Remount Blue

The combat story of the 3d Battalion,
86th Mountain Infantry of the
10th Mountain Division.

This copy of the original document has been expanded
with a number of recollections, *marked in cursive*, by others who were also there
and shared these experiences.

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- Preface -

Some of the veterans of the 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry, may remember the Po Valley plains near the little town of Castenedolo as the place where a few men in the outfit began to write the Battalion's diary. Each of the companies was asked for a few qualified volunteers, and in such hot and sticky shade as these men could find they started a job that really hasn't been completed yet.

It was intended that the history of Remount Blue - code name for one of the best battalions in the business - should appear in book form. But the way to the hoped-for book is not yet cleared of trip flares and tactical wire. There were too few advance orders to begin to finance it, and the Eastern publisher who kept us on the string for nearly three years by promising to publish the book became frightened last May at the prospects of rising costs and falling markets. We have been left in the lurch.

A book-length manuscript is still on hand. The story it tells is pretty complete, from the day the mountain-troop idea was no more than a gleam in "Minnie" Dole's eye, to the final break-up. There are sketches by William Reyes, of I Company; photographs by men in the Battalion as well as by the Signal Core; other photographs of German mountain troops in training; maps; photostats of German documents; an especially humorous account of the D Series by William Hosking, of Headquarters Company; an appendix of Mountain Troop songs, a battalion roster, and a checklist of books and articles about 10th Mountain and the smaller units that cadred the regiments. The text as a whole, while still centering on the 3d Battalion, has been revised so as to be of interest to many others than those who served in the Battalion. The manuscript as a whole, has been highly spoken of by many who have read it and checked it over. But for all that, it isn't in print. We shall have to hope that it will all come out someday in good form, and that you'll be after a copy when it comes.

Our story here passes right by all the preliminaries; it is concerned with the Battalion's most important role - what it did overseas. Even so, it is the work of many men, some of whose names may already be starting to slip from your minds, but whose accomplishments, combined with your own, you won't want to forget:

Henry H. Burnett	Greenleaf W. Pickard
William D. Drake	Merril Pollack
Richard M. Emerson	Edward Reilly
Linwood M. Erskine, Jr.	Ernest A. Ross
Paul T. Hodul	Wilbur G. Vaughan
Frank J. Kiernan	Archie Vaughn
Curt Kreiser	Richard F. Weber

Specific acknowledgment of the work of these men is not made in the text. Others who have contributed are mentioned by name with the parts they have written. I hope that those of you who were really in the thick of

it will not be too troubled by the occasional intrusion of personal anecdotes about what the rear echelon - in the person of Blue 2 - was up to. My main job in these pages was to fill up the holes in the story that existed here and there, to supply as well some needed transitional passages, and finally, because editing is my job, to throw a few commas around and try to get most of the spelling to agree with Webster. Grateful acknowledgement is made to George Earle for excerpts from his History of the 87th, as well as to the IV Corps historian for his contribution to the necessary over-all view. I am obligated to Lt. Col. John Hay for encouraging - if not needling - the project. Thanks are due to Roland Moody and Leo Healy for checking facts and adding accounts. And finally, special thanks are due my wife not only for many hours she spent on the retyping of various drafts of the manuscript, but being a damned good editor's editor.

May the result remind you, if not of happy days, at least of important days, and of friendships you made in a few months that will last you a lifetime-even if some of those friends aren't going to be around.

David R. Brower
University of California Press, Remount Blue 2
Berkley 4, California,

Remount Blue

Chapter 1

OVERSEAS PAY

When we boarded our converted luxury liner, the S. S. Argentina, the order was "Get in your bunks and stay there until further notice." But the problem at hand still remained how to lower same, when they were ceiling high, five deep, and there were such slight encumbrance banging around one's neck as steel helmet, rifle, gas mask, pistol belt, pack, and duffel bag. Strong legs and stout hearts plus the ability of some of the men to stand on their heads finally accomplished the order. Shortly after daylight the trembling of the ship told the still conscious that the 86th Mountain Infantry, leading the 10th Mountain Division, was moving and was starting on a new pay scale.

We were told that we would be fed two meals a day on the trip across. For most of us, during the first days, that was two too many. The safest place to be was on the top deck, where you could get seasick to your heart's content without fear that someone above you was doing likewise. As the days sped by we became acquainted with the big ship, and a few words of the language of the sea. The ship's loudspeaker would inform us to "muster" down in the "galley" for evening "meal." We frequently patronized the "ship's store," regardless of what it was called, especially with cigarettes at five cents a pack. Everything possible was done by the ship's personnel to make the men comfortable; they kept the soldiers and the Air Corps separated whenever possible, and even let us have some drinking water occasionally. Many men took advantage of the warm sunshine to lie on the decks when there was room. We learned that ordinary soap would not lather in salt water, the importance of the strict blackout, the meaning of the word convoy. We watched the ships in our convoy as they changed speed and direction to complicate any submarine's attempt to line up its sights on us. Our ship led the convoy.

Certainly it wasn't with a tourist's eye that the 86th had it's first glimpse of Italy. Otherwise the men might have enjoyed it, for it was beautiful and surprisingly rugged. They swarmed the fore structure of the Argentina to see it, seeking every point of vantage on the wind-and-spray-swept bow to watch the rocky summits rise into the late afternoon sunshine. Perhaps they glanced back, past the crests of the wake waves, from which spray was torn to scintillate in the sun, and thought of places they had come from, then to glance ahead and wonder what they were getting into. A few of them realized that they were speeding toward the Naples harbor, with no air cover necessary, no shots fired, by virtue of the struggles of the men who had fought and died in Africa, on Sicily, at Salerno, and on north. A man could well wonder what other units might come later, to advance as freely without air cover or shots being fired, but far to the north, by virtue of the fighting and dying the mountain troops were about to undertake.

But if GIs approaching Kwajalein in an assault boat subjected to small-arms and mortar fire could sing "Happy Birthday to You" while making an amphibious landing on a Jap-held atoll, certainly we could think of cheerful subjects while moving into a peaceful, if some- what upset, port of Naples. Tomorrow could well take care of its own troubles. This was new; the war damage, the small craft, the Neopolitans were interesting; and for the first time for most of us, we were now foreigners.

This did not mean that we no longer gave consideration to rumors about our future. We had already pumped the ship's personnel well enough to know that Italy would be our destination; we had reached conclusions, hardly wrong, about the date of our landing from the presence of the Christmas-dinner ration in the galley. And now we were hearing that we'd have two weeks to rejoin our equipment and gather more of it in billets just outside Naples; we would then move up within artillery range of the Germans for training for another two weeks or so; following this we would be indoctrinated into combat piecemeal, key officers and NCOs playing visiting firemen to the organizations on the line, picking up what battle lessons they could before the entire regiment gave its training the combat test.

We unloaded at the dock and moved by truck out to what was ironically called the "College," at Bagnoli, just up the coast from Naples. The college had never been completed and bombs had already started to tear it down. The buildings, with an elaborate touch of camouflage, had been used previously to billet German troops. To us it was just a bunch of cold stone walls with all the windows missing.

Walking, on pass, through the rubble of Naples we could see the barefooted children, dressed in whatever scraps they could beg or steal, some crippled by bombing or perhaps by malnutrition. The older people were little better off. They would pick up a cigarette butt as soon as it hit the ground. At each mess hall, crowds of civilians waited to pick up scraps of bread, the mess-kit garbage, and the coffee grounds we threw away. Black markets flourished; cigarettes could bring up to two dollars a pack. Nor was that all they would bring. The most casual of Leadville Lotharios - even the most hardened of the 10th Divisions later acquisitions, who knew full well that all red lights were not stop lights, - must have been given slight pause by the Napolitans' methods of merchandising. They had heard that one approach that was expected of the GI wolf on the prowl was, "Dove casa, Signorina?" But how could they be prepared for what could be called the vicarious reverse approach? Imagine, for example, that you are walking along Via Roma on a chilly December evening. From just inside the depths of an alley or store front you hear a piping voice, "oh my achin' back!" The voice, you find, comes from an Italian boy, an urchin still in his soprano. So far as it goes, his English (or Americanese), is perfect, the inflection just right. He knows little more, but the rest of his idiom, or

sales talk, comes straight from the latrine. From his next single question you learn that he is a front man, trying to help his sisters support the family. And a pack of cigarettes is the most popular medium of exchange.

Also, apparently, there were the signorinas who had to do as best they could without the assistance of a small brother. The next to the most enterprising of these, so the story goes, somehow passed the entrance examinations at the College at Bagnoli. She graduated the same evening, lacking only three packs of having two full cartons of cigarettes -a thirty-four-dollar windfall at the current price of cigarettes.

Her alleged success was only exceeded, it would seem, the following May in the Po Valley town of Brescia. The vino, in Naples, was hardly as pure as she. One bottle, upon analysis, was found to be mostly gaso- line, canned heat, and artificial coloring. There was, therefore, little wine drinking in Naples or Bagnoli, where we celebrated a most dismal, gloomy Christmas. As one man remarked, "This is my fourth in the Army. I spent the first one in the guard house, the second one in the Pacific, and the third one in an army hospital. But they were all great compared to this." The only bright spot was the first mail from home.

Our pre-indoctrination plans were leisurely. Unfortunately, they did not take German plans fully into account. The day after Christmas, having learned through his own intelligence a little too much about the plans for an Allied push along Highway 65 far to the north, the enemy decided to play the old game of striking the first blow. He struck on the left flank, in our 92nd Division sector, on the opposite side of the front. That he was a little too successful was well demonstrated by the speed with which our training time was decimated. The regiment was transferred to IV Corps reserve, without waiting for the Division to assemble first. We were part of Task Force 45, instead.

We moved out of Naples on the morning of December 26th, aboard the Sestriere. With memories of the luxurious Argentina still fresh in our minds, we found in this little Italian freighter nothing but floating discomfort. Nor was all of it floating; some of it was airborne, for the deck latrines drained too freely to windward. Luckily our trip was short. We docked at war-torn Livorno the next day, moved about twenty miles, and pitched pup tents in neat rows just three miles from Pisa. We could now hear the rumble of artillery and see its flashes at night.

The Germans had planned that their push would carry them to Bagni di Lucca and San Marcello, which they would occupy for the winter. Instead we were to be there two weeks later. They were stopped short, with no calls on us as Corps reserve, and we were able to move south through Livorno to a training area near Quercianella. Here we became acquainted with the different types of German Mines. There were mine fields on all sides of us. Too soon we learned of their deadliness. One of our guards, walking post along the railroad tracks, stepped on one; then other mines claimed the lives of several medics and a chaplain who came too hurriedly to help. Still other mines, not yet detonated were found under the bodies by A&P men, who skillfully and cautiously came to clear the area.

We were not in Quercianella long enough for much indoctrination. Only one officer from the battalion was able to visit any of the units on the line. He returned from trips to the 85th and 91st divisions to report a type of warfare that was fantastic. Clearly the men who wrote "the book" didn't have Italy's winter front in mind. These were some of the reports brought back: (1) There wasn't a CP in the IV Corps that wasn't in a building. (2) One regiment had its reserve battalion billeted in a beat-up town within easy range of German artillery, with German observers looking right down its throat, and was getting away with it. (3) Artillery was being traded just about round for round. If we didn't shoot, the Germans wouldn't. (4) Although German SS troops were still as heinous as ever, there were some mountain troops in the German side of the Apennine line who, if they shot up a man in one of our patrols, would give him first aid and fix him up with a cigarette before they took off. (5) A reserve company on the line could go back to a battalion rear CP and take showers. A reserve battalion could have a change of clothes to boot. (6) Nobody worried about occupying valleys. Both sides sat on ridges and looked across at each other, sending out patrols only at night, and then only to get prisoners often enough to know who was relieving whom. (7) The night after a regiment came into the line on a relief, the Germans welcomed it by name over a public address system--which was straightaway shot up. (8) The resident Italians shared billets and CP buildings with our troops, and farmed no-man's land without being particularly bothered by the artillery. (9) Italian partisans were operat-ing far behind German lines and did much of the deep patrolling some, however, for whoever offered the best deal. (10) And the book says a battalion front 800-1500 yards? Well, one battalion front in the IV Corps sector was a mere nineteen miles. They called it The Gap. The Germans were just as thin on the other side. We were bout to know more about The Gap. We were to learn that a battalion CP could exist with nothing between it and the enemy but a guard post and a lot of snow-covered moun- tains. We were to learn how to censor telephone calls so that enemy patrols would not, by tapping a 19-mile line patrolled only by jeep and half-track, know as much about our left-flank company's doings as we did. We were to learn how to pronounce and spell "Montafegatesi" without having to stop for breath in between syllables. We were to add our own footnotes to the fantasy of static winter warfare in Italy. For on January 8th we moved into The Gap, as reserve battalion-with nothing to do but cover a 5-mile front and run 77 patrols in less than two weeks. It was not all going to be as nice as it had sounded.

Chapter 2

PATROLS WERE ACTIVE

January 8 was our day. Our precombat training was over. Fort Lewis and the singing ski troops, detach- ment "deals" all over North America, Camp Carson, the Mountain Training Center, the Mountain and Winter Warfare Board, the Washington desks over which our equipment and training plans had gone, the scramble and shuffle at Hale, Kiska, Hale again, Camp Swift--what had all this done for the 10th Mountain Division? The 86th Infantry was about to find out, and the 3d Battalion along with it. We loaded into trucks and headed toward the front.

Recall by R. Sanctuary, I, 86th.

This was a very long, non-stop truck trip, and finally it became necessary for some passengers to relieve themselves. This was accomplished with no great exertion by simply standing at the side of the truck and using the edge of the road as a urinal as it went by. This all seemed quite reasonable and was done by an increasing number as time went by. However, there was amongst us a very reserved person, who felt that this sort of thing was done only in private and not as a public display along the roadside. Eventually a case of a near bursting bladder dictated that relief be sought immediately. After soliciting information that there were no towns in sight from those in the front of the truck, he finally commenced to relieve himself. Moments later the truck rounded a corner and we found ourselves driving right down the main street of a small Italian village. At this point it would have been a physical impossibility to even attempt to stop the flow. So to accompanying cheers and side-wrenching laughter from the rest of us, he continued to relieve himself right on through town. A waving elderly gentleman standing on the side of the road was completely surprised when the stream passed right across his chest. Two young girls happened to see what was coming and quickly ran into an alley. There, peeking around the corner of the building, they watched in utter amazement as we proceeded by. The town is probably still talking about those crazy Americans.

East to Florence, over to Pistoia, up into the Apennines we rode. Most of the GIs could well have had an off-feeling inside them that day. Nobody had much to say, and few knew quite what to expect. We were soon in snow-covered mountains with a cold snowstorm in progress, and we could think back to Camp Hale and D- Series. This time, however, we were riding in a country where small villages were perched along the streams. Several of these, in the San Marcello area, were being held by an antiaircraft battalion which was acting as infantry to fill the 19 miles in that sector. This was The Gap, we were their relief, and they were very glad to see us.

The 2d Battalion of the 86th occupied the Cutigliano sector, blocking the only north-south road in the Gap. The 1st Battalion drew the hot spot, and was in the Lizzano sector to the east, directly under the most threatening of Italy's many Monte Belvederes. The Germans sat on top of Belvedere, with excellent observa- tion, patrolled often at night, and fired artillery at any target that might be remunerative. The 3d Battalion, in reserve, was to maintain contact with adjoining units, patrol to the front, and hold down the left flank of the Regiment. The Battalion CP and headquarters group were placed in the little town of Gavinana; near by, companies L and M were set up in the former winter-resort town of San Marcello, where GIs cast many covetous glances at the handmade ski boots worn by residents of all ages. Com- pany K occupied Maresca, while Company I was set up at Bagni di Lucca, with positions on high ground around Monte di Villa Lugnano.

Recall by R. Comer, I, 86th

I Company Headquarters platoon moved into a house some 3 to 4 hundred meters north and west and up a hill from the Bagni di Lucca commercial area. One of my assignments was to establish a telephone switching central of much greater complexity than normally assigned an infantry company.

As I recall, there were two SB-71's, each of which had a capacity of 24 lines, and one SB-72 with a capacity of 12 lines. These switchboards were leaning against a wall next to a window with a bundle of some sixty pairs of wire entering the house through a hole in the wall or the window. By testing each pair of lines with an EE-8 telephone, I found at the other end another phone, another switchboard, or nothing (a dead line). I arranged the switchboards so that the drop cords from any one switchboard would reach to any plug-in position on either of the other two boards. After considerable trial and error, I finally had all the lines tied in, and also those company lines that Sergeant Olson and the wire crew had installed. We in the comm platoon eventually had a 60 drop switching central to man.

One of the first calls received was a coded message. I had never been involved with coded messages before. I knew that if I gave the message to the Company Commander he would handle it. His system for handling this problem was to give me an M-209 Converter and a Tech Manual on how to operate it. After much trial and error along with several passes through the TM, I was finally able to decipher the message. This was the first of very few coded messages received by Company I during the rest of the war.

Late one night, while working the switchboard, I received a call from some front line outfit, not ours, requesting to be connected to another switchboard. I found the proper line on my circuit diagram and made the

connection. A further connection was requested and made. Eventually he was talking to his wife in Washington DC.

In Bagni di Lucca, I also got a lesson in Italian customs. Further up the hill from the I Company CP was a public bath. Inside were rooms which contained huge bathtubs into which flowed water from natural hot springs in the mountain. Each of these rooms was attached to a dressing room. The procedure seemed to be to undress in the dressing room as the water ran into the tub, then go into the tub room, bathe, return to the dressing room, dry off, dress, and leave. I did all these things just as custom required, except that when I returned to the dressing room, stark naked, there was an Italian family, mother, father, and several small children, all also stark naked, awaiting their own turn to bathe. Having been raised in a family with strict puritan values, and never having seen so much nakedness, nor ever having been caught so naked before, I went through a fair amount of emotional trauma as they moved past me to the tub room. I quickly dressed and left them to enjoy their bath.

Recall by R. Duke Watson, I 86th

"The Gap", described in the early part of Chapter 2, was occupied by our 3rd Battalion. Company I was stationed at Bagni di Lucca, on the extreme left flank, well detached from the rest of the battalion. Our night patrols are described in some detail, but no mention is made of the patrol which we sent out, once every 24 hours, to establish contact with a similar patrol from the 92nd Div, on our left. The two patrols, after meeting, would agree on a different time and place for the following patrols to rendezvous.

I well recall each of our patrol leaders, without exception, in reporting to me upon return, relating the bizarre (and comical) behavior of these patrols from the 92nd. Our men would usually reach the rendezvous point first, after traveling in defilade and concealment. They would watch in amazement their counterparts moving along the skyline, with no apparent regard for concealment. After a few days, as the enemy began a penetration of the 92nd's sector, in what could have developed into a serious flanking maneuver, the veteran Tenth Indian Division (British) was rushed in to replace the current troops (the ones who, the British told us, "all lean forward in their foxholes, when they get the order to attack"). As our contact patrols continued with the Tenth Indian, our unit would never see the other until it suddenly popped up out of the bush. The latter was normally made up of stealthy Gurkhas.

As described, suffice it to say that I Company was treated to a graphic illustration of the wrong way and the correct way in scouting and patrolling.

The situation was not active enough for the reserve battalion to experience much difficulty from the Germans, but we were having trouble to burn with the Italians in making ourselves understood.

L Company's routine of guard duty and training was abruptly interrupted on the evening of January 14 when Captain Bailey called for a volunteer combat patrol to obtain prisoners for questioning. Innumerable details, check-ups, and all meticulous preparations being com- pleted, the white-clad patrol, led by Lt. Ralph Meyer took off. Guided by terrain-wise Partisans and made up of 58 heavily armed men on snowshoes, the patrol reached its objective, Campetti, successfully in spite of the snow- shoes, but returned without having contacted the enemy. The tired men nevertheless felt the tense and exciting atmosphere of battle. The ice had been broken.

Company I, meanwhile, had been running increasingly longer patrols into the snow-covered country north of Bagni di Lucca, initially going to Montafegatesi, a village at first as mysterious as its name is long. It was visited one night by our patrols, the next night allegedly by German patrols, on what might almost have been called a schedule. The Partisan residents were always willing to add an imaginative touch to their accounts of German forays and would describe firefights that had gone quite unnoticed by our observation posts, easily within earshot of any fireworks. Soon Montafegatesi became only a way station - on the milk run - for patrols that were to continue farther and farther afield to Monte Mosca, Alpe Tre Potenza, other less attractive place names, and a few remote spots determined only by their coordinates on the map. A white-clad suspected German or two would be seen on distant ridges, but there was no contact except--as tired I Company men would attest--with the elements.

Recall by Victor Eklund, I, 86th.

While I Company was headquartered in Bagni di Lucca, an Air Corps pilot returning from straffing up near Brenner Pass had to bail out of his damaged plane near one of our outposts. Our fellows went out and brought him in and then on down to Company Headquarters where be spent the night before returning to his outfit. He was understandably quite pleased that he had landed near our lines instead of behind the German lines.

I talked to him that evening after dinner about his experience and he told me all about it. He then said, "Boy am I tired". I said, "I imagine that was a rather trying experience". He replied, "Oh, its not that. Last night we had a dance at the base with lots of Italian girls there and I didn't get to bed 'till early this morning"

That of course confirmed my suspicions about the soft life of the Army Air Corps, so I decided to even the score a bit. I said, "How would you like to trade your 45 automatic for a genuine trench knife"? He replied, "Gee, that would be swell". So the transaction was promptly completed.

On January 16, however there was a little action. A 15-man patrol led by Lt. Adna Wilde set out for Ospedaletto, in country that reliable Partisan reports assured us contained enemy. Possibly the patrol was picked up by enemy observation at the time it crossed its LD at Monte di Villa Lugnano. At any rate shortly after dusk the scouts, dressed in OD, drew fire, a Partisan guide was believed mortally wounded, and a second Partisan guide disappeared in the darkness. The patrol hit the round, but it was snow-covered ground and offered much less concealment to them than it did to the white-clad Germans in a firing line that Lt. Wilde discerned through his night glasses. He quickly planned a little flanking action of his own, only to hear an unknown number of Germans moving through the trees and shadows among the boulders on his own flank. The patrol withdrew, with nine men under T/Sgt. Ed Gulczynski, while three men with Lt. Wilde, carried the wounded Partisan back to the shelter of an abandoned barn, later to notify other Partisans of his whereabouts.

The results of the patrol were not at first hailed by Battalion as satisfactory. Fifteen men were turned back empty-handed by what may have been six men--or what may have been several times that number. But neither side had taken prisoners, and at least the German ambush, in territory the Germans knew better, had been out maneuvered. Higher headquarters could take comfort in the survival of the patrol and knowledge that the enemy was still around. The patrol had not met a problem that could be answered right out of the book. Events on the winter front were still too paradoxical for that.

At least the patrol had no difficulty until it was far beyond Montafegatesi. There were even stories that some I Company men attended parties in that town of an evening, well beyond the front line, if it could be called a line. It remained for a higher-echelon patrol later to be pinned down by presumed enemy observation and unable to move during daylight--but still at Montafegatesi, on the milk run.

Thus, slowly, were battle facts picked up the only way they could be remembered--at first hand. There was one other occasion when battle facts were learned, practically without cost. The order came down reaffirming that higher headquarters wanted prisoners. The German outpost at Piansinatico, up the Cutigliano road toward Abetone, seemed ripe for plucking. Observers spent two full days in OPs, noting any outpost movements, charting all new footprints in the snow that indicated occupation of buildings in the battle scarred village. Company L was to provide the patrol--one platoon, well reinforced. Lt. Stutz was to take 53 men, and they were to take the town, long enough to clean it out. Artillery support was planned, patrol leaders studied the observer reports and stereoscopic air photos of the town, Partisans were questioned, the detailed plan of approach, fire, and maneuver was re- viewed. This was to be the big act in the Regiment's memoirs of the static winter front, and all boxes were full. The curtain went up late the night of the 19th, and the 53 men toiled up snow-covered, steep slopes in the darkness, to attain the ground from which they could lash at the village from the west and from the rear, sweep it clean and carry the debris down the canyon with them to friendly lines.

They started out with enough firepower, artillery included, to clean out a town several times that size. But they were to soon learn a battle fact instead--that weapons which were choked, or even only slightly flecked with snow, do not fire when needed. As they approached along the ridge, a single enemy shot had been fired, presumably for no reason. But when the patrol was about to take its culminating ride, in the wake of the abundant firepower, down into the town, that single shot would seem to have been a signal. The Germans did the firing instead. Hardly more than eight of the patrol's fifty-three weapons would function. The others jammed. Meanwhile, the Germans, having moved into their positions on the warning shot, now fired the works. Flares, tracers, machine guns, burp guns, and mortars cut loose in pandemonium. The small arms were to pin the men down, the mortars to finish them. And Jerry mortar shells made a mud-dotted line in the snow up a draw which was the most likely route for the patrols withdrawal--but which happily was not the one used. "Banshee," the British artillery support for the patrol, saved the day. It was called for and expertly adjusted, the town was plastered, and withdrawal was accomplished in comparative quiet. One man turned an ankle. He was the only casualty.

Add to this the night the Luftwaffe visited the Battalion with one of its rare (to us) Italian appearances, dropping six bombs near a Bailey bridge at Bagni di Lucca, and you have the major excitement in The Gap. The men may be said to have met the combat conditions extremely well, and could look ahead with confidence, if not impatience, to whatever lay before them.

Recall by Victor Eklund, I, 86th.

The British seemed to have an entirely different approach to the war than did we Americans. I don't know if it was because they had been at it longer, or if it was the traditional British way of life. The following incident is an example of what I mean:

We were getting ready to relieve a British unit on the lines somewhere and Captain Watson sent me over to determine the layout of the positions, locations of outposts, etc., before we moved in to take over.

The commander of the unit showed me all around, answered all my questions and then asked if I would join him and the other officers at tea in the villa they used as company headquarters. I accepted his invitation and we went in and joined the others at a big table in the main room of the villa. Then down the staircase from the floor above, came 5 or 6 young and lovely Italian ladies, who

joined us at tea.

While we were enjoying our tea, and the company of the ladies, the commander asked when we would be coming up to relieve them. I told him that it was classified information. He explained that they needed to know a day or two ahead of time so that they could take the ladies on down to the valley to their next location. Since I could see how important that maneuver was to their operation, I told him when we would be coming up and he seemed to be most grateful for the information.

Company L and elements of Company M relieved Company C of the 1st Battalion in its position at the foot of Belvedere. This came after a difficult uphill march over eight miles of snow-covered trails, by men who were loaded down with heavy packs and weapons. The eerie atmosphere set up by the silent mountains and shadowy ravines was further heightened by the artificial moonlight of the searchlight battalion, many miles to the rear.

Here, at Querciola, more commonly known as Coca-Cola, Company L as a whole experienced a shelling by German artillery and mortars for the first time, as well as the nerve tingling sound of Jerry machine guns when they started belching lead at better than 20 rounds a second. The defensive set-up was complicated not only by the enemy's being well entrenched on three sides, but also by the sub-zero weather, snow-blanketed terrain, and poor visibility. However, the men accustomed themselves to an inverted schedule of living, got what sleep they could during the day, then "sweated out" the long, cold nights in the various positions outposting the area. The defense consisted of a series of strong-points, connected by phone, with the light and heavy machine guns and mortars giving the riflemen mutual support in the most vulnerable spots. The houses used were blacked-out completely. They were picked both for their commanding positions and for the protection they afforded from shell fragments and small- arms fire. Some house walls were thick enough to with-stand a direct hit from a 75mm medium-velocity shell. The main strongpoint around the CP was further reinforced by the firepower of two light tanks.

The chief fare was the ten-in-one ration, supplemented occasionally by bread and doughnuts to introduce a little variety. The small groups living together had both the facilities and the necessary time for turning out substantial and surprisingly tasty meals. Living quarters were fairly comfortable, considering the circumstances. Either sleeping bags or fires were essential for midwinter living; but neither fires nor smoking chimneys were advisable too close under Belvedere. The knee-length alpaca parka and white ski parka, warm wool gloves, and shoe packs or mountain boots were standard equipment for this part of the regimental front. They enabled the men to endure the penetrating cold during their long periods in cramped positions.

Contact patrols were maintained nightly with the Brazilian troops holding positions on our right flank. The necessary exchanges of information and reports were carried out by means of field-expedient interpreters on either side. For the most part they used Italian, which neither Brazilians nor Americans knew too well. But it worked.

This more or less regular routine was abruptly changed on the night of January 24th, when two Germans deserted. They turned themselves in to a guard and gave warning of an impending enemy combat patrol attack. All defenses were immediately alerted. Men spent several miserable hours in cold foxholes with out seeing or hearing any activity. Early in the morning of the 25th, however, the anticipated attack hit. The first blow was struck at the most isolated strongpoint of "Rattlesnake," a house manned by two squads, and outposted by six men. The camouflage clothing of the Germans blended perfectly with the snow, and aided by poor visibility they were able to slip through the outposts before being seen and fired on by an observer in the house itself. By then an estimated 22-man patrol had set up a firing line close to the back of the house. The immediate action of sergeants Wesley and Renzetti, aided by pistol-bearing mortarmen, saved the situation. They set up and reorganized the forces within the house, who returned the fire and engaged the enemy with grenades. The Germans sustained several casualties; finding the attack was not succeeding, they withdrew less than an hour after they had struck.

A coordinated attack was launched against the "Lions" strongpoint, hitting some few minutes later. This time the outpost line was hit from two sides by a heavy concentration of burp guns and light machine guns, followed by rifle and hand grenades. The machine gun position manned by privates Schoonmaker and Feldman suffered a direct grenade hit which knocked out the gun and wounded Schoonmaker, who nevertheless continued the fight.

Lt. "Swede" Johnson, who directed artillery fire to within twenty-five yards of the position, contributed greatly to the breaking up of this attack and the second attempt which took place during the next hour. The Germans again suffered casualties, while L Company lost Pfc Art Argiewicz, * killed while coming to the aid of the garrison, three men wounded, and one man taken prisoner.

* Argiewicz, an outstanding climbing instructor in the West Virginia detachment, was a major contributor to FM 70-10, Mountain Operations.

The enemy, having tested our defenses, remained inactive except for scattered artillery during the remainder of our stay there. For our part, defenses were strengthened, several small patrols reconnoitered to the front of the position, and listening posts were maintained.

A now weary but battle-wiser garrison was relieved by I Company and new elements of M Company at 0030, February 1, and took the road back to Vidiciatico and a me-

rited rest. A deluge of morale-building Christmas packages and mail greeted the men the following day and further added to the enjoyment of the first relief from combat.

Recall by Duke Watson, I 86th
My Close Call - Now It Can Be Told

A fearful incident that stands out in my recollection of wartime experiences as a bit different, in that it involved none of the usual thrills and chills of actual combat, is related hereunder. Although the episode occurred almost precisely 57 years before the date this account is being written, it is quite indelibly imprinted on my mind. So aside from possibly a few memory lapses regarding incidental details, I can vouch for its accuracy.

During the night of February 8-9, 1945, Remount Blue's I Company was being relieved from its lonely position at Querciola, the deserted village at the foot of Mt. Belvedere. The relief process occupied all of the hours from dusk until dawn, as Querciola was in a much too vulnerable position for daylight activity. As company commander I had my hands more than full in coordinating with the relieving units of the 87th, and in getting I Company and its supporting elements of M Company on the march in time to be over the ridge to the south and in defilade before daylight. Thus it was more than a little annoying when a IV Corps finance officer arrived at the CP and presented me with I Company's full payroll for the month.

