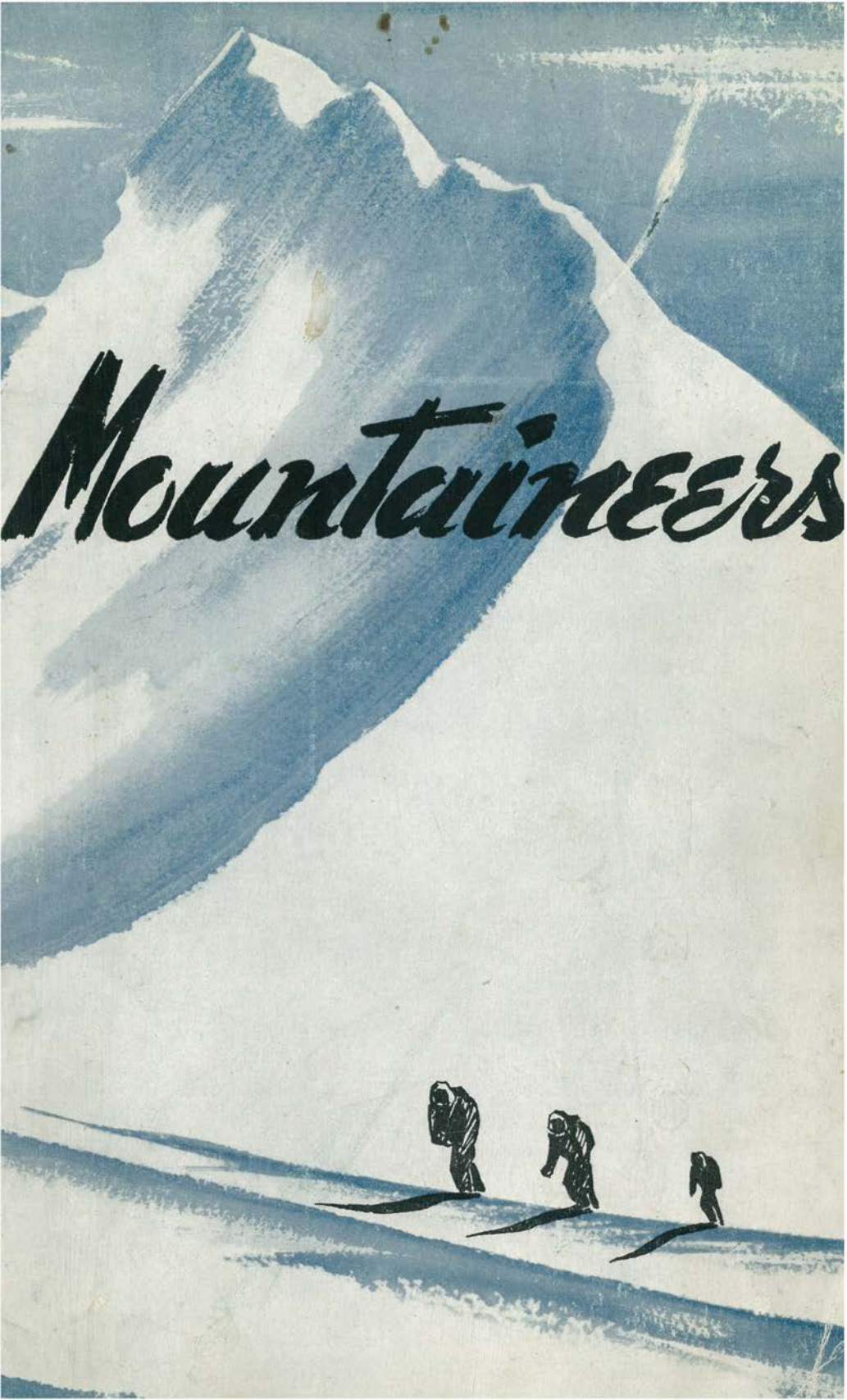


The illustration features a large, jagged mountain peak in the upper half, rendered with white and light blue brushstrokes. A long, dark blue shadow of the mountain is cast diagonally across the middle of the image. At the bottom, three small, dark figures of mountaineers are shown ascending a snowy slope. Each figure has a long, dark shadow cast behind it. The overall style is graphic and minimalist, using a limited color palette of white, blue, and black.

Mountaineers



FOREWORD

THERE IS NO COMPLETE STORY. THE
ENDLESS INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE AND
IMPRESSIONS AWAIT PERSONAL PENS.
YET, WE HAVE TRIED TO PRESERVE
HERE THE ESSENTIAL CONTINUITY OF
THAT HISTORY TOWARD WHICH
EACH HAS CONTRIBUTED A PART.
THIS IS THE OUTLINE.

BANGOR
PUBLIC
LIBRARY
BANGOR, ME.

Mountaineers

Because of your special training in Mountain Warfare, you were assigned the most important and hazardous mission of any division in the Italian theater. You were directed to spearhead the Fifth Army in its final attack on the German Armies.

By your gallantry and devotion to duty, you accomplished this mission with outstanding skill and determination. You broke through the enemy's heavily defended mountain position, met and defeated the hostile strategic reserves, split the hostile armies in two and paved the way for, and led the advance of the fifth Army from the Apennines to the Alps. You played a major rôle in the decisive defeat on the field of battle of all enemy forces in Italy.

Your dash, esprit de corps, and high morale were an inspiration to all Allied troops in the theatre. As your commander, I am proud of your achievements and inspired by your loyalty and confidence in me and in your fellow officers and men. You should always retain a feeling of pride and satisfaction in your personal contribution to the successful conclusion of this tragic war.

My best wishes go with all of you for your future happiness.

