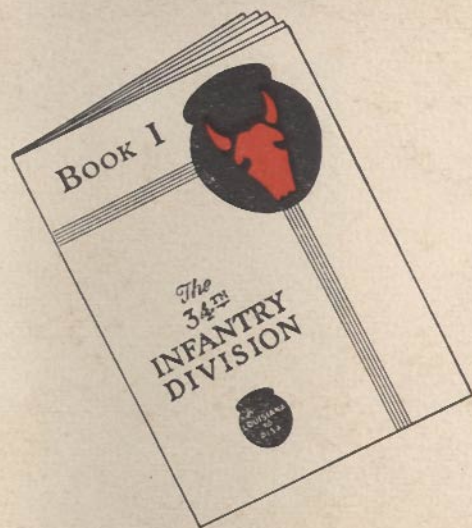


BOOK II



The 34TH INFANTRY DIVISION

The
STORY
of the
34th
INFANTRY
DIVISION
BOOK II



COMPILED BY
MEMBERS OF THE 34th DIVISION
PUBLISHED BY
THE PUBLIC RELATIONS SECTION
AT
ARCHETIPOGRAFIA DI MILANO - S. A.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
ROSIGNANO SOLVAY — Training	7
GOTHIC LINE — Considering	11
FLORENCE-MONZUNO — Assaulting	17
BELMONTE — Dragging	31
YEAR'S END — Defending	35
NEW YEAR — Patrolling	43
BOLOGNA — Smashing	53
HIGHWAY — Slashing	59
BRESCIA-IVREA — Triumphant	71

FOREWARD

The previous narrative broke off at the point when the 34th Division, having captured Leghorn and driven up to Pisa, was relieved for rest and training. The present account continues the story up to the end of hostilities.



CHAPTER I

ROSIGNANO SOLVAY — Training

Without question the fighting for Leghorn was a tough proposition and the complete victory achieved by the Division against Nazi SS troops was a fitting end to another phase of the Italian campaign. For such had been the rapidity of the Allied advance from the Garigliano, from the Anzio beachhead, past Rome, past Civitavecchia, Cecina, and now Leghorn, to the southern fringes of Pisa, that our supply lines were overstrained and our troops tired. The Arno River, winding down the lovely plain of Tuscany, marked as definitely as a line on a staff map, a suitable point at which to break off active fighting for a spell to make new plans, to bring up supplies, and to train for future operations. The Division was relieved by an anti-aircraft brigade and went for a summer vacation along the Mediterranean sea-shore south of Leghorn. This was unexpected good fortune and the tired troops took full advantage of it. For a full week at the outset they overhauled their equipment, put on clean clothes, went swimming, or just lay around letting the Mediterranean sunshine put back into them some of the energy which they had so generously expended in the rough wooded hills between the Cecina River and the Arno.

Soon it became necessary to think of grimmer events to come and to digest and profit from the lessons and

mistakes which had come to light during the recent slugging. Heavy casualties and the large numbers of replacements who had only recently joined their units meant that the standard of teamwork between the infantry, the artillery, and armored forces was inevitably lower than usual. The men just did not know each other. So co-ordination and team-play were especially stressed during working time and for this we were very lucky to have attached to us even during the training period the 757th (Medium) Tank Battalion which was to enter combat with the Division in the near future. By dint of hard training, careful planning and willing spirit the weeks passed in profitable achievement and a high degree of self-confidence was attained throughout the command. After the day's work was done, there was always the resort coast of the Mediterranean, the ample facilities of the Red Cross, and the fabulous beauties of Rome, of Siena, and of Florence.

Nor did the Division's fame go unnoticed by the exalted. Mr. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain, inspected a representative detachment drawn from the major units of the 34th on 19 August and said in part, "The 34th United States Infantry Division has the record of the longest period of action of any American troops in this war and participated in Africa, Salerno, Cassino Heights, Anzio beachhead, and glorious capture of Rome and movement north thereof. We are now at a phase of this campaign where our enemy can be and will be given a thorough thrashing. The combined efforts of the Fifth and Eighth

Armies in assaulting the common enemy has resulted in a greater friendship, more binding than ever before for the United Nations. The former glorious achievements of the Fifth Army and the Eighth Army must be continued and we will have further glorious adventures. The campaign, with the action of Allied troops in Normandy and Southern France, will administer a thorough thrashing to Hitler. We shall destroy them so that no other man or nation will again impose such oppression upon the nations for hundreds of years. I pay tribute to officers and men of the 34th United States Infantry Division for their glorious contribution in this great effort."

"... the 34th has the record..."



with intense fury on a narrow front with the avowed objective of turning the entire Apennine defenses by penetrating through the narrow plain which lay between the mountains and the sea north of Rimini and thus of flooding into the Po Valley behind the Germans.

By the end of August the battle there was in full swing; much progress had been made and the Germans were growing anxious. After so many years of war, even the tough, smooth-running German war machine was going short of raw material—that is, of men. Two first-class divisions were removed from Italy to be replaced by a couple of inferior formations; other fine troops whom they could ill afford to spare from the active fighting lines were dispatched rapidly from the Eighth Army front to the Franco-Italian border, there to stand watch ceaselessly lest victorious Allied troops from France should spill over the Alps and sweep across the Po Valley in the German Army's rear. The Fifth Army, though quiet now, lay along the Arno River and no one knew when it would spring into action. Yet in spite of this threat, the Germans were forced to remove units from the sector north of Florence and to rush them as soon as they could to the Rimini gap where the Eighth Army was continuing its expert butchering. If the Germans could plug this one small leak in an otherwise water-tight defense system protecting the Po Valley, who could say how long the war in Italy might last? To make sure that nothing was left undone to hasten the victory in the peninsula, the Fifth Army prepared itself to assault the German defensive

line frontally, to cross the Apennines and to enter the Po Valley where great possibility for exploitation existed. Even had we to conduct the enterprise against an enemy only recently installed in the mountains, it would still have been fraught with risk and hardship; but the Allies knew and had known for many months that the toughest phase of the Italian campaign would only have begun when Florence fell.

As far back as the initial Allied landings on the toe of Italy and at Salerno, the enemy high command had believed that the defense of the entire peninsula in the face of Allied air and amphibious superiority was not feasible. Searching for the most economical defense line by whose retention the maximum share of Italy's wealth could be assured to them, the Germans decided to base their main belt of fortifications on the southern crests of the Apennine Mountains chain, north of the Arno River, where a kink in the backbone of Italy placed the forbidding heights in a barrier from the western coast right across the boot almost to Rimini, now under assault by the Eighth Army. This belt of defenses the Germans had named the "Gothic Line."

From the start it had been conceived as a long-term project. Even in January of 1944 constant aerial reconnaissance had discerned the preparations for permanent concrete defenses, field works, and the beginning of one of the most elaborate anti-tank ditches in the theater. Although the successful German resistance along the Gustav Line at Cassino had diverted the enemy's attention from the Gothic Line to positions south of

Rome, the defeat which the Germans had suffered in the fighting from May onward had refocused their attention to their original defensive choice. Reports from many sources testified to the feverish activity in the Apennines and by August the project was very nearly complete. The line itself was three to four miles deep and consisted of field-type bunkers revetted with logs, rails and railroad ties, "text-book" concrete emplacements for anti-tank guns, tank turrets with high velocity guns dug into the rock so that only 12 inches of the cupola appeared above the surface, enormous minefields sown wherever movement appeared feasible, anti-tank ditches wide and deep enough to accommodate a double-decker bus, their sides strongly reinforced with

... Apennine Stronghold...



pine saplings, and the whole undertaking protected by thick bands of barbed wire and anti-personnel mines actuated by trip wires. Some of the most cunning positions known were anti-tank and machine gun emplacements dug into the face of a cliff in such a manner that only a small embrasure could be seen from the Allied side. Access to this artificial cave was gained by means of a trap door in the surface of the road above, down a vertical shaft leading to the firing chamber.