The relief went smoothly enough, and the last units of our column were crossing the ridge to waiting convoy trucks as dawn broke. One amusing memory of that exit march stands out. I had Lt. Bennett, Company Exec., leading the way, and I was at the rear of the column, riding herd on stragglers. One small private was having a desperate time, struggling under an abnormally heavy ack. I decided to relieve him of his load for awhile, but quickly examined the contents first. In addition to his regular equipment he had stowed several segments of brass pipe from the Querciola chapel organ as "souvenirs". Needless to say, those pipe segments were tossed into the brush.

A several hours ride brought us to the pleasant village of San Cassiano, where the afternoon was spent getting billeted, in anticipation of several R and R days. That evening I was relaxing with the rest of the I Company officers when it hit me - the Company payroll! All of those lira just waiting to be spent by the 200 or so enlisted men of Company I on their San Cassiano holiday; and there they were in Querciola!!

My first impulse was to have the five lieutenants draw straws, and indeed, a couple of them volunteered for the job of retrieval; but that payroll being my responsibility, I decided the task was mine. I ordered a jeep from the motor pool and was soon on the way.
We drove to the location where we had rendez- voused with our truck convoy. Here I advised the driver, a young corporal, that he was going to endure a long, cold wait, but that he would be safe enough from any enemy activity. He nervously responded that he would much prefer to accompany me, and I acceded to his wish. It was a long, eerie walk on that lonely road. Searchlight beams from God knows where played about, mixed with, as I recall, a moon overhead. I was apprehensive about an unannounced approach to Querciola outposts manned by nervous sentinels. Sure enough, as we neared the first outpost we were challenged. I replied with my code name and further identification, which went something like William Xray Cost Negat, Raccoon Green (probably not quite correct, but it's been 57 years!). After verification we were conducted to my CP of 24 hours ago, now occupied by a company commander from the 87th. As we entered he greeted me with a grin and the comment "I thought you would be back". (The finance officer had also brought in his payroll; he assured me, jokingly, that had I or a delegate not arrived by the following morning, he would have been tempted to distribute double pay.)

I grabbed the packet with relief and departed with little delay. Now the two of us were relatively relaxed, traveling terrain we had recently passed through, and with no prospect of encountering trigger happy sentries. We made good time and were perhaps more than halfway back to our jeep when the unexpected happened. Fortunately, we were traveling silently along a roadway largely free of snow. However, the surrounding landscape, mostly forested, was covered with several inches of crusty snow. This crust enabled us to detect the crunch of footsteps from our right, headed our way. I gave my young companion a signal for silence and led him into the brush on our left. We crept ahead along a shallow gully for several yards and lay down. I could see the roadway to our rear through a small gap in the foliage. We were in deep shadow, but there was fair visibility on the open road. Then my worst fears were realized. Two men in German garb, carrying rifles, crossed the road, almost where we had left it. A moment later the main patrol, another six or seven men, arrived at the road, but without pause followed the two scouts. It was, from its size, a reconnaissance, rather than a combat patrol; it doubtless came from some enemy post on Mt. Belvedere. It seemed to be making a wide circuit around Querciola. For what seemed an eternity but was ten minutes by my watch we lay there in silence. Then we arose and as noiselessly as possible continued along our route.

The jeep was reached without incident. But there was no relaxation; I directed the driver to head for Vidiciatico, a short distance away, posthaste. I knew the IV Corps intelligence had a unit there. I had visited its headquarters earlier, so found it without having to ask for directions in a village that showed no signs of life in the dead of night.

*The intelligence officer, a colonel, that I reported to was impressive in his detailed grilling. Before we departed he instructed us not to mention anything about our encounter to "anyone-repeat, anyone" in our chain of command; Corps would handle it all. Thus the story was not disclosed by me, nor, I trust, by the corporal, whom I never laid eyes on again after reaching our billets.**

As to the payroll; payday for Company I came in routine fashion the next morning, as though there had been no problem.

**As a footnote, after the close of hostilities I received a short medical leave from the hospital where I had been recuperating. During a brief stay in Rome I spent a couple of days seeing the sights with fellow company commander Ev Bailey, Bob Works, Division G-2 and Jeff Irwin, Division G-3. I told the story to Colonel Works, who recalled receiving the information concerning that German patrol from IV Corps. He had passed it along to Dave Pfaelzer, our regimental S-2. So the intelligence channels did their job; but it all seemed superfluous a few days later, when serious combat got underway.*

Companies I and K, relieved by the 87th after a short stay on the line, rejoined the rest of the outfit at Vidiciatico. After a long march through melting snow and mud, the Battalion reached its trucks and, some time later, the village of San Cassiano, far from the lines. The companies were billeted in the near-by picturesque villas, which dated back hundreds of years, to enjoy good food and regular hours of sleep. The unseasonably mild weather, as well as showers, clean clothes, movies, and passes made this stay quite pleasant. Companies were returned to full strength, and with further intensive training in weapons and tactics the Battalion was made ready for its important role in the forthcoming operations.

Chapter 3

BELVEDERE BREAKTHROUGH

The division's first attack mission has been summed up by Division Commander, Major General George P. Hays, who in effect told his Division to accomplish the following:

Concentrate in a valley overlooked on three sides by the enemy, over an inadequate road net, without being discovered by the enemy.

Seize by night assault the precipitous mountain range on your left consisting of mountains Mancinello, Serrasiccia, Cappel Buso, and Pizzo Campiano.

Assault by night the enemy strong defensive line including the strongpoints of Mt. Gorgolesco, Mt. Belved- ere, Valpiana and the fortified towns of Corona, Polla, and Rocca Corneta.

Hold the areas seized against counterattacks and capture the successive objectives northeast of Mt. Gorgolesco to include the final objective Mt. della Torraccia. A total advance from left to right of some 8,000 meters.

In other words, Belvedere must fall, and the 10th Mountain must go on from there. But Belvedere could not fall, and stay down, unless Riva Ridge, "the precipitous mountain range," which gave superb observation for flanking fire on Belvedere, fell first.

In mid-February part of the "patrol activity continued on the Italian front" for several weeks was about to bear fruit. Riva Ridge had been scouted out by patrols of expert mountaineers assigned to the job when the mjor part of the 86th was pulled back to Corps Reserve, near Lucca. In reconnaissance patrols heavily enough armed to be able to fight their way back down, these men had probed for routes up various parts of the ridge. One of the patrol leaders was Lt. John A. McCown II, a member of the American Alpine Club who had for several months been in charge of Seneca Assault Climbing School in West Virginia, which had specialized in teaching a few men how to get many men up steep slopes and cliffs. Much of the choice of the route for C Company, which was to be the most rugged avenue of assault used by mountain troops, was his.

The swift events of the assault on Riva Ridge have been by now often been described, and sometimes over-described, by journalists. Certainly there will in the end be as much confusion in the battle accounts concern- ing the ridge as will exist in any dramatic battle. Certainly the achievement of the 1st Battalion plus F Company will remain outstanding in American military history.

For the attack on the Belvedere strongpoints, the 86th Mountain Infantry was in reserve. On paper, that status sounds as if it were restful. But the men in the 3d Battalion, 86th, already knew the meaning of "reserve."

The patrols. The patrols run out of Bagni di Lucca, Maresca, and into Piansinatico were by no means restful to I, K, and L companies a few weeks before. Certainly it is already clear that the 1st Battalion and F Company, of the "reserve" 86th, were having no day off on Riva Ridge on February18.

Recall by Vic Eklund, I, 86th
An Easier Way Up Mt. Belvedere
by Victor T. Eklund, I Co. 86th.

During the afternoon of February 19, 1945, Bob Comer, our company radio operator, and I joined the 1st Battalion of the 85th Regiment. My instructions were to be the Liaison Officer between the 1st Battalion 85th and my Battalion, the 3rd Battalion 86th Regiment.

It was a cold night as we waited for the attack to begin at 2300 hours. Finally we started moving slowly up the mountain in the dark. Since we were with the Battalion Commander and his staff, we moved in a slower and more relaxed manner than the rifle companies who were doing the actual attack.

As I look back on it now, I was a spectator. I

had no duties until called upon to ask for support and the call never came. So I just walked up the mountain, and when daylight came I could see what was going on. It was a mess, as you might expect. Lots of dead, dying and wounded. Prisoners were being marched down the mountain. They were the lucky ones.

When we finally reached the top of Belvedere everything seemed to be under our control. So now it was time for visitors. A high ranking artillery officer came up to see what was going on. He saw the artillery observer lying there, busily calling in coordinates for artillery strikes. "Give me that radio son", he said, in a condescend- ing manner. The observer gave him the radio and the maps as well. The officer made some hasty calculations and then radioed the information back to the guns, which were probably located in Pisa of Lucca. "Round on the way" he proudly announced. We all waited looking out ahead to see where the shell would land.

"There it is sir", a G.I. announced. "Where", asked the officer. "Back down the mountain", said the G.I., pointing to an explosion about half way back down the mountain. Nobody said anything. The artillery officer quietly left the scene.

Bob Comer and I spent the rest of the day and that night with the 85th. The next morning I sent Bob back to I Co. Late that afternoon I was released to return to my company. I got as far as a barn near Gaggio Montana and spent the night there on a pile of hay in a manger.

The next day I found I Co. in time to join in preparations for the attack on Mt. Della Torraccia on February 24. That was where my part in the war ended, early in the morning of the 24th.

On the night of February 19, when the Division's main effort began, the reserve 3d Battalion went right to work, too. The Battalion had already moved into the area around Il Palazzo, at the south base of Belvedere, on the night of the 17th. The Brazilian Expeditionary Force was in the line in that sector, and remained in the forward positions. BEF men ran all the patrols that were run. We were taking no chances of having a 10th Mountain man captured while on patrol and thus revealing the shifting of a mountain division into the line. Doubled up in the rear positions, we struggled with language again; knowing no Portuguese, we shared our meager Italian with the Brazilians, and they in turn shared their coffee--sweet and almost thick coffee at that. We learned that when an operator on the switchboard answered, "Lapa Azul," he was merely identifying himself, not insulting us, and we learned to say "Terminado" when we had finished talking.

During the confusion of the partial relief, an excitable Brazilian major would flutter in to complain, through interpreter, that our men were violating black-out by smoking, or were blocking the road with jeeps. We'd spurt out in a chewing mood and find that the culprits were his men. But in the main the relief went smoothly. Company L occupied the left flank about Casa Nuove di Sopra, Company K setting up at Pranotti and the west flank of Santa Filomena. Company I, with M Company mortars and heavy 30s, set up north of Gaggio Montano, anchoring the right flank. The COs were thoroughly briefed on all phases of the forthcoming attack and OPs were set up at Casaccia, Filomena, and Montiloco. Routes of advance were checked through field glasses, several German machine gun positions being noted in the survey. One or two men could walk along the lower slopes of Belvedere, in full view of enemy observers, without exciting anyone. But a jeep was another matter, and would bring in Kraut artillery.

When the 1st Battalion moved out on its daring plan of attack, we sat quietly, sweating the men out, growing more and more amazed as the hours passed and they met no resistance. We shared their outraged feeling, after resistance was met and overcome, when the telephone relayed to us a story of a treacherous German counterattack in which the Krauts had advanced in mock surrender, with hands up, and had at the last minute dropped into firing position and cut loose.

At 2300 on February 19, twenty five hours after the 1st Battalion's jump off, Companies L and M moved into the battalion assembly area above Casa Nuove. Weapons were unloaded while the 1st Battalion of the 85th passed through L Company and beyond K Company, and then were loaded again. Tension was mounting, and we wanted no trigger-happy characters shooting up the 85th. We knew that we were about to start something. The "This is it, Men!" phrase we had used for simulated drama at Hale was now quite devoid of humor.

The general plan of attack now called for 85th's 1st Battalion to clear the high ground running northwest from Monte Gorgolesco to a position west of Mazzancana, a fortified, battered farm building. Company L was to follow to the right rear of the 85th, and K Company was to clear the lower slopes and inhabited places on the right flank; L Company was then to take and hold Mazzancana "at all costs." An attack coordinated with this was to be launched on the left by the 87th.

With no artillery preparation to warn - or harass - the Krauts, the attack jumped off. Very soon the sound of machine guns and mortar fire announced that the attack had been discovered. The advance of the 85th was halted midway between Belvedere and Gorgolesco by intense artillery and small arms fire which inflicted a considerable number of casualties. This in turn prevented the forward movement of Companies L and K, then under heavy artillery and mortar fire, and they were forced to dig in at the foot of Gorgolesco.

At 0415 the 87th reported that the village of Corona had fallen and that they were continuing the assault on

Belvedere. This released the pressure on the 85th, which again pushed forward. At daybreak Company L moved over the crest of Gorgolesco through intense mortar and artillery fire to come abreast of the 85th. Here, among the snow-covered ridges and treacherous ravines, L Company felt the full weight of the fanatical German resistance. The carefully prepared defenses, uncannily accurate artillery fire, and mortars set up a barrier that was surmounted only by skillful leadership and by trained mountain men of high spirit and courage. One cannot put down all who combined to make this drive a success, but the daring leadership of Major Hay, Captain Bailey, and the platoon leaders throughout the day is worthy of note. In L Company, lead scout Patti and BAR man Trew figured prominently in the opening stages of the advance, fearlessly exposing themselves to enemy fire to release pinned-down elements. Both received the Silver Star posthumously.

The Germans fought bitterly as they were driven back across the ridges, exacting a mounting toll of dead and wounded, calling upon heavy artillery and mortar fire, and supporting their shifting defense with automatic weapons, riflemen and the deadly snipers. By noon the troops were well ahead of schedule, although the German resistance showed no signs of letup. The 85th men, meeting stiff resistance on L's left flank, had fallen behind. The Germans were quick to capitalize on this, bringing a murderous crossfire on L's exposed flank, halting further advance. A coordinated attack by riflemen supported by a section of LMGs, managed to outflank the enemy, who was again driven back with heavy casualties, and the first prisoners were taken. The unrelenting advance was beginning to effect the enemy's morale, more and more prisoners surrendering voluntarily or with decreased resistance. K Company's advance on the right flank was highly successful; the small pocket of Germans, in "inhabited places" cleared on the lower ground, yielded a quantity of prisoners. Giving air support, the P-47s increased the tempo of their attack.

The advance along the ridge line came to a halt about 1300, when advance elements encountered a mine field. A 500 pound bomb was accidentally dropped among L Company's second platoon as it advanced through the woods, killing one man, wounding Lt. Johnson and three others. A strong German counterattack was mounted soon after this, and a sharp fire fight followed for more than an hour. From this area L Company swung down the ridge to the heavily mined and fortified, castle-shaped house of Mazzancana, its final objective.

Only four of the original garrison remained, and they surrendered without a fight. Company K cleared the last group of houses at Ronchidos di Sopra and di Sotto and joined up with L at Mazzancana. All dug an SOP perimeter defense.

The sun was setting now on a day no 3d Battalion man could forget. But he could finish his foxhole and eat his first meal of the day--cold C-ration. The physical and mental strain of the day, the thoughts about the absent faces and the casualty reports filtering in, were reflected in his somber face. Enemy fire increased through the night, so he couldn't sleep. Nor could he even be warm; packs had been dropped at the forward assembly area, and he had only a thin mountain jacket, if he was lucky, to protect him from the penetrating cold that flowed down the slopes on which the snow was splotched.

Chapter 4

COMBAT INFANTRYMEN ON TORRACCIA

"This was their finest hour." If these words were to be applied to the men of the 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry, surely they ought to be saved to describe the deeds of those men on Monte della Torraccia the final objective, in the Belvedere phases, of the 10th Mountain Division. To tell here an adequate story of the taking and defending of that mountain would require many more pages than are allowed. There must be, nevertheless, space here for the more intimate details of the action.
There follow excerpts from the accounts which have been written by eight men with widely diverse jobs from company messenger and rifleman on up through squad and platoon leaders to the Battalion Commander, who gives the final critique. The collation combines the observations, personalities, and reactions of the attackers and the attacked. For no man in the Battalion will forget that the job was not alone that of taking the mountain, but also of fighting off the most strongly mounted counterattack that was ever directed at any Battalion in the Division.

A SQUAD LEADER IN COMPANY I
Staff Sergeant Richard M. Emerson,
Third Platoon

The 2d Battalion of the 85th was scheduled to take della Torraccia, but they had been moving a long way and were in no condition to complete an attack on the mountain. I Company men who relieved them will verify the beating they had taken. The 3d Battalion of the 86th had been in reserve and was chosen to make the next try at it.

At around 0500 the Battalion started moving up to replace the 2d of the 85th. It was black as India ink and consequently we didn't know just what we were getting into at first. L Company was in reserve, K Company on the left, and I on the right. Within I Company the first platoon was in support, the third on the left, the second on the right.

The jump-off was at 0700, the 24th of February. The I Company LD was a shallow gulch on the forward slope of a small knoll about 400 yards short of the objec- tive

and 200 yards short of enemy positions. Directly ahead the ground swept down low and then up to the objective. To the left the high ground curved horse-shoe fashion around to the front, with a low, flat saddle between the knoll and the objective. This saddle was full of hedgerows and heavily defended.

At the LD there was a tremendous collection of firepower waiting silently to deliver overhead fire. At 0630 Lt. Wilde of the third platoon gave his squad leaders a last briefing. The dawn was coming and it was possible to view the terrain as a silhouette against lighter sky. As Lt. Wilde pointed out a likely Jerry MG position, a German was seen to crawl out of a foxhole and to go to the position on hands and knees, perfectly silhouetted against the sky.

This was to be the first combat for these men, and it proved to be a very thorough initiation. The men were all in position waiting, and as it grew lighter they saw the field ahead littered with the bodies of 85th men and some more lying in a row behind them. At 0645 the preparation began and at 0700 Lt. Wilde Blew his whistle. With one strok all the light and heavy machine guns opened up and the second and third platoons went over the top. A few seconds later the Germans pressed their triggers and the party was on. Lt. Wilde was hit with the first burst from the objective. The men saw the snow kicking up around them and wondered how in hell the bullets had all missed except those that didn't miss. They felt bewildered when the German guns rang in their ears yet couldn't be seen.

From then on it was fire and movement and a lot of praying. The second platoon went down low and headed for the objective from the front. The third platoon tra- versed the knoll and crossed an open snow slope at an expense. Once they had reached the hedgerows in the saddle it was close-in fighting and very tricky for both sides. Pfc Charles Murphy, assistant gunner on a BAR, took the weapon from the wounded gunner and was able to get infilading fire down on the hedges. With this cover the men could move up and finish the job with grenades.

By this time the first platoon had been committed and was moving up. They swung across the saddle and fought their way out onto the forward slope of Torraccia. The second and third went on for the top. Here they finished off with a few hand-to-hand challenges and at last surrender. In the meantime the first platoon was having a heyday with retreating Germans. However, there were a lot of enemy cut off by the first platoon that were giving them trouble, not to mention the artillery they received on the forward slope. There was a hand-grenade duel that comes second only to the movies. German hand-grenades were picked up and thrown back uphill. U. S. grenades were thrown back and rolled into the first platoon. Finally Pfc Tex Christensen, with a grenade launcher on his rifle, dashed up the hill and fired a grenade point-blank into the hole.

The objective was taken, but it wasn't comfortable. There was fire coming from the extreme right shoulder that ran out to the right 400 yards, with a gentle curve to the north. The third platoon was sent out to clear it with the assistance of a 50-caliber MG firing from the first objective. T/Sgt. David of M Company, who fired the 50, scored a half dozen killed by sending his slugs directly through the parapet of a shallow trench leading between positions. This strongpoint proved to be the main OP from which the artillery was directed on the knoll and the LD.

The rifle platoons averaged one-third casualties, but the heaviest losses were back on the LD, from where the firepower of the attack was delivered. The artillery fairly turned the hill inside out and the old LD became known as "Blood Gulch." The Jerries didn't want us to have that mountain and kept those 75s and 105s warm for days. Some men that received minor wounds from small arms were killed at the Battalion Aid Station by artillery.

A PLATOON SERGEANT IN COMPANY K

T/Sgt. Cross, Third Platoon

At 0600 I quietly toured the foxholes of the third platoon of K Company and woke my men. We tried to enjoy a can of C-ration, but that hollow, jumpy feeling in the pit of our stomaches made that impossible.

It was hardly light when we organized the company and formed up for the jump-off. With the terrifying ferocity of a 20-minute artillery preparation still pounding in our ears, K Company moved over the crest of the hill which marked the LD. We had been told that the objective lay but 700 yards ahead, but I'm sure if we had realized what each of those 700 yards held in store for us it would have taken greater force than patriotism, self-pride, and intestinal fortitude to maintain our forward impetus.

As the third platoon was in support, following the second at 100 yards on the right, I didn't realize quite what was going on until I had crossed the LD and lay behind a small hillock covered with snow. There I saw a medic being carried back with a bullet hole squarely in the center of the red cross on the front of his helmet. He was not yet dead and his arm kept falling off the stretcher and an already tired litter bearer kept throwing it back on. A short distance to the right lay Lt. Howell, face down, dead. He had hardly started when an MG found him.

I lay for what seemed like hours but was probably 15 minutes waiting for the second platoon to move; but as they didn't, I crawled to the corner of the knoll and found that Lt. Logan had already gone ahead with only part of the platoon. I quickly organized the men, who by now were getting anxious, and led them to the next hill ahead, where I found part of the second platoon and John Tackacs, our platoon messenger, waiting to guide us still forward.

I followed him with the platoon trailing behind up a winding hedgerow strewn with broken bodies and marked by the blood soaked snow. The wounded, ashen white,

holding bloody bandages over the afflicted part, were now a steady stream. Captain Duke Watson of Company I came down the slope holding his stomach while red flowed over his hands.

We reached a point behind a knob overlooking the objective where Captain Dole directed us forward. Logan led off at a run, the platoon following at intervals. While I lay there waiting for the platoon to get going, I had a chance to observe our first platoon on the left, systematically cleaning out Kraut after Kraut. Under Lt. Boyer's able direction they were doing a heroic job. K Company casualties this far were light, but the worst was still to come.

Dashing madly, loaded with ammo and rations and an M3 "grease gun," I followed the platoon up another hedgerow. Shells began falling on us like a New England hailstorm. It seemed that the bastards could see every man, the way they sniped with 75s and 105s. Right in front of me an assistant squad leader, Joe Byrd, was badly wounded. I caught up with the boys only in time to have a tree burst hit close by and take four more casualties. Crawling forward to see what was going on I found five more men of the third squad wounded and S/Sgt. Kresse carrying Glenn Ashby to safety, as his leg was badly shattered.

We lay there for a frightful eon, experiencing all the terror that any man could endure. We prayed, swore, and dug the frozen earth in a vain effort to gain cover, but still the shells poured in, splashing us with snow, mud, and spent fragments. It didn't seem that any man could survive such a barrage. The wounded laying behind us screamed for aid, but the aid men were far outnumbered by the casualties that day. All K Company platoons were cut down to half or two-thirds of normal strength. The objective was a finger of land jutting out about 150 yards from where we lay. During a lull we advanced down a diagonal hedgerow while a platoon of L Company came to our aid and I Company cheered us from the peak on the right.

The valleys on both sides of our objective were pockmarked with holes. There was hardly a square yard that was untouched by our, or Kraut shells. Germans who would never heil another Hitler completed the tapestry of snow, shell holes, and blood.

The third platoon with what was left of the second dug-in in an L formation, covering the valley on our right, while a platoon from Company L occupied the farmhouse to the front. M Company machine gunners came up to reinforce us. Shells kept coming in regular barrages of 10 or 12 rounds until late afternoon, when Jerry decided that we were there to stay. Or rather, when Jerry concluded we were there to stay. We had decided it.

Della Torraccia is only the geographic name for the hill men of the 3d Battalion died for that day, but the men who lived through the battle like to remember and refer to it in such colorful terms as Purple Heart Ridge, Honeycomb Hill, or Dead Man's Gulch. Those names are more vividly descriptive than "Torraccia" of the most awful day in our memories.

A RIFLEMAN IN COMPANY K

Pfc William E. Long

I have often wondered why we continued forward against the enemy. Perhaps we do so only because we must. Our minds say no; but our bodies, unmindful of the plea, always continue. The wounded return, and luckily for them they are away from battle. One can see the relief on their faces. We who continue forward are inclined to be evious, for they have lived through this that threatens at the moment, but we go forward, some trusting to mere luck, others to sheer determination, while many do so because of the faith in someone greater than all this.

There are those among us who feel the best place to be during an attack, if there be a best place, is with the forward elements, but in this case such a place proved to be almost disastrous. We were not battle wise as yet, and this, our second battle, brought forth mistakes. Shortly after the jump-off, K Company allowed elements of two platoons to be pinned down by machine-gun fire while forward elements continued the attack. Artillery opened up at this opportune time, causing us to flatten and become part of the good earth while the forward elements, for lack of similar cover, took the beating. It was here that Lt. Howell and two other men were killed. It was interesting to watch the little spurts of snow relentlessly follow a running soldier, skip over his luckily found depression, continue in search of another soldier, and try to catch him before he could discover a similar depression. We moved forward in a manner never before used in the wonderful days of training at Camp Hale. By dashing madly from foxhole to foxhole, all of them previously dug, we made rapid progress forward. The terrible sound of an enemy shell passing close overhead made some men loath to move. Shells found many a man in such a state and immediately claimed another victim. Two medics, while treating a wounded soldier, fell victim to such a shell and the three resulting casualties formed a fear-instilling and heart-rending picture of torn bodies and vanished dreams.

Each company has a different story and a different way of telling it. To do complete justice to each of the men of each company is virtually impossible. The individual acts of heroism are without number and this battle could not have succeeded but for them. Pfc Tex Christensen from I Company rushed a machine-gun position and blew it to hell. For spirit, there is the man who, having lost three fingers from one hand, and other- wise too badly injured to walk, held up the injured hand and said, "Look. No fingers." Then too, there were the boys on the machine-guns who never left them when the shells fell, but kept on firing, even with steam rising from the gun-barrel water jackets, because they knew there support was essential. These are simple

examples of the determination and courage that made this victory always possible.

On Torraccia the standard of living hit an all-time low. Even the savages of darkest Africa had a higher standard. They lived above the ground and partook of good clean air. Our air was too full of strange sounds to be fit to live in. The rapidly approaching whine of an already gone by enemy artillery shell, the strange high-pitched zing of small-caliber stuff, the irritating buzz of flying fragments, and the dull thud of fragments hitting the ground - these sounds kept a man's head continually in that hang-dog position. When human decency and common sense have vanished like raindrops on a hot desert stone, only hate and contempt can remain. Enemy soldiers looked like us and among themselves no doubt acted like us. They dreamed of the same things and lived almost as we did. It was sometimes hard to believe that death was present in so many forms; it was hard to believe that the man facing you intended to kill. As long as you remained untouched and could still live and breathe you almost refused to accept the fact that death was about. But surely that arm at my feet belonged to someone; so did that pair of shoes with the feet still in them, and the head laying there on the trail. When a piece of jagged iron the size of one's hand is traveling through the air with the speed of a bullet and is suddenly stopped, or slowed down, by flesh and bone, there can be but one result, only less devastating than a direct hit by the shell itself, which would result in a "missing in action" entry on the morning report. "It looks as if someone had butchered a sheep there," I thought at my first glance toward what was some Kraut's entrails. He had been unfortunate enough to be under a small bomb dropped by one of our P-47s. "And this American soldier looks so peaceful in death." He was crouched in a shell crater and looking down the sights of his rifle, as if to fire it, when the next shell found and left him there. "I'll wait for you here," or, "To hell with it; I'm staying here where its safe," were the actual last words of other men who might have been famous.

What was left of two platoons of K Company dug in on the reverse side of a small protruding ridge. Our foxholes were numerous, on a small knob, and shells landing among them would spray the area with fragments. The Germans could, and did, lob shells at us that would follow the contour of our knob at an elevation of a scant few feet; those that came lower caused great consternation. They came without warning and had gone over by the time you heard them. There was an unexpected shoosh followed immediately by an explosion and flying steel. All the shells that were high enough to miss our position contin- ued on across a small draw and exploded on the opposite ridge in L Companies position. So regardless of where they hit they caused somebody to duck. Two shells in quick succession hit the lip of the foxhole next to mine, but luckily both were duds. Shells could land very close and spare you; or they could hit far away and kill.

A MESSENGER IN COMPANY I
Pfc Donald Dallas

The order came down to move out. Silently we moved up the hill and into a narrow road cut which we were soon to name Bloody Gulch. The artillery rushed over our heads and crashed with earth shaking violence in the enemy's territory. We glanced at our watches: 0641-- just nineteen minutes until H-hour. Then what? Slowly the minute hand moved closer; then came the order and the first man left the gully. A hose came off a heavy 30 and steam rose from it. Someone yelled, "Put that hose back on before Jerry zeros in on us."

Things happened fast as Jerry shells came whistling in. A 50-caliber crew was knocked out but was quickly replaced. A 30-caliber machine gun, whose crew had been knocked out, began to hammer again, a cursing, wounded mule-packer firing it. Someone yelled to the gunner, "give 'em hell!" and the gun answered with another burst.

The men were moving out fast, not stopping for fear they might not start again once they lost their momentum. Through the gully with its wounded and dead they moved, never hesitating, continuing over the crest of the hill and out onto the shell-torn field on the other side. They froze and hit the ground as more shells came whistling in. Then as the shelling subsided, they rose as if reluctant to leave the protection of the earth. Not all of them got up; a few lay where hot metal found them. One man was running across the slope and I saw little spurts of dirt coming toward him, finally catching up and passing on, but not without clipping him and leaving a limp form behind them. The whole thing would have been a welcome nightmare, if only it could be a nightmare. It was grim, frightening reality. Only one amusing incident comes to mind. At one time Pfc Rosenberg was found outside the house his platoon was holding, taking careful aim with his sniper rifle, then firing at the enemy. After each shot he would bellow out to the Germans, "Need a medic?" And from the German viewpoint, many of them did.

A BAR MAN IN COMPANY K
Sgt. Robert M. Soares

I won't try to tell you what every man in our platoon did on Monte delle Torraccia, because I was too busy dodging bullets. It was hard enough to keep track of myself, let alone the others, so I'll just tell my story.

The preparation so stunned the enemy that the whole platoon was over the crest before they put fire on us. We were soon pinned down by machine-gun fire. Luckily no one was hit at this point, although it seemed to me that I had been singled out by the Kraut machine gunner and that he had decided to make life miserable for me.

We started moving again and gained some cover

offered by a draw at the bottom of the ridge that had been our LD. We then started moving up and to the left on the mountain. As we reached a small ridge that ran up the mountain a couple of Krauts started rolling grenades down toward us. Between us and their hole a small patch of scrub oak and briers stopped the grenades just short of us. We pulled back slightly and swung to the left toward a draw that ran almost to the crest and that would provide good cover. All this time we were still drawing rifle and machine gun fire although it was growing lighter, whereas the enemy's mortar and artillery fire was getting heavier.

As we moved forward we sprayed the areas from which we thought the hostile fire was coming. This tended to silence them temporarily and gave a chance for us to continue forward. We were advancing too rapidly and too close to their own positions for them to use their mortars and artillery effectively.

Having to cross an open spot before reaching the draw, we double-timed across it. I was so exhausted that I walked most of the way across until a bullet lent wings to my feet. When we reached the draw we stopped for a moment, caught our breath, then started up the draw and emerged from it about 300 yards from the crest. By this time the hostile fire was almost nil, so we made good time.

As I climbed a small knob I almost fell into a machine-gun nest containing three Krauts. I believe that they were as much surprised as I was. I yelled and a couple of the other fellows came up and I motioned for the Krauts to come out, but they wouldn't budge. Getting impatient, I motioned again and this time one of them reached for something in the bottom of the hole. I gave them about a ten shot burst from the hip with my BAR and then we moved forward again. We found more Krauts in their holes, but these were less reluctant to leave them.