George P. Hays

Major General, USA
Commanding

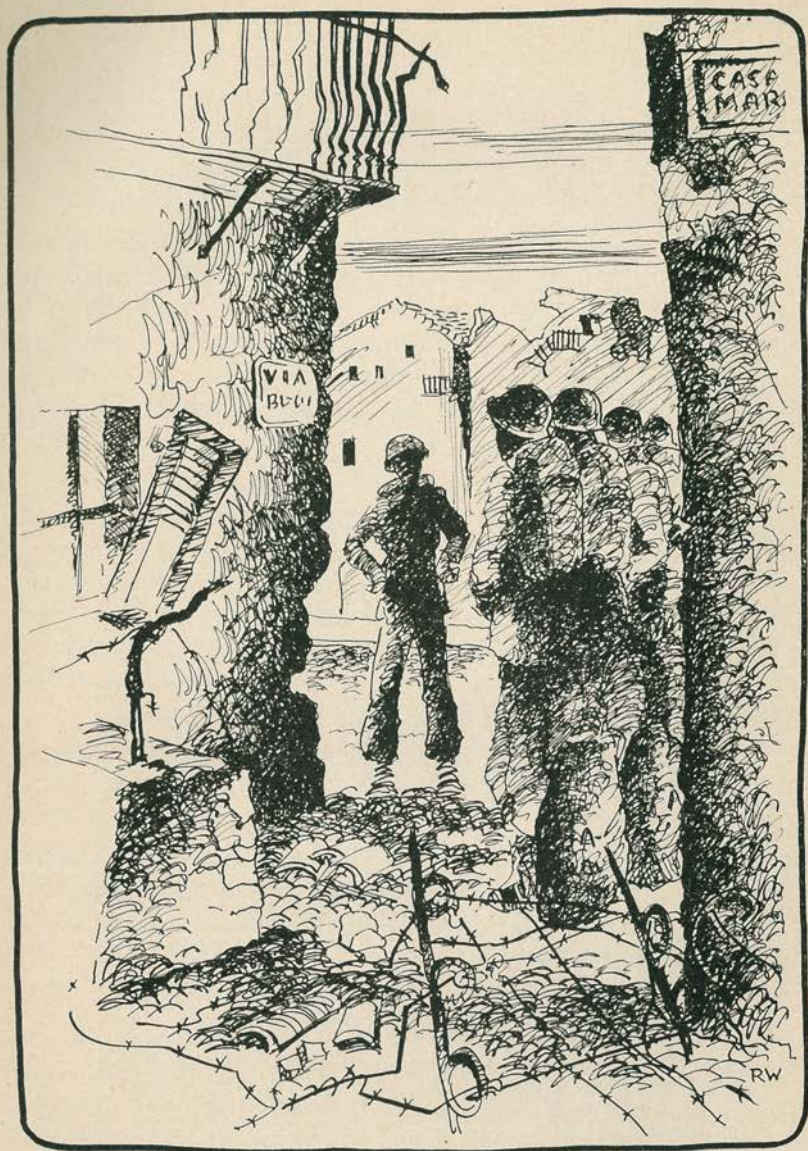


MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE P. HAYS
COMMANDING
10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION

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We were new..

CHAPTER I

« »

LATE IN 1942

The rocky, treeless valley floor ran for three miles between the slowly lifting mountain ridges. The surveyors had correctly calculated the pattern of barracks and company streets. It was late in 1942; Camp Hale was new, pocketed away in the Rockies west of Denver. The story of the first mountain division in the history of the United States Army began to unfold. The first few, halting pages were cold but enthusiastic.

Down from Mount Rainier and Fort Lewis came the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment, made up primarily of those interested in skiing and mountain work. The creation of a reinforced mountain battalion marked the beginning of an "expansion" policy. The 86th Infantry, slowly recruiting new members from all over the country, became a regiment in strength in June of 1943.

We were surprised when the 87th piled on the trains and left the Pando Valley for the West Coast. To fill the gap created and to bring at least the substance of a division into being, a pool of personnel was established, from which the 85th and 90th Infantry Regiments were formed. With the gradual accumulation of special battalions, the division framework came into existence.

CREATION

It was Washington, D.C., July 15, 1943. At the War Department it was noted that a new division was being activated as of that date—the 10th Light Division. Out in Colorado the usual afternoon cloudburst broke loose as the journal clerk recorded the fact that the division had been officially activated. A month later there was a formal occasion; Pando, Colorado witnessed the parade and ceremonies honoring the birth of the Tenth. Major General Lloyd E. Jones reviewed the troops.

TO THE ALEUTIANS

The Japanese had bombed Dutch Harbor and had landed on the Aleutian Islands short of the Bering Sea. The Americans had retaken Attu after the battle of Holz Bay. To constitute the spearhead of an American-Canadian attack against the cut-off island of Kiska, Lieutenant General Buckner chose the 87th Infantry. To gain the necessary experience for such an amphibious operation, the regiment had moved from Hale early in the summer of 1943 to Fort Ord, California.

On August 15, 1943 the battalions of the 87th waded through the heavy Aleutians fog toward the rough shore. For two days there was practically no visibility. As yet no battle had occurred; it was difficult to ascertain the whereabouts of the Japanese. As the third morning light increased the visibility, it was discovered that the Japanese had evacuated the treeless stretch of land. Four months of cold and damp "sitting tight" followed.

PROGRESS ELSEWHERE

The work of molding a unit in Colorado still lay ahead. Basic training in such terrain became flexible, adaptable to the individual nature of equipment and personnel. The full conception of "mountain troops" was but a dim impression. The specialization so vital to fulfilling such a mission followed basic training. Groups of individuals went into the mountains for rock-climbing, assembled around the stables for mule-skinning, and later went into the long, sloping hills between the higher peaks for early fall skiing. The versatility of each man increased.

The mold began to harden as battalions, then regiments marched out of camp on firing problems. The 87th Regiment returned to Camp Hale in January, 1944 to participate in the last of the RCT exercises, thereby replacing the 90th. To each the meaning of coordination became more apparent; its need, more impressive. By the winter of 1944, as Allied Armies in Europe gathered strength for the pending spring offensives, specialization as such ceased for a while. The test of effectiveness passed to the highest echelon.

THE TEST

On March 24th, 1944, the units wound slowly out of the valley up the Tennessee Pass road into the 11,000-foot mountains beyond. It was the beginning of one of the most severe "D" series ever undertaken by a division. To the individual it meant performing the job, for which, by this time, he had been specially trained. We can recall the first nights when the temperature ran down to 35 degrees below zero, or a wet, snowy Easter Sunday on Ptarmigan. The test was rugged, tiring, and sometimes overwhelming in snow and cold.

By the middle of April, however, the mold had taken form. The Army knew that they had created the first authentic mountain troops within the States; the individual varied his emotions with the task and sensed that he was part of that conception.

SOUTHWARD

Training did not end in the Rockies. To round out the background of the division's pre-combat work, the Tenth moved to Camp Swift, Texas. Flat—in some cases slightly rolling—country can be difficult. The hot days along dusty roads, or in torrential rains seemed foreign to men, the majority of whom had spent their only time in the Army flanked by rough, broken landscape. The total number of men jumped as changes in tables of organization were made in an effort to reach the most efficient operating body possible.

The story was dull. There was none of the color of D-Day, or on the surface none of the direct contribution so obvious to the invading armies. Yet, we had written the opening lines.

MOVEMENT

There were no maneuvers in Texas. By Thanksgiving Day, November 23rd, there was a definite direction to every move. Two weeks previous the preliminaries had begun. Colonel Robinson E. Duff, Assistant Division Commander, had gone to Washington. On the Western Front, on the 12th, Brigadier General George P. Hays had taken a last look at his 2nd Division, stepped into a staff car and sped through

France for Paris. On the afternoon of the 15th he boarded a plane in the French capital and headed westward.

At the airport on the Azores Island two planes, coming from opposite directions, lighted and taxied to the drome. A colonel informed a general of his mission, and then headed for the Allied Force Headquarters of the Mediterranean Theater. Colonel Duff had spoken with General Hays. The latter flew on across the Atlantic for Washington to take over his new post. On Thanksgiving Day, General Hays assumed command of the 10th Mountain Division.