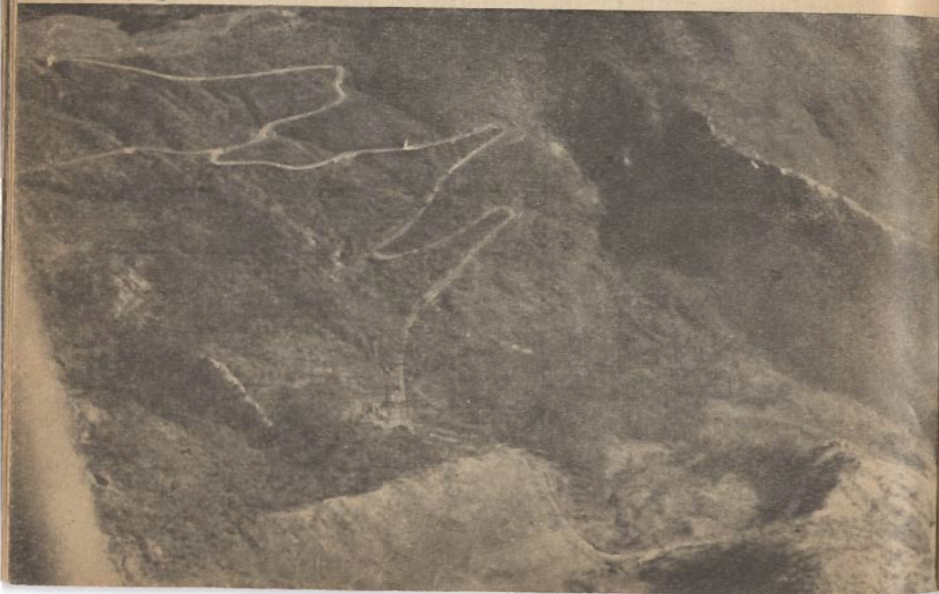
Through this formidable network of defenses two main routes existed in this sector north of Florence. One was the main highway (No. 65) connecting Bologna with Florence; the second was a parallel road connecting Bologna with Prato, running by way of Vernio. Both of these highways ran through easily defensible mountain passes, the most famous of which was the Futa Pass on Highway 65. The Germans had prepared demolitions on all bridges along these roads, and at awkward hairpin turns they had laid 500 pound charges at intervals of a few hundred yards which, on being detonated, would blow the road off the face of the earth.

The penetration by frontal assault of long-prepared defenses, adequately garrisoned, is one of the most costly projects known to warfare, and while everybody realized that the operation, if successful, would virtually end the war in Italy, it was in no mood of lighthearted optimism, but rather one of grim determination, that

the 34th Division began preparations to play its part in the attack on this famous position.

It was practically impossible to count upon surprise to help us to secure an initial advantage, which in some degree might compensate for the handicap which any attacker must bear in reducing a fortress. A number of troop movements designed to deceive the enemy about the point of our main effort was carried out, and various cover measures were put out to harass the enemy's intelligence service. Nonetheless, it was well known that the enemy in his positions overlooking Florence was keeping a close watch, not so much on our movements in the rear areas, as upon the frontline troops who opposed him.

... Gothic Line Fortifications...



CHAPTER III

FLORENCE - MONZUNO — *Assaulting*

On 9 September the Division entered the line on the left of the II Corps sector, relieving British troops north of Florence. The mission was to advance along and to the east of the Vernio-Bologna road, screening the Corps left flank and assisting the 91st Infantry Division on our right in their major task of capturing the Futa Pass and piercing the Gothic Line. On the left of the 34th, the 6th South African Armored Division was to advance and occupy ground as it was vacated by the enemy and was to screen our left, but the plan did not call for the South Africans to take part in the all-out attack. In general, the Gothic Line seemed likely to be rather less formidable in the 34th's sector than it was in the Futa Pass area. There was no anti-tank ditch, fewer concrete pillboxes and sunken tank turrets; probably more important still, the caliber of the troops of the 334th Infantry Division, who opposed us in the left half of our sector, was not nearly so high as that of the tough soldiers of the 4th Parachute Division who defended the Futa Pass and the right half of the 34th's zone. On the other hand, the terrain was extremely rugged in the path of our advance, and the road not of the most primitive type. The German High Command had expressly warned its lower units not to rely merely on difficult country to act as a defense against Allied attacks. French and American troops had taught

the enemy this lesson in the offensive of the previous May. In spite of the good counsel, the enemy seemed to have left a slight gap in his defenses about half way between the Vernio road and Highway 65, at the place where the mountains were most steep and jagged. The 34th noted this for future reference.

For several days prior to their relief by our troops, British units had been advancing rapidly, against negligible resistance, from the northern outskirts of Florence toward the foothills of the Apennines. The Germans, feeling the pinch in manpower, had clearly decided not to become involved in heavy fighting before they had retired into the protection of their defensive line. The enemy units, falling back methodically from phase-line to phase-line, kept watch on our movements and harassed us liberally with self-propelled and long-range artillery.

The countryside just north of Florence is rich and heavily cultivated. In fine, warm weather the 34th forged ahead rapidly, with reconnaissance pushed well forward and both flanks screened by mechanized cavalry from the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and the 34th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop. By 11 September, the 168th Infantry on the right of the Division sector had cleared the towns of Cavallina and Barberino, while the 133rd Infantry on the left was well up alongside them. Enemy resistance remained very light, but demolitions, a few minefields, and harassing artillery fire slowed our progress a little. It was not until 13 September that the enemy outpost line was reached,



by which time the 135th Infantry, having passed through the 168th, was the right flank regiment of the Division. The next few days saw stiff fighting as the enemy was driven out of his positions. Although the Germans had not built a continuous chain of fortifications at this point, all key hill features were well organized, and determined groups of enemy with automatic weapons infiltrated at night back to to places from which they had been driven in daylight. In the face of many small counterattacks the 34th Division penetrated the enemy outpost line by 15 September and began the development of the road to Bologna, to the north and east in an arc which took advantage of every feature of the terrain. Although the main watershed of the Apennines was several kilometers further to the north, the mountain range was broken up by tongues of high ground, bare, rocky, and jagged, which ran south, splitting the area into many valleys, each dominated on both sides by hills. In order not to be caught under direct observed fire in the low ground, our advance had to be made laboriously over the ridge lines, where the best approaches were barely passable for mules, and where soldiers' backs formed often the only means of getting forward supplies.

Our penetration of the outpost line had placed us very near the main defenses near Vernio and here the Germans fought savagely to prevent our further progress. Further to the east, our advance was more rapid, for the enemy had more room at his back before occupying his long-prepared bunkers. But here also were

the first signs of a German weakness. It had already been noted that a narrow gap in the fortifications existed in some extremely difficult hills which the enemy may have thought strong enough to stop us, even unsupported by troops. It had since become clear from enemy prisoners of war and captured documents that the boundary between the 334th Infantry Division and the 4th Parachute Division also fell at this point. The German army group commander had issued warnings to his troops not to neglect the defense of unit boundaries, yet in spite of his foresight it began to look as though the enemy had committed the double error of exaggerating the defensive strength of difficult country undefended by troops and of failing to protect a divisional boundary.

Accordingly, the 135th Infantry pushed due north leaving the threat to its flank to be taken care of by the 133rd Infantry which was heavily engaged with the 334th Division northeast of Vernio. The Germans had evidently decided that the only way in which they could obtain any immunity from the heavy concentrations of American artillery fire was by resorting to continual hand-to-hand combat since they realized that we would then have to lift our fire to avoid casualties to our own troops. The repeated counterattacks which the enemy launched were therefore supported not only by the normal methods of artillery and mortar fire but also by the most lavish use of hand grenades seen since Cassino. One counterattack in particular, involving merely a platoon of enemy, was made with the support

of about 200 men who, from a nearby hill, threw a veritable barrage of several hundred hand grenades just in advance of their own soldiers. It was evident that the commander of the 334th Division was very concerned with preventing our reaching the Vernio road and was devoting most of his strength to that sector. Inevitably, a gap opened up between his division and the parachute division. By 19 September the 135th Infantry, after a morning of heavy fighting during which only slight advances were achieved, jumped off again at dusk and before midnight had succeeded in placing two companies onto the tops of hills between the two enemy divisions. Meanwhile, the German counterattacks on the left flank against the 133rd Infantry con-

... No time for bridges...



tinued to be very severe, centering about the dominating feature of Hill 810, which changed hands several times. After one particularly heavy counterattack the Germans managed to regain possession of the hill for a complete day, but the effort cost them dear; under unceasing American artillery fire on their positions and on their lines of supply, their position became untenable. The temporary success may have encouraged the rest of the Germans for the time being, for they fought with great determination. But the strain was beginning to tell—enemy units were broken up and shifted about to provide reinforcements for the critical sectors, even engineers being committed as infantry.

By 19 September the Germans' exhaustion had forced them to abandon further local counterattacks and to content themselves with resisting passively along a line which included only the northern part of their defense belt. In the gap between the 334th and 4th Parachute Division our initial infiltration was detected, and although the enemy was unable to do much to strengthen his position there, he used his observation from neighboring heights to bring down mortar fire and artillery concentrations on any injudicious movement of ours.