By this time we were on the crest and were getting some Krauts out of holes when we began to draw fire from a couple of draws and two long finger - like ridges that ran out from the mountain. As we were digging in we got the order to move out and secure one of the fingers. At the end of it a large knob rose a few feet higher than the ridge itself. When we were about half-way out to this knob we began to draw heavy small-arms fire and were pinned down. Here again it seemed to me that they had singled me out, as a bullet plunked into the tree I was behind and another in the snow a couple of inches from my side.

Moving out again we reached the knob and I crawled behind a pile of rocks. The other fellows had spotted some Krauts in the draw to the left and were giving them a miserable time with their M-1s. I looked over the pile of rocks and saw five or six Krauts in holes around the right side of the knob. Telling the rest about it, I raised up again with my BAR, intending to spray the Krauts. As I cleared the rock pile a Kraut saw me and began yelling. As I pulled the trigger the bipod on the BAR swung under the barrel and threw my shots wild. I ducked in time to get a face full of rock chips as they opened up. Peeking around the pile, I got more rocks in the face. Since the Krauts couldn't do any good with rifles, they tried grenades, but it was uphill and they couldn't quite reach me. Then they resorted to rifle grenades but they didn't do much more than scare me plenty.

Next they started firing direct fire at us with a 75. When they did this I was glad I was out behind the pile of rocks. They put the shells anywhere they wanted them and did a lot of damage to our platoon. My assistant gunner was killed and also the BAR gunner of the second squad. Our platoon leader was wounded and also four other men. I wouldn't have given a plugged nickel for my life that afternoon.

We had an artillery observer with us, but the Kraut positions were just about out of range of his concen- trations so the fire wasn't very effective. Later, when we dug in, he did a wonderful job of zeroing in the draws around our position. I believe his name was Lt. Motley.

When the Krauts quit firing with their 75 we pulled back just off the knob and dug in along the finger, our last hole being on the edge of the knob. By the time we were dug in they had us zeroed-in fairly well with their artillery and mortars. They kept laying them in all night and no one got any sleep.

COMPANY K
AND THE COUNTERATTACK
S/Sgt. Stewart, First Platoon

It was our newly won position, only two days old. It had the appearance of a Warner Brothers battleground with the exception of the dead and wounded. Our medics and litter bearers had all they could handle at the time of our arrival, but within forty-eight hours our casualties were cleared from the stage and we were preparing for Act II.

The stage was all set, the actors were dead tired, but they were ready. Our forward artillery observer was a leading man and we all put our trust in him.

I'm representing the first platoon of our company. The company defensive area was U-shaped as the U looks to the reader. The first platoon was dug in good and deep along the left side of the U. On Torraccia we all learned to respect German artillery and dug our foxholes accordingly. My hole was on the very tip end of the letter. There was nothing between that foxhole and the few Jerry outposts three hundred yards out, and down, below our vision. We had a pretty good view of things, Dick, myself, and the BAR. We were all warned what to expect, but hoped it wouldn't happen. We were tired and beat, no blankets, little food, thoughts of what happened to our best friends two days ago; all that was playing havoc with us. Our throats were dry from lack of water; eating snow made it worse. I thank the lord that we could still manage to joke about our mise-

ry. There was still a laugh in all the guys and that was good, very good.

Toward the evening of the third day a single shot rang out from the adjoining foxhole. A rifle shot was something new three whole days after our attack. We were used to the artillery and mortar fire; there was a lot of it both for and against.

The assistant squad leader of the first squad was responsible for that shot. It made us all wonder a little, but that was the end of the incident.

About seven hours had passed since South had squeezed that trigger. It was now night; I can't say it was dark, because the moon on the snow made it otherwise. South fired again, but this time it didn't close the issue. Everything broke loose. It sounded like a million Germans down over the bank, all giving orders at the same time. The whole platoon concentrated on the gully which ran parallel to our section of the U. It was a genuine route of approach for any Jerries with ideas of pushing off that hill. We knew it and so did our FO. For two nights at intervals of not more than an hour or so our artillery and mortars dropped them in the gully, just to see how good they were.

We knew what some of those orders must have meant because we were peppered by enemy artillery and mortar fire which lasted the whole length of the twenty- minute fire fight that followed. We were too busy to think of hand grenades yet; rifle grenades were flying through the air both ways. We didn't see a great many of our assailants, but what we did see were silhouettes against the snowy ridge which looked down on the whole affair. The sky was lit up with tracers and puffs of mean black smoke. Dick loaded clips just as fast as I emptied them. I fired at voices and silhouettes and thought that everyone else was doing the same. I knew Dick was. I remember Dick fired one clip of his M-1 at rapid fire and I told him to cut it out because it might give away our position. I had just finished about three BAR magazines at fast cyclic rate. I know for sure I knocked down two silhouettes which were getting entirely too close to one of our foxholes. We were all yelling for our artillery and getting worried about it.
Finally it came and from then on never ceased to come.

We can thank our platoon sergeant, then acting platoon leader, for getting that stuff and getting it out in the right places. At that moment the artillery stole the show and kept it until the end. They dropped what seemed to be an endless supply of shells in that gully of ours and in the surrounding gullies which might prove advantageous to enemy advance or withdrawal. Some of our shells were just parting our hair so we thought we'd better crawl back into our hole and then look up every once in awhile. We knew we were no competition for our mortars, 75s, 105s, and whatever else they threw into that gully. I don't know how long all that lasted because some of us fell asleep as soon as we hit the bottom of the hole.

The firing had stopped, however, and we heard agonizing cries from the gully below. We knew then they had taken an awful beating. We started yelling at them in every language imaginable; we knew no German. We tried to get what was left down there to come out. Then we heard a voice answer us in fairly good English. It said he was trying to get his men together and give up in a bunch.
He made it clear to us that he had an awful lot of wounded. He was fifteen minutes trying to get his men together, so we threatened him with more artillery. Anything but that, the voice said, and out they came, some thirty odd. (I got a blanket out of that maneuver). Everything happened so fast that night we didn't have much time to be scared; now that it was over we were scared to death with the thoughts of what the Jerries had planned for us. We found out their plans through documental information taken from one of the German captains, who was also the man with the voice.

The casualties in the first platoon were few, the first squad none. Sometimes it pays to be as far front as possible. Behind us the casualties were heavy.

Next morning we went down over the bank to see what damage had been done. There weren't as many dead Germans down there as we thought. I think I counted nine. German medics must have done a good job of evacuating. They forgot a couple, but our medics took care of them. We picked up about everything we could get our hands onto and into, meaning we went through dead guys pockets. All this was something to compare, trade, and talk about during our stay there.

We wanted to be relieved, but bad; we had enough for awhile and thought we deserved it. They told us it would be tonight and it was like that for seven more nights. We never moved far from our holes because Joe Jerry never quit with his artillery. It got so I could tell the exact minute one particular mortar about 500 yards out was going to pump. Some of the artillery was like that, too.

Finally we were relieved; not the way we wanted to be, though. They walked right through us and we had to take up the rear and follow.

MEDICS ON TORRACCIA

T/4 Harrison Swados

A combat battalion has many different specialists within its ranks, and among them are the medics. The 3d Battalion has a medical section of approximately forty-five men whose job it was to care for the wounded from the time they were hit until they could be transported to the collecting station. The most honored men in the medics were the Aid Men, the boys who worked, slept, ate, and sometimes died with their company. The Company Aid Man cannot be praised enough.

On Torraccia the Aid Men worked very hard to take care of the wounded. Long after the Battalion had consolidated its position on the mountain, the man with aid

kits and red cross on his helmet was bandaging, splinting, giving morphine, all the while dodging Kraut steel. At times the red cross meant nothing to the Germans but a bright target. The litter teams and Aid Station group were indefatigable. The Battalion Surgeon worked for forty-eight hours with almost no sleep. From the Aid Station at Carge to the front-line foxholes was a long, long way, and the Germans often dropped in a shell to hurry on the litter teams. After five or six trips, the litter bearers were exhausted. However, there were still many more wounded men waiting where they had been hit for the Medics to carry them back, so the tired litter bearers went out again. It was a difficult carry off Torraccia, along the narrow ridge where so many shells landed, down the slope through the old chestnut trees, along the cart path to the muddy spot which many feet had churned into a slippery mess, past the discarded helmets and bloody rifles, into the farmhouse that served as an aid station. Eighty-five men were carried off Torraccia, most of the work being done by the four Battalion litter teams and by four litter teams from Company B of the 10th Medical Battalion, with aid from anyone that could be pressed into the job.

This, of course, does not mean that there were only eighty-five casualties. There were the walking wounded, too, who came back alone or helped each other. Some were still in good enough shape to steer prisoners ahead of them. Others were dazed by blast and had to be guided or set on the right path, occasionally, in order to make the aid station. Prisoners carried their own wounded. These were taken care of too.

THE BATTALION COMMANDER ON TORRACCIA

Lt. Col. John H. Hay, Jr.

Two previous attempts had been made by another unit to capture the vital objective of Monte della Torraccia, and both met with failure. Fours hours after the time of attack, the 3d Battalion had secured and organized the objective. The success was due to (1) A well-organized plan of supporting fires, (2) Aggressive leadership on the part of all from company commanders to squad leaders, and (3) Control. These are discussed in some detail below.

1. Supporting Fires

An intense twenty-minute artillery preparation preceded the attack. The artillery fire was shifted to known and likely enemy positions at H-hour. The preparation was thickened with 81mm mortars at H minus 10, and shifted to known targets at H-hour. Targets of opportunity were fired on call thereafter.

One platoon of heavy machine guns supported I Company on the right, and the other platoon of HMGs supported K Company on the left. Their fire opened at H- hour, covering the objective, and included all suspected enemy positions. As the troops advanced, the fires were swept ahead of them, continuing until the objective was taken. One section from each platoon displaced forward just prior to capture of the objective and was in position shortly after the objective had been secured, at which time the second section of each platoon displaced forward to organize the defensive fires on the objective. These guns fired an average of 6,000 rounds per gun. All suspected enemy positions were thoroughly covered, such as hedgerows, straw piles, sheds, buildings, and commanding ground. The terrain was such that it permitted the troops to advance to within 25 yards of the firing, at which time the fire was shifted forward. It was later found that fire of the machine guns on suspected enemy positions was extremely effective. In several hedgerows and straw piles more than fifty Germans had been killed by what appeared to have been machine gun fire. The maximum range that was fired at any time during the attack was 1,200 yards.

The light machine guns were in a position to cover the jump-off. They fired initially on suspected enemy positions and displaced to join the companies, giving them close support, firing on targets of opportunity. The machine guns of the reserve rifle company were used in the initial fire plan and were displaced when one rifle platoon of the reserve company was committed in the final phase of the attack.

Four .50 caliber machine guns were employed, one section in support of each attacking company. The primary mission was to place fire on sheds, buildings, and emplacements in the sectors of fire. The secondary mission was to fire on targets of opportunity. The .50 caliber machine guns were extremely effective, killing many Jerries in the houses and emplacements, and forcing many others out of their positions. All machine guns, lights, heavy, 50-caliber, opened fire simultaneously. This fire had a terrific shock action and a devastating effect on the enemy. Whenever possible, the synchronizing of all guns is important as it gives maximum surprise, shock action, and effectiveness of fire.

The 60mm mortars fired on targets of opportunity and were used in close support of attacking companies. They were retained under company control, to give maximum effectiveness and control of fire. The plan for employment of the rifle companies called for two companies in the attacking echelon, and one company in reserve. Owing to the nature of the terrain it was necessary to attack initially with companies in column, and as the attack progressed, to deploy two companies abreast.

2. Leadership

All leaders kept the men moving rapidly through heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire. When stopped by small-arms fire, they immediately outflanked the resis- tance. The tendency for troops to stop under fire must be dealt with quickly and aggressively. Only by this means can casualties in numbers be avoided. They made excellent use of artillery and mortar fire on observed enemy automatic

weapons and other points of resistance through- out the attack. They followed closely the supporting artillery and machinegun fires. This allowed them to close with the enemy and reduced casualties. It also allowed them to capture many prisoners who were still dazed as a result of these fires.

Offensive infantry combat, regardless of the size of the unit concerned, consists of numerous small engagements whereby squads, half squads, or two or three men- neutralize enemy positions. The success of the operation depends upon the degree of coordination of these engagements and the speed, aggressiveness, and tactical ability of the small-unit leaders and the individual soldier.

3. Control

Control of supporting weapons and units was effectively accomplished by use of radio and wire. The following communication system was used successfully in this and all following attacks: Each rifle company was equipped with two SCR 300s (one regular and one spare). This was done as it was found on many occasions that company radios were knocked out by enemy fire. The spare radio was then employed and control and communication maintained. The spare was further used for flank patrols, combat patrols, and to supplement Tank-Infantry and Tank Destroyer-Infantry communication. This gained control and coordination that would ordinarily have been lacking. The heavy weapons company was assigned the alternate Battalion channel with their spare radios, and in addition had one radio in the Battalion net. The alternate channel was used to control the machine guns and mortar platoons. One SCR 300 was used by each .30 caliber machine gun platoon and one for the .50 caliber platoon. The 81mm mortar platoon used two SCR 300s, one at the guns and one at the mortar OP. The wire communication was frequently completely shot out by enemy shell fire. This system of radio communications for the supporting weapons accordingly enabled the Battalion Commander and company commanders, through Battalion, rapidly and effectively to control the actions of the machine guns and mortars in the Battalion. The Battalion S-4 was equipped with one SCR 300 in the Battalion net, which aided in the displacement of the supply point and speeded all classes of supply. The Battalion aid station was equipped with one SCR 300 in the Battalion Net. This allowed us to make the maximum use of a limited number of litter teams and aid men by controlling them through the Battalion Aid Station as the area of casualty density developed. It also aided in the rapid displacement and control of the Aid Station. One SCR 300 was used with the Battalion Commander and two At the Battalion CP, one as a spare to be used when and where necessary. All radio communication was supplemented by wire in the attack as well as the defense wherever possible. In all attacks with limited objectives, wire was laid by the assault companies and proved very satisfactory.

This system of communications may appear complex for a battalion, but it was found very effective and gave excellent control of the units, installations, and supporting fires.

THE COUNTERATTACK

Immediately upon capture of Torraccia, defensive areas were assigned to each company and platoon. Our frontage was by no means normal as outlined in FM 7-20. It was from 4,000-5,000 yards and the terrain was ex- tremely broken. It was necessary to establish strongpoints within defensive areas in lieu of the MLR. This took advantage of the strong defensive terrain in each defensive area, gave depth to the position, and allowed economy of force. Generally each platoon had from three to seven key points in its area, and the company from nine to twenty- one. The strongpoints were selected as far as possible to mutually supporting, and were built around automatic weapons. Depending on the location, size, and importance of the terrain feature, each point contained a squad or section or platoon of machine guns or BARs, supple- mented and protected by riflemen, varying from a half squad to a platoon. All entrants not covered by small-arms fire were covered by tactical wire, antipersonnel mines, trip flares, and mortar or artillery preparations. Each platoon established a minimum of one OP, each company had one and the Battalion one. This economy of force allowed the company commanders from a squad to a platoon as support.

Reorganization was carried on concurrently with the establishment of the defensive positions. The company commanders immediately indicated the strongpoints to be organized and the strength of each in their company defense areas. The company and Battalion commanders made the necessary adjustments and changes upon inspection.

The next step was immediate registration of all mortars and artillery. The company mortars were used both in battery and attached to platoons or strongpoints. When the situation allowed, even the 60mm mortars were held in battery. Each company registered all entrants in its area and prepared range data for these registrations.

The 81mm mortars registered immediately upon reaching the objective. One observer was assigned each company. He was thoroughly indoctrinated with the importance of immediate registrations of the entrants into the positions in his defensive area. Whenever possible the 81mm mortars were held in battery. They were laid on their primary targets - the most dangerous entrants; but by firing in Battery through a simple fire direction center, they were able to concentrate rapidly wherever and whenever a threat appeared.

Artillery was likewise registered on all important entrants immediately the objective had been attained, and was laid on the most dangerous entrants. All concentrations and guns were reported to Battalion upon completion of registration, and were plotted on a fire-control map.

With each mortar laid on its primary target and the artillery registered across the front and laying its normal barrage, the entrants were thoroughly covered, and it was possible to mass fire within seconds on any point across the position that might be threatened.

All mortars and strongpoints were required to have a sufficient supply of illuminating flares (mortar and rifle) present and ready at all times. Communications within companies was through sound-power phones and necessary wire and reels to enable them to have wire communications with each platoon CP and one additional SCR 300 for use as spare, as already described. Two wires were laid across country, or well above trail to keep mules and traffic on trails from cutting them. It was found that during normal enemy shelling wire could be kept in, but in a heavy shelling during an enemy counterattack, when communication was most needed, it was impractical to keep wire in. Sop required periodic negative reports day and night, and immediate positive reports. This gave a constant check on communication.

Upon organization of the position in the manner explained, the Battalion was ready for its mission to find, fix, and destroy the enemy.

To find the enemy by night, flares were shot over the area the enemy was suspected of being in. When he was sighted he was fixed by machine-gun and small arms fire, and mortars were shifted to that area. All fire of artillery and mortars was massed at this point to destroy him. Most night attacks are on limited objectives and narrow frontages, which allows a devastating concentration of mortar and artillery fire on a small area under attack. Should the attack come on a broad front, during the day, artillery and mortar fire would be fixed on all en- trants, with the heavier concentrations on the area proving to be the line of main effort.

This was the defense that was successfully used on Torraccia. A German mountain battalion, heavily reinforced, counterattacked our Battalion's positions there twenty-four hours after the mountain's capture. The attack came at 2400 hours and followed a one and a half hour preparation of 1,000-2,000 rounds of 75-, 105-, and 155mm artillery, some possibly heavier. The enemy plan, as disclosed by documents captured before the attack was fully underway, was to assault with two companies in column on our left flank, with a third company making a diversionary attack on the center of our position. The preparation knocked out all wire communication (except that between Battalion CP and forward switchboard). Following an initial combat patrol action in the early evening, the two enemy companies attacked our left defensive position from a range of 200 yards, having worked up a steep wooded ravine to this position when they set off a trip flare. OPs and strongpoints reacted immediately. Mortars and riflemen lit the area with flares, disclosing the enemy force, which our machine guns took under fire from three points. The one 60mm mortar assigned to this entrant immediately placed fire in the area. This combined fire momentarily fixed or pinned the enemy down. He brought his machine guns and some mortars to bear on the strongpoints, but this had little effect as the defensive positions were well dug in and all automatic weapons had overhead cover. Within two minutes we had six 81s and a battalion of field artillery concentrating fire on the enemy in this area. The artillery was using time fire, and the mortars HE light, superquick fuse. Flares kept the area well lighted and allowed accurate fire of small arms and automatic weapons. The enemy suffered heavily when attempting to move, and artillery and mortar concentrations smothered the area. This fire was held on them for twenty-five minutes, at which time the German company commanders surrendered the remnants of their companies. Fifty-six prisoners were taken, and many enemy dead and wounded covered the area.

During the preparatory enemy artillery fire all wire communications were hopelessly knocked out. Some of the radio aerials were clipped off, since they were above ground. But they were replaced and the radios continued to give excellent communication and allowed control of units, artillery, and mortars throughout the counterattack. Whereas the flares had allowed us to find the enemy, artillery and mortar fire had to be concentrated rapidly in the area or the enemy would have worked out of the fixing fire too soon. The rapid shift and adjustment of artillery and mortar fire to points desired was only to be gained by thorough preregistration and marking of concentrations.

On this particular occasion the Battalion reserve was Company L less one weapons section and rifle platoon. Each forward company had one rifle squad plus some headquarters personnel as support. All reserves were familiar with the plans for counterattack to restore positions. But it was not necessary to commit any reserves, for the men had fought hard and well to attain those positions and they weren't leaving.

Recall by R. Comer, I, 86th.

At 0700, when we jumped off from the LD toward the objective, Mount Della Torraccia, the company headquarters group consisted of the Company Com- mander, Capt Watson, PFC Rosen with a reel of wire and a telephone, and myself with an SCR-300 radio strapped to my back. We moved out between the 2nd and 3rd platoons. Near the bottom of a ravine across which we were attack- ing, Rosen got hit. He suffered there, with his wounds, for most of the morning before the medics could get to him. I felt very sorry for him there, as we could hear him calling out for help. A young mountain trooper from Wausau, Wiscon- sin, was also assigned to the headquarters group, and he was very hesitant to leave his foxhole. He had a premonition. He talked about it a lot on the ship going to Italy. He was certain that he was not going to return home. It turned out

that he was right, as a Kraut mortar shell went right into the foxhole where he died.

The Company Commander and I got up to a saddle on the crest line of Mount Della Torraccia. We could see enemy troops moving rear-ward on the back slope of our objective. We fired at them with our carbines, but the rounds fell short. The Germans moved into a ditch near the bottom of the slope. Soon the position the Company Commander and I occupied was saturated with mortar fire. Capt Watson was hit in the back, and I was hit in the canteen. What I thought was blood running down my leg, turned out to be water. Thank God! The Company Commander was tough. He walked back to the aid station with his back torn by shrapnel. I never saw him again.

The company executive officer then came forward to take charge of the company. He brought with him two BAR's and enough ammunition to supply the whole company. He gave a BAR to me and most of the ammo. All this to go along with the thirty-six pounds of SCR-300 that I was already carrying. The Company Commander had told the Executive Officer that the carbine was no good as it did not shoot far enough. So he brought up the BAR's. I never did shoot the thing. About a week later I was issued an M-3 machine gun which was ideal to carry with the radio.

Recall by R. Comer, I, 86th.

One day, while we were sunning ourselves on the reverse slope of Mount Della Torraccia, a jeep with trailer came bouncing along the trail from Belvedere as if it were Main Sreet USA, instead of front lines Italy. In the jeep was a beautiful Red Cross girl (Sgt Olson knew her as a debutante from the Boston area). In the trailer were several large boxes of doughnuts. "Deb" had just finished handing out doughnuts to everyone, when the shelling started. We all dived for near by slit-trenches and foxholes. As I recall, the girl, Dick Keller from Canajoharie, NY, and I, ended up in the same foxhole together. That was the most pleasant shelling of the war, in spite of Keller's presence.

Chapter 5

DON'T STOP NOW

The fall of Torraccia, which ended the first phase of the Belvedere attack, developed a weak spot in the German defenses, and Fifth Army had no intention of letting that weak spot go completely unexploited. The story went around that the 10th's initial success had taken both the German and our own higher echelons by surprise. There would seem to be evidence, in the degree to which the eventual breakthrough was not exploited to the maximum, of the surprise of Allied Forces Headquarters. That will remain for history, and documents not now available, to decide. We were to find, at any rate, that Torraccia was not the final phase.

For five more days we sat on Torraccia, never far from our holes, ever perfecting our technique of diving into them on a whoosh's notice, making the holes more commodious, trying to devise ways of waterproofing them against a light rain. We had hoped to be relieved and sent back to the rear, but our hopes ceased when the advance parties from other units, who came up to reconnoiter, did not look over our positions, but those of the enemy up front. Lt. Col. Hampton, commanding the 1st Battalion, contributed to the main excitement of the period by reconnoitering so far out in front that he got into a fire fight, and was pinned down by enemy fire until our "M Troop" got its 81s on the Krauts and silenced their fire long enough to spare the 1st Battalion the unwanted problem of replacing its commanding officer.

Men from units who were to pass through us moved into an assembly area to our rear and dug in, coming out of their holes on occasion to serve as a gallery during the interrogation of batches of prisoners that were still being brought in, scurrying back to their holes when a few harassing Kraut rounds came in on their unpredictable schedule. Our own Battalion was brought back to full strength in numbers, at least with replacements, some of these poor devils arriving in a strange unit, on strange terrain, in a strange country, right in the middle of the Torraccia counterattack. The Personnel Section was working almost too efficiently. If their efficiency had been stepped up just a little more, a GI in a front-line foxhole might then have experienced the unpleasant sensation of having someone tap him on the shoulder and say, "Hey, you. I'm your replacement."

The attack was to continue. If we were not to be relieved, at least we were to ride the buggy. Attack overlays showed ambitious looking circles and ovals on the terrain features of us limited objectives marked Able, Baker, Charlie, and on up through the phonetic alphabet to Mike. Ours were well through the alphabet. The tough ones fell to the 85th, 87th, and the other battalions of the 86th.

On the morning of the 3d we listened to friendly rounds of our own artillery preparation expressing overhead a thoroughly good sound. As an almost immediate result, enemy artillery stopped falling on Torraccia. More immediate and urgent targets were presented to the Krauts as the attack rolled on, and kept ahead of schedule. We tailed on behind in battalion column. The 85th and 87th moved so rapidly, successively taking over Monte Terminale, Sassomolare, and moving on toward Monte Novuleti and Monte della Spe, that the forward elements of our, the reserve battalion, were on their objectives before the rear elements of the column had all reached the forward assembly area. Luck was with us. The draw through which the entire battalion passed a column nearly four miles long was blanketed with enemy artillery just before we went through, and again just after we had passed. In the draw just north of and under

Torraccia, the rear elements of the column had, fortunately, just enough space between units to absorb about thirty rounds of 75s without suffering a casualty. The rounds either hit the spaces, or landed just across the bottom of the draw from the column's route. The ridge from which the forward elements were to jump off received a terrific barrage just before the jump-off. Plans were given a last minute switch, the opposite end of the ridge, apparently outside that artillery concentration, was used for an LD, and not a round fell on the attackers.

The other Division units had by now overrun the enemy artillery positions. By-passed small enemy units were surrendering in droves, to tell us that there was now nothing between us and the Po. The rest of the Division had not shared our luck, but was nevertheless not slowed in the least. They moved swiftly onto the high ground of Sasso Baldino, Grande D'Aiano, Novuleti, and della Spe. Now it was our turn to look down the German's throats, the only good observation -but too good- left to the enemy being Montello and Monte Balgaro. The area that was in the 3d Battalion's sector, centering around Campo del Sole, lent itself admirably to a text-book defensive organization, which was just as well, inasmuch as we were on the Division's left flank, and the enemy units to our left had by no means been overrun and were periodically reminding us of that fact.

In the Battalion CP area a small farmhouse had been so shaken by artillery ours, no doubt that stones were still falling occasionally from its walls. But it was now in good artillery defilade, and its roof and upper floors seemed adequate to absorb direct mortar hits. Moving a few cows and rabbits, and leaving the upper floors for the farmer and his family, we took over the basement. Even more thoughtfully, we consented to share the basement with the chickens on a we'll-have-fresh-eggs- or-fresh-chicken basis, and were rewarded with half-a- dozen or so eggs daily. The residents were not put out at all. In exchange for the eggs, they received enough C ration and 10-in-1 ration goodies (this I report purely from their point of view) to enable them to eat better than they had for years particularly better than they had when Tedeschi took the lion's share of whatever they had in exchange for not taking more.

Although they were more vulnerable to mortar shells in the upper floors during the day than we were, it was turn about in the evening. For then the entire family retired to a dugout under the floor of the barn, while we slept--those who were off shift, that is in the hay stored in that barn, covered only by the flimsiest of roof structure. Some of us were touched by an episode in our reception by the head of the house. Hardly had we moved in with his chickens and rabbits than he came into the basement, muttered about something he had hidden from the ever grasping and ever stealing Tedeschi, and dug out from hiding several items of treasured hardware which he could once again fearlessly display in his house. I recall seeing nothing in his cache more valuable than a pair of brass andirons, but it was his trust that impressed us, anyway. No, we were impressed by something else, too. For along with his cows, chickens, and rabbits, we also shared his cache cover the pile, slightly steamy, of compost under the chicken roost. Significantly or not, this was the officer's quarters.

Part of our luck ended before we had quite set up the Campo del Sole defensive position. German artillery quieted down, but something happened to the sights of one of our own batteries. Short rounds came in by the dozen, and we had a devil of a time finding out who was responsible. Since the "working" battalions in the Division were still on the move, our artillery could not be stopped while the lay of all guns was checked. It kept coming in, and our "bloodless attack" ended with the death of several men, mostly in L Company, from friendly shells.

This was not our first difficulty with friendly artillery, but we found it exceedingly difficult to be philosophical about it. Our own artillery had, as has been said, such a good sound to us that it was just a little hard to accept a short round as harmful. You'd hear the shells overhead and smile. Then a few would land too close. My own first thought at such a time was a momentary "Those can't hurt; they're ours" it was only a momentary thought. When the same situation occurred on Torraccia, Major Hay called back to the relay phone, just after a volley had passed far too low over the rear switchboard, to ask in due exasperation, "Do they think that's funny back there?"

Some of the short rounds were accepted understandably by the infantryman. He well understood the value of close artillery support, and knew that casualties would be far higher without it. He took his chances. But when an objective had been taken and he himself was no longer asking for supporting fires, and short rounds still came in, then he took a dim view. It ruined the slight sense of relief he could feel in what he had presumed was artillery defilade. The question of who was to blame is only an academic one now. It wasn't then. It was forgivably easy to forget Artillery's superb job on Torraccia.

Recall by R. Comer, I, 86th.

Company I had reached its objective for the day, a hill across a wide valley from the town of Montese. The Germans were moving in large numbers across the valley floor into a small town below Montese. I was asked to call on the SCR-300 radio for artillery on these targets, but was informed that the artillery was displacing forward and had no guns that were able to fulfill my request. Instead, my radio was soon patched through to Tac-Air. The next thing I knew, I was talking directly to some pilots in P-47's. I directed them to the targets and they put on a display of straffing, bombing, and napalm fire that left me with more than a tinge of relief, and even joy, that we had control of the air so that we did not have to contend with German airpower in addition to the other problems we were facing.

Chapter 6

STATIC AGAIN

The rumors had been going from foxhole to foxhole for so long that they were worn out. We were being relieved. We were not being relieved, we were attacking, we were not attacking. Just what the hell were we going to do? Then came a real hot rumor: one of the boys had been up to Battalion Headquarters and had heard definitely that we were leaving for a long rest. Since wehad never been relieved before, we didn't know just what a rest was, but it sounded good. The next evening the 3d Battalion of the 87th moved into our positions and we started for the 6 x 6's waiting some three miles to the rear at Abataia.

Cold, sleepless truck rides through the night are always an unhappy experience even if you are going to the rear for a rest. We arrived at Campo Tizzoro, the division rear CP, at about two o'clock in the morning. Most of us were so tired that we didn't really care where we slept, but there were makeshift cots for almost everyone. When we woke up in the morning, we found ourselves billeted in an old school building; as long as it had a good roof we really didn't care just what it had been.

The engineers had a small portable shower set up on the main street of the town, and through this we scrubbed our way, company by company, picking up clean clothes at the far end. We were then clean enough to be able to chose between a movie, a dance, writing letters, or trucks to Florence for anyone who wanted to go on pass. This was the first chance to see a large Italian city, so most of us jumped at the chance.

We didn't know how long our rest was to be, but we soon found out. Three days. On the morning of the forth day we loaded our somewhat rested bodies into the trucks again to head for the Division Reserve area. The convoy went down the canyon to Porretta, but instead of taking the now familiar turn toward Gaggio Montano, it went down the Reno River into territory taken in the recent push. Turning off into a side valley, we began to climb up its steep sides through shattered villages and shell-pocked fields to San Maria Villiana. Here the Battalion disposed and dug in for a week, during which some of us were occupied with the usual battalion training schedule, while others perfected their technique of goldbricking. It was a good life and came to an end all too soon.