PROSPECT

The prospect of moving overseas left few alternatives. New equipment, thorough packing, careful attention to all the details of troop movement—its effectiveness became the responsibility of each individual. On November 28th the last units of the 86th Regiment had cleared Camp Swift. Under the command of Colonel Tomlinson, the men were on their way; four days later they had reached a port on the eastern seaboard. Early in the morning of the 23rd of December the 86th Mountain Infantry laid anchor in the Bay of Naples. The States were a long ways off. Christmas Day at Bagnoli, just north of Naples, wasn't too pleasant; nor was Christmas in a port of embarkation. There was the rapid processing and then the slow wait for the ships to be loaded. Other units—infantry, engineers, signalmen, medics—all piled into the transports. The entire division was on the "high seas" by the 7th of January, 1945. The definite direction of each move had obviated much of the confusion that usually accompanies the process.

ABOARD

The contagious quality of life at sea failed to convert many "mountaineers". The Atlantic was not too rough. The lights of Tunis and Oran were nostalgic; the Rock of Gibraltar just another piece of rock worth scaling. The long reaches of the African shore were another thing entirely. The sun-cut, white Serra Bullones in the distance were encouraging.

Naples had, by 1945, acquired a beaten look. The harbor gave the men waiting on the boats for unloading a much

different impression of Italy than did the juts of land on which were located Capri and Ischia. A squabble on the docks, upturned ships, bombed buildings were new and realistic. The effects of war could also be seen in the city streets. Some saw the historical value. It was different; it was a first impression.

FARTHER NORTH

By the time all units of the Division had arrived in Italy, the 86th Mountain Infantry had made "contact" with the enemy. Up the coast of Italy, and on through the staging area the regiment had struck out for a refresher center at Quercianella.

Accidents in the States had been infrequent and usually not too costly. Seven enlisted men and a chaplain lost their lives at Quercianella when several S-mines were exploded. It was a greater tragedy perhaps than combat.

From Quercianella the 86th moved in trucks to an area just west of Campo Tizzoro, with the exception of the 1st Battalion which went to Vidiciatico directly. The snow whirled across the icy roads. We couldn't ride all the way. Under a gray winter sky, we marched into the line near Bagni di Lucca, La Lima, San Marcello, and Vidiciatico. In the modern school building at Campo Tizzoro, General Duff, made a Brigadier General on December 7th, assumed com-

*"Our
First
Billet
San Marcello"*



mand of the Task Force 45 sector. The first elements of the 10th Mountain Division had moved into the Apennines to take over new, frontline jobs, and to form their impressions of what it was like "over here". The story of patrolling came later. We listened to new sounds.

REUNION

By the 13th of January the 85th and 87th Regiments had landed at Naples. Five days later the special units and Division Headquarters were disembarking on the temporary wharfs. Pino domestica standardized the horizon silhouettes.

On the 20th the 85th moved into frontline positions, taking over some of the sector held by the 86th. The 87th in



"Winter Fashions—Italy"

the meanwhile had opened a new bivouac area at Villa Colli. Once there the regiment was designated as IV Corps reserve. On the 26th of January, the Division took over the entire sector originally assigned to TF 45. The Headquarters at Campo Tizzoro opened officially as General Hays assumed command. The movement of the Division into a combat theater was finished—from the flats of Texas, across the ocean, and into the hills of the northern Apennines, sparsely covered with snow.

The story was still rather dull; the lines lacked the zest of major operations.

PATROL

We were not especially active. The work of patrolling is limited; our night might come once every four or five evenings. There is a certain routine—to the old soldier it is a set routine. Enemy artillery dropped in periodically, and we fired back. The artillery battalions, under the command of Brigadier General David L. Ruffner, began to master the tricks of sound registry. Firing in the mountains otherwise contained nothing new for the pack artillery batteries.

The first days in the valleys before the Serrasiccia-Campiano ridgeline and Mount Belvedere had an edge to them even though it was only routine patrolling. It was a good way to be broken in. Ice made the roads dangerous and drifting snows made the trails difficult to travel. We settled down. Yet, from the static situation emerged the phrases with which we all would be later acquainted—"gallantry in action" and "meritorious achievement".

CASES

Was it possible that we were in Patrol 332 when the fire fight developed? Or were we with the morning patrol to La Serra as enemy automatic weapons pinned us down and mortar concentrations taxed the control of our unit? The weather conditioned the effectiveness with which we patrolled. Slush along trails wide enough to maneuver mules, breakable crust between stream gorges, and ice-coated rocks made progress tough. Skis and snowshoes came in handy. The interrelated problems of terrain, weather, and supply dominated the efforts of both forward and rear groups. The color is brought out most vividly in this field message:

"Very high wind. Visibility poor early in the morning to Dogannaecua; . . . snow knee- to waist-deep. Could not see Mt. Spigolino. Had to dig footholds from Dogannaecua to timber . . . Crampons and ice axes needed badly. Cleaning and clearing of weapons necessary quite often."

The days at Camp Hale came back.

ACQUAINTANCE

We soon learned the tricks that Jerry used; we bettered him as often as possible. Reconnaissance and observation looked at abstractly and isolated appear to have little significance in the Division story. But they served two definite purposes: They gave us the experience under fire necessary for calm cooperation, and they gave us the information needed for a big-scale operation.

What was much more apparent was the failure to return of one or two men, the evacuation of another. The real cost of war began to impose its most plastic price on the Division. The lines of the story grew heavier; the pages turned less easily.



*Shrine
at
Lizzano*



We Succeeded ..

CHAPTER II

« »

PLANS

By the middle of February the Division was beginning to move around, jockey into position. On the 15th the Field Order outlining the forthcoming operations against Mount Belvedere was issued.

"10th Mountain Division will attack on D-Day to seize, occupy, organize, and defend the Mt. Belvedere-Mt. della Torraccia ridge, prepare for action to the northeast."

There lay the first major mission of the Division in Italy. The disposition of the German troops was known accurately. Our routes of approach had been fully planned as a result of a month's patrolling. The General Staff had ironed out the details behind the operations.

PATTERN

The pattern to guide the battalions as they pushed out across the LD placed the brunt upon the 85th Infantry. To prevent any devastating flank action, the 86th was to secure initially the rocky, sharp cliffs comprising the Serrasiccia-Campiano Ridge on the western boundary. The 87th was to join the 85th in the frontal assault, before the latter swung to the northeast against Mt. Gorgolesco and della Torraccia. The rough terrain, known enemy minefields, and lack of easy supply routes laid a heavy burden on the supporting units. Well remembered also were three previous, unsuccessful assaults against the same defenses by other allied troops.

The battalions moved quietly under the cover of darkness into assault positions. By the 18th the Division was operating from areas north of Lizzano-in-Belvedere. During the bright and warming sun of the 18th the attack was cocked. The tension had been brought to a peak.

