day, if there's a free minute, Col. Hooper's men swim in a reservoir that once was part of a tremendous Oahu plantation. The regiment has a baseball team that holds second place in the Hawaiian Department, and the regimental band provides music for nearly every concert and swing session in the vicinity.

The marching band of 45 men breaks up, incidentally, into a swing outfit of 16 pieces which, with three saxes, a bass, clarinet, and drums, makes a jump sextette of a quality seldom-heard below 125th Street. There are so many jive trios Chief WO Russell Wooding hasn't counted them.

It's Mr. Wooding who plans the music, and he, as the Troopers say, is hep. He was arranger for Irving Berlin's "As Thousands Cheer" Lew Leslie's "Blackbirds," and the Shuberts' "At Home Abroad." He is also something of an expert on Chopin, Debussy and Bach, and it isn't too unusual for "Swing It Sister" to compete with "Prelude in C Sharp Minor."

Almost all of the officers in the regiment are college graduates; so are more than a score of enlisted men, and the libraries with the various units have as many volumes of Shakespeare and Thomas Mann as of the latest comic books.

Many of the Troopers have gone back to the mainland for OCS, mainly for coast artillery, infantry, ordnance, and signal corps training. A few are taking courses in the Army Institute, and one man is qualifying for Adjutant General's School, one of the toughest in the Army to enter. He is one of the regiment's several attorneys.

But it's jive that Hooper's Troopers—or the Pineapple Army, as they call themselves—like best. For months, now, they have been working up an arrangement of a tune they wish to dedicate to an emperor known as Hirohito. They will play it sweet or hot or both; they will do their best to please his highness.

The selection is titled "I'll Be Glad When You's Dead, You Rascal You."



**BEATING IT OUT: PFCs. FLORES, BECKHAM.  
ALFORD, BRISTON.**



*"Pine-Apple Army"*

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