On the evening of the fifteenth, after the delays which are a normal part of any move, we prepared to move out of the Division Reserve Area at San Maria Labante. What we were heading into we didn't know, but we expected to know before long. We only hoped that it wouldn't be too bad. After what we had been through on Torraccia we didn't exactly think it would be a picnic. We were ready although we definitely were not eager beavers any more.

Those of us lucky enough to ride, loaded on the jeeps, and the rest shouldered packs and started walking. We reached Sassomolare shortly before dark and waited behind the hill until it was dark enough to continue, since the road ahead was under enemy observation and fire. "No smoking" was the order, but there were plenty of cigarettes glowing momentarily when the boys took a drag from them. Although they did not attempt to conceal them, they seemed more worried about being seen by their officers than by the enemy.

At last we shouldered our packs and started down the hill, stumbling and falling over the irregularities in the road. When we reached the bottom, instead of making a right turn to Gualandi, we turned left and marched confidently toward the German lines. Before long though, we turned around and retraced our steps to the fork in the road. The story that was passed along the column was that a German sentry had stopped the head of the column and given directions for reaching the objective. At any rate, this time we took the proper turn and presently found ourselves climbing into Gualandi, a town with the usual two decks, upper and lower. Gualandi di Sotto and di Sopra were both about the same size; the buildings in both were equally old, few, battered, and dirty. The inhabitants were a match for the buildings, and had already passively, stoically, withdrawn into as few rooms as possible, leaving most of the thick-walled (but thin roofed!) buildings as welcome shelter for command installations. But it was far too dark to observe much of them now.

In perhaps an hour the jeeps arrived, and the fun of unloading them began. No one seemed to know which jeep was carrying whose equipment; this was understand able in view of the fact that the vehicles had been loaded and reloaded three separate times before our departure from the motor pool. Eventually some semblance of order began to appear from the chaos, and mortars, machine guns, rations, ammunition, and all the other paraphernalia were segregated. As soon as we were ready to take over the positions, the 1st Battalion moved out and the relieving operation was completed.

With daylight we looked around and took stock of the situation. There were buildings in which some of the troops could be billeted, and for the remainder, which was by far the larger part, there were plenty of foxholes. Quite a few of them had been made into veritable dugouts, with reinforced roofs and walls, with shelves for candles, rations, stoves, and other small items.

The gun positions, in contrast to the foxholes, were uniformly poor. None of the machine gun positions were good, and some of the mortar emplacements were no more than level spots on the ground with one or two rows of sadly sagging sand-bags around them. Furthermore, hey were under direct observation of almost the entire enemy-

held Montello ridge. There was a good deal of swearing when we saw this.

As soon as we had breakfast and moved into the better foxholes we set about moving and improving the gun positions, which took the greater part of the day. Then we zeroed in our defensive targets, especially likely routes of approach such as the Sasso Baldino draw. On the next night an enemy patrol arrived via that draw, and the mortars and machine guns had a good deal to do with driving it off, although the riflemen weren't just sitting on their dead ends.

Every day we fired on various targets, either on the ridge above Sasso draw, in the draw itself, or to the north where a number of houses were suspected to contain enemy troops. In all, during our first day at Gualandi, the 81s fired over two thousand rounds, mostly at targets of opportunity. One night we laid down harassing fire of nearly a hundred rounds per gun, using two full sections.

During most of our stay, however, the firing was sporadic, leaving us quite a bit of leisure time which we spent as we saw fit. That meant trips down into the valley between Sassomolare and Gualandi for eggs, which we were able to get at the rate of two for one can of C-rations, and milk, which cost us one can per quart. We also put in a lot of time sunbathing. Although most of the German firing adhered closely to a schedule, it was a good idea to stay near a foxhole, because they occasionally dropped in a shell or two at odd hours, just on the chance of catching us napping. Furthermore, there was a sniper somewhere between I and K companies, and he seemed to take delight in shooting at embarrassing moments, literally catching us with our pants down. We cursed him whole heartedly, but were unable to locate him, so cursing was about all we could do. He also made life uncomfortable for the wiremen who were required to service lines when they were knocked out by enemy artillery and mortar fire, which happened rather frequently.

Recall by R. Comer, I 86th
The Luck of The Draw.

The Company I First Sergeant and I were talking outside the Company CP one evening. We were standing in the reverse slope near the military crest of the hill when an enemy mortar shell came in on us. We heard it coming. We hit the dirt. The shell hit behind me. Shrapnel fell all around us. I was untouched, but the first Sergeant had a small hole in the middle of his forehead. He was dead. I was alive. The piece of shrapnel that hit him must have gone right by me. I will never understand how some were fortunate and made it through untouched, some died and some were hit and had to live with permanent handicaps.

Rumors of course were not forgotten, and when a number of men were sent to Pisa for flamethrower training, rumors really flourished. We were going to push off any day into the Po Valley, and there were a lot of pillboxes and permanent fortifications there, which we would have to take. We were going to be pulled off the line and be sent to the CBI. And always there was that recur- rent phrase, "Just one more ridge."

Back in Gualandi proper, a page from a diary (if we had been keeping diaries) could have read something like this:

The artillery crumps in our battalion area at the rate of one per minute every time Jerry gets on the ball and starts firing it; we count the rounds, fire back two for one, go on about our work, and Pete Coursen, who has taken over now that Duke Watson is due to go back to the States, calls out to say, "Send me out a bigger box and I'll catch some of them." Then a one-man Kraut ammo-burning patrol starts up one of our entrant draws and cuts loose with a burst of belts with his machine gun, firing at nothing in particular--just firing. Through the turmoil Able Company phones in to say, "Routine report, negative," meaning that nothing has happened. Nevertheless artillery keeps pounding in, though hitting nothing in particular, machine guns are making like a motor boat, and some German patrol has stumblingly set off a trip flare over in front of the 87th next door. The battalion observers call in from the OP to let us know that in the last 30 minutes 24 rounds have fallen, estimated 105s, hitting near Able Company, coming from azimuths of 356, 320, and 285. Jack Hay, the battalion commander, complains because the rim of his aluminum canteen cup is twice as hot as the coffee in it, which may be a physical impossibility but nevertheless true. He picks up the EE8 to put a call through to G-3; gone is the GI formality of the telephone conversations of maneuver days. The CO's first words to whoever answered the phone are, "How are you getting along in your work?" But the rest of the conversation is lost. A German deserter has just been brought in. The night before he had been posted as security for a Kraut detail laying mines in front of our position, but had decided to take off, instead. He shows on the map exactly where the mines were laid. Yes, that's where they were laid, at two o'clock in the morning. But such a waste of time. Our own A & P detail mined the area just 200 yards short of there, two hours before his crew did. So goes the war in a static situation.

Local color? There's that too. The walls of this room are browned by the years of smoke that couldn't find its way from fireplace to chimney. Most of the buildings are intact, but we knock on wood, of course. Kids play in the streets - correction: the street - all 100 feet of it. They're batting C-ration cans around with sticks. Some old Ginnso brings a pot out and flings the contents to the rear of the building, washes it out in the well, and disappears. It isn't a cooking pot. Our own latrine, just across from the CP, in between a pigsty and a hen house, is not so odoriferous as it is a point of interest, and it smells plenty. Some old biddy

always manages to come out to feed the chickens or to air the Ginnso children just when someone wants to use that latrine. During the straining moments she'll barge right by with a "Buon giorno," entirely oblivious to the constipating effect of the what-the-hell in her attitude.

When the 2d Battalion relieved us, with as much of a mix-up as had attended our replacement of the 1st, we moved back to something that was, as far as we were concerned, much worse than Gualandi had ever been. It was raining when we arrived, and we had pyramidal tents set up and awaiting us, so we thought we were lucky, although we would have much preferred buildings. But when, shortly after we moved in, we were ordered to take down the tents and set them up again in a different arrangement, we were not only wet and muddy, but very much PO'd. We described certain persons very thoroughly, and we didn't pull any punches, among ourselves, in doing it. We did manage to get a little straw to put under our bedding, but things were still in terrible shape. Tents sagged like punctured jellyfish, and stakes kept slipping out of the mud, and the drainage ditches did not drain. Everything and everyone was soaking wet and plastered with mud.

The next day, although we got our duffel bags, which we hadn't seen since Lucca, we still weren't in the best of spirits. It continued to rain, and we had gotten word that we were going to have a session of close-order drill, hikes, inspections, and all the other things that we felt belonged in garrison life, but not in the life of a front-line soldier. And those tents could hardly be classed as garrison. That was the general opinion, at any rate, and it was voiced at every opportunity. The drill, for which we could see no reason, was not held in an area where we could really maneuver, but on a road where all we could do was march up and down. That made it seem all the more futile. We did manage to get into Campo Tizzoro in the evenings, though, and there were shows, dances, showers, and the facilities of the Red Cross to help alleviate the miseries of the day. Also, we received our periodic beer and PX rations, which as usual were gone almost as soon as we got them.

On the 2d of April we moved back to the Division Reserve Area at San Maria Viliana and took up residence in the same holes we had occupied the first time. Here, too, we had half-day hikes and training, learning for the umpteenth time how to shoot a rifle grenade and a bazooka, and how to talk on a telephone.

But still it was rest, and we could use it. Countless details go into an offensive action. No man who has anyone under him dares take his mind off those details. You have to make sure that you've done everything possible to prepare properly. And each time you step back from your work to see how it looks, you find something else you can do that may help. This goes on until the orders are finally passed down below you. In battalion headquarters, at that time, the rest of the staff can settle into an apprehensive rest, but the S-2 - that "high-priced telephone operator" - must get the last possible bit of enemy information and pass it up and down. When the attack actually starts, the telephones are silent only when the lines are shot out, and then radio carries on. The pressure continues right up to the objective, and doesn't stop then because you've got to get set against the inevitable counterattack. There's a certain security in a CP dugout, because it will probably take a direct hit to upset the occupants. But there's not security against the gnawing feeling of responsibility you have for the men out there whose safety - what there is of it - depends too much on luck and very much on the proper support the battalion must give and coordinate. So you just get gnawed at until there are mostly calluses left. You can step out, view the human devastation, and marvel only that there hasn't been more. You feel lucky that you're able to view it still.

Even here, where you must learn that life depends on the dealing of death, living depends on friends. You are plagued with uncertainty for every friend every time he is out of sight or hearing. There is no reason to believe that your friend's being within sight or hearing is any contribution to his safety, but you feel better, anyway. That takes care of that friend. But there are still those in another squad, another company. So you grow another gray hair or two.

Then comes the reaction. You get sleepy, sleepy as hell. You can sleep standing, sitting, in any position, even with a phone propped by your ear. And if you've slept long enough, you wake somewhat rested, with a bit of your sensitivity restored. You get back most of it when you're relieved and back in a rest area. There you can sit back and feel muscles that you thought were relaxed loosen a little and slip back where they were before it all started. And then you can write letters again.

In the course of our rest at San Maria, we assembled between I Company's latrine and an 81mm mortar position to hear a speech from no fewer than four stars. Following a rather informal talk by the Regimental Commander, Colonel Owen A. Tomlinson, who gave intimations that the Battalion was to play right half on a left-end run to Bologna, General Mark Clark arrived to tell us how good we were. He was speaking to the Division through the medium of the 3d Battalion, and he spoke very well. Of course, one would hardly expect four stars to be stage struck in front of a mere battalion, but we had on previous occasions heard fewer stars miss the boat completely when in front of fighting men, or men about to fight. He was interesting, direct, and, as we had noticed in newsreels, presented an excellent appearance, second only, possibly, to the Battalion Commander, who had a few words to say to his Battalion after all the high brass had departed, and suffered none by comparison. But there was always a slight flutter in a GI audience at the sight of four stars, even in nothing more than newsreels. And there they were, walking around. General

Clark made an effective departure by saluting the men while they were still sitting at ease in front of him, doing a right face, and taking off with a smile.

That was pleasing. But we learned from him too clearly that things would not be dull much longer.

On the 5th we moved back to Gualandi, this time without taking the wrong fork in the road. We had a mildly noisy reception, because the enemy chose the night of our arrival to deliver the papers. They shot their "extras" in some sort of propaganda rockets that moaned over and popped. Their stuff arrived a little tattered, but no less amusing. One of their cleverest bits of copy was a bunch of instructions, printed on the reverse of a V-mail form, for fooling the medics and simulating various ailments that would enable a man to sit out the war in a hospital. In another issue the headline screamed, "And You Dare Talk of Atrocities" on a broadside that showed a child injured in our bombing. What V2s were doing to London had probably slipped the editor's mind. In one issue of the Low Down (the name of the propaganda sheet) they insisted on page 1, that they were going to keep on fighting and fighting, while on page 2, they argued that we should take no unnecessary risks in the European war, which had already reached "five minutes to twelve."

The Allies delivered propaganda, too. The Frontpost went overhead in 105mm shells which were timed to burst high in the air over the enemy lines, where they could be distributed by the wind - so long as it wasn't a capricious wind that blew the papers back over our own lines. Mixed with the Frontposts were "PW passports" which promised in several languages to give safe conduct to bearer on his deserting way through our lines. More than one prisoner had his safe-conduct pass neatly tucked away in his billfold, and produced it with a sheepish smile when he reached the interrogation point. Reaction to the Frontpost seemed very favorable; the PW's most frequent complaint was that the paper hadn't been delivered regularly enough.

We were glad to take up our old positions again, despite the fact that they had not been too well cared for in our absence. At least while we were actually engaging the enemy in combat we were safe from the petty nuisances of rear echelon life. All we had to worry about here was the enemy.

This time, however, we found we had a little more cause to to worry about him. Sunbathing and egg hunting weren't quite as safe as they had formerly been.

We continued to make trips after eggs and take sunbaths, but we exercised more care than we had previously. We didn't know when the Krauts might throw some shells at us, nor did we know when we might run into some of his troops. His patrols were more active than before. One small patrol, as a matter of fact, raided one of the farmhouses where we got eggs, carrying off food, linens, and the farmer's attractive daughter. They could do things like that and get away with them.

Aside from this small increase in activity, things went along much as before. Firing at intervals, both day and night, flares going up regularly after dark, and the same eager desire for mail, chow, and PX rations. In M Company's CP the radio was going most of the time, and by means of a soundpower telephone laying on top of it, the music was carried to the entire company. The rifle companies, however, were still patrolling.

We were still receiving a multitude of rumors, too, concerning our future movements. Nearly all of them agreed that preparations for a big push were under way. That, in fact, came from General Clark when he addressed the Battalion at San Maria. Many of the poopsheet prophets showed a tendency to place the 3d Battalion at the head of that push. There was also the forecast that we were going to take "just one more ridge," and then be relieved by the 85th Division. Still other sources had it that we were going to change positions with a unit that was at present some little distance to our right, though how that was going to be done without leaving one place or the other unmanned was not explained.

Meanwhile we continued to supplement our diet of 10-in-1 rations with fresh eggs and milk and, when we could get away with them, chickens. On one occasion the Germans surprised us with meat when one of their shells killed a couple of rabbits and threw them on the roof of a near-by building. We still had to skin and cook them, though.

On the 10th we were relieved again, this time by the 10th Antitank Battalion, and moved around the east end of the valley to Madonna di Brasa, where we dug in again and spent the night, listening to German counterbattery shells come in. In the morning we received confirmation of certain of the rumors. We were told that we were going to spearhead a pursuit into the Po Valley, which was just over the next ridge, and lead the entire Fifth Army in an envelopment of Bologna. The riflemen were supposed to ride on tanks, and everyone else would be riding on organizational or Quartermaster vehicles. For the first time in its history the 10th Mountain was really going to be mechanized. We were to have some 1500 airplanes in support, 300 of which were to be detailed to our battalion. Also we were to have a large amount of artillery, up to and including several batteries of 240mm guns. Our mission was to circle Bologna and take up a position on the other side of the city. The push was postponed, however, and was still being postponed when we moved to San Maria Lebante. Then they brought in the mules--and we knew that the plans had been changed. Before long we received official notice of that fact. There was still going to be a push, but of a radically different sort. Instead of sticking to the roads and highways we were going over the ridges, and of course we couldn't use vehicles there.

We had mule school again, there on the hillside, and learned how to load our weapons and ammunition on the packs. No one was injured, but one mule threw his load and rolled down the hill, dropping into, and out of, several foxholes. Of course, they left other reminders of their presence all over the slope.

From San Maria Lebante we could see a road that reminded us very much of home. It wasn't one of those painstakingly built Italian affairs, with the shoulders carefully constructed of rock and concrete, and with each loose rock, or potentially loose rock on the upper side of the road carefully braced in place with a man-made stone arch. No, it was pure Yank. A bunch of bulldozers attacked the mountainside. They gouged on the inside, spilled dirt on the outside, and there was a road. The hell with the landscape; it takes traffic, doesn't it? But that was the American way of waging war. The Germans had blown the good roads, or blocked them, or there was no defiladed road of approach into a forward area. So our engineers slapped one in. And the only way the Germans could tell we had it was by getting his information from such agents as could trickle though the lines.

His air observation was so absent that we could sometimes feel almost noncombatant. After the training we had received in camouflage, identification of our own and enemy aircraft, concealment from air observation and such, Italy was quite a comedown. Jack Hay came back to.

His attitude was shared in other ways. I overheard from a reconnaissance in a cub to remark upon the ease of distinguishing the front line. "I could almost spit into Bologna," he said, "and there wasn't a sign of life any where not a car on the roads, not a man in sight. Then I looked back our way. Christ! Traffic was tearing this way and that. Clouds of dust were rising from the roads. You could see men and equipment out there in the open, and you could pick out each individual front-line foxhole."

We could be reminded of a PW's remark right after Belvedere.

"Didn't you see our troops assembling?" he was asked. "And didn't you expect an attack?"

"We always see your troops," he replied. "On the skyline, in houses, everywhere. We didn't think it was anything unusual."

Of course we weren't that bad. When Belvedere fell, you will remember, the Krauts thought that in our sector the Brazilians were the only ones on the line. It must have been a pretty tough phase of the war for them to fight, with no air observation, and now without even good mountaintop observation, whereas we could pick up minefields, by air-photo interpretation, without actually having seen them. Once in a while a lone German recon- naissance plane would saunter out after dark. We could hear the telltale difference in motor sound, report it in, and forget it.

I remember one reason we didn't see German planes in daylight. I observed it in action early in January, before the 10th Mountain had gone into the line. At that time a few of us visited the 85th and 91st Divisions, then in combat, to see what war was like. Just before dusk a lone Jerry plane flew over. "Come outside and see the show," said the 91st Division G-2. We did, and found no trouble spotting the plane. It seemed as if the entire Fifth Army front had lit up and gone into action. From one mountain horizon to the other, streams of various-colored tracers from guns of many calibers were streaming up into the evening blue, intersecting about at the plane, and floating on beyond to fade out. There was all the pageantry and racket of a Fourth of July at the lake. Not for the pilot, though. The plane dipped and swerved, dodged as best it could, and headed back northward toward safety. Some of us, in a misguided moment of sympathy for an underdog so overwhelmed by firepower, caught ourselves pulling for the wrong team. We quickly got on the beam, however,
and were concerned to observe that all the guns seemed to have the wrong lead--that all the tracers were trailing the plane, and that it was getting away. One of the forward regiments soon phoned in to report, however, that it didn't.

With no troubles from the air, we marked time at San Maria Labante, some of us managing to chisel a good breakfast from our engineer hosts hotcakes, cereal, fruit, and good coffee. They had a very kindhearted mess sergeant who seemed to like the infantry well enough not to want the footsloggers to eat more C-ration than they had a revealing bit of conversation one night in the hall just outside my roofless and wall-less room. One engineer, apparently, hadn't been shelled before and was quite impressed by the business. He spoke of hearing the shells whistle by (they were ours) and how close they seemed. One (not ours) had hit some distance away, and "...you should a heard that piece of shrapnel whizz by!" Quite a sound it is, at that, usually most noticeable when you're just about the maximum effective range from the shellburst. You hear the fragments whining several seconds after the burst, and if it sounds at all close, you stay low. The whine ends where the fragment thuds to the surface. Then you pick it up to see what kind of shell it was, and study the sharp, torn edges that were streaming your way. Next, you pick yourself up and go on with what you were going to do, trying not to look too embarrassed for having ducked something that wasn't too close.

Our engineer went on with his tribute. He was outside the front door with the guard last night "...and the guard said, 'we'd better step into the doorway, because there's going to be an airburst overhead' and sure enough, just a few seconds later there was one. 'How did you know?' I asked him, and he said, 'Well, I saw one over thataway and another one over thataway and I just figured the next one would be overhead.' And their officers are on the ball," he went on. "I heard one out shooting the bull with some of

the men and he said 'Are your holes good and deep? It's going to be a little hot around here tonight as soon as they learn where you are.' And the men know how to take care of themselves. When one shell came in I was standing up taking a leak and this one comes whistling in with stuff flyin' around and I turned and looked at the infantryman and he was crouched real low against the building, and there I was like a damn fool standing up!"

Chapter 7

FINAL PUSH: OUT OF THE APENNINES

Time deals out many kinds of hours. There is the microscopic one that passes without the knowing of the couple parked on the hill. There is the short hour by which a newsman's deadline measures its approach. Hours are from moderate to long, depending on one's interest in a task, attenuated if you are on time and someone else is late, interminable if you're pacing the maternity hospital lobby.

But how to describe the kind of hours the soldier gets when he is waiting for the jump-off, the hours that he divides into minutes and again into seconds that he cannot squander?

For two forevers, then, men listened to Division Artillery, watched it lift the edge of night all around, watched the faulty VT fuses challenge the stars as our sector of the front prepared to move into its mid-April action on the final push. We had been waiting long. The weather required several successive postponements, and there had been too much time to think about what lay ahead. Someone had said of that no-man's land just over the hill, "If you want to lay another mine out there, you've got to dig one up first." Through this minefield the end run to Bologna was to be run. The Tenth was to carry the ball through the soft spot it had developed when it pushed a salient northeastward to Monte della Spe in March. But the football analogy fell short. The Division was also to open its own hole in the line (and not just run the end), as well as run its own interference. True, the infantryman knew that artillery, air, engineers, medics, signal, and supply were indispensable. But he was only too keenly aware of his need for the other branches when he didn't have them.

The football analogy should not be dropped, however, just yet. It is used expertly by George F. Earle in his excellent description of the situation confronting the 10th Mountain which appears in his History of the 87th Mountain Infantry, excerpts of which follows.

After diversionary threats by the reconstituted 92d Division over on the West Coast, and by the Eight Army on the East Coast, the 10th Mountain Division was to jump off at 0700 on the Mediterranean Theater D-Day. The springboard of the attack was....M. della Spe [from which] the 85th and 87th were to jump off simultaneously. The 85th on the left was to drive to the north and seize the commanding mountains directly ahead of them, and thus secure the left flank of the division. The 87th was to make the main drive. They were to hit north of the town of Torre lussi and then, turning sharply to the right, seize a long series of steep, rugged hills that stretched for five miles to the east and northeast. This terrain belt of hills had been selected by the German for his main line of resistance.

The 86th Mountain Infantry was to follow along inside of the arc formed by 87th's turn to the east and mop up the German areas forward of his main line of resistance. Once the 87th had shoved back this line to the east, with the 85th holding on the west, the 86th was to drive into the breakthrough. The 86th action was to be like a football halfback swinging to the right and then cutting back through the big hole opened by the tackle and held open by the guard, then racing down field through the secondary. The 87th would be the charging tackle; the 85th would be the checking guard....

The difficulties of cracking the initial line cannot be overemphasized. The first and most obvious difficulty was the terrain.... The other difficulty was loss of surprise. The German, this time, knew what was facing him across the line. At Belvedere, the 86th had amazed him by scaling the cliffs; the 87th and 85th confounded him by attacking in the dark. On delle Vedetta in March, the German was still taken aback by the speed and direction of the attack. But what surprise could there be in April? The jump-off salient pointed at his center like an arrow. He knew that the only unit that had been able to punch a hole in his lines all winter was crammed into this foremost salient of their own making. He knew they were mountain troops. He also, rightly or wrongly, believed them to be "hand- picked," "elite corps," made up of, to use his own words, "Physically superior soldiers, sports personalities, and young men from wealthy or politically significant fami- lies." (From captured enemy documents describing the 10th Mountain Division.)

Therefore the usual advantage of the mountain attack, surprising an enemy when he depended too heavily on natural obstacles, could not be realized. The enemy expected to be attacked right where the attack came. Knowing that rugged terrain had not yet slowed down the mountain troops, he built up a complete defense with elaborate fire plans covering each key high point and draw. He prepared concentrations on the ridges that he occupied, so that if forced to retreat, he could bring immediate fire on the attacking troops when they reached his old posi- tions. He manned his well-prepared positions with the crack 334th Infantry Division. On D-Day he had moved all three of his regiments of this division onto the immediate sector in front of the 10th Division, so that the whole 334th German Division was on the line, and the 94th Division was in reserve. The only surprise felt by the Germans was that our attack was begun in such excellent visibility so late in the morning. The Air Corps preparation consisted of four

Thunderbolt fighter-bombers, at a time, on the front of the Division. For forty minutes they peeled off and dove over the German positions, setting several fires with fire bombs, and doing considerable damage to buildings along the mountain line with demolition bombs. They also characteristically dropped a bomb on the CP of the 2d Battalion [87th] at about 0830, and another in the 85th Regimental area that set their "ammo" dump on fire. The ground support was more effective. Starting promptly at 0910, all the artillery units from Corps down fired for 25 minutes. The ground shook, and great billows of dust and smoke clouded over the line of mountains to the north. Both air corps and artillery officers claimed that nothing could live through that preparation. It was a tremendous spectacle, but ten minutes later, as Company B, the leading rifle company crossed the line of departure, the enemy had crawled out of his deep holes and was waiting in the settling dust very much alive.

Inasmuch as the 10th was delivering the main punch for IV Corps, it is reasonable that much of IV Corps history, written in Italy, should speak of the lead Division in some detail. The Corps' view was naturally a general one. It suggests, but does not explain in detail, the bitter struggle of the attack waged by the 85th and 87th regi- ments, which jumped off abreast through a rain of artillery fire on the Monte delle Spe line of departure.

Progress was slow; the enemy was waiting for us in a deep defensive position which had been skillfully organized on extremely rugged terrain, in which no opportunity had been overlooked for the most effective use of mines, demolitions, self-propelled guns, and machine guns to halt our advance.

But like a relentless tide, which stemmed in one spot, flows serenely around the obstacle to engulf it, the 10th Mountain Division, with soundly coordinated fire and maneuver, was once more on the offensive. The Hun could and no doubt would make things difficult; that he could stop the mountaineers, except momentarily, here and there, was doubtful.

Certainly the comparison of the mountaineer's attack to a tide is a complimentary one, but that there was anything "serene" about the flow of that tide is not found in the IV Corps' account as it continues:

For three and a half days the German 334th and 94th Infantry Divisions resisted doggedly; the enemy's local reserves were committed in repeated counterattacks and severe artillery and mortar concentrations were employed against our slow but steady advance northeast- ward. German losses in men and equipment were heavy; not only did the number of enemy killed and wounded left on the field testify to the terrible destruction he was undergoing, but the steadily increasing stream of prisoners of war flowing through the 10th Mountain cages became so great as to make their evacuation a problem.

But as the movement got underway in response to a laconic order from the division commander to "take all Krauts off all high ground," many mines hindered progress and enemy resistance increased as the day wore on. The maneuver had turned and was rolling up the flank of the German 756th Infantry Regiment. The extent of the Hun's chagrin is best revealed by the fact that after the objective fell about 1515, there were ten separate counterattacks launched in a vain attempt to regain it. But ground once in the mountaineer's possession was usually theirs for keeps, and this case was no exception...

The 10th Mountain Division had not made this deep penetration without paying the price; casualties in killed, wounded, and captured for the four days had amounted to 1,429, and despite rotation of battalions, men were beginning to be physically tired from their efforts. Any weariness the body of the division might be feeling, however, had not in the least been communicated to its soul; as time would demonstrate, the offensive spirit, the will to close with the enemy, still surged strongly in every mountain soldier's breast.

Throughout the initial hours of attack, the 3d Battalion, 86th, had been the reserve battalion of the "reserve" regiment. We had plotted on our operations map the progress of the other division organizations as it was reported back to us by telephone, and it was easy to see that the blue-penciled front of friendly troops was not advancing with anywhere near the scheduled speed into the great ovals that marked the division's objectives. The 85th, which was to take and hold Monte Bulgaro, was grinding to a bloody halt. The 87th was greatly delayed by fierce resistance in the fortified town of Torre Iussi. The other two battalions of the 86th had quickly found that the term "mopping up", while it rolls easily off a man's tongue, was for them no easy kitchen task. The area to be mopped up included Rocca Roffena, the roughest terrain of all.

Our Battalion, the breakaway halfback perhaps, was still on the bench. Late in the afternoon of the 15th the coach sent us in, and as we moved toward the advancing front we were again slowly indoctrinated for a repeat performance in the front of an attack. That drawn, grim feeling fell over the men again; smiles were hard to come by.

We carried three days rations and about all the ammunition we could lift. The first part of the road we followed was old, and had required only the clearing of mines by the engineers; but from the point where we topped the ridge and ran into the first light artillery fire, the engineers had built the road literally from the ground up, circling the base of a mountain, and passing through the largest minefield we had seen, nearly a mile and a half in depth. They suffered losses, including a bulldozer, but they kept on going until they had made a road capable of carrying six-by-sixes. The infantry units that had earlier crossed part of this minefield found out where the mines were by the

simple expedient of detonating them. When an infantryman stepped on one, at least the immediate vicinity was clear. Cleared areas were later bordered with tape.

A mile or so on the other side of the minefield we stopped for a time while advance elements tried to chase the Krauts out of the area we were supposed to occupy later that night. While we were sitting there we could look out over the sector to our right and watch the artillery preparation for the II Corps jump off. The sound of the big guns made a continuous roll, and the flash of shells lit up the sky like a huge fire. Air bursts left their glowing streaks in the sky, and we could occasionally see a string of tracers leading each other into oblivion on some hillside miles away. We watched this display of deadly fireworks for nearly an hour before we got the word to move on. Our assembly area had not been completely cleared even then, but the Germans had retreated far enough for us to take shelter in an area that was reasonably safe from their shelling, though we were bunched up more than was desirable. The hillside we did stay on was a good part solid shale, so most of us didn't bother to dig holes but just lay down and went to sleep. Sleep seemed to us more impor- tant than security.

The next day proved to be one of the most eventful in the campaign. We followed a few hundred yards of road, climbed a ridge, walked along a trail marked by short pieces of engineer tape, and cut across a meadow to hit the road again near a spot where the engineers were filling in a large blasted out section. We were around that, across a stream where many of us filled our canteens, and recrossed the road, to follow a little cart trail instead.

While traveling through a broad, rolling field, we watched two long files of prisoners being brought back, some of them carrying wounded. Just around a bend we passed one of their old field 75s; near by were two oxen, bleeding from a score of shrapnel wounds. Beyond them were two dead horses, their stiff and bloated carcasses blocking the trail. The mules refused to pass them, and it was necessary to lead them on a wide detour.

From the open woods at the edge of a farm clearing ahead of us a scattered column of Krauts, perhaps a dozen of them, appeared, unarmed, waving whatever they had that was white. Their position had been by-passed on both sides, and they were glad it was all over. We added them to our PW bag, making a mental note that they were to be credited to another battalion, not ours. But we had lost count of ours by then, anyway.

Beyond the clearing we stopped for a few minutes while the machine guns and some of the mortars were sent forward to points of vantage where they could be set up. Then forward again, this time stopping just below the crest of the ridge facing Montepastore. The mules were unloaded and we shouldered their loads, sending them back to the rear. This was the last we saw of them, and while none of us liked them, we were in a way sorry to see them go. For despite their unlikeableness, they carried equipment without complaint that was otherwise carried by the men.