Our pressure achieved its objective two days later. After shattering days and nights of constant mortar and artillery fire, the enemy on Hill 810, disorganized and completely cut off from his battle group headquarters, made an organized surrender. The remainder of the Gothic Line in our sector was completely overrun

and the enemy, still nervous about the boundary with the 4th Parachute Division, began to retreat from ridge-line to ridge-line. Local enemy defensive actions remained stubborn, but it was evident that central organization was lacking, due primarily to very effective interdiction of enemy communication and supply lines, by the Division Artillery, supported by the British 10th AGRA. During the entire Gothic Line battle, enemy artillery fire had been heavy, indeed. For many months he had been saving his ammunition for the show-down. Still, on 23 September German howitzer fire fell off sharply while self-propelled fire greatly increased in proportion, indicative of a policy which the Germans invariably followed when they were withdrawing their field batteries to new positions. The 34th Division pressed its advance on the following day, with air

... with air observation confirming...

observation confirming the fact that the Germans were withdrawing steadily. Our troops intensified their pressure along the craggy difficult ridges.

During the day and night of 24 September the little village of Montepiano, on the road 7 kilometers north of Vernio, was subjected to one of the heaviest German artillery concentrations of the entire campaign, when a total of over a thousand heavy shells fell within its narrow confines. The intensity of the fire may have been due in part to the enemy's wish to use up all the ammunition he could not carry away, but it seems probable that the Germans were completely deceived about the direction of our main attack. For, while it may have appeared to him simpler for us to follow the Vernio road, it turned out to be much quicker and safer to accept the difficulties of the terrain and to continue the advance northward along the ridge lines. On the same day the disorganized enemy battle groups that were conducting the delaying action were stabilized by a fresh battalion from the 362nd Infantry Division, which it took the remainder of the day to neutralize. We maintained a steady advance in the hills and along the trails, opposed by opportunist resistance from hastily chosen hill features supported by artillery fire of all types.

Up till now the weather had been definitely favorable to the attackers, but on the evening of 27 September rain clouds gathered and there was every indication of a break. Enemy movements and small concentrations throughout daylight on 26 and 27 September had been

picked up by air OP's, and on the evening of 27 September the enemy laid a smoke screen across our entire front. Throughout the next 24 hours it poured constantly, reducing visibility to nil and so affecting road communication that our troops came almost to a standstill. German artillery increased in intensity and it became a certainty that a considerable reshuffling of German forces was under way. The engineers, who already were overworked in making by-passes on the few trails that were possible for motor transportation and in maintaining the crumbling road surfaces, now found an even greater burden thrust suddenly upon them. Roads and trails became quagmires of greasy mud as the rain and dust were churned up by the pass-

... Roads became quagmires...



ing vehicles. Flash floods washed out fords and strained make shift bridges. Movement even by foot troops over steep surfaces made slippery by the down-pour was a slow and difficult business. The enemy, under cover of the natural screen, broke contact completely and disappeared into the fog. The weather cleared on the morning of 29 September, but close infantry contact was not regained until 30 September, by which time the enemy, by dint of immense exertions, had again completely organized and stabilized his defenses.

The exhausted 334th Infantry Division was completely relieved by the fresh, well-equipped 16th SS Division, a formation which had suffered defeat at the hands of the 34th in the fighting for Leghorn but which had been completely refitted and rested in a quiet sector of the line since the Arno River phase-line was reached. The new-comers, in addition to digging in machine guns and mortars, had laid a large minefield in front of their positions across practically the entire sector, and a reconnaissance battalion was brought into the line to help to fill the gap between the SS men and the parachutists on their eastern flank. Notwithstanding the fresh enemy troops and our own fatigue, the 34th Division resumed its slow but steady progress, driving the Germans from hill after hill in the face of heavy artillery fire and well-handled machine gun and mortar defenses.

By 4 October our attack had reached the lateral secondary road connecting Highway 65 at Loiano with the village of Monzuno. Much of the 34th's supplies



... our attack... Loiano...

had to be bounced along tracks by jeep or mule since there was almost a complete absence of motorable roads in the sector. On each occasion that a temporary change in the direction of attack of one of the regiments took place, a completely new main supply route had to be found, since there were no connecting trails between the various regiments' roads. On no less than three occasions, dumps and service installations were shifted to new MRS's serving the bulk of the Division. The Vernio - Bologna road (which was fairly suitable to heavy traffic even in wet weather) provided hazards of a different kind, for the successful advance of the 34th Division had placed them ahead of the other units in the Corps and had resulted in our left flank being

opened for a considerable length to direct enemy observation and fire. Supplies and ammunition for a complete regimental combat team were infiltrated by truck along this exposed route although enemy artillery interdiction was heavy and accurate. Our own Divisional Artillery, reinforced by the British 10th AGRA, did good work in neutralizing many enemy batteries, but the fact that the British guns were obliged by their weight and lack of maneuverability to remain in the valley only a few yards away from the road meant that the Germans were able to retaliate with counter-battery and interdiction fire at one and the same time.

The Germans had found the Monzuno road extremely useful and opposed our approach with great bitterness. Finally, as the enemy tired and as a threat of American break-through several miles to the east diverted the enemy's attention, the opposition to the 34th crumbled and our troops entered the town of Monzuno against weakening resistance, although the enemy threw a great weight of artillery fire into the town after we had occupied it. As we moved ahead it appeared that the 34th Division had scored a definite tactical success. Fatigued though we were, the enemy disorganization was so great as to make it likely that one further concerted push would see a complete penetration of the German force. In particular, across the river which paralleled the Vernio road northward to Bologna, a single rampart known as M. Sole, the dominating feature of the area, was thought to be held only lightly, according to patrols which had worked

up toward it. The hill was in the sector of the division on our left, but if we could capture it, not only would the enemy's observation and interdiction of the Vernio road be reduced virtually to nothing, but the way would be open to exploitation with mobile forces of this, one of the two major routes of access to Bologna and the plain beyond. But the bigger plan envisaged a break-through to the east of Highway 65, and in order to maintain the momentum of the Corps offensive at this point, higher headquarters ordered infantry of the 1st Armored Division to relieve the 34th of their mission on the Corps left flank, freeing the 34th for commitment several thousand yards further east alongside the shattered ruins of Loiano where they took over the sector of the 85th Infantry Division on 14 October.

CHAPTER IV

BELMONTE — Dragging

The 85th had done a notable job in whittling down the enemy division which opposed them and in scoring clean-cut advances against the stiffening opposition. As the 34th found to its cost, these advances were made only by virtue of high determination and resource, for the pitiless rain had made communications so poor as to provide a major threat to the success of the offensive. The road net, though bad in our former sector, was virtually non-existent in the new one. Flash floods, colloidal mud, land-slides, poor drainage all contributed to the worries of the engineers. Truck-load after truck-load of rock was spread over the trails, only to sink into the apparently bottomless sea of mud. Bridges were washed out, forcing the infantry to use cableways, rafts, and mules - not merely for bringing up water cans, ammunition, and ration boxes, but also for the much more delicate work of evacuating the wounded. In the emergency, all kinds of troops, from clerks to general prisoners, were organized into work details to reinforce the engineers. The offensive, it must be admitted, had lost its momentum and was now grinding and shuddering forward, held back as much by its own drag as by the enemy's opposition. Indeed, the German situation was very poor. On one freak afternoon when the weather happened to clear, ground and air OP's of the artillery obtained direct

observation on enemy field batteries, and our gunners proceeded to execute one of the most successful missions they had had in Italy. Firing almost without pause they placed heavy and accurate concentrations upon nearly every enemy battery and caused great destruction. The sharp drop in enemy artillery activity which followed was the direct result of this fine shooting. The Germans were definitely worried by our persistency, and on 19 October they began to commit the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division, hurriedly brought over from the Eighth Army front.

In very heavy rain, the infantry of the 34th, supported by their teammates in the artillery, slogged forward over bare craggy hills and through swollen mountain torrents, taking successive objectives in the face of stiff resistance. Castel di Zena fell on 21 October and the whole American front struggled on in appalling mud although by now casualties and exhaustion had greatly lowered our fighting efficiency.

... placed accurate concentrations...