ATTACK BY NIGHT

Security is never absolute. Early in the evening on the 18th of February there was noise in Vidiciatico. As one captured German officer remarked afterwards: "We failed to take note of it because we are accustomed to hearing the roar of American trucks and jeeps."

Under the leadership of Lt. Colonel Hampton, the 1st Battalion of the 86th and Company F of the same regiment had been hiding in houses at the base of the ridge for a day and a night. On the night of the 18th we moved out along the darkening trails of the Serrasiccia-Campiano Ridge. Expert rock climbers tightened their rifle slings, coiled nylon ropes over their shoulders, and started picking their way up the treacherous rock faces. There were both mud and ice. In one case, the lead men had to fix ropes for the company to follow. Heavy packs and loads of ammunition made it hard and tiring. The haze which hung over much of the ridge was valuable to the attackers. We began tossing grenades in ridge-top positions by 0530 on the 19th. The Krauts were surprised; these ridges were supposedly impregnable.

The battle was not over. Counterattacks hit new positions on Mt. Mancinello, Serrasiccia, Cappel Buso, and Pizzo di Campiano. Contact between companies was difficult because in many cases knife edges separated the 4,000-foot peaks. From the valley the 605 Field Artillery encircled our position in an effort to prevent the Germans from retaking any key points. In return enemy mortars laced the top fea-

"Clearing the Ridgetop"





"Somewhere Along the Route"

tures. The ridge was ours. The flank was secured on D-1. Behind the attack lay the tortuous movement of men and materials. The work of Company B of the 10th Quartermaster was especially exemplary. History was being written both among the fighters and those performing miracles of supply.

H - HOUR

The initial division objectives were dominating mountain peaks with long, steep, and barren approaches, strongly defended and heavily mined. The hazards of launching a night attack of invasion strength by an inexperienced division were carefully weighed against the losses that would surely result in a daylight attack. A bold, surprise night-attack of five-battalion strength was ordered. No preparatory or accompanying fires were permitted. The objectives were to be seized by grenades and bayonets; firing was to commence only at daylight when the bypassed enemy strong points were to be mopped up.

At 2300, the 19th of February, the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 85th pushed out across the LD, in direct assault on Mt. Belvedere and Mt. Gorgolesco. To their left the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 87th had attacked simultaneously in the direction of the Valpiana sector. On their right the 3rd Battalion of the 86th attacked the south slope of Mt. Gorgolesco. Enemy mines, uncovered by the melting snows, slowed the advance. Some companies suffered heavy casualties as the Germans poured continual grazing fire down from the west side of Belvedere. At 0600 on the 20th, as a clear day dawned, the 1st Battalion of the 87th, commanded by Lt. Colonel Wilson, seized Valpiana. The Germans were hammering at the wheeling elements of Lt. Colonel Shelor's 3rd Battalion of the 85th to the east. Heavy enemy mortar and artillery fire was encountered. Mt. Belvedere fell at 0610. An hour later to the northeast, the 1st Battalion of the 85th, under the command of Lt. Colonel Wooley, had ousted the Germans from Mt. Gorgolesco after fierce resistance.

POWER

The Germans gathered together their local reserves and launched numerous counterattacks in hurried efforts to disrupt our advance. However, they had lost commanding ground and thereby the tactical means of a decisive counter-attack. Furthermore, they did not have the power.

Air power was extremely encouraging. As the planes swept over the enemy positions in front, there was new confidence in the ability to deal knockout punches. While the riflemen crawled toward enemy strongpoints, wiremen laid lateral lines; engineers cleared minefields for advancing tanks and tank destroyers; or medics carried litters down off the ridges to aid stations. We had the power.

PROGRESS

The attack was progressing. As the 87th dug in defensively and wiped out the German positions at Campo Florio under the direction of the regimental commander, Colonel Fowler, the 1st Battalion of the 85th, on the east side of Gorgolesco, fought bitterly over the intermediate ridges on the way to Cappella di Ronchidos. The night of the 20th Lt. Colonel Stone's 2nd Battalion of the 85th passed through the lead elements and spearheaded the drive onto the peak.

At 2030 the battalion buttoned down on top. This was the first day's record. The battle was not over; so far it had been successful.

COUNTERATTACKS

Further counterattacks came; the Germans did not give up without trying again and again to retake the lost ground. They lost the ridge line. The 87th held firm on the northern slopes from Polla to Belvedere. To the west the 86th consolidated their defensive system on the Serrasiccia-Campiano Ridge. On that flank the 126th Engineers had eased the problems of supply and evacuation by erecting a tramway to the ridge.

Using the line through Mt. Gorgolesco and Cappela di Ronchidos as a springboard, the 2nd Battalion of the 85th began the attack against the last two objectives, Hill 1018 and Mt. della Torraccia. The attack was trying; ammunition, water, and rations ran low. The weather remained good. Into the daylight hours of the 22nd the battle for the

*"Lizzano
Direction
Center"*



southern, lead-slopes of della Torracchia continued. Elsewhere along our salient, the Anti-tank Battalion took over the Serrasiccia-Campiano Ridge defenses. Partisans and one enlisted man occupied the former stronghold of Rocca Corneta, between Pizzo di Campiano and Valpiana. The steady battling continued into the next day.

FINAL ASSAULT

The Brazilian Expeditionary Forces on our right had moved along and taken Mt. Castello. They were protecting our eastern flank as we got set for the final assault of the push.

Moving up from Mazzancana and Malandrone Draw to the southeast, the 3rd Battalion of the 86th, commanded by Major Hay, passed through Lt. Colonel Stone's battalion and swung into position to continue the attack. At 0700 on the 24th the attack jumped off. By the middle of the afternoon the infantry were over on the northeastern slope of the 3500-foot peak, having secured the crest earlier in the day. Machine gun crews had wiped out the hedgerow defenses.

Then began the most serious counterattacks thrown against us in the five days' action. With a prelude of heavy artillery the Germans thought that they would catch us disorganized. It was sound; but it didn't work. As the commander of our defending battalion remarked, "Artillery was everywhere." The final attempt, launched from the valley where so many enemy had been cut down by our artillery, died after midnight. We consolidated our gains.