Part way down the ridge we ran into opposition and had to stop. We waited there for some time and watched our tanks firing on buildings on the other side of the draw, knocking out great chunks of wall; airplanes were diving on other buildings, bombing and strafing them. We finally moved again, and as we hit the bottom of the draw, M Company found itself in the unprecedented position of being ahead of the rifle companies. The reason? The rifle companies had been pinned down by machine- gun fire, or so they were told, and M Company, following them, had not known of it, nor did they now encounter any fire. A short distance to the right, however, a couple of burp guns were active, although not in our direction.

To labor the football analogy a little further, we, the halfback, were just now passing through the hole the charging two-regiment line had opened, and we were beginning to sense the first confusion of the secondary defense, which had apparently overshifted, expecting us to pop through somewhere else. Staff Sergeant Gordan Miller, of L Company, has recalled two incidents that illustrate the confusion.

At the start of the attack on an objective best known by its check point number, 31, which referred to a group of houses named Monzuno on the map, L and K companies were leading. They had progressed about 2,000 yards northwest of the town of Tole, to a point some 2,000 yards short of the objective, without encountering any resistance except from artillery and snipers. However, at this point L Company ran into three camouflaged enemy tanks, which opened up with direct fire. The second squad of the third platoon, which was acting as point squad, managed to crawl forward close enough to the nearest tank to be able to fire into the slits with their BAR and rifles, and damage the suspension gear with their bazooka. S/Sgt. Horace L. Sullivan, the squad leader, was subsequently killed, but under the continued harassing fire from his squad the tank was forced to retire from its camouflaged position and was then destroyed by a Thunderbolt fighter supporting the attack. The other two tanks then also withdrew.

Farther on in the course of the advance on Monzuno an incident occurred that the mortar section and CP group of Company L will not soon forget. While the rifle platoons were well occupied removing very stubborn tanks on the objective, the mortars had gone into action to support the attack from a short distance behind. From their CP location near by, Lt. McClintock and 1st Sgt. Brown spotted a platoon of Jerries coming up unnoticed along the road from the exposed flank. From their casual drill- ground appearance, in a column of twos, the Krauts seemed to be entirely unaware that fifty yards ahead, obscured by a bend in the road, were Company L's mortar men.

Receiving a hasty warning on the SCR 536, the men swung their mortars around to face the surprised Jerries.

When, dazed and stunned, they fled from the barrage of Needs, Weizorek & Company's direct lay, they gathered in a very helpful and understandably excited group to pose for the CP's marksmen. One 29th Panzer- Grenadier platoon was kaput.

The sun set on schedule, but the expected darkness didn't come. On all sides of us were firing and fires--huge pyres lighting the night as haystacks, buildings, and even small towns flamed into ruin. The hillsides were dotted with fires, and the sky was crossed and recrossed by streams of tracers reminding one of the lights of passing trains. Airbursts described their short flaming arcs, and flares cast their cold, flickering glare over everything. Guns boomed, chattered, and cracked; shells screamed and moaned overhead; flying fragments gave forth their threatening hum. Once or twice we could hear someone screaming. There were few who were not impressed by the relative unimportance of the individual soldier. It all combined to give the feeling of a Saturday night hell.

Up across the hill we went, finally to strike a road again, where we formed into a column of twos, one file on each side of the road. At last we reached a farm where we prepared to stay until daylight. As we started to dig in, a wagon drove into the yard, to be immediately surrounded. As the crestfallen driver explained, he thought the place was still held by his own troops. When they sent him after food supplies with which the wagon was filled, the Americans had been far across the ridges with no one expecting them to advance nearly so far. However, we had. We made short work of the rations we had captured. Food was food, even if it was German.

If this German driver was confused, he was not altogether alone in his confusion. Excerpts from the IV Corps history are enlightening here.

There was a certain amount of delay and confusion south of Tole and in the town itself owing to interdictory fire by enemy guns and to the use of the same road by two divisions, the 10th Mountain and the 1st Armored, and part of a third--the left RCT of the 85th. Corps artillery was also displacing over the same road at the same time. Traffic control was a problem, and was aggravated by the presence of many individual vehicles that were trying to get forward by infiltration at the earliest possible moment.

In the early morning hours of Tuesday, April 17, company commanders were called to the most substantial of the buildings at Monzuno, and there munched on German bread and heard plans for a formal attack on the Monte Monascoso ridge, less than a mile to the northwest. The traffic-control problem behind us had been solved to the degree that we would now have ample support from artillery and tanks. We had never worked closely with tanks before, always having been in terrain too rough for them. It was comforting to know we had their power with us.

The tanks and some TDs were all lined up and the men were in position and waiting. The LD was to be crossed at 0700. Our objective lay on the far nose of a long, narrow ridge that branched off to the left of the high ground we were on. It was open and flat, with hedges and a few dirt farm roads running here and there. It looked as if it would be a cinch, what with our armor.

Everything went smoothly as we moved along the crest. No fire of any kind came from the enemy, if, indeed, he was there. The TDs plastered a few buildings with 75s and 50-caliber machine guns. We approached the road junction from which one road went left and north to the high point of Monascoso, and then we paused. On top of the rising ground just left of the same junction was a large field of dense brush about head high. Our tanks moved on, cutting the corner short of the brush field, and moved out, squirting their machine guns at various likely targets. Then I Company started into the brush.

The first platoon was suddenly fired on by machine guns. The Jerries had kept their heads down until the tanks passed them, and until the first platoon had moved very close. Their fire immediately pinned us down. However we were able to return fire and crawl into the concealment of the brush which hid the Jerries. Tex Christensen, who had rushed the position with rifle and grenade on Torraccia, attempted the action here against a machine gun. He was stopped by a bullet squarely through his helmet.

by R Sullivan, I, 86th.

THE TEX CHRISTENSEN STORY

Tex Christensen was a bolo, a sad sack, a snafu, everything you might think of to make a perfect misfit. I would guess his I. Q. was about 70. What was he doing in an elite outfit where the average I. Q. was high enough to qualify a man for O.C.S? Was this another of the mysteries of the Selective Service System?

Tex had albino white hair, and watery light blue eyes that seemed to look in two differant directions at once. He was of medium height, and stocky build, and he spoke with a high pitched tinny voice with a slight lisp. He was the bane of every NCO in the company, as he was never in the uniform of the day. His trademark, when he could find it, was a greasy, dirty ski cap, the peak of which might be pointed to any of 360 degrees.

While in "D" series Tex seemed to know every- one in the regiment. He should have, as he spent time in almost every company in the 86th. It was the lot of "I" Co. to become his home.

It was on "D" series that something happened to make us look at Tex in a different light. 1st platoon, I Co. was in a defensive position when an umpire came bounding in, saying, "You must retreat. Your position is being shelled". Tex yelled out in his thin voice, "Where I come from, we don't retreat". There was no sense of bravado, heroism, or machosism; it was a mere statement of fact.

After we were sent to Camp Swift, the division was reorganized. I lost everyday contact with Tex. Being a mortarman I was transferred to the weapons platoon.

The only time I saw Tex at Swift was on pay day. He would visit the other barracks to get into a pay day crap game. He was always broke by sundown. He was the original go-for-broke man and a rotten gambler.

While at Swift Tex's mother died. He went to the Red Cross for money to go home to Corpus Christi. The Red Cross refused him. A fund was taken up in "I" Co., to send him home. When he returned, he was a more subdued Tex than we had known before.

The next time I heard anything of Tex was after the attack on Mt. Della Toraccia. Tex had singlebandedly stormed a German machine gun nest, knocking it out. He was put in for the Silver Star for this action. It got no further than Battalion H. Q. where they kicked it back, saying he was mentally incompetent, and could not have known what he was doing. Tex took no obvious notice. About two months later, one day before Check Point 50, we were meeting light resistance against outposts of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division. Tex again went after a German machine gun position. This time he was killed.....Tex was awarded the Silver Star.....with Oak Leaf Cluster.....Posthumously.....

The Germans realized that it wouldn't be long before the tanks returned, so a number of them tried to surrender. When a group of thirty came out to do so, shots from their own NCOs killed some of them and pinned down the rest. Jerry fire kept them down for a long time. Each time one tried to show himself for surrender or to raise a flag, a shot would ring out and send him down again. Finally the men of the first platoon of Company I crawled into the hedges, and with a spectacular display of firepower persuaded them all to surrender. After it calmed down, the platoon found itself with more prisoners than men.

It was a large force of Jerries in a well-chosen defensive position. The English-speaking commanding officer told the S-2 why it had gone as it had--"a fiasco," he called it. His force had been moved up late the night before (about 0300), and had just commenced to dig in. Their position was good but their holes were only six inches deep. They were well-armed with light machine guns and bazookas, and had mortar positions set up in the rear; but no communication with their supporting artillery had been laid as yet. They did not know that the hill to their front had been taken the night before and thought that they were in reserve. If they had had their communications in, their mortars and artillery could have played hell with us on that mile stretch of open ground.

K Company had meanwhile swung short of the junction, to move with little resistance to the summit of Monascoso. All companies set to work organizing the position, but soon found that mortar fire was coming from two houses out of sight in the canyon to the northeast. A twenty-man patrol was chosen as the remedy, and the third platoon of Company I provided the men; two NCOs, six BAR men, one bazooka team, two submachine gunners, and eight riflemen. The patrol dropped down, found the house, and received one quick burst from a burp gun. They then formed a semicircle around the house and really opened up. This lasted a short three minutes, whereupon the entire patrol moved in fast with grenades ready. Pfc. Joe Carmelo, in the excitement, pulled the pin on a grenade and tossed it into the house. A long pause..... No explosion. When they went in they found the grenade in the middle of the floor all by itself. In the corner sat a trembling Jerry with his head between his knees. The grenade had a yellow band of tape still holding down the lever. The patrol's entire sack was one German PW, one chicken shot neatly through the neck, and any number of laughs.

Around the road junction the equipment of our bag of some 150 prisoners was scattered all over the area. Gas masks, rifles, machine guns, packs, canteens, clothing, grenades, food boxes, were strewn around their shallow holes. At a near-by farmhouse, a dugout was found which contained a large stock of weapons of all descriptions. Here a tank crew found an entire case of Lugers which had never been opened. We dug and scouted for souvenirs. Before long everything worth while had been picked up, and late comers were doomed to disappointment. Our jeeps finally caught up with us, bringing in ammunition and rations.

We could see our own artillery firing on targets to the north, across the Samoggia River, and about two miles to the west our planes were raising hell with San Prospero, a ridgetop group of buildings. Time after time the fighter-bombers came in on their runs, until there was a cloud of smoke and dust towering two or three thousand feet in the air, so dense that it seemed impossible for them to see their target. Still they continued to sweep in, firing rockets and strafing after their bombs were dropped. It was hard to believe that anyone could possibly live through that bombardment, yet the fact that it continued showed that there must still be fierce resistance.

Company K prepared defensive positions on Monascoso, from which the buildings of Modena were dimly visible in the Po Valley haze. We relaxed a little in the sunshine. The grass underfoot was green, and even had flowers mixed with it. As a still more cheering omen, we heard once again that the 85th Division was to relieve us. We could stand a little straighter, breathe a little deeper. That afternoon it was just as well, perhaps, that we didn't know the battle for Check Point 50 was coming up.

Check Point 50 will not be found by that name on any ordinary map of Italy. It is just a nameless piece of terrain. When the maps were gone over by higher echelons

before the attack, it was a prominent enough piece of terrain to merit a number which could be used for hasty radio reference in the field. The low-numbered terrain features were back near the line of departure. The Po Valley was in the low seventies, so 50 was pretty far along. The number marked a low knob, rather abrupt, at the very end of a long sloping ridge 4,600 yards north of Monte Monascoso. When we first saw it, the ground around it was open, covered with new green grass. The terrain slopes down from the knob in such a way that the houses which were on the knob were a little like a medieval castle in their command of the surrounding country.

Yes, Check Point 50 seems to have been taken from the pages of a text book as an ideal defensive situation. Unfortunately, as we were to learn, it was the enemy who was doing the defending, and an exceptionally strong enemy at that. He was as the press had pictured him in the earlier days of the war; his soldiers were well-trained men who knew how to choose the best ground for defense and how to use it for best advantage. Hastily gathered to defend this ground, which was as strategically important as that defended by the safety on a football field, were elements of SS troops, the 90th Panazer-Grenadier Division, and Hitler Youth.

But we didn't know that yet. On the morning of April 18th the 3d Battalion was merely moving forward again in the approach march formation, over trails that looked on the map as if they might mark a route that could be followed by the armor with us.

Out in front was the point, made up of one squad from I Company, one squad of the ammunition and pioneer platoon, two tanks, and one TD. A squad from L Company patrolled each flank.

The procession started moving down a narrow, winding road on the north ridge of Monascoso. Heavy woods were soon encountered and the going became rough for the tanks. They were very important in this attack; we were so far ahead that they were the only artillery available. Most of the morning was spent moving slowly down, with no resistance of any kind. At about 1045, before the rear elements had moved out of their gallery seats on the summit of Monascoso, the point emerged from the woods onto a long slope of cultivated fields and pasture land. They learned from some Italians in a farmhouse that Tedeschi had pulled out the night before. About five minutes later the point was fired on. The advance continued to a small group of houses, where the first prisoners were captured, disarmed, and started back along the column. The point was strengthened into a platoon - the third platoon of Company I leading off.

The tanks moved out first with the riflemen close behind. As they topped a small rise of ground, machine-gun fire from Check Point 50 halted the riflemen. Immediately, heavy mortar fire dropped in on the tanks and men. It was apparent that heavy resistance was ahead. Shells from self-propelled 75s were soon being mixed with the mortars, and minutes later 210s joined in. One squad of the point had maneuvered into a sheltered position just off the ridge. The first squad was in support and back by the buildings, which offered some protection. However, the third squad stayed on top of the ridge with the tanks. When the order finally came to move on down, they counted noses. The third squad--four killed, six wounded, two men left. The second squad-- two killed, none wounded. The first squad all present.

Recall by E. Beard, I, 86th.

My section of machine guns set up on either side of the house to cover the advance of the 3rd platoon. The only, and safest spot that I could find to dig-in and direct the fire, was in a manure pit in front of the house! It was easy digging and I made myself comfortable, disregarding the location and smell.

We were soon ordered to proceed to the objective and I joined the dash down the long forward slope. The machine guns were firing steadily and I could see the dirt being kicked up below me and heard them going over my head! How we made it there I'll never know.

I finally reached the objective, and picked out locations for my guns to fire on a long column of retreat- ing enemy. Only problem was, I couldn't find my guns! I had made a record dash and outdistanced my section. They finally showed up, but the opportunity of the campaign was lost!

Captain Coursen, commanding Company I, ordered the point to take the next house, about fifty yards short of the objective. Lt. Ramey led his platoon down on the house in a series of fast dashes. The building offered welcome shelter from the constant hail of machine-gun and rifle fire. The second platoon, plus the machine-gun sections with Lt. Minturn in command, followed. Lt. Bennet, the executive officer, was down at the house almost before the scouts.

In the meantime, three tanks moved down the ridge past the platoon and brought heavy fire on the objective. The Jerries were still stubborn. They kept their small arms constantly pecking at the men who were trying to gain the shelter of the house below.

The light machine guns were set up to fire on the objective from around both sides of the building. The third platoon was preparing for a rush. They were to secure the left half of the steep ridge in front of them. The second platoon was to follow and take the right half, including several buildings in a group to the right.

The third platoon moved out one man at a time, going like hell, around the corner of the house. The first squad led off with Lt. Ramey in the lead; the remainder of

the third squad came next, then the second. Down the last 150 yards of grassy slope they went in a long staggered file, Jerries with small arms looking right down their throats. The seventh, eighth, and ninth men were hit by what seemed to be one sweeping burst of machine-gun fire. To slow down at this point was to die. An all-time record was set that day for the 100-yard dash.

A brush fire started, blanketing the steep slope of Check Point 50 in smoke. Lt. Ramey and the first five men climbed up through its protecting concealment. Suddenly they found themselves on top of the objective with the Jerries still pouring out lead. A few grenades and long bursts from the BARs brought a Kraut surprise and surrender. It was a baffled and startled bunch of Germans that rolled and skidded back down the slope. One man burned his fingers when he touched a Kraut machine gun.

Meanwhile the second platoon had moved out and heavy enemy artillery was being directed on the house they had just left. One shell killed Lt. Minturn and wounded Lt. Bennet.

Recall by R. Sanctuary, I, 86th.

I was in the first group, of five or six ,crossing the long open field to a small, stone field building. Directly ahead on the objective was a German machine gun that fired at us constantly while we were running across that field. It was easy to tell that he was firing at us because the bullets were making streaks through the grass all around us including going right underneath. With absolutely no cover at all, the only thing to do was to keep running. Although I was carrying both a sniper's rifle and a bazooka, I still made some kind of a speed record.

It must have been particularly frustrating for the German gunner, because he obviously must have been doing an excellent job with his gun the way the bullets were streaking the grass around our feet and snapping in the air by our ears. However, he never hit any of that first group, or any of those that followed. Amazing!

The tanks had been battering at the house on the right when the second platoon moved in. It seemed as though it might be easy. But these were determined Germans. Two of them, in an upstairs window, proved it. One Jerry quickly opened the shutter while the other, standing back, fired a light machine gun into the second platoon point-blank, killing Lt. Schreiber and wounding the platoon sergeant. The Jerries knew the game was up and intended to surrender, but they had to play their last card before they did.

The objective had been taken, but still there was no rest. The Jerry artillery kept pounding and casualties kept mounting. The company aid men were handling a devil of a job in a marvelous manner. A temporary hospital was set up in the buildings on the objective.

Direct-fire weapons were harassing tanks and supply jeeps on the road leading down to the check point. One tank was hit while moving, missed by ten feet, then hit again and sent rolling down the hill in flames. A jeep driver, doing a remarkable job, came down the road at full speed with the shells following close behind him all the way. He was bringing ammo. Soon after the objective was taken, L Company moved through to take the next two hills. They suffered their way through heavy artillery fire both before and after reaching Check Point 50. However, they took advantage of the terrain and secured the hills without loss of life.

Although some violence may be done to chronology, it seems important to enter into the record here one man's sequel to Check Point 50. It is a letter written February 1947, by Marlowe W. Hartung, Jr., an I Company rifleman who rose to squad leader and finally, when first platoon sergeant Bernie Cordes was hit just short of Monascoso, took over as platoon sergeant himself. His tenure was short lived:

Things were nightmarish from the day Bernie was hit forward, and to this day events lack coherence; those hectic days kaleidoscope into an indistinguishable mass. The first day of the final push I remember well - its long march and successive halts that chilled us to the bone, the elated feeling as we passed rear-echelon troops of other outfits who humbly waved and stared as we passed. Yes, the spirits of the gang were damned high and my recollection clear that far; beyond there are just pieces.

You probably know more about the all-around picture the morning prior to Check Point 50 than I do. I remember that we were beginning to look down on Jerry territory that morning instead of up, and things on the road below indicated a very hasty withdrawal. Evidently things weren't too hasty, as we judged by the sounds of the fight raging below us. The second and third platoons had been committed, and we were in support, Elufson ahead for a looksee. Our position was nerve-wracking to say the least, what with dodging our own tanks and Jerry shells that were hunting them down at an alarming rate. I had the boys dig in on what protection we could find in the forward slope.

We did, however, have a beautiful view of the proceedings. I remember feeling for a roan tied to a tree on the exposed trail; our supply officer had been riding him that day.

As expected, it wasn't long before Dallas picked up orders over the radio, and we were committed. Elufson had succeeded in reaching the protection of a forward farmhouse and waited for us there. In the process of moving the platoon forward we passed through the courtyard of a battered house. The battering was still in process. Evidently every machine gun in the company was firing from second-story windows. It seemed as if it was the last place of refuge before the great beyond. Here I recognized I Company

men, mortar men, machine gunners, runners, medics--the house was bulging with men, all of them striving for a last breath before the dash. It wasn't long before the platoon sensed this feeling as they deployed in the rubble. We, Dallas and I, knew Elufson was in a house beyond here but where we were not sure. My intentions were to start the platoon forward on the only feasible route available and meanwhile find the lieutenant by a quick look over the top. They moved out willingly enough over one of those unique Italian cowpaths, led by Harris and my old squad. Dallas and I, dashing around the corner of the stone house, ran into Ceravolo and the executive officer. He commented on our route and the lack of time. His description of Elufson's position was incoher- ent, and as we loped into the open I called and asked if he were coming. His answer was to the negative.

It was at this point that some strange voice told me to get the hell off this razor-back. From where we were the whole fracas was visible below, and I caught a glimpse of the lieutenant waving from the rear of a house. In the process of heeding my intuition I jumped a fence, followed by Dallas with his radio, and turned toward the reverse slope of the hill where the platoon was threading its way. My intentions were evidently good but too late. Next thing I knew I was down and gushing blood from my left foot, which wasn't exactly a foot any more. Dallas hurdled me, yelling he'd get Farmer, the medic, as I grabbed hard trying to shut off the faucet. Between bursts of thirties over my head I heard someone yell to stay down, the medics were on the way. It wasn't long before practically a whole company came slithering in on their bellies. From that time on I relaxed. Honest to God I felt as though the weight of the world had been lifted from my aching back. Ceravolo was there to give me that Alabama sunshine smile of his. Just before they put me under I asked for an I Company man and Sullivan appeared. I was playing safe with a beautiful leather belt and a Belgium .38. Sully took it and I passed out.

The agony of helplessness followed as rumors of this and that person's getting it reached my bed. Believe me, Dave, I would have rather lost my leg after the whole thing was all over than to lie on my back and think of the gang slugging it out up there. Finally I began to see familiar faces carried into the wards and their stories began to help.

That night K Company relieved I Company, which moved off the hill and down behind L to spend the night. On the way down the steep bank Lt. Ramey fell and broke his ankle.

Recall by R. Comer, I, 86th.

One morning when we were still south of the Po Valley, we were pinned down by very heavy artillery fire. Several of us dived into a root cellar to avoid the shelling. The walls of the cellar seemed to be made of roundish rocks about five inches in diameter. Just then a shell exploded in the doorway, knocking loose some of the "rocks". One of the others there then discovered that the "rocks" were in fact mold covered cloth laid over a round of the most pungent cheese that I have ever had the pleasure to taste.

Things were comparatively quite April 19th. It was another of those warm sunny days; we were fortunate enough to have many of them throughout our part of the campaign. It soon began to appear that this was the day we had been waiting for for months. The 10th had really made its breakthrough. That afternoon, from an assembly area east of Check Point 50, we could see a stream of vehicles moving slowly down the primitive road that followed the Lavino River canyon from Montepastore - just east of the Monascoso Ridge - to the Po Valley. Jeeps, six-by-sixes, tanks, four-by-sixes, tank destroyers, self-propelled artillery, prime movers and bigger guns, wrecking cars, weapons carriers, ambulances - in an endless, bumper-to-bumper parade they ground on, churning up the dust that rose several hundred feet in the air, to mark the course of the winding canyon for miles.

We knew that our time would come to join the column. It came at about 1800, when we, too, moved along the dusty, congested road. It was a long, stimulating night. At about midnight we turned off into a field and were told to dig in and sleep while we could. Then the order came. "The 3d Battalion will participate in a coordinated attack at 0800." We were to attack on the left with an exposed flank. Objective: To cut Highway No. 9 and hold the strategic Ponte Samoggia.

We were on the road again at 0330, after nearly three whole hours of sleep for the lucky ones who didn't spend that time digging in deeply. After dawn we passed a sign reading, "Bologna 11 kilometers." However it was not our lot to enter this long-sought city. We turned off the road instead, and climbed to the hamlet of San Lorenzo in Collina, which straddled the last ridge of Apennines, our LD. We looked ahead at strange flat ground and a hazy horizon.

We met little opposition until our forward elements were well down the slopes, when we received heavy long-range artillery fire from the valley. The 81mm mortar sections of Company M suffered several casualties.

Far out in the valley columns of smoke gave evidence of the air corps' work. One of our P-47s went down just to the right of the Battalion, the pilot bailing out barely in time. Another went down, the pilot with it. The plains to our front resembled a huge patchwork quilt in greens and browns, each segment separated from the other by a hedgerow, road, or canal. We were soon moving swiftly, with sporadic artillery fire following our course down the slopes. Now and then machine-gun fire from our flanks kicked up dust in the fields. Our advance was a series of long dashes from farm to farm. At about 1100 we had reached the flat valley bottom. No longer could we find the welcome

defiles and observation provided in the hills. We followed our azimuth through small fields and orchards and across irrigation ditches. The weather was very warm, and many men were reminded of the 25-mile hikes in the Texas heat. Few of us knew the exact distance covered, but it was only shortly after noon when our leading elements cut the main highway and headed toward Ponte Samoggia, a short distance to the west. The highway brought rewards--abandoned and commandeered bicycles, motorcycles, wagons, carts, and horses were pressed into service. The Battalion was no longer on foot. No more heterogeneous parade ever arrived at the Samoggia bridge!

On the dash to Highway 9 we had already passed happy Italians, who stood in their farmyards offering wine to the hot and thirsty GIs as they passed. Except for blasted fortifications, abandoned vehicles, and occasional white flags waving in the windows of farm buildings which were housing Germans more than willing to give themselves up, we saw no signs of the enemy. Taking running snacks of salami, bread, and wine, riding what we could, collecting Tedeschi souvenirs before we sent the prisoners back with hands over their heads, we were a jubilant outfit. An 85th Mountain Infantry platoon, going down the Lavino River road all the way, had hit the Po before we had. Our Battalion would get credit for taking out the enemy safety man on Check Point 50, or credit for an assist if you prefer baseball in your analogies. But we weren't worried about which of the units got credit for what. We, the 10th Mountaineers, had another first to our credit. As the IV Corps historian put it, "On its seventh day of continuous attack, the 10th Mountain Division in- creased the speed of advance with tank-riding infantry, jeeps and trucks as it debouched into the Po Valley, the first American unit to fight its way out of the rugged Apennines."

Ours was not undiluted elation, of course. Too well we knew of the wreckage that was behind us. Too well we knew that there were some friends missing--but friends who would not begrudge us our seizing the fleeting opportunity to rejoice and making the most of it, if only in our minds, before we had to begin worrying about what new battlefield firsts the higher echelons would, we knew, also all to well, soon be planning for us.

Chapter 8

FINAL PUSH: ACROSS THE PO

Ponte Samoggia was not much of a town. It consisted of a small group of buildings straddling the Torrente Samoggia, here more of a sluggish river than a torrent. Every building in town had been damaged by bombs and the bridge across the stream had one side blown out. Companies L and K crossed to the other side to hold the far bank and set up road blocks with the aid of TDs.

The disorganization of the enemy was easily apparent. Enemy vehicles were caught in the road block throughout the night. The prisoners taken had no idea that the town was in our hands; in fact, they had no idea where their lines were. Our air corps and mobile columns had cut all lines of communication.

At 0800 on the 21st the Battalion started moving over the bridge and across the countryside in the direction of Bomporto, twelve miles away, where another bridge required to be captured. Before the column had cleared the town a heavy barrage fell on our position of the previous night. Before it was over, the shell of a building used as a CP was nothing but rubble. Short rounds inflicted casual- ties in M Company.

As no roads were followed this day, the point set out on an azimuth of 335 degrees, just about due north. The route lay over fields, across deep canals, through farmyards, past elaborate but never-used fortifications; we crossed, but never used, the dusty, dirt roads. In almost every farmyard the paesans were ready to greet us with vino and bread. One farmer, to do this, had to flag down a tank. He prevailed upon the driver to detour around a spot in his fields--then dug up and served his choicest sparkling Burgundy, or at least the Italian farmer's equivalent.

Italian partisans were met in increasing numbers. Theirs was not a well-organized fighting force, but armed with Italian, German, and British weapons, they did a great deal to harass the Germans. Occasionally Italian para- troopers were encountered. These men had been trained by the British and dropped behind German lines to cut communications.

As we advanced through the fields toward Bomporto, prisoners kept coming back along the line. We could hardly send them back through channels, because the channel ended at the rear of the Battalion, and would end there until the gap between us and whatever unit was to follow should be closed up. So the men started appropri- ating prisoners, marching them forward with us until such time as they could be collected by regiment. The prisoners didn't march empty-handed, however. They would be liberated of whatever of their equipment was of souvenir value. A GI would place the souvenir in his own pack, then pass souvenir and pack over to the German to carry forward for him. The Germans took this without so much as a hurt look, and walked along cheerfully.

Very little firing was heard, and we could not notice this unless we paid particular attention. It was the same with sniper fire. A man would hear a bullet crack, but unless it was close he would hardly feel uneasy. He would just shrug his shoulders, call the sniper a bastard, and go on about his business. They brought a sniper back to me in the course of the afternoon. The order had been given that all snipers would be shot. As soon as I heard that he had sniped, I said, "I wash my hands of it," and turned to halt some partisans who were armed with German Weapons,

but who I could not be sure were partisans. We broke up their rifles, and as I returned to the march column the guard, who had been the intended victim of the sniper, was marching the sniper away from the column. The sniper had a subdued, but unmistakably beseeching look on his face, or perhaps it was as near as this thirty-year-old, Teutonic soldier could come to a forsaken look--forsaken, with dignified anguish. I passed, then turned when I heard the guard order him to face about, fire, saw the sniper stand, careen in a half circle, take a few steps, then drop. One of the mildest men in headquarters company, an almost naive, you might say Christian-Endeavor lad, fired two more shots because he wasn't sure the sniper's agony, if any, was over, and the column kept moving on. The partisans laughed. I didn't. My mind was milling a little. There was a life that might have been spared if I hadn't "washed my hands," and it had ebbed before my eyes. The forsaken look would pass before my mind for some time, I knew. The order could have been stretched at my discretion, I assume. For it is one thing to kill a sniper as immediate retaliation. It is another thing to capture him during a rout, disarm him, then march him back to a battalion CP and a delayed death. I can only rationalize that this man, who had hidden out to shoot after his unit had left, and after he could have given himself up without sniping, was a murderer at heart, and that this had been war's swift justice for murderers.

On reaching Bomporto we were surprised to find that the town had already been occupied by the British artillery unit attached to us, who had outpaced us by moving along roads. Before morning the whole 86th Regiment and its attached units were in or just outside the town. Hundreds of prisoners added to the confusion.

On the morning of April 22, the 3rd Battalion became part of a task force whose mission was to reach the Po River. A task force is a self-sufficient group, containing everything necessary for a specified period of fighting. In this task force, besides our battalion of infantry, were tanks, TDs, self-propelled guns, heavy artillery, engineers, signal corps men, reconnaissance units, and naturally a sufficient supply of food and ammo. This day may well have been the most enjoyable day of combat. At every crossroads cheering mobs greeted us, offering hard Italian bread, vino, and eggs. The Germans had told the Italians that the Americans were starving, so we were offered whatever food was available. Children threw flowers into the trucks and a good many of the girls were kissed.

The trip, however, was not at all so free of interruptions as it might have been. Several times German convoys and individual vehicles were met as we cut through back roads. The men in most of these vehicles were from rear-echelon units and were attempting to get to the Po River and north before we cut them off. These troops were easily persuaded to surrender.