On 22 October yet another factor was introduced, when the Army Commander decided that it was not possible then to achieve the original goal of seizing Bologna and breaking out into the Po Valley. That task was more difficult and required more time and troops than was at first anticipated, and by the end of October, theater reserves of ammunition, particularly for mortars and field artillery, had shrunk to such a low level as to make it dangerous to expend more in the prosecution of the attack. The order was given to halt the offensive and to dig in, in the best defensive situation locally available, pending a resumption of the attack at some later time. However, the 34th Division received permission to maintain its drive until the key terrain of M. Belmonte had been secured. This apparently minor feature was nevertheless essential to the occupation of a sound defensive line, since it gave observation southward and northward to whomever held it. So vital was it that, although the Germans had just committed a division to reinforce their line, they now ordered up Kesselring's own bodyguard—a battalion of five hundred good troops—to man part of the sector opposite the 34th Division. Thirty-six hours of heavy infantry and artillery fighting followed before the hill was taken, by the 133rd Infantry and a defensive line was selected. At once mines and wire were laid in hasty field works pending the arrival of supplies for the construction of a more elaborate defense.



Joseph R. Ferrington, House Military Affairs Committee, (Right) with Maj. Gen. Bolte.

CHAPTER V

YEAR'S END — *Defending*

Thus the great Gothic Line offensive ended—without fanfare, without being planned by the army, almost without being noticed by the world. And thus, also, insidiously, began the phase of the Italian campaign which became known to those who were in it as the Apennine Winter. It is well here to run over in our minds, just as the soldiers of the Division did, what had been achieved and what had been lost as a result of the weeks of strain, suffering and depletion since that first day in September when they began to climb the hills north of Florence. First, and without question, the Gothic Line, the intended bastion for northern Italy, had been destroyed. All that was now left were the deserted pillboxes, the twisted guns, the be-draggled wire of the conquered defenses. Secondly, the Apennine Mountains, which were the real protection for the Po Valley, had been climbed and the peaks left many kilometers in our rear. While the chain had not been completely pierced, the 34th Division was now facing down-hill and for the first time in many a month looked upon the enemy from higher hills than he possessed. Thirdly, a strong, well-rested enemy force had been routed, depleted, and was, at the time when the fighting died down, so exhausted as to be capable of only very limited operations. All that represented a clear-cut gain; but what was the cost? We had suf-

ferred heavy losses; no less than 107 % of rifle company officers had in two months become casualties. We had become disorganized and tired so that concerted action, where each element supported the others, became daily more difficult to accomplish. We had run out of artillery and mortar ammunition, so that in default of heavy weapons' support any further advances by our weary foot soldiers would have had to be made at the cost of much heavier losses, than we had suffered already. Let it be frankly said that our success was not complete. The energy and blood so freely expended would have to flow again in order to force a way through the last few kilometers of mountains which alone separated us from the rich valley of the Po. But before we could even begin to make further efforts, we needed, above all, rest.

... relaxing between battles...



It was the beginning of November; winter was almost upon us, our defenses were flimsy, our resources slim. The 34th Division had to buckle down to a program of extensive preparations calling for the greatest initiative and skill in improvisation before it could, with reasonable safety, relax and recover some of its strength. During the long autumn nights, in dank fog and heavy rain, carrying parties stumbled along hill trails carrying barbed wire, mines, and sandbags to improve the hasty defenses. Soon we had a barrier between us and the Germans which gave protection from surprise attack and permitted us to devote more

... small stone-built cottages...



time to protecting troops from the weather. In the Apennines, small stone-built farmers' cottages are scattered sparsely in the hills; every effort was made to use these as shelters and as supply bases. Straining the overworked American ingenuity, the infantry devised dugouts, hewed caves, piled sandbags, and arrived somehow at rough dwellings where men could obtain shelter from the wind and cold and protection from enemy fire, and a place to warm coffee or to light a pipe. Up on the mountain peaks haggared soldiers looked through their glasses and could discern the shinning city of Bologna dimly through the fall haze. And they could see also little groups of Germans digging, carrying, and laboring in much the same way as our own soldiers, to gain some place to live in during the coming weeks. Gradually, as the days went by without major action on either side, a routine of life became established as the cold hand of winter pressed more heavily upon the mountains. The troops in the frontline were thinned out so that as many as possible could be brought back for a rest, baths, and clean clothes. Patrols became the chief activity of the infantrymen, and as time passed and the Germans became more and more firmly seated in their positions, the risks to each scouting party grew. As if fretting at the ammunition restrictions forced upon them, the artillery and mortars growled a little, popped out a few shells, and returned to stony silence. The rain grew colder and turned to sleet, the mud grew deeper and thicker, the wounded lay longer and suffered more. The winter was going to be rough.

When the Gothic Line offensive was called off, it had been originally hoped that the delay in resuming the attack would be comparatively short—a matter of four or five weeks. Plans to go on with the drive were therefore kept going and a target date of 8 December was originally set. This was later postponed until the weather cleared sufficiently to make it reasonably certain that we should have two consecutive days of good flying weather, for it was necessary to off-set the shortage of artillery ammunition by maximum use of air bombardment. A new provisional date for 18 December was fixed, but this again was cancelled due to bad weather; it was lucky that it was, for the least citizen of Loiano apparently knew all about it several days in advance. The Germans would have been waiting for us.

As the troops in Italy then waited for further orders, news came from Belgium of a German counter-offensive in strength which had apparently taken the troops there at a weak point and was making headway. Almost immediately, reports came from the Tyrrhenian seacoast that German troops were massing for a possible drive down the Serchio Valley with the apparent object of cutting the supply lines of the Fifth Army and of destroying our main base at Leghorn. Almost hourly these rumors grew in number, although at no time did it seem that there was more than doubtful evidence in their support. Nonetheless, the protection of Leghorn was deemed to be so vital that the very highest authority directed that Allied dispositions be at

once changed to concentrate sufficient troops on the west flank of the Fifth Army to prevent such a possibility from being realized by the Germans. Since the main weight of the Fifth Army had up till now been concentrated astride Highway 65, in view of the resumption of the attack upon Bologna, the new directive forced the complete abandonment of our offensive plans. Two full Allied divisions were hurriedly dispatched to reinforce the western coastal sector while the 135th Combat Team, together with the medium tank battalion then supporting the 34th Division, were also sent to prepare defenses in that area. On 26 December an attack by an estimated two battalions of Germans was launched down the Serchio Valley and gained a few

... until spring brought good weather...



kilometers before it was stopped. In view of the radical change which had been made in the deployment of Allied forces, further plans for the offensive were dropped, and the Allies had to postpone their all-out attack until the coming of spring brought good weather.

Just before the new year, the 34th Division was relieved in the line and went back to the vicinity of Pietramala and the Radicosa Pass for a little rest and training. As a training vehicle it had to choose and begin the construction of a belt of defenses, whose task it would have been to prevent any remotely possible German thrust from cutting the lateral highway between Highway 65 and the east, pending the organization of a counterattack force to restore the original line. By now it had snowed heavily and the hardships of digging in the frozen, rocky ground and of working instruments in the vicious wind made this so-called rest period almost as much of a strain as service in the line, for Radicosa Pass was practically at the summit of the Apennines.

CHAPTER VI

NEW YEAR — *Patrolling*

On 12 January the Division was ordered back to the front, to the sector east of Highway 65 and took up once again its task of patrolling and watching. Our knowledge of the enemy in the sector was meager in the extreme, for no identifications had been obtained for some time. The only clue gained was that of four German corpses which had been identified as coming from the 305th Infantry Division. It was comparatively easy for the enemy to preserve the secret of his identity, for not only was the snow a foot deep everywhere, increasing in drifts almost to armpit level, but in addition there was a bright moon which made it possible for German sentries and observers to detect our every movement. Even where accidents of the ground gave our patrols concealment, noise of boots crunching on the frozen surface of the snow gave away our approach long before we were within range to accomplish anything useful. The terrain favored the Germans, for the long tongues of land which lay between the little stream valleys feeding the Po River were ribbed with sheer bluffs, the steep side facing us, while the German side sloped gradually northward so as to give the effect of teeth on a rasp—making movement easy from north to south but difficult in the opposite direction. It followed that infantry work in these conditions was practicable only at certain points