QUIET

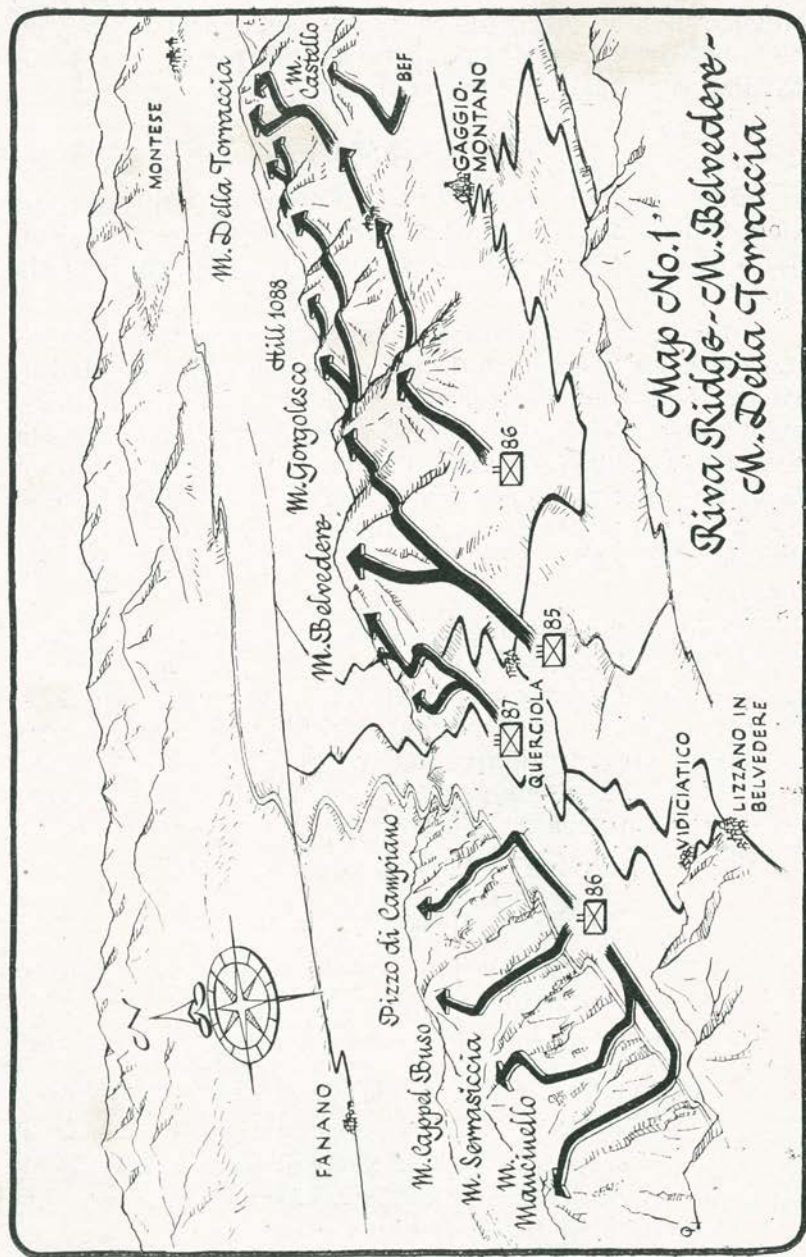
The 25th dawned bright but hazy; it was quiet again. We knew our strength. . . .

In a letter of commendation, Major General Hays said:

"In your first assigned mission you had the following difficult tasks:

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

b. Seize by night assault the precipitous mountain range on your left consisting of mountains



Map No. 1
Riva Ridge - M. Belvedere -
M. Della Torraccia

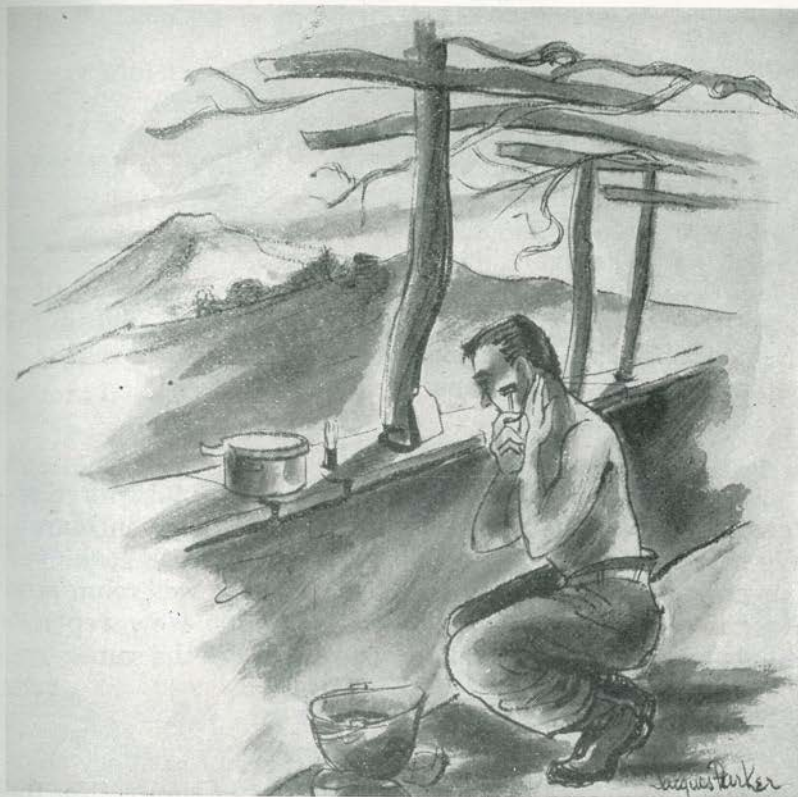
Mancinello, Serrasiccia, Cappel Buso, and Pizzo Campiano.

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

d. Hold the areas seized against counterattacks and capture the successive objectives north-east of Mt. Gorgolesco to include the final objective—Mt. della Torraccia. A total advance from left to right of some 18,000 meters.

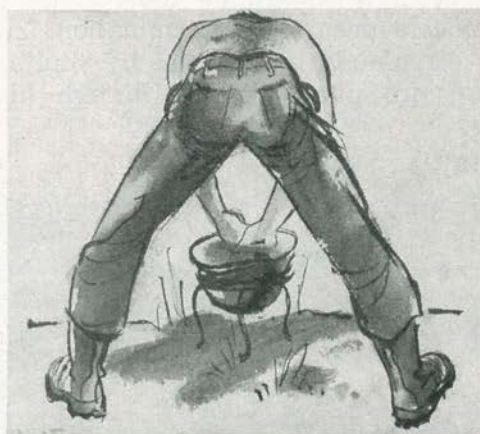
"You accomplished all of your assigned mission with magnificent dash and determination. You caught the enemy completely by surprise by your movement at night up precipitous slopes through his heavily

"Between Battles"



mined areas and by your destruction of his dugouts and bunkers. You overran and defeated elements of eight different enemy battalions (parts of two divisions, plus two separate battalions), from which you captured approximately 400 prisoners of war. You accomplished these results with remarkably low casualties, in comparison with the results achieved.

"By your action you have won the confidence and admiration of all troops within the theater and the highest praise of your Corps, Army, Army Group, and Deputy Theater Commanders.



"A
Wash-up"

"As your division commander I am very proud of you and salute your courage, determination, fighting spirit, and the professional workmanship you have displayed in all your actions."

BREATH

This had been the beginning of a general task-force offensive, the second phase of which would begin in March. We moved to the right as a regiment of the BEF took over our positions in the Belvedere sector. There was room now for rewards; there were hospital patients. New replacements began to add new blood. The color was the same.