About three o'clock in the afternoon a vehicle cut into Company M's convoy. It took a minute to realize that it was not a U.S. vehicle, but a German Volkswagon. A German major, his orderly, and his pet dog were hauled out in spite of the protests of the major, who said that enlisted men had no right to touch or search him. But shortly after a crowd of screaming, grasping Italians had gathered and had begun to close in on him, he was glad to be remanded to the custody of enlisted men. It turned out that the major and his dog had been making this trip every afternoon for a year and a half, from his villa to a quarter-master depot. He had no idea he would meet us on this day, and thought that the world was about to fall apart around him when a GI claimed his gold-braided service cap as a souvenir.

During the day several burned-out convoys were passed. Our air force had done a good job strafing the vehicles that the Krauts tried to use in daylight. However, it was evident that we were not far behind a group of Germans who still had transportation, for the partisans kept urging us on, saying that the Tedeschi had just passed through. We moved so fast that we were occasionally clear off our maps, and traveling by roadside signs or by azimuths. Maps were soon dropped to our rear elements and rushed forward. There were times when they dropped the wrong maps.

It was fortunate for us that the Germans were unable to consolidate their positions. Indications were that they had planned a bitter campaign for us in the Po Valley. Along every little road or supply route could be seen willow sticks with small bundles of straw tied to the top of them to mark the many emplacements and dugouts which were prepared for quick occupation when our planes strafed their convoys, or when they withdrew. Some were elaborate underground emplacements, well camouflaged and capable of holding many men.

Each time the head of the column met some little problem - a sniper nest, a group of surrendering Krauts, or a question about the route - it ground to a stop which was soon communicated to the rest of the column as it used up the distance between vehicles. Men in the rear vehicles thus would often have time to collect food from the Italians who gathered around in great numbers, or deploy to the fields to catch a little sunshine and perhaps a nap. They could also relieve themselves, in the uninhibited, casual Italian manner - a distinct advantage of Italian over American countryside in a long road march.

On one of these stops, when the Italians had gathered in greater numbers, we suddenly became aware that they had trickled away--perhaps they moved faster than that--and were back in their houses. Someone hollered, "Jerry tank!"

At that moment, the column of troop-carrying vehicles was quite vulnerable to a flank attack; we had expected no one to be so bodacious as to fire on us. But here, streaming toward the column from a roadside orchard, was

a branch covered armored car, its machine guns blazing at the crowded vehicles.

"I tried to climb out of the truck," one man said, "but I didn't have a chance. I was washed off the truck with a wave of men--and had to climb back in to pass rifles out to some of my squad."

The men quickly deployed and organized into a firing line - but their work was already done. The armored-car crew had been more valorous than discreet, and had neglected to notice our tanks, one of which was about four vehicles ahead in the column. The tank crew traversed the turret around toward the Kraut car, found that a telephone pole blocked the gun barrel, and immediately traversed 300 degrees in the opposite direction and fired two quick 75s. Both were hits, and the armored car was ablaze and harmless.

We could well expect that machine guns, firing at the broad side of our crowded vehicles, would have exacted a heavy penalty for our carelessness. There was a casualty at that: one man had had two fingers skinned where a machine gun bullet passed between them!

Recall of R. Sanctuary, I, 86th.

When the German armored car came racing down the road at us, I was sitting in a truck right beside the tank that finally shot it. As I was carrying a Bazooka, I started to get it ready to fire, all the while watching the armored car firing its guns and getting closer all the time. When it got about 100 to 150 feet away from the road it seemed to realize what it had gotten into with the tank sitting there such a short distance away. It stopped very quickly and went in reverse back up the road just as fast as it had come down. It was much too slow, however, as it was at that point that the tank was able to bring its gun to bear. With the first shot it just stopped dead in its tracks, in more ways than one, and proceeded to burn.

There was another incident that happened during that same assault by the armored-car. Someone in our Company (I), I don't remember who now, jumped off a truck that was in the line of fire, and as he hit the road, a machine gun bullet went between his foot and the road. It cut the sole of his shoe in half without any injury to him whatsoever. Later when he showed it to me you could see his foot right through the cut sole.

Too soon we congratulated ourselves on our luck, or at least those who did congratulate each other neglected to cross their fingers. For by the time our nerves had quieted and the column was rolling again, six planes appeared overhead. Our air-ground training had taught us precise means of identification, and we knew these were P-38s. A formation of six of them flying overhead was just as reassuring and welcome a sight as we could have asked for. But something had happened to their ground-air training; although our vehicles carried the air-identification panels which signified that we were friendly, the formation wheeled and took a run at the column, strafing as it came. Our smile of welcome was lost in a mad scramble to spread out in the fields on either side of the road, those men who had been strafed before (and there weren't many) taking to the left hand side.

Only the first three planes, fortunately, made strafing runs. The pilots of the other three apparently picked up our frantic supplementary air-identification signal in time (yellow-smoke grenades were tossed all over the place), and called off the chase. The formation then went on about its business, while our ambulances came streaming up from the rear as soon as we could make radio contact with them. We could wish that our first damaging strafing had not been conducted by friendly planes.

Dusk came, and brought with it the same mild to stop by the crew of one of the TDs in our column. But they hadn't thought it was necessary to stop. Another time temperatures, the same soft pastel shades that make evening a welcome thing on an early summer day in the Central Valley of California. Those of us who knew that valley felt almost at home in the Po. The color of the sky was subduing to a deep blue that was to be a perfect backdrop for what was to happen next.

It was time to release the trucks we had been riding, for it was now the 2nd Battalion's turn to ride. The head of the long column was already afoot, and I was back at the rear of the column with Company I to turn the last trucks around, talking on the SCR 300 with Major Drake, who was at the head of the column commanding the Battalion. Suddenly, from several bends ahead in the road, there came the loud reports of rapid, high-velocity artillery fire which definitely interrupted our conversation. Almost immediately a series of further explosions followed, and a cloud of smoke streaked with the comet tails of exploding ammunition puffed into the sky, and kept puffing as more ammo was exploded. The radio went to work again.

"Hello Uncle One Able, hello Uncle One Able. Dave what the hell is going on back there? Over."

"Hello, Uncle One Able. That's what I was going to ask you. We don't know, but we'll find out."

We were no longer, after that strafing, quite so confident. A Kraut tank might have laid low on our flanks, have escaped our observation, and now might be in on our flank, raising hell with the foot column and the organizational vehicles, some of which carried ammo. We could tell that it had been high-velocity artillery fire because the wump! of the gun and the carroomph! of the exploding shell were almost simultaneous. We had heard that there still some Tiger tanks, armed with an 88mm AT gun, lurking in the Po. That would not be good at all. Our own TDs were not too good a match for a Tiger at best, and foot troops would certainly be hard put. The only optimistic thought I had at the time

was that the fireworks that were shooting up in front of the smoke and deep blue sky didn't look as if they could have come from anything we were carrying. But there was only one way to find out.

A platoon of I Company men spread out and selected the most defiladed route of approach that was at hand -the reverse slope of a wide irrigation canal-, moved quickly forward for several hundred yards, and cautiously crept up the bank to have a look.

The show was all but over. One hundred yards down a side road were several burning vehicles; several bodies were strewn around them, and some ammo was still popping and crackling. On the pavement at the intersection of that road with ours were about a dozen hot, friendly shell cases, scattered at random. We moved forward again in our road march, reported over the radio that all was well, and then learned what had happened. Krauts, thinking that our column had passed, had tried to clear out of the area on the vehicles, had been spotted and ordered they would have, but as was only too often true on a battlefield, there wouldn't be another time.

A little farther on, near a small village, firing suddenly broke out. Someone had caught sight of some Germans in a house and fired on them. For a few minutes bullets were ricocheting off the buildings, but the firing died quickly when it was observed that the fire was no being returned. More than a company of men surrendered here.

At one house two soldiers were walking past when a Kraut called out in broken English that he wanted to surrender. The two men were much surprised when, instead of one man, almost fifty filed out the door. The two GIs had all the German pistols they could carry.

Some prisoners came even more easily. I had pulled up my jeep to the side of the road to check the motor column. We were immediately surrounded by babbling Italians, including some well -dressed, healthy- looking honeys, about four deep around us, marveling at my Bramani-soled GI mountain boots (all six pounds of them), stroking Sergeant Vaughan's beard, laughing at Pfc. Carriera's meticulously trimmed mustache, when someone edged in and laid a little piece of cloth over the side of the jeep. I think all of us did a perfect double take. On our second look, we saw that the cloth was white, that it was held by a German, and that he was eager to give up, along with the three others beside him.

Shortly after dark our column was advancing slowly along a high canal bank when suddenly a Stuka skimmed overhead at tree-top height. We had orders not to shoot, so took what cover was at hand and watched while the plane circled back over the column and disappeared. Some of us thought that it had just taken off from the other side of the canal, where it had possibly picked up some escaping high officers; others surmised that the Germans, lacking ground communications, were sending their planes out to locate us.

We were in no position to tangle with planes. Our route now led along a narrow levee on a still narrower road, which would have been quite adequate for foot troops alone. But we were not alone. There were still task force vehicles in our column - tanks, TDs, SPs, reconn cars - in addition to our organizational vehicles, the jeeps, trailers, weapons carriers, supply-carrying six-by-sixes, and ambulances. It was a dark night, there could of course be no lights, and some confusion was inevitable. Lt. Frank Crain, the Battalion A and P officer, seemed to bear the brunt of it. He'd get word from the head of the column, then travel almost the length of it, sounding off with the order, "Get the vehicles off the road; the tanks are coming through." Almost immediately, upon other instructions, he'd go back along the column with the countermand, "Get the tanks off the road, the jeeps are coming through." Then, "The Reconn cars are coming through." For each order, the unwanted vehicles would stack up bumper to bumper on the little stretches of road shoulder they could find to pull off on. Then they'd back onto the road again as best they could in the dark. It seemed particularly hard for a driver to find the road again after he had pulled off far enough to let the tanks pass.... But here we go again; Crain is coming back, and the Infantry will have a turn: "Get the vehicles off the road; the troops are coming through."...

We stopped about midnight at a small village near the canal, where we got a few hours sleep and made preparations for the next day's pursuit. We were only ten miles from the Po River at this point, and believed that our Battalion, traveling as a task force, was well out in front of the remainder of the leading division. Our supply lines were very thin, and there was little hope of reinforcement had we run into opposition. There were times when we had no contact with other allied units except radio.

Later it was learned that a large force of German combat troops was crossing the Po where we were headed. Throughout the night could be seen flashes of exploding ammunition dumps which lit up the sky in every direction. Apparently the partisans were having a high old time.

The following morning, April 23rd, we started our pursuit on foot at about 0800. Our objective this time was the pontoon bridge over the Po River at San Benedetto. This was the only bridge which our bombers had spared. We were to follow the 2nd Battalion, but after some delays the 3rd Battalion cut left to the main highway and continued to lead. At least, we thought we were in the lead again until we ran into British units setting up their Long Toms in near-by orchards, in preparation for the assault across the river. As we approached San Benedetto, we found the highways strewn with smoldering German convoys and charred bodies. Some of the dead were still at the wheel; some had crawled to the ditches before they died. One was minus a

head. Our airmen had again hit the jackpot, which included a 28cm German railway gun.

The German's transportation was in a sad state. Their gasoline supply had been cut so low that it was used only by high officials for the most part; many of the vehicles were horse-drawn--which left the Italians minus horses. Some entire convoys had been abandoned for lack of gasoline and many of the vehicles, filled with our gasoline, were taken over to speed our pursuit--until too many had been fired upon, in error, by our own men. With many of the strafed convoys lay dead horses. Camouflaged around many of the farmhouses were abandoned German artillery pieces, their prime movers fuelless. Our men destroyed them with thermite bombs as we passed, lest hidden Krauts turn them around on us.

Recall by R. Comer, I, 86th.

Around the 23rd of April, while the 3rd Bat was part of Task Force Duff, I received a radio message from our right flank patrol, indicating that they needed the immediate attention of the Company Commander. We broke column, and went over to the flank position, which turned out to be a cross roads. In the center of the intersec- tion lay two dead and bloated cows, one of which had been recently punctured by a bayonet. This was an act to be regretted since the area down wind was uninhabitable due to the strong odor of putrefied protein. This, however, was not the reason that we had been called out to the flank. The patrol leader wanted to know what should be done with the warehouse full of booze that they had come upon.

The CO took several bottles of a licorice flavored liqueur, and then detailed the patrol to load a nearby Jerry truck with enough cases of champagne to wet down the company. He then told me to report this find to Battalion. The Battalion Commander soon showed up on the double. He then ordered a detail to fill a couple of trucks with enough champagne to wet down the battalion. He then had his radio operator call regiment. On arriving, the Regimen- tal Commander confiscated a few bottles of this liquid refreshment, then instructed MP's to guard the place and secure the remaining contents for a big 10th Mountain Division party at the end of the war. You will remember that we each got a bottle of champagne during our supper meal when bivouacked on the airfield outside Brescia.

We entered San Benedetto to find the Division CP already set up, evidence that we had not exactly been in the lead. Our assembly area was a grain field just outside of town. No one had to be reminded to dig in, for enemy artillery was now plastering the town, and we expected some ourselves.

Some of the confusion of the two-day approach to the Po River is cleared up in the IV Corps statement on the pursuit:

The 10th Mountain, on the left of the 85th (Division), and still led by Task Force Duff, continued to advance rapidly; it captured the vital communication center of Carpi and sped on north. Meeting many deter- mined pockets of resistance, including road blocks, self-propelled guns, bazookas, and small arms, it by-passed the larger towns and arrived at dark on the south branch of the Po River, just north of San Benedetto Po. About 35 road miles had been covered during the day.

The Division command post moved along with the task force and due to the rapidity of the advance, clerks, cooks, and staff officers had to clear towns, rout Krauts from foxholes, and probe the flanks for snipers. .
.During the night the bulk of the division closed along the south bank of the Po. Preparations were at once begun to force the crossing of this formidable river obstacle on the following day. . . .

As late as 20 April, the day the mountaineers were debouching onto the Po flats, no decision had been reached as to whether or not IV Corps would cross the river. All the long-range planning had foreseen that the breakout would occur farther east, and reasoned that the main attack, speeding on toward Verona, would take the Po in stride. IV Corps, destined to carry out the minor task of reestablishing law and order in northwest Italy, was expected to reach that area by routes south of the Po; its eventual crossing, at a later date and supposedly under peaceful conditions, would be provided for somewhere near Piacenza.

The troops in the main effort were therefore scheduled to receive priority with respect to the limited equipment and specially trained personnel available for combat river crossings. No allocation of bridging equipment was made to IV Corps, although the speed of its advance across the valley did result on the evening of 20 April in ordering forward 100 assault boats to Anzola, where they might be available, just in case. This equip- ment arrived on 21 April, and 50 of the assault boats with paddles (there were no motors) were turned over on wheels at Anzola to a 10th Mountain guide at 2200B, about as the mountain soldiers were reaching the river bank, 64 miles away. . . .

The enemy, if given time, could and no doubt would move his reserves to prepared positions to oppose the threatened crossing of the Po, and it therefore be- hooved us to get across the 300-yard-wide river immedi- ately and establish a bridgehead.

Fragmentary orders for the operation were issued during the night; the final order was issued verbally and provided that while one regiment was making the crossing, another would guard the two flanks, and the third would protect the rear of the division area. It will be seen that, due to the speed of the advance to the river, all was not exactly peaceful on the south bank.

The 50 assault boats with paddles arrived on

the scene at 0800B, and when all was ready at 1220B the crossing commenced with two companies of the 87th as the leading rifle units. . . .

The appearance of the first move on the south bank was the signal for the enemy to open fire with every weapon that could bear. Hostile 88s, apparently fired without observation, began to come in in considerable volume, but for the most part went on over the river and levee, causing some damage in the final assembly area. Well-aimed flack bursts coming from the left flank broke over the river itself in vicious clusters of thirty or more rounds; frequent changes in deflection provided effectual coverage of the whole width of the crossing. From carefully prepared and well-concealed positions along the northern levee, mortars and machine guns with deadly coordination swept the surface of the water across which the boats had to be paddled.

Unshaken, the men of the mountain division, infantryman and engineer alike, picked up their boats, carried them into that churning cauldron of the enemy's malice, launched them unhurriedly, and coolly paddled for the northern bank. It might have been a training maneuver.

The news was soon around that two companies of the 3rd Battalion, 87th, had reached the north bank of the river, after suffering heavy casualties from the artillery fire we had been watching from our untouched grainfield. Whereas the IV Corps version of the crossing is a little oversimplified, our Battalion's version, coming as it did, in the absence of normal communications, by third and fourth-hand rumor, was not at all accurate. George Earl, in his History of the 87th, has compiled a superb account of the crossing, from which some excerpts are appropriate here to illustrate the 87th's achievement.

The crossing of the Po is probably unique in the sacrifice of preparation in favor of speed. A more detailed study of the river and the enemy situation would have disclosed that enemy antiaircraft artillery west of the river bend would be able to enfilade the positions of the waiting troops on the south bank, as well as the actual crossing of the river. A crossing farther east would lessen the effectiveness of this fire. Another important advantage of a lower crossing would have been the avoidance of the crossing of the River Mincio just beyond. The bridges over this deep tributary were vital to the continued advance of the Division.

No study of aerial photos had been made in the regiment. The only reconnaissance was a quick "look see" from the southern end of the German barge crossing. The enemy situation across on the north bank, overprinted on a G-2 map, was received too late for study. Artillery was rushed into position as it arrived from Bomporto, but no customary, heavy preparation fires were possible. Air support for the initial crossing was completely absent. The air groups were in the stage of moving to forward fields to be within range, and all of their communication equipment was on the move. Finally, there was no bridging equipment immediately available, no powered boats, nor any kind of amphibious vehicle. There was not even a satisfactory telephone cable heavy enough to withstand the broad stream's current. . . . Maps were issued in time to be pasted together. The regimental overlays were dashed off in about ten minutes. . . . General Hays was standing on the peaceful river bank at 0830 when word reached him that the boats had arrived five miles away. Fifteen minutes later he made his decision. The river would be crossed without delay. . . . and at 1015 Company A was ordered to "be at the river in ten minutes."

The boats had not yet actually reached the river, nor had there been time for even fragmentary planning by the smaller units. H-hour was postponed, and it was two minutes past noon that A Company started its "training maneuver" and "coolly paddled for the north bank." A few minutes later, T/Sgt. George W. Hurt, who in West Virginia had taught men how to establish "bridgeheads" on cliffs, was the first mountaineer to step onto the sandy sloping bank of the slow-moving river in a flat valley, and the third platoon of A Company enjoyed the distinction of being the first Allied unit to fight its way across the Po river. Other Allied soldiers had crossed earlier, but not necessarily of their own volition. One of these was Pfc. John Willis, a driver from 3d Battalion Headquarters of the 87th. He was captured two days before, and was transported to a German headquarters on a motorcycle of a German general who claimed he had lived fifteen years in Califor- nia. Willis was interrogated, but as Earl relates, he refused to reveal any information. Even had he been willing, there seemed to be little he knew that they didn't. They rattled off the names of all the units of the Division, all the regimental and battalion commanders names, and the dates of activation of the three regiments. They were only in error in the case of the commander of the 3d Battalion.

Just before midnight on the 22d he was taken across the Po on the pontoon bridge at Gorgo, and managed to escape when a lone German plane strafed the retreating column. He attempted to cross the river again in a boat, failed, and hid out in a dugout. The following noon, peering out to learn what all the commotion was about, he was surprised to see . . . . American GIs advancing abreast of his dugout (and) came out with his hands in the air. It was Company A, and the men seeing a soldier in an American uniform surrendering from an enemy dugout, were of a mood to shoot him on the spot. Someone yelled, "He's an American! Don't Shoot!"

Captain Klemme restrained the men and got up to Willis, who was quite shaky from his experience.

"What outfit you from?" Captain Klemme was suspicious of a German trick.

"87th," Willis answered.

This seemed too pat to be true, and the men all remembered G-2 warnings about American-speaking Germans

trained in our ways to drop behind our lines and spread confusion. Captain Klemme was openly suspicious. "What company?"

"Headquarters, 3d Battalion."

"Yeah? Who's CO of K Company?"

Willis looked around at the desperate faces and realized he was at that moment, just as he thought himself safe, in as ticklish a spot as he had been throughout his experience. He became tense. He couldn't think. K Company was just a name. Then, just as Captain Klemme was turning away to leave him to the fate of spies, it came to him.

"Captain Eddy," he shouted.

"How about L Company?"

"Captain Duncan."

Captain Duncan had been Killed six days before, but Klemme was satisfied.

"Hand the man a rifle, and let's go," ordered the captain, and Willis was back in the outfit. . . . It would be hard to deny that he is the first man of the first Allied unit to set foot on the north bank of the Po River.

By evening of the 23d, units of the 86th were crossing in force, and at about 2100 the 3d Battalion was given the order to move. While we prepared to move, German planes, the last to function as bombers in the Po Valley, dropped bombs on units just to our rear, inflicting heavy casualties on some men of the 87th, but missing us. It was a cold night, and we shivered a little in our light clothing as we walked and waited intermittently. At 0300 on the 24th, a mile and a half below the Gorgo bridge site, we started across. The trip was not what we expected. The bright moonlight, reflected on the wide stream, made a perfect silhouette of each heavily loaded assault boat. With our equipment loosened and ready to jettison quickly, we paddled swiftly, silently downstream and across. Not a shot was fired. We walked several miles past the many empty emplacements along the north bank, to our assembly area, where our last unit arrived after dawn. There we stayed all that day and most of the next, while the engineers went to work, building a bridge across the river that would withstand the weight of truck and tank columns which were now transforming San Benedetto Po into a reservoir of Allied power.

Elements of the 85th Mountain Infantry were the first to strike out from the Po River bridgehead; they quickly seized Villafranca airport and the town itself, only to have to pull in their ears and sit out an artillery barrage as a unit of the 88th Division attacked the town.

Passing through the 85th elements on the 25th, the 3d Battalion continued through the night in rapid pursuit, and approached the outskirts of Verona at 0600 on the 26th. At that hour Verona's several bridges were blown by the fleeing Germans, in an explosion so great that shock waves could be seen to spread in swiftly expanding concentric circles in the cirrus clouds, after which a column of dust and smoke mushroomed into the sky.

As we reached the marshalling yard we came upon a macabre sight. At a main intersection a number of Kraut trucks were strewn about in disorder. One truck, loaded with ammunition and pyrotechnics, was burning furiously with a beautiful display of signal flares and colored smokes. On the road around the truck were bodies; some were badly dismembered, others were charred and motionless, and a few were still moaning and writhing. One German officer, blinded at least by blood, lay in the rubble with his hands over a sucking wound in his chest. Sullen German aid men--at least they wore the red cross-- wouldn't touch him until ordered to do so by Captain Meincke, the Battalion Surgeon, when he came upon the scene and launched into an effective German tirade.

Evidently the luckless Krauts had been trapped in the city when their own engineers demolished the bridge across the Adige River, and had then had the misfortune of being surprised by some TDs from the 88th Division, which had stopped on the outskirts of town.

Farther up the street our vehicles were halted by a blocked underpass, and were forced to detour through the yards, which bombs had turned into a mass of scrambled cars and twisted rails. By this time the foot elements of Company L had entered the city, taken an inventory of the bridges (one teetering bridge was left), and soon the entire Battalion was within the city walls clearing out the few remaining Krauts. Some were disguised as civilians, but armed partisans had their numbers.

Italians, in the streets and squares by the thousands, welcomed us with almost embarrassing enthusiasm. At each momentary stop vehicles would be covered with civilians, laughing, crying, and singing. Flowers covered the streets and colorful flags hung from the buildings; balconies almost sagged with people. One elderly lady, weeping with joy, was singing America to a jeepload of men; she knew no other English. Church bells rang incessantly. Signs were scrawled on the sides of buildings, "Liberte," and "Vive Americani." Everywhere, damage from the explosions could be seen. Windows were broken and buildings along the river had collapsed from the blast. Streets within a half mile of the river were littered with pulverized bridges.

The high point of the day came when the mayor of Verona stepped out on the city hall balcony to proclaim the war was over. This was it, we thought. Everyone went mad, soldiers included. Weapons were fired and people danced in the streets, drinking wine or whatever was available. Celebration among the GIs soon ceased when it was discovered that the mayor was referring only to Verona's war. However, we did not feel too disheartened. Verona was a pleasant city, with plenty of wine and many friendly girls, some of whom were well-dressed and fairly clean in contrast to the farm girls farther south. There were few troops who had not lined up a place to sleep in a private home.

Recall of R. Sanctuary, I, 86th.

After we had settled in one of the houses pro- vided for us in Verona, one of my buddies and I decided that we ought to see some of the city. We walked through the streets until we finally were wandering around the square by the big Colosseum. After looking it over, we were standing by a small restaurant on the edge of the nearly empty square. All of a sudden people started firing weapons all over the place as they ran out of buildings around us. We took what cover there was, assuming that we were going to be involved with some kind of German resistance activity, however it quickly became obvious that everyone was happy and cheering in some sort of celebration. Within moments the whole square appeared to fill with people, all of whom had some sort of compulsive need to hug and kiss the two of us. It seems that we were the only two GIs in the whole square at that time.

We were continually told that "The war is over!" Everyone was certainly ecstatic enough for it to be true. We finally were able to determine that it had just been announced on the radio that Mussollini had been killed, and as far as they were concerned, that was the end of the war.

As things began to quiet down a little, we were taken in tow by a family and escorted to their store residence. When we arrived, they lifted the store-front shutter about waist high, and we all scooted under. To celebrate the occasion they offered thimble sized glasses of a clear, somewhat thick liqueur, followed by large glasses of good Italian red vino.

A short time later another visitor came in and joined the party. He was introduced as the mayor of the city, and after telling us how thankful the city was to have us there, we continued our celebration with more vino.

Shortly after that, a man obviously of the church, came in and was introduced as the bishop of the city. After more thanks and welcomes from him, we continued our celebrating.

It was about then that we decided that we couldn't stand many more visitors and the resulting glasses of vino, so we thanked them for their fine hospitality and weaved our way out and proceeded back to the house to which we were assigned.

On our arrival we were informed that we had about ten minutes to get our gear packed. We were being relieved there and were moving out. So goes the saga of our trip through Italy.

Recall by E. Beard, I, 86th.

That evening in Verona, the weapons platoon was assigned space in an office building to spend the night, prior to moving north in pursuit of the Germans. I made myself as comfortable as possible and settled down for some much needed sleep on a desk top. However it was short-lived. We were ordered out to the street and into formation to await arrival of trucks to transport us north.

After an hour or so, and no trucks, we were permitted to get some more rest. We would be called when the trucks arrived.

I was soon fast asleep again and awoke about 7 AM - al alone! The room was empty of all troops, and so was the building.

I made my way to the street and soon encountered an MP. I explained my predicament and found him sympathetic, but he had no idea when the outfit pulled out, or where they had gone! He did give me directions to a little restaurant that the military government had estab- lished. There I enjoyed a sumptuous breakfast of ham and eggs (real eggs) before making my way north.

I had no idea of where to go, and took a ride on the first truck that would stop for me. It was hauling supplies and the colored driver was very nervous. Shelling could be heard in the distance and he said that he had never been as close to the front.

I don't recall now, how I actually found the outfit, but when I did, I was brought before the CO for being AWOL. He said that he would let me off if I would tell where the other three guys were! Guess they figured a group of us had deserted. Somehow, I convinced him that I knew nothing of the others and that my trip had been solo! No charges were filed.

Recall By R. Comer, I, 86th.

26th April, at a very early hour (dawn), I Company was the first into the City of Verona. The scout on company point was the first American there. The Company Commander and his radio operator, me, were tied for second. We went through the outskirts of town without much notice because of the early hour, but soon the streets were lined with many happy flower throwing civilians.

I remember being assigned roadblock duty near a brown colored church next to the river where there had once been a bridge. Our mission was to observe and report any enemy activity across the river. During the afternoon, we were visited by several "actresses" from the local burlesque theater. We were given tickets to the show that night and an invitation to the party that was to follow.

About suppertime we were relieved of our roadblock assignment. We went to supper, we got cleaned up, and were about to leave for the theater when we got word that we were moving out. This, on top of the rumor that the war was over, was hard to believe, but move out we did, for Lake Garda.

In the late afternoon the billet bonanza abated. We heard that the 88th Division, in II Corps, was supposed to have taken Verona, but because of a mix-up in the boundaries on the overlays in Corps Headquarters, we were

given the job. However, the error was now found and could be corrected. They were sorry. We were moved out and the 88th was moved in. Along with the billets--and the spoils, we can assume, of war--they took credit for the liberation of the city. At 1800 we loaded our packs, left the city in our vehicles, and arrived in a bivouac area in the fields just out of Bussolengo, a few miles from Verona, where at midnight we finally settled down under an open sky. It was raining.

Chapter 9

PURSUIT IN THE ALPS

Our first view of the Lake of Garda and the Alps around it came on the cold stormy dawn of April 28, when the Battalion first touched its 100-mile shoreline. Through a drenching, all-night rain the 87th and 85th Mountain Infantries had taken turns pursuing the Wehrmacht up the east shore from the Poe Valley, and just before dawn the 86th passed through the forward elements of the 85th at a small group of resort-like villas known as Navene. Our eight-hour shift in the lead was coming up. At least it was supposed to be eight hours.

At Navene we found that the shoreline of Italy's largest lake was beginning to get rugged; gray granite cliffs and steep brushy slopes dropped sharply to the black, very deep, rough water, and rose more than seven thousand feet to the snow-covered bordering peeks. Along the east shore it became increasingly difficult for a highway to cling to the mountainside. About a mile north of the town was the first of a series of seven tunnels which led through the rocky buttresses to Torbole and Riva, the larger towns at the head of the lake. The first of these tunnels was now demolished, at least at its entrance, for the Germans had effectively halted the progress of the 85th by blasting the tunnel, as well as some minor bridges that led toward it.

Preparatory to following the 86th's 2nd Battalion, the 3rd Battalion moved off the road and dispersed. Artillery and tanks moved up into position to fire on the enemy across the lake. The battalion CP was set up, for the moment, in a villa that had, until a day or two before, housed German antiaircraft officers. It still housed--but not for long--a large hero-worshippers' portrait of Hitler. From the beach around the villa point we could have enjoyed our first close-up of the Alps, stormy though it was; but German shells began to whoosh over the point, to kick up fountains of water just beyond its far side. When our counterbattery fire put an end to this, we could still not settle down to enjoy either the villa or the scene.

The situation was not a happy one. We were committed to attack along Garda's east shore, where the ruggedness of the terrain multiplied the strength of each defending enemy soldier by ten. The highway, our main avenue of approach, was entirely too much an avenue for enemy defensive fires and demolitions. Word came down to the Battalion that higher headquarters were considering a flanking action to the right of the highway. A trail led from Malcesine almost to the summit of the high escarp- ment east of the lake, then worked north, up and down, along the slopes of the ridge to a point above Torbole, at the head of the lake.

Wasn't this situation just what we were asking foe? Hadn't we, as mountain troops, been trained and equipped for just such terrain? Shouldn't we be able to effect complete surprise by attacking along a route that the enemy -especially a disorganized enemy, few in number-- would have to assume could defend itself? There were some who would answer yes to all those questions. But there were more who would answer no. Ironically, I remembered the training years that had gone before. At Camp Hale, and in West Virginia, in orientation lectures in which we tried to point out to mountain-troop and flatland GIs why we were giving them mountain training, one of the standard examples had been this; as the fighting in Italy moves northward, men are going to be needed for invasion routes across the Alps, or at least for flank protection when the Allied armies do a column right or column left to by-pass the Alps. Some big gear in Wash- ington will thumb through the files and say,"Ah ha! The 10th (or the 28th, the 45th, 35th, 77th, or 95th) Division has been at Camp Hale (or West Virginia). They know all about mountain fighting. We'll use them." We could all laugh easily at that purported humor. We realized, first, how little we knew about mountains and how sadly unprepared we would be, after a hardly more than faltering mountain-training in lesser American mountains, for the ever so much more rugged Alps, with ever so much more thoroughly trained German mountain troops fighting in them. And in the second place, we were sure that the big gears knew of our shortcomings, and that such a horrible predicament could never happen to us.