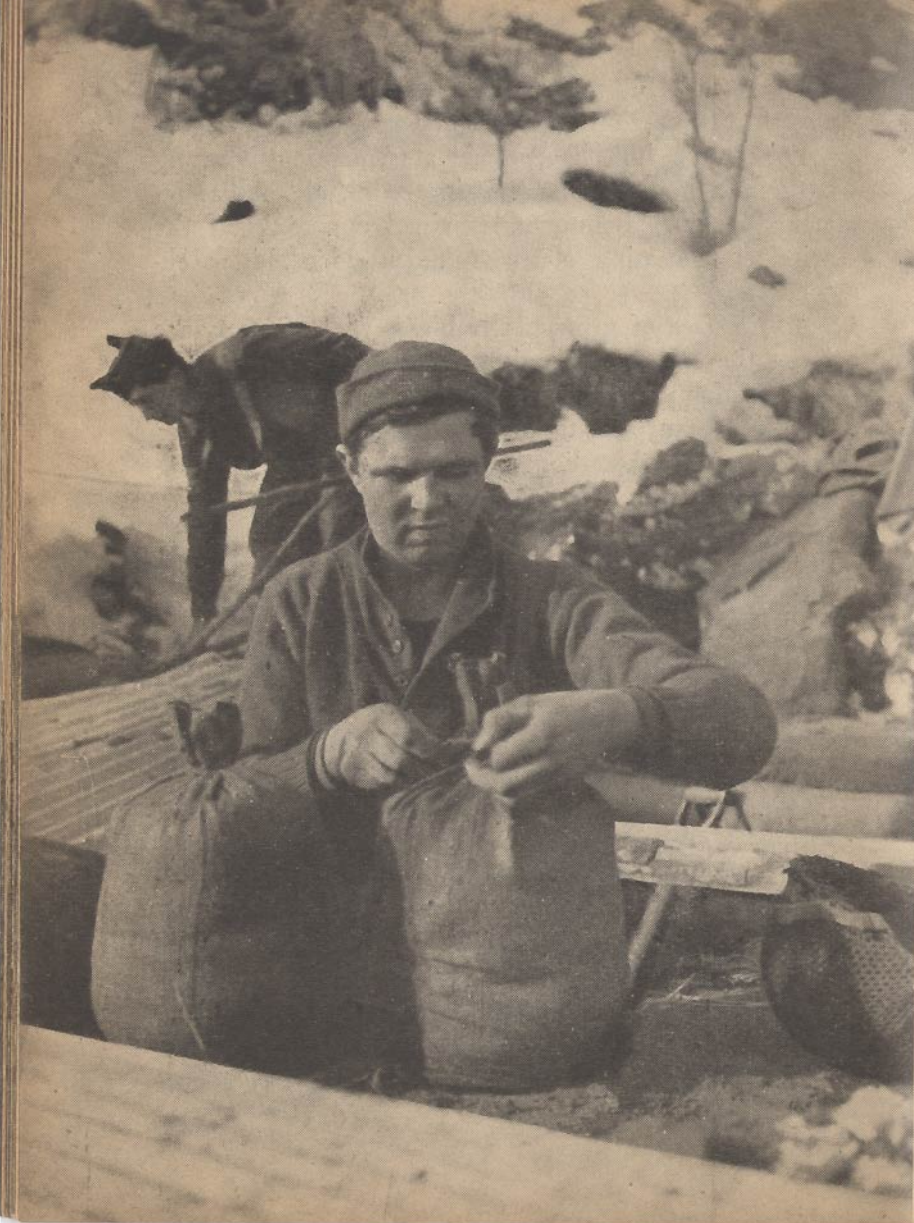
... no wonder my feet were cold...



which were as well known to the enemy as to ourselves. By dogged perseverance and at the cost of disproportionately heavy casualties we finally were able to confirm the location of the 305th Infantry Division, which had been moved from the Eighth Army sector about a month previously, relieving the weary former occupants. It would be difficult to exaggerate the deadliness of the kind of warfare that went on at this time. There was nothing spectacular in it and possibly from the over-all point of view each little operation was of small account. Nonetheless, the fact that each approach to the German positions was covered by previously registered mortar concentrations and machine gun defensive fires; the alertness of the enemy; the fact that we were carrying the fight to him all the time, allowing him to choose his own moment for bringing down fire; the excellent visibility in the crisp chill of the winter's night—all these factors combined to make this period one of the most difficult and wearing of any that the 34th Division had known. Moreover our sector was of crucial importance. As part of their winter war of nerves, designed to prevent us from getting firmly set in our defenses, the Germans had for the past few weeks been making small-scale raids on critical hill features. Occasionally they succeeded in capturing a prominent point which they at once put to use as an advanced observatory to harass and make miserable the already grim life of the forward areas. The enemy had his eye on M. Belmonte, which, had he been able to get it, would have given

him a wonderful vantage point against us. It would also, in conjunction with the by then famous Gorgognano Church hill, have made a tremendously strong bastion to hold against the time when the Allies attacked again. Belmonte remained ours only at the price of unceasing alertness and sudden, bitter encounters.

In the face of a practically blank wall of ignorance about the enemy, and with the ever present necessity of obtaining data about them in case they should try to spring a surprise upon us, we made a limited raid involving two battalions on the afternoon of 6 February centering upon the steep bluff and the rocky outcrop at Pizzano. Broad daylight was chosen for this operation in order to take advantage of surprise, since it was known that the Germans, like ourselves, used to sleep during the day while they kept vigilant watch at night. With necessarily limited artillery support, our troops were stopped cold during the first few hundred yards. The enemy, holed up in the rocks and caves, was quite safe from all kinds of fire except direct head-on shooting with high velocity weapons, and his excellent observation prevented us from moving up anti-tank guns or tank destroyers for this purpose. Only one way to drive out the Germans seemed possible—hand-to-hand fighting with bayonet and grenade. This game was not worth the candle, and we resumed our former defensive attitude. The infantry regiments were relieved shortly afterward and spent nearly a month in a training area at Calenzano



Preparation...

preparing themselves for offensive operations. It was a strong policy of the Division that the current pre-occupation with defense in all its forms should not lead to an attitude of stolidness, still less defeatism, among the troops, for it was clear to all who were able to take the larger view that the winter phase was merely transitory, and with the melting of the snow, it would give place to active offensive operations once more.

It must be stated that in mountain warfare of this type, especially where communications are poor and equipment not specialized, road conditions are of paramount importance. Because of this, every effort had

... and recreation



been made during the preceding months to restrict transportation to a minimum without prejudicing the conduct of operations. Thus tanks and tank destroyers which had been emplaced many weeks previously remained in their positions, only the crews being relieved from time to time. Field artillery battalions exchanged pieces with other units to avoid destroying the fragile road surface which was only maintained at the cost of exhaustion on the part of thousands of engineers and civilian laborers. There was another reason for keeping down the amount of traffic. The rough roads of the autumn months had taken a heavy toll in wear and tear on trucks and the maintenance services were greatly overworked, hampered by the short supply of spare parts. Road accidents during the icy conditions which followed meant that our nonbattle casualties were more numerous than those who fell in action. At Calenzano maintenance and repair were stressed as much as the physical training of the troops.

The 34th Division returned to the line, this time on and west of Highway 65, during the first week of March, taking over positions in front of those insignificant but highly dangerous places—Ca Valla, Monterumici, and Zula. We did not very well know who were the enemy units who opposed us, but it was certain that the eastern half of our sector was held by the 65th Infantry Division and that a newly organized and good quality formation, the 8th Mountain Division, confronted us on the western side. So once more, as melting snows raised the level of water in the streams



and turned ice into mud on the roads, the 34th Division resumed the deadly, nightly job of probing and patrolling under conditions where an alert but passive enemy had things mostly his own way. However, by this stage the Division staff had been advised that the information obtained was not merely for the preparation of our defense but would be used for the much more serious job of planning the resumption of the Allied offensive. Information obtained by the patrols, carefully stored and checked, became the basis upon which the troops who did eventually attack could plan ahead and, by using their knowledge, minimize their own losses. In order that it shall not be said that the enemy was at this stage already agreeable to give in, let it be admitted that on three successive nights between 15 and 19 March the German mountain troops scored clear-cut successes over our infantry in a series of patrol encounters in the valley and among the caves at Ca Valla, when our patrols were ambushed and captured by the Germans at no cost to themselves.

A few days later in the sector further east an attack with less than a battalion of the 168th Infantry took place with the object of penetrating to the crescent-shaped ridge of Monterumici, to test the enemy defenses and the state of their alertness. As had been the case at Pizzano, daylight was again chosen for the assault, this time shortly after dawn. Our attacking troops nearly reached the rim of the escarpment having very thoroughly silenced the first German mortar barrage by means of our own effective counter-mortar

organization. However, the Germans rapidly shifted their weapons to alternate sites and after a silence of half an hour laid down heavy mortar fire on all the draws in the area leading to their positions. Fortunately we had chosen to use the ridge lines for our approach and casualties were light. It was deemed prudent to withdraw under cover of smoke and artillery fire lest our soldiers be caught in the German barrage when the enemy became alive to the situation.