RENEWAL

On the 3rd of March at 0630 barrages of artillery shattered the quiet of morning. In a column of companies, the

3rd Battalion of the 87th, led by Company K, crossed the LD at 0700 as the 1st Battalion of the 86th began the assault in the west sector. Fanning out to the rear, Lt. Colonel Townsend's 2nd Battalion took Mt. Terminale within an hour. German counterbattery harassed the attackers. The wedge grew—Company E of the 86th fought for Iola; tanks and tank destroyers moved up to deploy; and the 3rd Battalion of the 87th under Lt. Colonel Works was brilliantly striking eastward in the direction of Mt. della Vedetta. The plans became flexible as the situation unrolled.

By 1800 the 3rd of the 86th, cutting northeastward behind the 2nd Battalion, had captured Campo del Sole and the hills in that vicinity. The Brazillians had since taken Rocca Pitigliana. In one day our troops had driven 4000 yards. A complete battalion staff had surrendered to the relentless movement of our advance elements. Rover Joe in the air had lent a terrific punch to the offense.

A SECOND DAY

Another clear day with only scattered clouds heralded more aggressive action. The artillery opened with a plastering of Acidola. The 1st of the 87th jumped off on time as Lt. Colonel Nations' 2nd Battalion branched to the west against Madna di Brasna. The 3rd of the 87th continued its looping, diversionary attack against Della Croce. The offensive never once passed out of the hands of the lead troops. The 1st of the 86th by 1100 that morning was sitting in the town of Sassomolare. And on the right Division flank, the 3rd of the 87th, in a paralyzing slice, had cut into Pietra Colora by 1245.

Prisoners were pouring into the MP stockades. Over 900 had passed behind the barbed wire in two days. The effect of combined air, artillery, and infantry was overpower-

"Castel D'Aiano"



ering. With this ground now held, the 85th pushed through the lead elements in a northeasterly direction against the controlling peaks in the Mt. della Spe area. Mt. della Castellana fell at 1425 in the afternoon. The 1st Battalion of the 87th, spearheaded by tanks, curved back and struck at Castel D'Aiano. Because of the weather, air support could not cover this attack. The Germans thundered the vulnerable arrow-jab with everything available. Mopping-up operations and the forward displacement of the 616 Field Artillery Battalion eliminated the resistance. The enemy threw in his best division, the 29th Panzer, to counterattack and stop our advance.

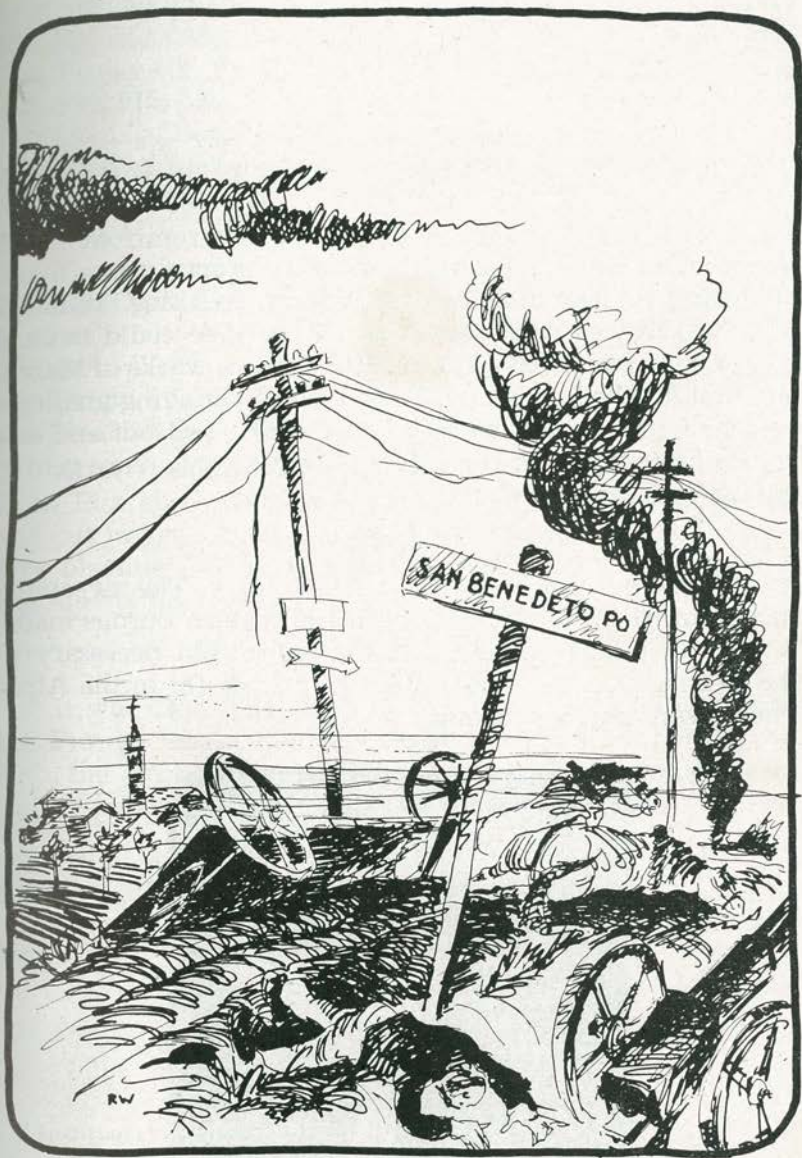
CONSOLIDATION

The 1st Battalion of the 85th defeated elements of the 29th Panzer, seized the Mt. Della Spe defenses, and consolidated positions. Four German counterattacks failed. The 604 Field Artillery continued to hammer away at the regrouping enemy and rearward movement of vehicles, mainly horse-drawn. Meanwhile, the west flank was secured by the 86th, ranged along the west slopes of Mt. Grande D'Aiano.

RETROSPECT

The two actions had cost men and materials; it had cost the enemy much more. A little rest came to the Division, well deserving. There were no longer any doubts. The gap the 10th Mountain Division had ripped in the enemy's defense line pointed to the fact that the ability to attack, sustain that attack, and prevent the enemy from striking back was part of the Division's story. There had been mistakes; there had been more successes. What was most important, the Division had found its combat feet. . . . Meanwhile the German fortress in the east and west was crumbling under the assault of Soviet, British, French, and U.S. might. . . .

It was part of a plan.



We Reached the Po..

CHAPTER III

« »

REST

Many of the men could not get much rest from four days' leave; there was far too much to see. Florence was a maze of historical monuments and English-speaking Italians. Montecatini was somewhat more coarse. We could have a rest or a wild time either place. The last two weeks of March and first of April rolled by. The sound of pounding artillery became more distant; but at night patrols went out and engaged the enemy. The reminders of war became more gentle but never disappeared.

PRIMER

We expected a final push against Jerry. The sweeping success of Allied might in western and eastern Europe made the all-out attack in Italy not only logical but necessary if the Germans contemplated any sort of redoubt in the Alps. There were postponements.