So here we were, mountain troops, fighting in the Alps. But where was our mountain equipment? Presum- ably, it was back in Naples. Higher echelons weren't interested in mountain equipment, anyway. The equipment and clothing with us was no different from the ordinary flatland GI's, right down to the last shred of underwear--except that even most of the flatland apparel had been left behind when we jumped off, and we hadn't had so much as a change of underwear for about a month and a half. Ropes, mountain boots, sleeping bags? Why ask about those? We hadn't yet captured enough German blankets to give more than one man in ten a blanket to his name. The 10th Mountain was less well equipped for mountains than were the flatland men who had suffered so many needless casualties from weather and terrain on Attu. Yes, the Alpine weather and snows above Lake Garda could be fully as severe.

How about the time element? Hastily calculating from my own mountain experience, I estimated that in

good weather, with no snow on the trail, one man, who knew a little about mountains and was properly dressed for them but otherwise climbing free of load, could have covered the high route to Torbole in about 17 hours. How would a battalion fare? The weather was not at all good; a unknown amount of snow covered the upper slopes. We may have had many men who knew a little about mountains when we hit Italy, but the Division's 4,000 casualties had included too many of the original mountain men. We utterly lacked proper clothing and equipment. A battalion column would be four miles long, hard to control, and flank protection for the column would be all but forbidden by the steepness of the slopes on either side of the trail. Without mules, we could hardly hope to secure such close artillery support as might be necessary. And finally, far from being free of loads, the men would have to carry weapons and ammunition. That would be bad enough for riflemen. Heavy weapons men would have tougher sledding still.

The road and the right flank were out. The left-flank route remained--the choppy waters of Garda, breaking against the lakeshore cliffs beneath the highway, fully exposed to all artillery fire the enemy could bring to bear. It must have been a difficult decision to make; it was certainly an unprecedented decision: the 10th Mountain Division would conduct an amphibious operation in the Alps!

Just about at this time, an ironical, terrible smirk crept over the face of fate with a capital F. A few hundred miles south of us, the highest echelons, seated in the comfortable splendor of the royal summer palace at Caserta, had fixed their names to the papers terminating German resistance in Italy and southern Austria. But at Lake Garda neither we, nor the Germans, knew it. The speed of our advance had been just about as hard on our own communications as it had been on theirs.

Perhaps more through fortune than foresight, a covey, or flight, of "ducks" attached to the Division at the time of the Po crossing, was still with us, having been used to augment six-by-sixes in the motor march to Lake Garda; the ducks would have enough freeboard for the choppy lake water. So Malcesine became a POE for the men of the 2nd Battalion. They boarded the ducks, which thereupon headed up the lake to by-pass the demolished tunnels, staying close to the shore for what protection it might afford. No sooner had the flight of ducks become a fleet that the Germans replied with their only defense -antiaircraft artillery. Garda had been a hot spot for Allied airmen who flew bombing runs across the Alps, and the 88s which had harassed them were now depressed to blast the ducks out of the water. They cut loose from their positions in Riva and Torbole, with time fire that burst in angry black puffs of flak over the ducks, and with point=detonation shells which shot geysers high in the air above the ducks and their burden of mountaineers. Some shells blasted the cliffs above the fleet, and falling rocks were added to the flying fragments. The ducks moved farther offshore. The firing gained in intensity.

To those of us back at Malcesine who watched the scene, swearing at the Krauts, sweating out the 2nd Battalion men as the moved steadily on through falling rock, flak, and geysers, straining to pick out enemy gun positions as counterbattery targets, it seemed as if the 10th Mountain's first amphibious attack could only be annihi- lated. Men couldn't live out there. Then the word came back that there had been no casualties - and that it was our turn. Not daring to expect such amazing luck, we took off, some 25 men to each bobbing target. Our first ducks were untouched, but later loads were less fortunate.

By-passing the first two tunnels, as had the 2nd Battalion, we landed on a tiny beach in a cove, scrambled up the steep slope to the highway, and moved into the shelter of the third tunnel, which was free of demolitions. Meanwhile, the 2nd Battalion had moved up the road nearly a mile and had set up a defensive position for the night. Under cover of darkness we passed through their position and set up our own well beyond it. Here the slope to the east was less severe, and although traversing it would not be easy, we welcomed the opportunity to deploy the battalion. Companies I and K would make the traverse; L Company would continue along the highway. Whatever remnant of the night had been left for sleep was made as uncomfortable as possible by the continuing light drizzle. But a dark, cloudy, drizzly night on a steep, slippery, and rocky mountainside was luxury compared to what was coming up.

Now the weather cleared. Observation was excellent altogether too much of an advantage to the defending forces. The delay along the road which had been brought about by expert German demolition work gave the enemy a chance to organize his defenses. But time had worked against us. Lack of sleep was beginning to show. Because of the rain, a late start, and the irregular motion of the truck, the men had not slept too well during the move from Bussolengo, in the Po Valley. Most of the following night they had been moving toward the forward defensive position, digging in to improve that position, and getting ready to move out for the dawn attack. In fact, none of the men had enjoyed a full night's sleep since the Po River was crossed, and that had been the only good night since the final push began in the Apennines, fifteen long, demanding days from this spot on Garda's shore. Nor had there been time to eat properly. The men were worn. But the attack continued. L Company men moved ahead through another tunnel, short and free of demolitions. But they couldn't get out of it. The north end was covered by maching-gun fire from an embrasure carved out of the solid granite just to one side of the entrance to the next tunnel. M Company men moved up a .50 caliber machine gun to seal off the embrasure with far more deadly fire than it could return. Under this cover,

riflemen spurted forward, tossed grenades through the doorway in the wall of the next tunnel which connected with the embrasure room. Two of its occupants staggered out into the tunnel to die; another six lay where they were. The tunnel was ours, and the advance elements of L Company moved quickly through the black interior, to stumble over a pile of debris in the far end.

This was the tunnel of the Dead, and Death had not left it. The first American troops to reach the far end had already seen too much horror to absorb any of the horror that met them there. Possibly it pleased them at the time. The debris was not all inorganic; it was a shambles. Apparently a rear-guard crew of about twenty Germans - it was not now possible to discern exactly how many - had been hand-moving a 20mm antiaircraft gun to a new defensive position to their rear, where they could keep it depressed and continue to fire on infantry, not aircraft. The gun carrier was loaded with ammunition. Somehow they ran afoul of their own demolitions, likewise intended for us, and they were hoist by their own World-War II petard. Their war ended quickly, if not prettily. The explosion set fire to their own ammunition and to them. Pieces of men were scattered as far as fifty feet out of the tunnel. Part of the massive rock roof of the tunnel collapsed and fell to the floor, but there was too little rock to complete the burial or to extinguish the smoldering.

The L Company men advanced over the debris, on toward the seventh--and last--tunnel, which curved, its far end being lined up directly on Torbole. The Germans did not intend to have L Company get out of this one, either, and fired machine-gun and pom-pom (20mm antiaircraft bursting shells) fire into their end of it. Too many ricochets reached for our end, and L Company stopped.

The heavy weapons company men moved to the debris-filled mouth of tunnel no. 6 to plan what relief they could for L Company. Major Bill Drake, now our Battalion Commander (Lt. Col. Hay was Regimental Executive Officer at this point), was there. With him was Major John Seamans, now commanding the 2nd Battalion, who was making a reconnaissance preparatory to relieving the 3rd. To complete the battalion-staff representation, the tunnel- end party included Lt. Jim Church of M Company, Captain Barrett Ely, H Company, Lt. Ernie Field, 3rd Battalion S-3, and Lt. Doug Butterwick, the Battalion's antitank officer. Then there was the artillery forward observer, and Regular Army T/Sgt. Davis, one of the best machine-gun men in the business, plus about half of M Company. Some of the men were in the tunnel. Others were spread out in front. Suddenly a few 88 air-bursts rent the air overhead and drove the men into the tunnel for protection.

The Battalion CP where I was at the moment, was quite comfortably situated behind tunnel no. 5 at the only point near by from which radio contact could be had with the traversing companies and L Company. It was sunny, shrubs and annuals around us were showing their springtime greenery, and a few men went down to the lake to fill their canteens with mountain water. An ominous message came back from the Battalion Commander's radio operator.

"Send up all the litter teams you can get!"

Captain Ev Bailey, now the Battalion Executive Officer, relayed the message to the Aid Station, farther back down the road.

Soldiers don't pale easily, but Lt. Butterwick, who came running back to our CP about then, was pale. A piece of shell fragment an inch across had ripped into, but had not entered, the top of his steel helmet, and was still embedded there, although he didn't know it.

"Major Drake's been hit," he said to Bailey, "and he wants you to take over. They got a direct hit inside the tunnel."

The details came later. The airbursts had driven everyone into the tunnel. Then a one-in-a-thousand shot hit the jackpot, and burst some fifty feet inside the tunnel. Those who were not hit with the shell fragments or rock splinters were at least temporarily stunned or deafened. Some thought that another demolition charge had gone off inside the tunnel. Others thought that an airburst had detonated in midair between the tunnel walls. Before the smoke and dust cleared there was the terrible sound of many moans. Men in agony screamed, "Medic! Medic!"-- words which were often last words. It was a long time before the Medics and litter teams arrived to salvage the living. The final toll was seven dead, fortyfour wounded. For one shell.

It was imperative to get some of the injured men back to complete medical aid as soon as possible. With the help from the walking wounded, the litter teams moved them to comparative safety behind a buttress some distance back along the road. But engineers had not yet been able to repair the demolished road to Malcesine, and the remaining route of evacuation had to be by water. As Pfc. Ross wrote:

The Germans had the water beyond the protecting ridge registered in and it was only with great difficulty that Ducks could move in and out with ammo and supplies. Consequently, fast assault boats, powered with outboard motors, were called up. They were just large enough to hold two litters and the one-man crew, and were manned by an engineer outfit that did a superb job in keeping the old motors going as the small craft bounced from wave to wave. Several of them stalled, but the engineers always managed to get them started again before enemy artillery could zero in.

Devastating though the shell in the tunnel had been, the attack went on. By that night Companies I and K relieved the pressure on the far end of the last tunnel, and L Company fought its way into town. The Battalion CP was set up among the German corpses in tunnel no. 6, and experienced great difficulty in maintaining communica- tions. Only radio was available, and although well outside the

tunnel, it was too well shielded by cliffs. Artillery men hand-moved their pack 75s into the tunnel, but had no targets to fire on. The will to attack seemed to be disinte- grating into a stupor. In the rear echelons of the Battalion the third sleepless night was beginning to tell. However, adrenaline, distilled in fear, was meanwhile keeping the forward elements well awake.

Excerpts from some of the front-line riflemen's accounts show that a staggering sort of progress survived the day's pandemonium. S/Sgt. Dick Emerson, 3rd platoon guide for Company I, was a cool observer and participant in what turned out to be Company I's only fiasco:

Early in the morning the men were wakened, and the advance was continued (without time for eating). The day was off to a bad start. We moved in a long traverse of the mountain wall above the lake, on trail part of the time, but mostly in the tall thick brush. The pace was moderate, but the going was rough, what with the heavy loads of ammo and weapons. Finally, around noon, I company, rounding the shoulder of the mountain, looked down on Torbole and called a halt.

Up to this time very few I Company men knew the scheduled plan of attack, including many of the NCOs. I Company was to lead off, with K in reserve. Our position on the hill was excellent for observation and cover. Lt. Elufson, the acting company commander, and the four platoon leaders, with NCOs, observed and chose the likely route. It entered the town from above and behind, through a corridor of olive trees with a rock wall on either side. (Both these rock walls, it was found later, were well fortified.)

Leading down the mountainside diagonally toward the town was a trail. The second platoon led off single file. the third, then the first, and finally the weapons platoons followed. As soon as the second platoon started down, it was fired on by long-range sniper fire. Immedi- ately the platoon leader radioed back, "We're pinned down by sniper fire." Only two shots had been fired. Machine- gun sections were moved up to give covering fire. They opened up, spraying the positions below-- but the company didn't advance. T/Sgt. Staley was given command of the second platoon. Again the covering fire started, and the second and third platoons moved down the slope. Snipers picked at each man as he displaced forward. Generally the shots missed by a good six feet.

Recall by R. Sanctuary, I, 86th.

Maybe it was one of those "two shots," I really don't know at this point, but it was during this descent that the sniper successfully ended my military career. With his bullet through my right heel, I was left alone on the slope at that point with my bazooka. Thanks to the morphine injection I had received, I did manage to sleep fitfully during the night. At some point in the middle of the night, Bill Reyes, my second gunner came climbing back up the trail. Fortunately I recognized the familiar shape of the American helmet against the sky. He reassured me that a litter crew would be back in the morning to pick me up. Then with the badly needed bazooka he went back down the mountain to join the rest of the second platoon. (I have never seen him since.)

All night long there was a light drizzle and I really felt cold. The reason why became apparent with first light. From a point just above me,everything on up the mountain was completely covered with snow.

Morning brought the promised litter team, and what must have been a real tough descent for them, off that mountain. I then joined a number of other wounded in a duck ride down Lake Garda with the Germans firing artillery salutes at us on our final trip out of combat.

By this time the sun was getting low. Radio contact with the second platoon was lost, so Lt. Rivers, of the third, went down with his radio man to regain contact and find out what the trouble was. The radio man was hit on the way. About then the Jerries were seen to drag up a howitzer some 1500 yards away and drop shells directly on the trail, inflicting casualties with each shell. Word was sent for the knee mortar to be brought up as a counter. The weapons platoon lieutenant had no knee mortar, so he sent the three mortar crews down the trail, mortars and all. Several were hit by the sniper because they presented too slow a target with their burdens. The mortars were never used.

An order came to withdraw. The second platoon was already down the mountain and the third almost. The second was in a good covered position and would have suffered coming back up, but could not advance alone. The third was brought back up to help the first as support for K Company, which was now going to by-pass I Company on a more direct route down. The second platoon was left where it was, with Lt. Rivers and a machine-gun section. They were not to move until dawn.

Recall by E. Beard, I, 86th.

My section of machine guns was attached to the 2nd platoon. Our covered position was a cave which had been used during WWI, where we found old rifle ammo left at the time!

When darkness came we lighted candles, but found that there were cracks that let the light out, for we were fired upon from town. Needless to say, the remainder of the night was spent in darkness!

Our water supply gave out, but fortunately there were a few places where water dripped from the side of the cave. By placing a cup in the right place, it would fill, drop by drop, in a period of hours!

Back on top again, Lt. Walucz took over the third platoon, and I Company moved down behind K. Through-

out the day I Company had plenty of spirit, but severely lacked leadership.

Before dawn this Battalion of mountain troops was to have run the gamut of infantry fighting. Already they had patrolled in camouflage whites and on skis in the Apennine snows, had fought their way down out of the Apennines while being supplied by mule, had walked through Po Valley farmlands, been cheered by liberated Italians, had ridden in motorized task force columns, had been strafed, had crossed a river in assault boats, captured a city, in the Alps had gone amphibious, and now had about accomplished a flanking action on a steep mountain slope. But they had not yet tangled with tanks. S/Sgt. Faulkner, who was with the company now about to lead describes the renewed attack: Finally the word came back that K Company was to go down the mountainside to take Torbole. Meanwhile, the good old air corps was giving Jerry a hard time by dropping bombs and strafing, which enabled us to go down the slope undetected and without taking any casual- ties. We then had to cross a large, barren, rock-studded plateau in order to enter the outskirts of town. Three snipers spotted us, and they, plus two men with burp guns, pinned us down. By rushing from rock to rock, we made it to a grove of trees, and there organized our next plan of attack.

S/Sgt. Holbrook of the first squad in the third platoon nearly jumped into a foxhole with a Jerry, but he spotted him in time. It was from this Jerry that we got our information about what was in Torbole. He told us that there were three tanks in town and about eighty men from different outfits. We sent him back to the rear and started down the rest of the way into town.

By this time it was dark. We had lost contact with the second platoon and most of the weapons platoon. We cleared out the first house we came to, which was used as a Company CP and aid station. From this house the first platoon started into town and the third followed. We spotted eight men coming down the road from the tunnel thinking it might be L Company. Too late we discovered they were Jerries, and opened fire, which they returned. Again the 20mm fire from the ridge we were to take opened up on us again. Jerry knew that we had gotten into town then and really let loose with all he had. A 20mm gun was holding the first platoon up in the village square, so Sgt. Smith, of our weapons platoon, set up a machine gun and had his men fire it at the 20mm gun by reaching around the corner and flipping the trigger, spraying lead in the general direction of the 20mm. This enabled the bazooka team to get close enough to knock it out.

With that gun our, we split up the town, with the first taking the right half, the third the left. We then searched the buildings in the dark, mostly by pawing around with our hands in all the houses. About halfway through town the first platoon came across an enemy squad and got into a small-arms fire fight.

Part of the town was burning, so it enabled us to watch the streets more easily. All at once we heard a clatter of tanks and several loud reports. Everyone began to head for the hospital, a large building down by the lake's shore; but the two lieutenants got together and decided we could stop a counterattack more easily in the village square. So everyone took off like a herd of turtles for the village square.

L Company, elements of which had now reached town, helped us set up a defense from the water's edge to the far side of the square. M Company finally showed up with the machine guns, and everything got under control. Except for one thing--we had very little ammo left and no artillery support. We were all out of antitank grenades and bazooka rounds, and even had to give some of the riflemen's ammo to the machine gunners to load into belts.

The Jerry tanks, Mark IVs, rambled up and fired at different buildings, and their foot troops spread out and protected the tanks, which would fire for a while and then move forward some more. The village square was pretty well protected by buildings in front of it, so the tanks had a hard time getting direct hits. But when they did, they really scored because of our crowded condition in the different houses. We had two men at each window in each house, and everyone was on his toes and alert.

The counterattack started at about ten at night and lasted until 4:30 next morning. It was pretty nerve- wracking in those buildings, where you never knew when one of those tanks would roll around a corner and open up on the building you were in. (Oh. While we were searching the town, a Jerry plane came over and bombed the mountainside we had come along after dark. I heard that the 1st Battalion really caught hell from those bombs. They were on their way to Nago.)

The 1st Battalion did have trouble, but finally took Nago. Meanwhile, however, neither K Company, nor the 3rd Battalion were through yet. An other man from K Company [whose identity is unknown to all men who worked on the history who have so far been asked.-Ed.], overlapping Faulkner's account slightly, tells the rest of the story:

Just as Sgt. Belyea came up to see about setting up his other two machine guns and began to give his orders, two tanks, up the road about 75 years, began to fire on the buildings we were in. Until now everyone had been merely standing around; now they raced upstairs and took up firing positions in the windows. The two tanks came steadily down the road, firing as they came. Of course, they didn't know which buildings we were in; nevertheless, it was very disconcerting to sit there waiting for them with nothing but bazookas for defense. Our bazooka man, Pfc. Martin, was placed in an alleyway between two houses. When the first tank nosed by the alley, he put one round through its weaker side armor, instantly stopping it. Then a BAR man went to work on the men riding on, and walking behind, the tank.

After that things went from bad to worse. We were beginning to be surrounded, and unfortunately we had only one bazooka round left. To top it all off, we found that we couldn't make contact with the first squad in the next building. Then the order came to withdraw by way of the hospital. That was all right with us. We couldn't find some of the guys, and some had taken off; we didn't know who had done what, and it would have made too much noise to yell for them; so after one quick look through our buildings, we all took off. Back at the center of town we let L Company take over for awhile.

Company L had left the last tunnel at 2200, when the town was reported to be clear, and reached town about midnight, just as K Company was pulling back. Most of the company took positions in houses while Canfield, with a rifle grenade, and Blair, with a BAR, attempted to stop the second of the tanks. It withdrew sounding as if a track had been damaged, but nevertheless kept firing at us. The enemy apparently did not have enough men to clear houses in the dark, although their numbers were estimated to be as high as 150. They were not combat troops, but men from air and service forces. Just before dawn the Germans withdrew to the north, taking two riflemen and one medic from K Company as prisoners.

Recall by R. Comer, I, 86th.

After our advance along the mountains above Lake Garda, I Company was positioned among the rocks and boulders above Torbole. We had not moved much since early afternoon. Now, about sundown, there seemed to be a lot of confusion. As I remember, at this time our officers consisted of Air Corps draftees that had no mountain training, and little infantry knowledge or will to fight. Our NCO's were young and in the unenviable position of being in charge of those with whom they had been fighting, side by side, just a short time before. As a result of all this, many decisions were made by committee; many directions were given with good intentions, but without authority or consistency. The whole operation lacked decisiveness at this point.

Dick Keller, Don Dallas, Jesse Barnes, Charles Young, myself and several others with now forgotten names, were organized into a patrol whose mission was to go down the mountain to the left, toward Lake Garda, and make contact with M Company. This was a break for me as I was thus relieved of the SCR-300 radio for the first time since leaving Verona, some twenty-four hours earlier.

While Dallas and I waited, crouched behind a sea wall that separated the beach from the road, a man in a yellow trench coat appeared across the road from our position as if from nowhere. We ordered him to put his hands up. Was he ever glad to find American soldiers? He asked us, in perfect English, to follow him into the mountain and officially liberate their slave-labor camp.

Inside the cave, dug into the mountain, we found a partially assembled airplane, about fifty German soldiers, and an equal number of civilians, both men and women. The German weapons were stacked on the floor. The German commander told us he was surrendering, as the war was over, but that they did not want to leave the cave at night with all the shooting still going on.

The civilians were celebrating, and Dallas and I had some of their wine to drink. A mistake! I sat down, relaxed, and quickly went to sleep. I don't know what Dallas did, but when I woke up it was morning, and I was the only one there.

When I left the cave, I came upon some German soldiers looking for someone to whom they could surrender. So I marched them up the road to Torbole and turned them over to the MP's.

At Company I headquarters, the Company Commander was pleased with the results of my morning capture, but when he found out that I had partied the night away while the company was in a firefight, he assigned me to more patrol duty. This patrol had the mission to scout the town of Riva and contact the 2nd Battalion - mission accomplished.

The next day company headquarters moved into an old castle on the shore of Lake Garda in Torbole. The Germans were storing sweaters and blankets by the hundreds in this castle. The turtle neck sweater, that I liberated there, was used for many years after the war.

I had the SCR-300 set up on a huge pile of blankets, with the antenna extending out a gun port in the wall of the castle when the word came that the war was over.

Some of the guys celebrated by going fishing. They rescued some boats from along the shore and captured the fish by dropping hand grenades into the water and stunning them with the concussion. It didn't last too long though as the boat bottoms were soon leaking badly from the grenade shrapnel and the same concussion that got the fish. Luckily, no one was hurt.

After daylight the companies collected their men, some of whom had hidden in houses the Germans thought they had cleared. They moved through town again to make sure the Krauts had really gone.

Torbole had been a very pretty place; the kind you see pictured on Italian tourist posters, a clear blue lake, a small clean town on the shore, steep mountains, and a ruined castle on a promontory above the town. Torbole now, however, had been the scene of fighting for a day. Formal gardens had shell craters in them, trees were shattered, and shops had been blown open and the mer- chandise scattered in the street. Although the search disclosed no live Germans, it did turn up a surprising number of souvenirs.

Regimental headquarters moved up to town that morning, and supplies and artillery began coming up on

ducks and by sailboat. Once again shells fell in the town as the Germans attempted to hit the vehicles and vessels moving in and out of the small Torbole harbor. Most of the shells landed harmlessly in the water, but occasionally one would land on the road along the shore. One of these killed Regimental Sergeant Major Evans and Colonel Darby, famous as a leader of the Rangers, who had just been transferred to the 10th Mountain Division as assistant commandant.

About noon a small patrol from I Company moved out to inspect the bridge over the Sarca River, on the road to Riva. The bridge had been destroyed, but a footbridge was still intact a short distance upstream. The patrol proceeded toward Riva, past well-made and well- concealed positions in the base of the ridge separating Riva from Torbole. A fairly large force of Germans was pulling out of Riva as the patrol moved in, and they began to come back into town when they realized that our patrol consisted of only about fifteen men. The 2nd Battalion arrive in time to change their minds. The only shots fired were between the Partisans and the departing enemy.

By that evening the 3rd Battalion, following the 2nd, had settled into and around a 300-year-old villa just vacated by German officers. The quarters were comfort- able, and to add to the luxury, an issue of clean clothing was begun there. L Company, in response to a dramatic Partisan note from the town of Arco, which ended "We cannot hold out much longer", moved north five miles on the morning of the 2nd and took the town without incident. The issuing of clothing, meanwhile, continued and sleeping bags were included. There were higher, colder mountains to the north, and preliminary plans were being discussed for a further attack along the high Alpine ridges leading toward the Germans last-ditch "Redoubt".With one eye on these higher mountains and their fortunately unoccupied, all-but-impregnable prepared emplacements on the slopes we had already passed, we strolled around the streets of Riva to see what we could, while we might, of one of Italy's most beautiful resort cities.

Riva and Torbole, to judge from the red crosses on almost all buildings, had been used largely as a hospital area. In addition, however, we found underground facto- ries, the most extensive of them being devoted to the manufacture of airplane parts. On the shore of the lake an astounding discovery was made. We had already seen ducks, assault boats, and sailboats on the lake. There had been a steam-driven ship there as early as 1828, and a boat propelled by the harnessed power of a horse going around the deck in circles has antedated the steamer. Consequently we should not have been surprised--but were-- to find in a lake shore shed an almost completed submarine. It was very small, but it would seem to indicate that the Lake of Garda was to have been the last home of the Italian navy. Clearly the 10th Mountain Division could achieve nothing finer. It had captured the navy intact!

Odd information had been filtering down from higher headquarters for some time. Back in the Apennines we had been told on two separate occasions that at a certain time on a certain evening a German plane would fly over the lines and was not to be fired on. On another occasion we were to be on the lookout for a German who would come to our lines and give a certain name. He was to be sped to the rear. Then, on April 30th, we had heard that there was to be no further air support in the theater. Two days later we had been ordered not to fire on Ger- mans who looked as if they didn't want to fight. Arco had fallen without a shot being fired.

At about 1700, on May 2, in the Battalion CP at San Alessandro, the phone rang. They wanted "Blue 6", the Battalion Commander, and Captain Everett Bailey answered. He listened intently, as usual.

"What?" he asked, in an excited, rather unmilitary manner. And the message was repeated to him. He smiled and grabbed my arm.

"Dave, the war is over in Italy!"

Four days too late.

CHAPTER 10

OCCUPATION

Jubilantly we marched back across the foot bridge to Torbole, where trucks were waiting for us. The 3d Battalion was to join a task force that was moving to the junction of the Swiss, Italian, and Austrian borders to occupy and block Passo di Resia the first principal pass west of the Brenner. The older members of the Battalion eagerly envisaged skiing and climbing in the Alps, and there were still enough of them to imbue the replacements in the outfit with the delights of the prospect. We were to be the first Allied troops through this part of Italy. No one was sure, however, that all the Germans actually knew that the war was over.

Heavily armored Task Force Thompson Rolled out of Torbole about mid-morning of May 3d, and headed eastward toward Rovereto on the Brenner Highway (No. 12). Soon after climbing the heights above the lake, the column was halted by a road block where the retreating enemy had blown a hillside down across the road. Engineers made a rough detour with bulldozers and there was no serious delay. Soon we began to encounter slave laborers, mostly men, but a few rugged-looking women, heading south to return to their homes. They were dressed in everything from old German uniforms to the striped jackets and pants of concentration-camp uniforms. They were carrying all their belongings, mostly on their backs, but some on carts or bicycles. Their one thought was to get south with as much as they could carry. Tired though their faces were, there was a radiant happiness in them.

In Rovereto the first German troops were met;

at first they were in scattered groups along the roadsides, watch- ing us pass, but soon our column was threading through platoons and companies of them. They still carried their individual arms and their weapons and artillery was still in good working order, ready for instant use. Although the Italians in Rovereto had formed a cheering throng in the streets as we passed through, the armed Germans very definitely showed no signs of welcome. We recalled the talk General Hays had made to the Regiment the previous morning in Riva's public square. "The entire 10th Mountain Division crossed the Po Valley with enemy to the front, unprotected flanks to the right and to the left, and no protection to the rear. . . . Never in its days of combat did it fail to take an objective, or lose an objective once it was taken. Never was so much as a single platoon surrounded and lost."

But more than one man could now ask the question, "Do we know what we're doing? Are we now to have an entire battalion surrounded and put away?" Having had orders to take nothing from the Germans, we could only--and uneasily--leave behind their perfectly functioning weapons, perhaps loaded, for the troops who were to follow us to collect as souvenirs.

The Germans had their own military police, who helped to keep the roads clear and direct our traffic. This certainly didn't seem right. We were accustomed to Germans who were either well-trained and well concealed fighting men, or who were dejected and disheveled PWs. But to have them fully armed, and directing our task force traffic!

There were many Czechoslovakian soldiers along the road, with neat green uniforms setting them off from the Germans, with smiles of greeting and snappy salutes setting them off even further. We were more interested in the roadside characters than in the terrain until we had traveled some distance up the U-shaped valley toward Bolzano. At one place where the valley narrowed, an area nearly a mile square had been churned by bombs until the valley was nearly impassable. The Germans had appar- ently repaired the railroad many times and attempted to deceive the bombers with decoy tracks, camouflaging the real ones. It would then appear that this had so irritated the air corps that the bombardiers had decided to abolish the valley.

Just outside Bolzano, when the column was halted, a group of German officers met the head of the convoy. They wanted our task force to stop in the city for the night, and had quarters prepared for us. The officers seemed sincere in their intentions, but our mission was to reach Resia as fast as possible, so the convoy moved on. For all we knew, the Germans in Bolzano had orders to delay us so that we would not interrupt troop movements to the north.

Darkness came as we rolled on toward Merano. Heretofore, tactical situations had of course required blackout driving. But it now seemed to be a propitious time to see what a highway looked like under automobile headlights again. Civilian-like lights for night driving would be a welcome change and speed up the column movement. The S-2 radioed ahead to Lt. Col. Hay, at the head of the column, to see if lights could be permitted. There was no objection, so a lighted column passed through Merano about midnight. Making due note of the most attractive women yet seen in Italy, who waved from the windows, we continued up the Adige Valley toward Malles and Passo di Resia. The night was moonless and little of the Alpine surroundings could be seen, but we realized that we were climbing, for the air grew steadily colder. Men who were not too cramped or cold tried to sleep.

By dawn we had wound up the final grade toward the pass, through new snow which lay on the open meadows along the road. The column had halted near Curon and a jeep was sent ahead to Resia to make contact with the German's area commander and make plans for billeting our task force. The jeep came back with an engaging story. The surrender of the forces in Italy, the German commander had believed, did not apply to the outfit across the border, which was still resisting the advance of the American Seventh Army. When they heard that our task force was coming up the valley from Merano, they turned part of their artillery around and registered on the road to prevent our attacking their rear. They had their hands on the lanyards. When our column came into range with lights ablaze, strung out for eight miles along the road, the Germans assumed that we had a very strong force and that something must have happened that they didn't know about; otherwise we would not have dared to use lights. It took some fast talking to convince them that we were entitled to pass. Finally, however, they took their hands off the lanyards, we advanced to the border, and Jerries and Yanks peacefully patrolled the line--with Yanks in the better billets.

