

Soldiers go the distance, complete 'Manchu 100'



PFC Darrell Wheeler, Company B, 1/9 nears the 100-mile mark.

Story and photos by Casey Fuller
Their mission: carry 40 pound rucksacks 100 miles—20 miles per night for five consecutive nights. At the end of each 20-mile leg, soldiers would conduct an ambush, raid, hide position or POW snatch.

Some Company B, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment soldiers smiled when they sat down for a few minutes rest at the 70-mile mark. How can someone walk 70 miles and still manage a smile? None of the soldiers had a serious answer. Maybe they smiled because the dust they were eating tasted good and the blisters on their feet tickled. Maybe they smiled because they had MREs to eat every night. Maybe they smiled because they felt like they were dead and in that case had gone to heaven.

The regiment's nine line companies, including forward observers from 2nd Battalion, 8th Field Artillery, participated in the "Manchu 100" Sept. 11-19 at Fort Hunter Liggett. Four major areas of evaluation were medical and physical fitness, morale, tactical soundness, and, performance of the mission. A point system was used to grade each company.

Good judgment on the part of each company commander and his subordinate leaders formed a major part of the Manchu 100 evaluation. "What we're trying to do is come up with a scoring system that causes the chain of command to make the kind of decisions that they would have to make in combat...." said



Company B, 1/9 soldiers give their feet a rest after finishing the "Manchu 100" mile road march.

9th Regiment Commander, Col. Huba Wass de Czege.

The course consisted of five 20-mile lanes. A field grade officer was assigned to each lane as an evaluator. Marching pace and frequency of rest stops were factors in a march discipline evaluation.

"The whole object of the exercise is for the chain of command and their soldiers to get to the objective every day and do damage to the enemy with as many people as they can," Wass de Czege said.

The scoring system was designed to encourage leaders to care for their soldiers. The penalty for a medical disqualification cost as much as the penalty for a straggler. Medics checked the soldiers' feet each morning and evening. If the medics and the chain of command agreed that a soldier was in bad shape and shouldn't continue, the soldier was medically disqualified.

The march tested the troops endurance. It also gave the leaders a

chance to sharpen their ability to manage all their resources including soldier power, according to Wass de Czege. "We're light infantry. We've got to depend on foot mobility. So, we've got to learn how to go day after day. We've got to learn how to manage our load, only take what we need, put things in the company vehicle that we don't need right away—we need to learn how to manage all of that."