*"What
a Time—
Montecatini"*

From Mount Della Spe we could look across the enemy-held valleys to the heights beyond. On the left there was the dip, and the green basin of Pra del Bianco. Rising from that floor were the connecting hills, so coldly labelled 893, 913, 909, 915, 898. Squarely in front of Della Spe stood the two towns of Serra Sarzana and Torre Iussi. To the east the rock face of Rocca Roffeno rose abruptly above the houses of Roffeno Musiolo. The narrow valley did not seem peaceful.

The 8th Army had opened the all-out attack along the Adriatic Coast. For three nights just after midnight General Ruffner's batteries unleashed heavy barrages against the Germans. When would we attack? The Krauts were expecting a night attack. The 5th Army opened an offensive along the Ligurian Sea. We waited. The tension grew.

After breakfast on the 14th of April, fighter-bombers from Pisa sped over the top of Mount Castellana, circled, and cut in against the German positions; a 35-minute artillery blasting gave the enemy further reason to prime for the inevitable attack.

INITIAL ATTACK

It was 0945. The artillery began to slacken. Down into the Pra del Bianco Basin, abreast the 2nd Battalion of the 85th, the 3rd Battalion of Colonel Barlow's regiment struck. To the valley's edge the advance was quick. Then the Ger-

"Awaiting the Hour"



mans let go with heavy machine gun and mortar fire at the troops in front. There was little protection in the middle of the green stretch. The 3rd Battalion, receiving the majority of the enemy fire, deployed to take up firing positions. Under continual enemy observation the men inched forward. To the right the 2nd Battalion of the 85th was meeting less direct resistance and, therefore, was able to move against Hill 860. From that vantage-point the attached heavy weapons relieved some of the pressure harassing the 3rd Battalion. The 604 Field Artillery fired further preparations.

By 1300 Hills 860, 913, and 909 had been taken. With this southwestern ridgeline temporarily secured, the attack by the two lead battalions of the 85th swung to the northeast against the two remaining adjacent peaks—Hills 915 and 898. The 1st Battalion of the 85th remained in reserve at an assembly area.

THE CENTER

At 0945 also the 87th opened the attack from the forward slopes of Mt. Della Spe. In a column of battalions it pushed to the road leading northeast from Castel D'Aiano. Within fifteen minutes the 1st Battalion had entered Serra Sarzana. An intense artillery barrage temporarily halted the advance. From well-camouflaged positions to the west German machine gunners were pouring in heavy searching fire. The 87th was engaged in a bitter fight in the town of Torre Iussi. Towards the middle of the first days fighting, the 1st Battalion smashed into Torre Iussi. Tenacious Germans persisted in house-to-house fighting. Mortar fire from behind Hill 903 kept coming into the town as we slugged our way through the partially demolished buildings. Colonel Fowler then ordered the 2nd Battalion to swing to the east, bypass the town, and head for Hill 903. Hill 903 fell; Torre Iussi was captured.

When the 87th had attacked, the 86th likewise had jumped off. At 1030, farther to the east, the 2nd Battalion of the 86th headed for the northern corner of Rocca Roffeno. Reaching the valley before the rock face, men hugged the ground under successive mortar barrages from the direction of Hill 903. As with the 1st Battalion of the 87th, once Hill

903 had been secured, the path was open. By five in the afternoon we had clambered over Hill 868 and taken Rocca Roffeno from the west.

At 1900 we began to consolidate and defend the hard won ground. The battle was not over. On the western flank the 85th had slugged forward onto Hills 915 and 898. We formed a semi-circular defense. We tried to get some sleep; for we knew another day of heavy fighting lay ahead. The initial attack of the "all-out" push had been launched. The attack proper was to follow.

ATTACK PROPER

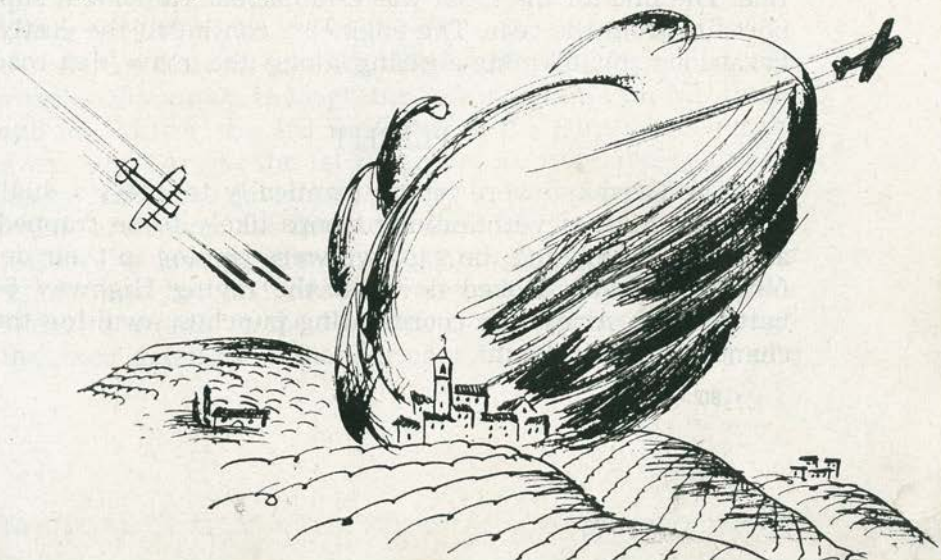
To the northeast the enemy was busily pulling together his troops in an effort to stave off the renewal of our attack. During the night the Germans had failed to reorganize to the strength required for an effective counterattack. We looked to the northeast as the early morning sky opened.

At 0640 the Division's artillery began a steady preparation barrage, joined by the tanks and tank destroyers. Twenty minutes later the 87th struck out across the LD for Mt. Pigna. In an hour, the regiment had elements on the summit ridges, storming the top. The attack continued—a slow process of infantry, medics, and engineers. Artillery continued duelling.

SPREAD

Once the attack was under way, the 2nd Battalion of the 86th, which had crossed the LD at 0700, had moved from Lamari to take Hill 840 and Amore. With help from Company F of the 87th, Colonel Townsend's battalion secured

"Among the Supporting"



Hill 840 and entered Amore. The way was not easy; but the enemy was showing signs of weakening. The crisis of the attack proper was fast reaching a climax.

Stemming from Mt. Pigna, the 2nd Battalion of the 87th headed northeast again for the next key terrain feature, Mt. Croci. We had cover in that sector; but we also had rugged country across which to work. More hills fell into our hands. To the left, the 1st Battalion of the 87th paralleled the advance in a drive against Mt. Le Coste. Attacking from the south, we worked our way upward over the difficult terrain of that line of attack. Enemy machine gun and rifle fire poured on us. In answer we maneuvered elements to the flanks. Soon the triple-threat assault paid dividends. The Germans surrendered. Meanwhile, at 1240 the 3rd Battalion of the 87th had begun the attack against Mt. Croci. After inching forward under intense artillery barrages, we wiped out the main pockets of resistance. At dark we reached the summit.