Passo di Resia is at the head of a small glaciated valley covered with meadow in which a chain of three lakes is nestled. The sides of the pass are forested and slope steeply up to the broad snowfields and glaciers of the peaks. The valley floor and lower slopes are cultivated, and the farm and village houses are Tyrolian--lower stories of stone, upper stories of unpainted boards, little balconies with ornate railings, window boxes full of colorful geraniums.

Many displaced persons in the area had been working on the railroad and electric bus line. Large newly implaced poles lined the road, but as yet no wire had been strung on them. Near the top of the pass work had been done to what appeared to be a narrow gauge railroad. It was later learned that the Germans planned to divert much of the Brenner Pass traffic to Passo di Resia, and to do so had to provide some means of transportation other than gasoline-burning trucks. The two high Nazi officials in the Resia area could not decide which was the better plan, so each went to work on his own pet project.

The area around Resia promised to be excellent for

skiing and climbing, although little excitement was available in town. Hopes for recreation and relaxation were put to an end when, two days after we reached the pass, an order came from Division for units not in tactical situations to have four hours of classes, physical training, and orientation each day. The order was interpreted as applying to us and an eight-hour, not a four-hour, training program was drawn up for each day. Complaints were loud and long and the program was relaxed somewhat. Climb- ing and ski equipment was gathered from near-by German warehouses, and a climbing school started. We now had time to wander about, inspect the extensive fortifications the Italians had built along the border in the early thirties and study Tyrolean girls.

The 87th occupied the valley immediately below us, toward Mareno. We multiplied their problems by passing along to them all the surplus surrendered person- nel we could move from our own area. But they enjoyed a decided compensating advantage. Their territory embraced the resort area under the Ortler, centering in Trafoi. Their climbing and skiing schools moved into some of the finest resort hotels in this part of Italy. They were surrounded with German mountain equipment, and even the lightest fingered among us could hardly pry it loose.

Big things were meanwhile happening at the pass. Machinations of surrender were under way.

War has always had its tragic absurdities. It became humorously absurd when these machinations were exposed. They brought great confusion to the task force and battalion command posts--both in the same building: German brass butting in here and there, their generals meeting with ours, the confused ethics of those who met, wondering whether they should be as courteous as they would be to any guests, or treat the vanquished as a hated enemy, or what? Should I offer him a cigarette? Or should I spit on his? Courtesy seems to have won out on both sides. The non-fraternization order was given out, but a GI was still a human being, mad at nobody any longer than it was tactically necessary. So the Germans were showing our men how to disassemble their souvenir Lugers, the care and cleaning of the German machine guns, and our upper brass were sharing cigarettes.

By VE-Day we had settled down to the pleasant task of guarding the border, content to let the marines finish off the Japanese. The best mission fell to a platoon of I Company, which occupied quarters near Roia which had been used by a skiing German border patrol, and took over not only the quarters, but the skis as well, plus the patrol route that included part of the Swiss border and some fine open slopes above timberline for recreational skiing.

Border patrolling down at the pass was more prosaic, but still new enough to prevent our being bored. We would be happy to settle down where we were. After all, we were the logical outfit to occupy the Alps, as we could handle any trouble that might arise. We thereupon left the Alps on May 13, heading back the 150 miles toward Riva. We were relieved by the 88th Division, which had so graciously relieved us of our billets in Verona, and rumor* had it that the 10th Mountain Division was being assembled in preparation for redeployment in the Pacific.

* Any reader who was not in the Army has by now heard enough of the word rumor, and is totally incapable of understanding the importance to the normal soldier of the free flow of rumors. They were the life blood and chief source of excitement to a soldier whenever he was not in actual combat. Men didn't read the army bulletin board merely because they were instructed to do so. They were only checking up to see what rumors were being con- firmed today. Who can say how many conversations were started, in lowered voice, with "I've got a hot one" or Did you hear the latest?"

Some malicious characters weren't content with the normal bountiful supply. They made up their own. Others guessed, but not out of malice. A few had third- or fourth-hand recourse to a man who knew someone at Division Headquarters. If a rumor was suspect, it was more often than not labeled a "latrine rumor," after the locale of the meditative laboring that was supposed to have brought it forth--and usually to have multiplied it by six, the capacity of the barracks latrine.

Back in garrison days one of the most fruitful sources of "hot poop" was the army wife. In the towns near Camp Hale, where the more fortunate married men spent their off-duty hours, the wives were not materially handicapped by rank in the business of passing rumors around, and the time of message transmission was accord- ingly reduced. A married man got so that he expected, when he got "home" on a week-end pass, to be told what was about to happen to him back in camp, and he also expected the forecast to be accurate.

Some division psychiatrist is missing a bet in not having come out before this with a monograph explaining why rumors were so important to the soldier. Possibly the best answer is that in army life the soldier's destiny is so affected by the apparent whim of someone's typewriter that he can't resist getting in there and trying to see what's behind the keys.

The 10th Mountain probably enjoyed - or suffered under - a vaster number of rumors than any other outfit, simply because the unique method of recruiting mountain troops had concentrated in one spot the open ends of more pipeline than they ever dreamed of needing in Arabia. I had a few pipes myself. Through one of the best I learned in April, 1944, while I was wondering if I'd ever get back to the outfit again, that I would be returned in the fall and move to a POE in November. That was the most accurate rumor I ever heard of. Then there were the other rumors, somewhat less accurate, such as the three that had me dead - Ed.

The trip down from Resia was too long. As far as we knew we were going to Riva to join the rest of the Division. However when we went right past Riva without stopping, the rumors began to fly again. We're going home. We're going to take off from Italy and the ship is going to do a Column Left and head through Suez. We're going to guard prisoners and police up the battlefields.

On through the tunnels that had seen so much bitter fighting two weeks before, on down the east side of Garda and along the water's edge we rode, finally heading southwest toward Brescia, Bergamo, and Milano. By now most of us were so tired that we didn't care where we were going.

A few miles before Brescia the convoy turned south onto a dusty road and we stopped just after dark near Castenedolo. Things got off to a bad start. We were told to "form for shelter halves" and pitch tents in neat rows, a thing we hadn't done since Pisa, and then only with much bitching. When we finally got to bed that night we were a tired and disgusted battalion.

Next morning found us in a large field, part of a German airport, which was cleverly blended with surrounding farms to prevent air detection. It wasn't a single large field, but a vast system of interconnected runways spreading for miles through the countryside. The hangers and revetments were built to resemble farm buildings. The Jerries had evacuated all but a few damaged planes, and apparently had not used it as a major air field for some time.

It was apparent that the entire Division was assembling. The change from the cool pleasant climate of the Alps to the damn oppressive heat of the Po Valley was difficult in itself, and recalled our move from Hale to Swift. The transition from the easy-going informal life that we had become accustomed to in combat, to the chicken, formal garrison life at Castenedolo was more of a blow. The men felt that they had won the war and now that it was over they were entitled to a rest. The army thought that any substantial relaxation in the familiar military courtesy and discipline would lead to speedy deterioration of military effectiveness in a world still at war. As usual, the army prevailed.

Recall by R. Comer, I, 86th.

As a part of the evening meal our first day at Brescia Airport, we each received a bottle of champagne. A bunch of us gathered at the latrine end of the company street, the end away from company headquarters. We stood and sat around, telling lies, singing songs and passed bottles around. We all drank from the same bottle until it was empty, then we opened another. There must have been about a dozen of us there, and it was not long before our ration was gone. I went up to company headquarters to try and resolve our problem. Sgt Holmes was busy at his desk, under which were more cases of the bubbly. As I visited with the First Sergeant, I reached under the desk, took a bottle and passed it out the tent flap to buddies waiting there. I was so relaxed in my condition that I was able to continue passing out bottles until Sgt Holmes finished what he was doing. I don't know how many that turned out to be. "What's going on out there?" he asked. I told him about the party we were having at the end of the street and that we had run out of drink. He reached under his side of the desk, took out a full case of champagne and said, "We'll take care of that!" The party then continued for several more hours.

Dick Keller and I had guard duty that night. We went on together at midnight. I remember going on post, walking to the end of K Company, walking back to find my relief waiting for me. Two hours of guard duty completed and I did not remember anything other than the one trip down and back.

Keller had the post next to mine - L Company street. We waited for him to complete his rounds, but he didn;t show up. We went looking for him, but we couldn't find him. The relief was posted and the rest of us went back to sleep away what was left of the night.

The next morning when I awoke, the tent smelled terrible! I looked over at Dick Keller and he looked awful. He yawned and said, "My mouth tastes like the Russian Army marched through barefoot!" "What Happened to you?" "I Really don't Know", he responded. "I remember walking my post at L Company. I remember I had to take a crap." (Keller didn't use profane language.) "I went to the latrine, took down my pants, and squatted. The next thing I knew some guy was pulling on the toe of my boot which was sticking out of the latrine with me in it. I must have fallen asleep while I squatted there." No wonder we couldn't find him to relieve him the night before. No wonder his mouth tasted so bad in the morning.

I remember how dry my mouth was that morning. How very thirsty we all were. I must have drunk two canteen cups of water before breakfast. We went on a twenty-five mile hike that day. I remember the hike starting - I remember the hike ending. I must have walked that twenty-five miles unconscious until that afternoon. I wonder if anyone else knew what we did that day. We must have been a pretty sorry sight, staggering along the roads of Italy.

The only bright spots in life at the airport were the passes to Brescia, where the things most likely to be remembered were champagne, vino, signorinas, and long lines in front of certain professional establishments. We could never forget the enterprising signorinas who, not wishing to wait for a line to form, went out and met it. They established themselves one morning in a building that was being used for showers for the men. Out of a company which went in for showers that day, fifty-five men lined up at their battalion aid station--for the usual treatment. (With respect to this, as well as the incident in Naples reported previously, it

should be pointed out that at Camp Hale the army's wartime VD rate was at its lowest; nor is this a nonsequitur.) Safer bathing was available in a near-by irrigation ditch. When that went dry we were treated to occasional swimming trips to the cool south shore of Lake Garda. The Po Valley wasn't too bad on the summer afternoons and evenings, as soon as things cooled down a bit. Well-tended fields, shade trees, orchards, vineyards, and open-walled farm buildings were abundant, and clear Po River water was running in a cool stream through many of the canals. Circumstances were ideal for cherry-tree raids, military style.

We'd drive up to some moderately intelligent looking paesan and ask, "Dove ciliegia?" and get nowhere, because the word for cherries apparently wasn't pronounced the way it was spelled in the phrase book. They wouldn't understand, we'd show them the word in the book, but apparently none had learned to read yet. Then we'd describe what a cherry was in our best Italian. One old women thought we meant nuts, pointed to a tree above us, and told us, "Niente matura encora." We went on, stopping in villages, picking up a boy or two who thought he could guide us to cherries, but later seemed rather to have hit upon the guiding role as a pretense for bumming a jeep ride.

At one place a "raiding party" sought another fruit. It was a complex farmhouse down below the road, and the men in the party could see cherries on the trees which apparently weren't ripe enough yet, but they went in anyway. An old hound picked them up and led their jeep in, keeping a safe, quiet distance of fifty yards ahead until he could get behind the protection of a fence, then barking like mad at the intrusion. As they drove into the casa courtyard, paesans began to come out of every door, all willing to help. Old and young and very young - they all tried to answer questions simultaneously, the assorted ducks, chicks, chickens, geese, and goslings all putting in their comment. The confusion and cacophony was wonderful, and hardly diminished when the men finally took of in their jeep, with ten small children chasing merrily and laughingly after, the very young not getting half enough speed out of their valiant effort to make the chase more than a gesture, but enjoying it just the same.

Once on the road again, the men reviewed one confusing bit of conversation. This different fruit they had been asking for was the fig. Figo, our phrase book said, and that's what they asked for. Perhaps because of the Po dialect, the most helpful farmer friend read it back to them as figi, obviously the plural, and he smiled nicely. But no, he helpfully explained, "Niente figi qui. Niente." Over a background of titters he went on: "Multi figi a Roma, Napoli." That of course, was easily understood. Figs would be ripe, possibly, farther south. It wasn't until they were back on the road, then, that they began to suspect that it was mirth just a little at their expense. For suddenly it dawned that there was no great distinction in sound between the figi they wanted and the Italian word for a rather old pastime.

We were suddenly alerted for movement. Tito and the Partisans needed watching, so the 10th took off for the Yugoslav border, just in case. This mission was a double break, although we didn't realize it at the time. We were to be out of the Po Valley heat, and we had, until given this mission, been high up on the list for redeployment to the Pacific.

Early on the morning of May 20 we again loaded into trucks and started our long eastward journey. Again we passed the southern shores of Lake Garda, went in and out of Verona, and continued through Treviso to Udine. We were slated to stop in the valley east of Udine, but as usual orders kept changing and we continued, until we pleasantly found ourselves again in the mountains, a little higher with each change of orders. It became obvious here that Tito's partisans were far from overjoyed at our arrival. They were already set on occupying a strip of Italy, five to thirty miles wide, that extended from Trieste to Austria. Armed partisans were on guard along the highways. In Capporetto, partisans and civilians were parading, carrying banners reading "Zivel Tito" and "Zivel Stalin," and singing partisan songs. The red star was worn by all partisans and was painted on nearly every building and road marker along the way.

We continued up through the deep canyons and into the rugged Julian Alps, until we reached Passo del Predil, near the Yugoslav border a few miles south of Austria. Our purpose here was to hold the pass in case Tito decided he wanted it too badly. The 85th and 87th wereless fortunate, and occupied zones at much lower elevations.

Predil was only a minor pass, but the wildest place we had been in. High bluffs of rock partly over- grown with larch and pine rise on both sides of the pass. Waterfalls, which on one side of the pass feed the Danube and on the other the Adriatic, poured over the cliffs. These streams were constantly replenished by snow and the frequent showers from storms and heavy mists blowing northward over the mountains from the Adriatic. The pass was dominated by Mount Mangart, an 8,900 - foot Matterhorn - like peak near the junction of the borders. Just below the pass and to the west was Lago del Predil, surrounded by other precipitous 8,000-foot peaks.

This area of the Julian Alps was war-scarred also. Bretto di Sopra, a near-by village on the road to the east of the pass, had been entirely burned out as a result of partisan clashes in that area several years before. Abandoned forts and emplacements were other remnants of these unpopular battles. After viewing some of the elaborate camouflaged emplacements, we realized how fortunate we were in not having to fight our way through the area. Possibly some of these had been built as part of the famous Redoubt. Others had been there for many years. Many battles have

raged through this area since the first invasion in 34 B.C.

No trouble developed, and we settled down on the 3,000-foot pass, where we remained until the 6th of June, our longest period without moving since Camp Swift. Training schedules, inspections, and SOPs were soon in progress. Conditioning hikes familiarized the men with the beautiful surrounding territory, and battle critiques of our part in the Italian campaign were on the daily schedule. The weather was not too favorable, as cold afternoon showers often interrupted training and sent men scamper- ing to their pup tents. Occasionally a GI would fill his pockets with grenades and try out the fishing in Lago del Predil.

Our vehicles were put to good use in taking personnel on day leaves. Several convoys went to Klagenfurt, the nearest Austrian city, but most went to Venice, where the GIs enjoyed the beautiful girls and gondola rides. The Venetian glass shops, the pigeons on St. Mark's Square, the engineering of the city itself, a city operating as cities should, not a chaos of shattered buildings and empty stores all this made the four-hour truck ride to Venice well worth enduring. Later the trips included Trieste, where the main attraction at the time was swim- ming at beaches crowded with many beautiful women. Leaves to the Fifth Army rest centers in Rome and Florence were liberalized.

We were honored, at Passo del Predil, with a visit and talk from Field Marshall Sir Harold Alexander, Commander of the Mediterranean Theater. We could particularly enjoy the theme of his talk. In effect he told us that we had won the war in Europe by spearheading the attack that, in bringing capitulation of the German forces in Italy and southern Austria, had undermined the founda- tions of all further resistance in Europe. He also stated that we had come to him with General Marshall's recommenda- tion that the 10th was one of the finest divisions, and should be an ample substitute for the divisions which had previously been moved from Italy to southern France. He and we knew full well that we had been only a cog in the big machine, but we enjoyed the humor of his presenta- tion, and perpetrated a slight breech in military etiquette by applauding his speech--a breech which he manifestly enjoyed.

On June 6th we packed our rain-soaked tents and moved to Cave del Predil, a small town just north of the pass and the oldest mining town in Europe. A varied program followed: interior guard for the line company billeted in the town; training schedules for the remainder of the Battalion, which was camped out in the woods by Lago del Predil; more rock climbing, this time near Valbruna, a few miles to the west; quotas for rest leaves, larger now, with better deals opening up to let more men go to Rome, Florence, to the Italian Riviera, ten day tours of "European Battlefields," to Austria, ski meets, glacier school, USO shows, officers' and noncoms' clubs, athletic events, dances, movies, and one man per company to Rio de Janeiro to see the Brazilians home - if this was army life, we didn't mind it too much, after all.

Guard, however, was a strict duty; Tito's men were still mumbling in their beards. Certainly no one in the Division seemed anxious to cause any crises during the occupation period in the Julian Alps. It wasn't at all clear what the mountaineer's mission was. At first, on Passo del Predil, the 3d Battalion was to dig in defensive positions, but only at the pass, ignoring the old fortifications high on the slopes on either side of the pass. If anything happened, we were not to shoot. We were to occupy and control the region, yet if the Yugoslavs, who were still occupying part of it, wanted to draft reluctant men into their army, we were not to stop them - a rather odd definition of military control. Higher echelons seemed reluctant to give definite instructions, and they themselves were seemingly depen- dent upon decisions at the highest levels.

In order to keep the Yugoslav's temperatures as low as possible, our own men were ordered not to associate with the resident women, ninety percent of whom were Italian. The women were not too much in sympathy with this edict, however; from the first, not having been properly coached, they seemed quite willing to be friendly. So the ally across the border began coaching. A page was taken out of the Frenchman's book, but was read upside down. If a Venezia Guilia woman was seen in the company of an American soldier, she was subjected to the threats of a haircut, and it was implied that she had weighed the cherry against the caramel and had chosen the sweeter.

By the time the Battalion had moved into Cave del Predil, the Yugoslavs had already been ordered, according to word that came down to us, to move east of the Morgan Line. Apparently word didn't get to them at the same time. Meanwhile, we had taken a census of the town and had established the ratio of nationalities. About seven percent were Yugoslav, three percent mixed, and the rest Italian. The minority was nevertheless able to keep things stirred up. There were no billboard ladies on whom to paint mustaches, so the local talent took to scrawling political slogans on the building walls. At about this time Major William Drake was commanding the Battalion, and he was tired of the horseplay. The leaders of the rival groups were called in and told there would be no more street demonstrations, no more defacing of buildings, and that the buildings themselves would be cleaned up. So down came the "Zivel Tito", "Tukaj je Jugoslavie", and "Viva Americani" signs. The town looked a bit neater, and was quieter for the moment.

Then, not believing that we were occupying the town militantly enough, the Yugoslavs picked up and held an Italian from our CP building, claiming he was really one of their own, or was a rampant fascist--depending upon who was making the allegations. Careful check indicated they were wrong on both counts, but wrong or right, we were occupying the town.

In his more benign moments, Bill Drake had a

mien that would make a credit manager look kindly by comparison. He could smile, certainly; but he had been in the army a long time. He decided not to be benign, and called the Yugoslav leader in. Drake was seated behind his desk when the leader was ushered before him. There were no amenities. The major's softest spoken word was a bellow. Although the interpreter didn't bellow when he translated, it wasn't necessary. The gist of Major Drake's remarks was that the Italian would be released by 2000 that evening or that we would come and get him. At 1930 a platoon of K Company, ready for action, was formed in the square. At 1955 there was still no release, and 2000 had produced no action. We were not anxious for Predil to become the poor man Mukden, but we were in no mood for temporizing, either. A messenger went over to the Slav headquarters, and found that they were a little confused by the time of day. The man was straightway released.

We didn't want anything quite this tense again. The quartermaster was called up for a convoy of trucks, and the Yugoslav leader was called over again. "This order says you belong east of the Morgan Line," Drake said in effect, "and tomorrow morning you and your men will be sent there in our trucks. That's it."

I don't think there's a person in Predil who would not agree that the Yugoslavs had been delighted by the firmness. At any rate, they were all smiles as they left.

Three days after reaching Passo del Predil, a Battalion Rock-Climbing School was started under the auspices of the S-2. The school was limited by lack of equipment and by the size of the areas suitable for instruction. During the second week of the school, however, thirty pupils were considered proficient enough to make the ascent of Mount Mangart, where, in the summit register, they entered their names below those of a German mountain-training unit who had climbed the mountain exactly one year before. Shortly thereafter a 10th Division slalom race was held on the vestigial snowfield on the west face of the mountain. Walter Prager, of the 87th, walked off with individual honors for the day, but high team score went to the 86th.

With the procurement of more ropes from a German warehouse and the purchase by the S-2 of snaplinks and pitons found in a Cortina sporting goods store, the school moved to Valbruna, a famous climbing spot beneath the cliffs of Jof Fuart and Jof di Montasio, which provide some of the best climbing in the region. A bivouac was established near the banks of the Torrente Saisera, near the entrance to a deep, boulder-strewn gorge. The gorge itself provided excellent climbing areas in which sheer drops of a hundred feet or more culminated in the icy waters of the stream. Ten men from each company were given a course in elementary rock-climbing each week. Each class went on a one-day trip to a distant point where they could put their skill into practice on the snow and rock of the higher peaks. Jof Fuart was climbed twice, but several attempts to find a route up the 3,000-foot north wall of Jof di Montasio proved fruitless. On these longer trips, fortifications used in the last war, when the Italians fought the Austrians in this area, could be seen. The only inhabitants of the positions were the chamois, which could be seen on rare occasions. Many of these well camou- flaged fortifications had elaborate ventilating systems and large underground rooms capable of holding hundreds of men.

After two and a half weeks the school was closed when most of its instructors moved to the 86th's Grossglockner Glacier School, set up under the highest mountain in Austria in a region with which the 86th was already familiar, since it had won a ski race near the Glocknerhaus earlier in June.

The Glockner area provided an opportunity for skiing and ice climbing within a mile of the Glocknerhaus, an inn owned by the Klagenfurt section of the Austrian Mountain Club. When plans for the school were complete, parties in jeeps were sent all over northern Italy and southern Austria in search of German mountain equipment. Our American equipment would have suited us better, but it was still in Naples and no transportation was available to get it to Austria. Within a week rope, pitons, axes, crampons, carabiners, boots, parkas, skis, pants, rucksacks, and various minor items of mountaineering equipment were pouring into the Glocknerhaus, largely through the efforts of Lt. Johnson, now recovered from his injuries sustained on Belvedere when he was with L Company, and serving as Regimental Athletic and Recre- ation Officer. The boots presented the greatest problem, as only one size could be obtained. The equipment was shared with the 85th, which soon moved into the area and took over the Pasterzenhaus, near by.

Although the school was under regimental control, the 3d Battalion provided the organizers and the largest number of instructors. While they were struggling to get the instruction program properly set up, skiers invaded the area to stage the last 10th Division ski meet. Again the 86th came away with top honors.

After receiving instruction in the fundamentals -step cutting, belaying, use of crampons, and rescue work- and witnessing a demonstration by the instructors of the more advanced phases of ice climbing--the students set out to put their knowledge to use. The Gross Glockner was climbed by about fifty men of the school. Those who were less advanced made a difficult ascent up the glacier, across great crevasses, and through a jumbled mass of difficult seracs to the Oberwalderhutte, a large hut maintained by Austrian climbing clubs. Others, who believed that ice climbing was a sport of crazy men, took easy trips on the lower mountains or spent their time skiing.

The men who were not satisfied with the amount of climbing and skiing provided during the week spent their weekends in the famous climbing areas of the Dolomites

or in the snow areas of Austria. Several peaksnear Auronzo were climbed, and three men in the Battalion got as far afield as the Grepon, in the Chamonix Aiguilles, France.

CHAPTER 11

BREAK IT UP

Contentedly, we were expecting a long occupation period in Italy, and we were therefore hardly surprised to read in the July 6th Stars and Stripes that we would be redeployed shortly and relieved by the 34th Division, which, it seemed, had pulled its rank. The 34th had been scheduled for redeployment, but after a compari- son of their combat time with ours, it was decided to give them the occupation job.

This was too much! Who could occupy mountains better than we, the mountain troops? Hadn't we been ranked out of enough already - leaving Verona and Passo di Resia to less worthy men than we?

Obviously with evil in their hearts (and clearly not knowing that ours was to be the last laugh), men of the 34th laughed at us as they moved into our mountain eyrie to effect the relief. Early in the morning of July 16 the 3d Battalion and regimental headquarters loaded into trucks for the trip to Udine, thence traveling by train with the other 86th battalions to Florence. The other regiments were soon to follow. The Battalion had everything packed by July 25, and each man had his duffel bag crammed to overflowing. Extra equipment and souvenirs had to be discarded or mailed home. At 0600 the next day Company K left Florence for Livorno on their last truck ride in Italy. The remainder of the Battalion went by train--in box cars.

Our ship, the Westbrook Victory, had been fitted out as a transport and was on her maiden voyage. There were almost two thousand men on board, which meant that it was overloaded by 500 men. These men lived on cots on the open deck or on the hatches below deck. On the whole, the ship was more pleasant than the Argentina - better food, more room, better ventilation, and fewer men. We left the battered harbor of Livorno just as the sun was beginning to go down, turning the bare, brown Italian hills to the same soft red we had seen as we approached Naples seven months before - the soft red many more of us had seen then, than watched it now. Was there a man who was sorry to say good-bye to Italy?

The eleventh night out we sighted lights on the mainland, and a little later entered Hampton Roads, where we docked next morning at 0800. We were back in the States in the same spot from which we had sailed two hundred and forty days before, but with several new things to think about--the thousand 10th Mountain men who weren't coming back, the Italian nightmares which had turned out too real to them, our own chances for new nightmares in the Pacific, and the pleasant possibilities incipient in the present elaboration of reports on the new atomic bomb. Even the shoddy America one sees along a city's railroad tracks looked unbelievably wonderful.

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That far-too-short thirty days' temporary duty over, the Battalion began to reassemble at Camp Carson, Colorado. The Camp personnel, with unusual foresight, had the barracks cleaned up and all the beds made for the incoming troops. An advance party for the Division had arrived there on the 12th of September, and shortly thereafter, slowly at first and then in ever-increasing numbers, the men of the Battalion assembled once more beneath the limitless blue of Colorado skies. Not all men assembled, however, for already the great machine of demobilization, clanking and faltering it's true, had begun to roll. Those lucky ones, the 85-pointers, were already being promoted to that longed-for rank of "Mr." But by the 20th of September all companies of the Battalion were once more operating. Spit and Polish, police, poop, all cussed chicken of garrison soldiering was the order of the day. Carson was pretty much of a mess. A year's accumula- tion of weeds and debris littered the area. There was plenty to do in the line of housekeeping, but with every afternoon off, life was pleasant enough.

Then on the 22d came the first of many surprises. All officers and men who had reported to their reception centers on or after the 15th of September were granted an additional fifteen days' temporary duty plus travel time. For the rest there was to be a generous pass policy. Lots of confusion now: hurried searching for orders to verify this, to check that, and on the 24th of September off went the lucky ones for another two weeks, plus. Three-day passes, one after another for those left behind, took some of the sting away. Then the lightning struck again. This time all officers and men who had served a total of six months overseas were granted the additional fifteen days and travel time. All, that is, except those eligible for immediate discharge--all this to be effective October 3. Once again confusion, meetings, poop. Who would have to stay? Would they get time later? All the rumors ever devised for a situation like this grew and multiplied. But as always happens, by some minor miracle it all straightened out and soon the Battalion had sunk into doldrums. Two officers and some twenty-five EM, for necessary administrative details, held down the fort. It was the same all over the division.

While all this was going on, old familiar faces were dropping out of the picture. Gaining momentum, the machine was graduating more and more officers and men of the old 3d Bat back into the coveted pin stripes. Captain Dole, who piloted K Company through the entire Italian campaign, was gone. And Pete Coursen, I Company skipper, left. Lt. Church headed for the wilds of Minnesota. Sergeant Melvin added them up and was out.

By the 10th of October the outward flow reversed

and the men and officers once again began to assemble at Carson. Right from the feed box, this time, came the dope that the 10th Mountain Division would be held in the regular army and those caught with their points down could at least look forward to some skiing and climbing. So much for the best-laid plans. Came Friday the 13th of October and a fateful TWX from Fourth Army. "10th Mountain Division inactivated, effective 25 October." That was the day morale really hit bottom. Even the men felt a twinge at the thought of The Outfit's breaking up so soon. And so began the dreary business of closing up shop. Low- point men were transferred to the 2d Division at, of all places, Camp Swift. Meanwhile the pace of discharge rose. More and more good-byes were said to late buddies who now wore the ruptured duck over their right pocket. Property responsibility, that ever-present bugaboo, raised its head and inspections, checks, and show-downs once more became prevalent. The 3d Battalion was chosen to organize a provisional battalion and Lt. Col. Hay whipped one together in short order to put on a battalion review. One last parade in Denver to help sell war bonds and the 3d Provisional Battalion was disbanded. This was the first and last public appearance of the 10th Mountain Division, and it was the old 3d Battalion that was chosen to make it.

Then back to the death watch once more. November 1: another drop in points. In an ever-growing torrent the stream of men to the discharge centers swelled. Then one by one the old outfits disappeared forever. M Troop was no more, then L too was gone, K joined the host, I and Headquarters to follow quickly. Finally, one day Remount Blue was itself no more. Inactivated on such and such a date reads the official War Department report. But still to all of us, no matter where we may find ourselves in the future, will come a recollection of friendships forged in the hell of war. Of privations endured and softened by humor. Of good and true friends left beside unnamed trails in Italy to be a pledge forever that we who did return would not forget what took place on those trails.

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And so ends the story of a mountain battalion - and to a degree a division to which it belonged. To those of us who were present at its birth and at its untimely end, "Remount Blue" will always hold a very special meaning. To those who joined us along the way, and to those who left us, we hope that this story will fill those blanks in memories. Hundreds upon hundreds of battalions made up the victorious army in the greatest war of mankind, but to us this, the Third Battalion of the Eighty-
Sixth Mountain Infantry, will always be
The Battalion.

Excerpts from a letter to R. Sanctuary, I, 86th, by Lt. Gen. John Hay, former Commander of the 3rd Battalion.

30 January 1993

"After reading your updated copy I thought about what I could say that would be interesting and might contribute in a positive way to the history of our Battalion. As you might expect, after 50 plus years the details of our actions are not as clear as they once were. There is one inaccuracy I noted - that is when I went to Regimental Hqts as Exec. Officer and when I returned to the Bn. This is not accurate in our history. I went to Regt. Hqs. the day we crossed the Po River and returned to the 3rd Bn. one day before we arrived at Cave del Predil. This doesn't add much to the history but it might be worth correcting"

"In thinking about our experiences in Italy, one recollection is clear in my mind and that is the combat effectiveness of our Battalion. It was a highly trained, highly disciplined fight- ing unit with great esprit which the Battalion proved throughout all it's actions in Italy. The fact that we had a record of never failing to take an assigned objective nor were we ever driven off one is a real distinction. On numerous occa- sions we were selected by the Regimental and Division Commanders for the difficult and tough combat assignments because they were confident we would accomplish them."

"I knew at that time we were a fine Battalion and would do a credible job on any assignment, but only after serving 33 years in the Army with some great units over these years have I realized how privileged I was to have commanded the 3rd Bn. of the 86th Mnt. Inf. - "Remount Blue," and it's outstanding men. For this I am proud and grateful."