The season had now changed from winter to early spring and as each day passed the time approached for the beginning of the Allied offensive which was destined not merely to complete the operation which

... laid down heavy mortarfire...



had dragged to a halt nearly six months previously but was to destroy the German forces in all Italy. During the long months, and aided by the restriction upon traffic, the engineers had diligently labored on the roads and trails, in places creating entirely new highways, until the surfaces were hard and smooth enough to take the immense burden of vehicles which would be imposed upon them by the coming operation. Successive convoys arriving in the base ports had discharged their loads of supplies and ammunition, to be laboriously hauled to dumps in the immediate rear of the front, eliminating decisively the shortage which had been the primary cause of our failure of the previous fall.

During the early part of April the Division Staff received the word to begin plans for the attack, and the complicated series of reliefs began which were to culminate with the 34th taking over command of the sector to the east of Highway 65 where it was to launch its part of the offensive a little later on.

CHAPTER VII

BOLOGNA — Smashing

The zone of operations selected for the 34th Division took the units back once more to the familiar terrain of M. Belmonte and the Gorgognano Church hill. Between us and the Po Valley lay a belt of field defenses in three strips making a total depth of three to five miles. The Germans had not been idle during the winter and had replaced the lack of concrete and steel by an abundance of alternate and reserve positions. The plan called for the seizure of the first line of enemy defenses on Gorgognano Church hill and the Sevizzano ridge, the exploitation northwards and westwards of initial success, and finally, the broadening of the Division sector to the west to include Highway 65 and possibly the city of Bologna. Throughout the winter, available training time had been employed to stress the importance of training in mine-clearing operations by the infantry. In order to further reduce the danger from German minefields, the 109th Engineers, operating in conjunction with the 133rd Infantry, carried out extensive clearing and marking operations for seven successive nights prior to the jump-off so that when the 168th Infantry (which was to be the assaulting regiment) closed into the forward areas they found that clear paths existed through the minefields almost up to the German outpost line. Allied formations to the

east and west having jumped off successfully several days before our own attack, the 34th began its assault at 0300 hours on 16 April following a terrific artillery and air preparation. It was a day doubly to be remembered for it was also the 500th day on which the Division had command of a sector in contact with the enemy—a record by then unapproached by any other American Division in the Theater. Almost at once the assaulting companies of the 168th Infantry ran into the heaviest kind of infantry weapons fire. To start with, little artillery was received, thanks to the excellent counter-battery work of our artillery and aircraft during the preceding hours. Progress towards the Sevizzano ridge and towards the rubble of the Gorgognano Church and its nearby cemetery was slow, and calls for artillery neutralizing fire against enemy mortar

"... and on this, your 500th day..."



and machine gun positions were constant. By noon on the second day of the attack our troops had secured a foothold in the ruins of the Gorgognano Church but the enemy continued to resist stubbornly from the graveyard hardly a hundred yards away. German artillery, by then having recovered from the first shock of our attack, placed accurate and heavy fire on our advancing elements, on one occasion laying down a concentration of 150 rounds of 15 centimeter fire on the churchyard alone. Our own guns were in action almost without pause, crunching down upon the German positions in a ceaseless drumming fire which ground up the earth and all things on it into unrecognizable shambles. Urged on vigorously, our troops maintained heavy pressure until by the evening of 18 April the Germans showed signs of weakening under this terrific punishment. Leaving large numbers of unburied dead on the battlefield, the enemy attempted to withdraw from Sevizzano ridge and from the Gorgognano Church hill to a previously prepared second line of defense 1000 yards further north, but by the timely commitment and rapid advance of a reserve battalion a great portion of this force was overtaken and captured. The left hand neighbors of the 34th, the 91st Infantry Division, had in the meantime been meeting similarly rugged opposition but had gallantly succeeded in reaching the base of the key hill of M. Arnigo, which they captured by assault on the evening of 18 April. At once the 133rd Infantry relieved the 91st Division troops on this feature and, as it took up posi-



... the only words of peace...

tions on the west of 168th Infantry, both regiments drove northward with undiminished vigor.

By this time the enemy had committed all of his immediate reserves and, having no other forces to throw in, began to show increasing signs of raggedness, exhaustion, and low fighting spirit. On the east of our sector the engagements were sporadic, although, further to the west isolated enemy groups defended with great tenacity certain hill features until, after hours of intense fighting our advancing troops overcame them.

On 20 April, only four days after the attack began through one of the strongest and best prepared lines the Germans had constructed, the 34th Division, in its

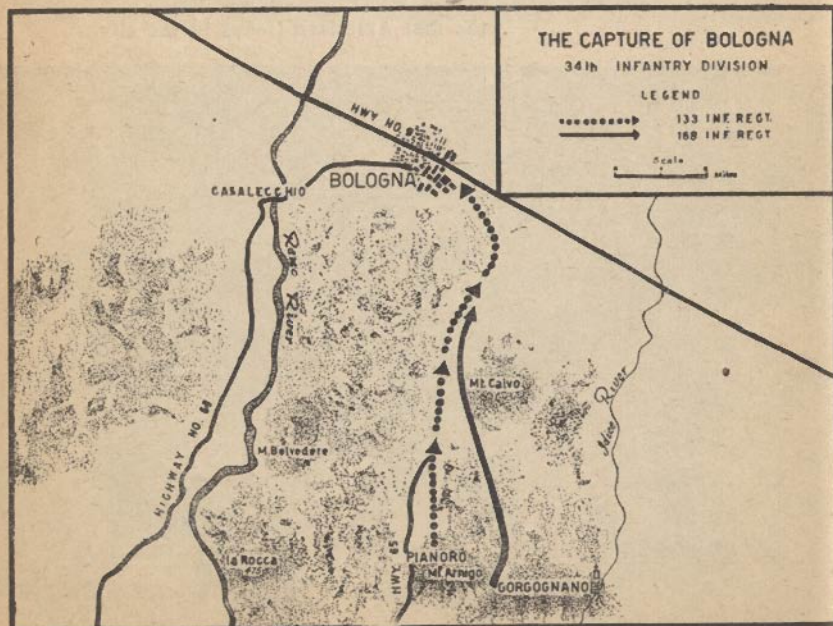
sector, was in a position to push rapidly to the north leaving defeated scattered stragglers to be cleaned up later. During the early afternoon of 20 April our troops, spurred on by the news that the 34th Division had at the last minute been given the mission of entering Bologna, exerted every ounce of energy to cover the remaining dozen kilometers which separated them from the city which had lain within their view for six dreary months. Bologna was entered by troops of the 133rd Infantry — the first American troops in the city — during the small hours of 21 April. Rapturous civilians joined with the Partisans who had risen in revolt against the German garrison to welcome our

... the first American troops in the city...



troops. They told us that the enemy left Bologna in headlong flight just before midnight on 20 April.

Upon occupying the city, the 34th Division began the task of garrisoning the place, maintaining order, and gathering-in its units which had become rather scattered as a result of the final chase. A battalion of infantry assisted counter-intelligence personnel in conducting a clean-up hunt in the city for Fascists and Nazis. After spending 36 hours in the great prize, the Division was relieved of its long attachment to II Corps and was placed under command of IV Corps for operations designed to clean the enemy out of northwestern Italy.



HIGHWAY 9 — Slashing

The situation had by this time become so bad for the enemy that it was known that his communications were failing him and units were very disorganized. An exception consisted of a group of divisions which had escaped the main Allied attack but which were now retreating northeastward from their mountain defenses near the west coast of Italy and were evidently intending to cross the River Po and to escape into Austria before our troops could contact them. Speed, therefore, was one of the most important considerations in our movements. The 133rd Infantry moved rapidly by truck to the city of Modena, situated on the broad straight highway leading northwest from Bologna to the Po River and northwestern Italy.

Italian cities renowned in history were located at intervals along this, the Via Emilia, but the wily Germans, foreseeing that an eventual Allied attack might be launched along it, had constructed permanent defenses screening each successive town on the southeast side. These fortifications included solidly built pill-boxes of concrete and brick, revetted anti-tank, ditches and large-scale prepared demolitions. To off-set these precautionary measures, our troops could count upon assistance from the Partisans who, having been instructed to rise in rebellion against their German oppressors,



... assistance from the Partisans...

were ready to prevent the Germans from carrying out a "scorched earth" policy.

The 133rd Infantry, relieving elements of the 1st Armored Division just west of Modena, moved rapidly along Highway 9 until they established contact with the defense force of Rubiera. After a brief fight the town was taken, and prisoners disclosed that the enemy units who were streaming northwards from the Apennines came from a large assortment of combat and service units all hopelessly jumbled and certain only of the necessity for retreating fast toward their homeland.

On 24 April our troops had advanced further up

Highway 9 to the outskirts of Reggio where an enemy garrison of several hundred men, drawn from a local infantry weapons training school, put up a shrewd defense of the city, falling back slowly from the airfield into the town itself. By the afternoon a few American tanks had arrived on the scene and these, together with a bold encircling movement from the south by the 34th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, resulted in an immediate collapse and the town was captured the same evening. To keep the pursuit fresh, the 168th Infantry now took up the chase. Throughout the night they pushed on to Parma, being slightly delayed by demolished bridges which the Germans had had time to destroy as they fell back.

By this time certain information had enabled us to gain a clearer picture of what we were up against. An enemy force, consisting of the 232nd Infantry Division,

... moving out of Reggio...





... not so super "Supermen"...

the 148th Infantry Division and the Italia Infantry Division, together with other Republican Fascist troops and a German armored infantry regiment, were falling back to the north in several columns along the roads leading from the Apennines to Highway 9 and the River Po. Parma was on the line of their retreat. After a fight on the outskirts of the city, the 168th Infantry, together with Partisan brigades within the town and from the surrounding countryside, captured Parma during the evening of 25 April. The Germans, although handicapped by poor communications, reali-

zed that our rapid advance up Highway 9 was cutting deeply into the flank of their retreat and indeed threatened to cut them off altogether. The leading German elements forced the pace as the 34th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, together with tanks, skirted Parma to the south; while the 133rd Infantry cleaned out by-passed German groups to the north.

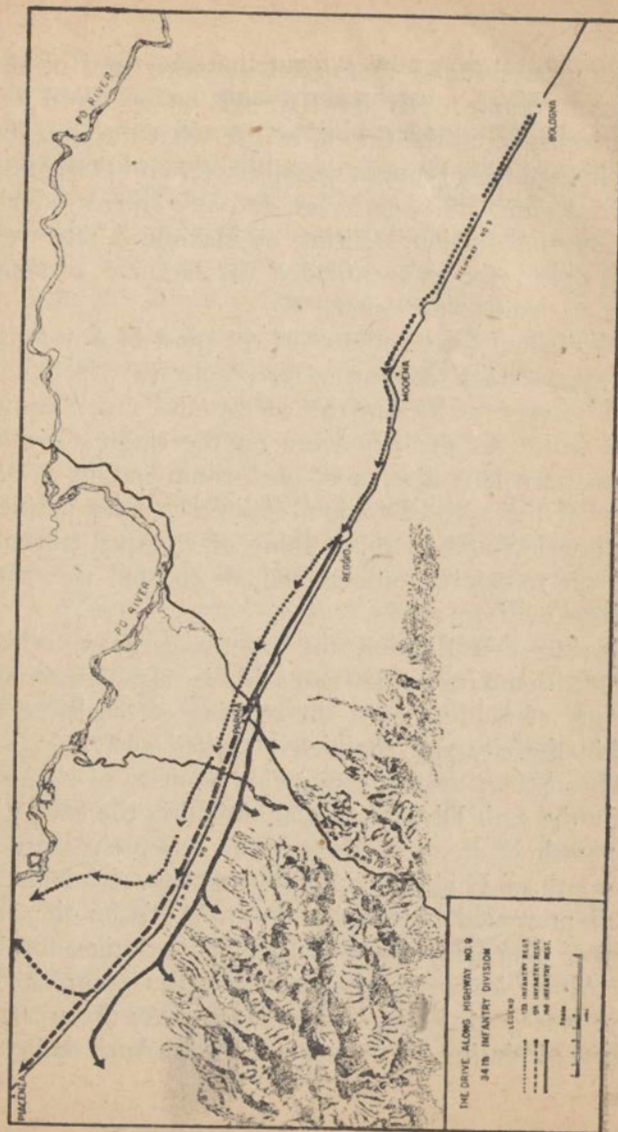
Now the 135th Infantry, arriving in high spirits, passed through the 168th Infantry and, dashing in trucks along Highway 9, found that the Germans had failed to destroy an important bridge. Fidenza fell the same day. They advanced at full speed to the Nure River, which they reached by morning on 26 April. After a brisk fire fight, the enemy withdrew from the river to positions inside of the town of Piacenza on the same

... racing up Highway 9...



afternoon. It was now evident that the 34th Division had achieved a great breakthrough and had cut clean across the retreating columns of three enemy divisions so that one of them, the 232nd Infantry Division, was isolated between Highway 9 and the Po River while the other two had not yet even crossed the main road. However, the situation of the 34th itself meant that with its own resources it had to face both south and north along a distance of about 90 kilometers and was constantly open to the risk of a concerted attempt to surround it by means of a double attack on the part of the enemy divisions which had been split. The Divisional plan was to block to the south with limited motorized patrols and road posts while the 133rd and 135th Infantry Regiments concentrated on the complete elimination of the 232nd Infantry Division in the shortest possible time.

Fighting between the River Po and Highway 9 was vicious and sometimes confused. As the enemy was compressed into a small pocket in a loop of the river he desperately tried to force a way out by charging down a road toward Piacenza with a column of infantry and some self-propelled guns. This force succeeded in surrounding a battalion of the 135th Infantry but, quite undaunted, the battalion fought on throughout the night until by daybreak all the enemy had either surrendered or been killed. During the same night, further to the east, a battalion of enemy troops advancing along a straight stretch of road became intermingled with two march units from the 133rd Infantry so that elements



of our troops found themselves at either end of the German column. As dawn broke on 27 April the Americans, being the first to realize what the situation was, immediately brought 57 millimeter anti-tank guns, machine guns, rifles, grenades, and any other available weapons into action. Firing at maximum rate over open sights, the 57's enfiladed the German columns from one end to the other.

After about forty minutes of the most bloody fighting the German column was completely wiped out, with heavy casualties to the enemy and much equipment lost. As the day wore on the single German commander left alive, a colonel commanding a regiment of the 232nd Division, realized that his position was hopeless and by the evening of 27 April surrendered his remaining officers and all enlisted personnel to the American troops.

During this fighting the enemy garrison, which included some Italian SS troops, in Piacenza, abandoned its duty of holding open the crossing of the River Po within the city and completely melted away.

Throughout the two-day period from 26 to 28 April while the 34th Division was annihilating the enemy to the north of it, the situation was extremely tense to the south of Highway 9. Rain and low clouds on 26 April prevented observation from AOP's on the progress of the enemy retreat out of the Apennines toward us. All we knew was that a numerically strong enemy force was getting nearer and nearer. As the weather improved during the afternoon of 27 April long co-

lumns of troops, including artillery and half-tracks, were seen only a few miles away from our weak road blocks. Partisans reported that they had harassed the enemy columns constantly, during their journey through the mountain roads, but, according to prisoners, they still consisted of between 6,000 and 8,000 Germans and Italians. The first element to contact our troops was the armored infantry regiment which made a half-hearted attempt to force its way past our road block to enter the town of Parma which, it will be recalled, was at that time a good 35 miles to the rear of our most advanced elements. Failing to enter the city and having suffered casualties, the enemy columns turned aside and moved northwestward into some high ground south of the highway, where contact was lost. To meet a possible attack by this enemy force, the only resources which we could spare consisted of the 168th Infantry Regiment, the 34th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, a company from the 894th Tank Destroyers and five light tanks, all spread out for a distance of 45 miles. Yet so vigorous were the parrying blows which were struck at the enemy spearheads as they tried to probe northward, that the Germans and Italians did not have the heart to attempt to cross Highway 9. The initiative remained throughout with the 34th.

On 29 April the Division was ordered to withdraw from the scene of its triumph in the Highway 9 area and to move in one day 145 miles—down to Modena, thence northward across the Po and then westward again to a village near Cremona where it was originally

intended to commit the Division in a sweeping movement to clear the Germans out of northwest Italy. It was left to the Brazilian Expeditionary Force to accept the surrender of the shaken German-Italian forces south of Highway 9 the day after the 34th left that sector.

No sooner had the leading regiment deployed in the Cremona area, where it succeeded in rounding up several hundred Germans, including the Commanding General of the famous 90th Light Division, when the Division's orders were changed and a further move of 80 miles was executed to close the Division into an area between Brescia and Bergamo. Thus, by dint of skillful planning and use of all available transportation, (and also by the old-fashioned method of travelling light) the 34th had moved a total of over 330 miles in nine days, enabling the High Command to count upon the readiness of the Division for combat far in advance of what the enemy believed feasible. In the new zone several thousand prisoners, many of them captured by Partisans, were rounded up. It was here that the first unmistakable signs of the impending German collapse were seen as complete convoys of German vehicles loaded with Germans and driven by Germans careened down the highway towards the prisoner of war cages, guarded by only a handful of American soldiers.

In praising the fighting troops—above all the tired, footsore infantrymen—for their work in this, the last, maddest chase of Germans in the Italian campaign, let us not forget the achievements of the service troops. Aptly named, they, in the closing stages, made it pos-

sible to exploit to the full the terrible collapse of the German armies.

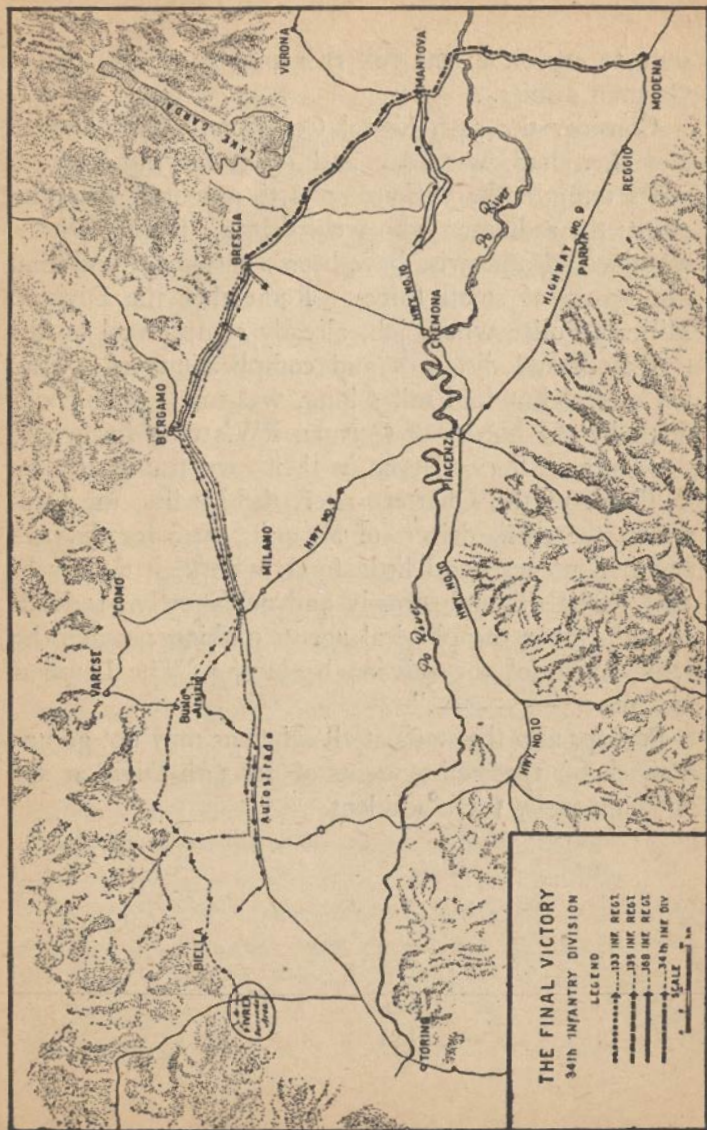
Consider the 34th Signal Company, which hauled, and then laid, wire day and night for hundreds of miles tying-in the various units to a central directing point; the radiomen who welded into a flexible whole, what would otherwise have been a disjointed and aimless group of small forces. Remember the Division Military Police whose job, already complicated by the unprecedented distances and complications of a road net several hundred miles long, was made doubly difficult by the hordes of German PW's who flocked to the cages, at the end even in their own transport.

Think of the Quartermaster, the Medics, the Ordnance, the truck drivers of all units, who for days on end had no rest, and little food; who kept their vehicles going although grossly and deliberately overloaded; who were the physical agents making possible the achievement of the mission beginning "The Division will move — — —."

Perhaps also the staffs at all echelons may not go unnoticed, for the achievements of the 34th Division did not happen by mere accident.

BRESCIA-IVREA — Triumphant

But now the climax pressed imminently upon us. All the enemy forces in Italy had been destroyed or scattered—except one. The elimination of this final group was to be the last battle task of the 34th in World War II. It will be recalled that before the Gothic Line offensive began, the Allied successes in Southern France had obliged the German Command in Italy to dispatch a force to the Franco-Italian Alps, there to keep watch against a possible Allied eruption into the plains of Northwest Italy. Throughout the long winter the Germans maintained their vigil, built elaborate defenses facing toward France, and strove to keep their lines of communication free from interference by the Partisans. The composition of the enemy force had changed from time to time but by the spring had solidified into a compact group under command of the LXXV Corps, which, beside various auxiliary units, included two full divisions. One was the 5th Mountain Division, a crack outfit of hand-picked soldiers admirably suited for Alpine campaigning who met us first near Mount Pantano and north of Cassino. The other, by the fortune of war, was our enemy counterpart, the 34th German Infantry Division, which had come to Italy in the summer of 1944 to rest and piece itself together after defeat at the hands of the Russians. It was an old division, by German standards, one of those formed during the



first expansion of the Nazi Army by Hitler in 1935. It had fought in France, and on several fronts in Russia, gaining a fine reputation. Now as Germany's homeland was on the point of being overrun, her armies defeated, and her leaders disgraced, the 34th awaited what the 34th would do.

The LXXXV Corps, it must be remembered, was not a beaten force. Its troops, though doubtless gloomy at the state of the war, had confidence in themselves and pride in their past performance. Its supplies were adequate, though transportation was lacking. All told, the Corps Commander, General Schlemmer, had a well-organized force of about 40,000 men with which to operate during Germany's last days. When the front south of Bologna collapsed and the Po was spanned,

... name, rank—Serial number...



... a quick frisk just to make sure...

General Schlemmer began gradually to withdraw from his Alpine fastnesses westward and northward toward Turin, possibly hoping eventually to reach the Austrian border and to form part of the last-ditch defense in the "National Redoubt" of the German Alps. Throughout his retirement he defended himself skillfully against the French forces pursuing him from the west, and, in return for his promise not to destroy Turin and other Italian towns he gained immunity from Partisan attacks as he moved out across the valley floor towards the north. But the German progress, limited to the plodding of the draft horses, was slow, and the enemy columns could not shake off the vigilant ring of Partisans, who surrounded them and shepherded them on their way. By 30 April, the spearheads of the 1st U.S. Ar-

mored Division had reached the Swiss frontier and the escape of the LXXV Corps was cut off.

It remained but to find the Germans and either force them to battle or to surrender. The 34th, and its old comrades of the 1st Armored, were given the job. Moving westward from Bergamo as fast as possible, the 34th crossed the Ticino River without resistance and pressed on to the area of Ivrea, a little village close to the Alpine foothills and about thirty miles north-west of Turin. There on 2 May we waited.

It will be recalled that the Italian Marshal Graziani, commanding the Ligurian Army, had by this time already capitulated. The extent of the Marshal's authority over German troops was uncertain, but obviously the enemy everywhere was cracking. Secret envoys to General Schlemmer during the preceding few days had learned that although he agreed that his position was hopeless, and that surrender in the circumstances was neither unreasonable nor dishonorable, he, General Schlemmer, had given his personal oath to Hitler not to give in. The enemy commander considered himself bound by that undertaking so long as his Fuehrer remained alive. Nothing could shake this almost oriental concern with "face," but early on 2 May came the report from Berlin that Hitler had perished in the ruins of his capital. A few hours later, General Schlemmer sent his Chief of Staff through our lines to the CP of the 135th Infantry Regiment to announce his willingness to sign an unconditional surrender. Thus it fell

to the 34th to accept this overture, one in a long series of similar acts up and down the battered continent.

Forty thousand Germans, including our opposite number, were thus, in the nick of time, spared the brief, bloody clash which could only have ended in their destruction; for with full air support and cooperation with the 1st Armored Division already arranged, our attack was imminent.

The war for us was over. The German surrender in the rest of Italy and then all over Europe followed within a matter of days.

The war sagged, without much excitement, to an end.

But the 34th didn't mind. It was not a bad end.

... It was not a bad end...