The early morning attack of the 85th Mountain Infantry had been met with heavy artillery and automatic weapons fire. Rapid advance was impossible because of the numerous mine fields. After a slow and difficult initial advance, the 85th consolidated on the 909-913 ridge-line. The 10th Anti-tank Battalion moved into the southwestern flank, establishing contact on the left with the BEF and on the right with the 3rd Battalion of the 85th.

By 2000 the 2nd Battalion of the 86th had seized Mt. Mantino. The dominating terrain was now in our hands. From Mt. Le Coste south through Hill 815 and Mt. Croci and farther southeast to Mt. Mantino ran our forward attack line. The line for the night was established. Tanks lent support fire from the rear. The engineers continued the costly, hazardous job of mine-clearing along the main dirt-road nets.

PLIGHT

The Germans were trying frantically to effect a dual-program: that of withdrawing troops likely to be trapped, and that of plugging the gaps we were ripping in their defensive line. We looked down at the raging Highway 64 battle. Fifth Army was coordinating punches, awaiting the chance for a knockout.

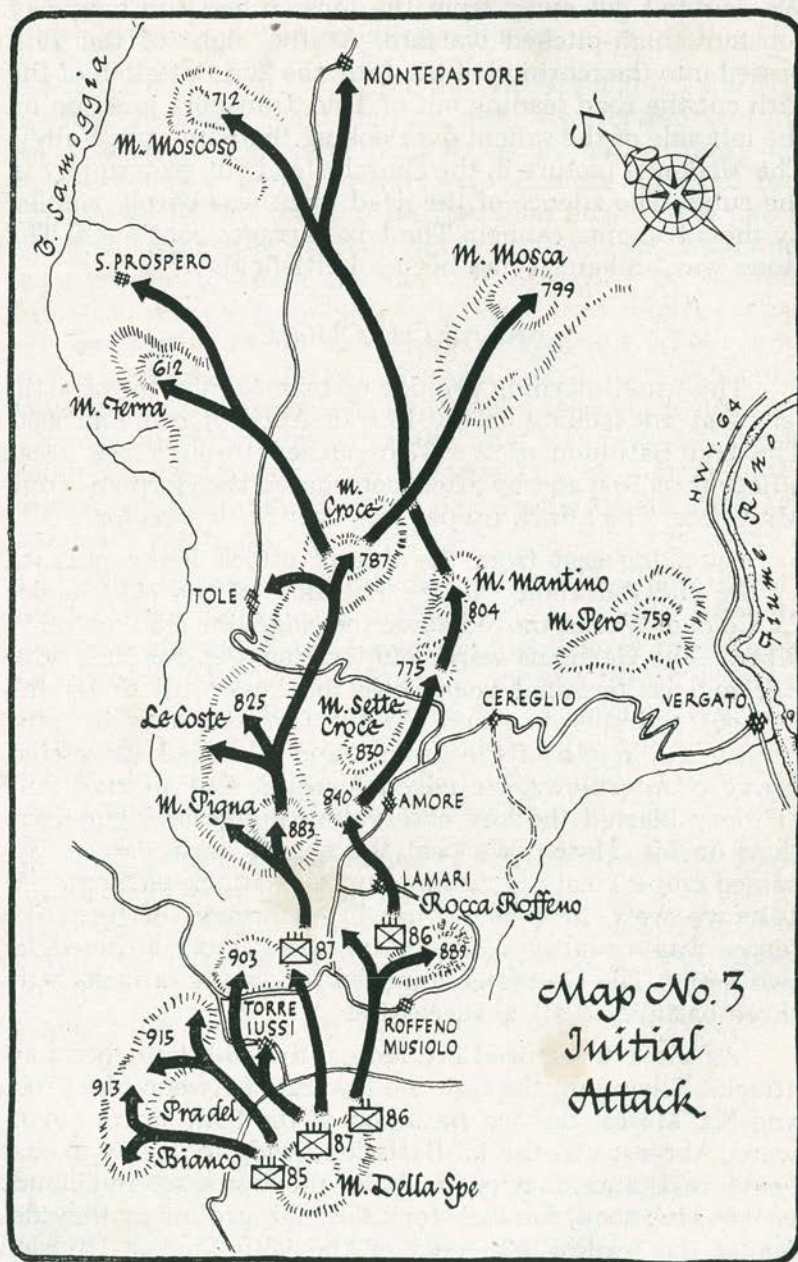
The mountainous terrain was not quiet at night either. We couldn't get away from the tension and the tempo of constant, high-pitched warfare. As the night of the 15th passed into the morning of the 16th, the 2nd Battalion of the 87th cut the road leading out of Tole, transport junction on the left side of the salient overlooking the Samoggia Valley. The Madonna picture in the church stood out grotesquely in the ruins. The silence of the dead town was barely rippled by the advancing cannon. The box barrages continued. The stone was broken; it had been a battlefield.

BREAKTHROUGH

The usual morning prelude of twenty minutes of artillery was not lacking on the 16th of April. It came at 0600. The 2nd Battalion of the 87th pushed through the areas adjacent to Tole and by afternoon chased the Germans from Mt. Croce. The attack proper was over in that sector.

Swinging east from the line of attack being pursued by the 2nd Battalion, the 3rd Battalion of the 87th, under Lt. Colonel Works, moved down the ridge line leading to Mt. Mosca. The Germans were counterattacking, for this ridge line and its terminal peak were too important to let fall without a desperate stand. As the Germans dug in tenaciously the length of the ground and launched successive, heavy counterblows, we edged forward. Our mortars and artillery blasted the key observation points and gun positions on Mt. Mosca. We beat the enemy back slowly. Bypassed snipers kept harassing our rear attack elements. At 1415 we were in control—the breakthrough of fixed defenses was a reality. Mopping-up operations continued for two hours. The Germans launched ten counterattacks with three battalions, all unsuccessful.

As the 87th secured Mt. Mosca, the 86th launched new attacks. Slicing up through the low cuts between Mt. Croce and Mt. Mosca, the 3rd Battalion of the 86th swept northward. Abreast was the 1st Battalion, ready to deploy in case heavy resistance developed. Under the low, scattered clouds of late afternoon, the 86th took the high ground as they defeated the leading elements of the 90th Panzer Division which was the last available reserve of the enemy. We looked downhill to the Po Valley; we had broken through the fixed defenses of the Germans in that sector; only one



strong enemy division, the 90th Panzer, stood between us and a major success.

THE FOURTH DAY—APRIL 17

The fourth consecutive day of battle was the beginning of a three-day battle against the 90th Panzer Division. In this phase of the operations, the 87th jumped off again. Using tanks with the forward elements, we were engaged by the bulk of the 90th Panzer Division in a bitter struggle. Just short of the top of Mt. Ferra, direct enemy fire came pounding in from the exposed left flank. While the 2nd Battalion was pinned down by this accurate artillery, the 1st Battalion of the 87th swung to the east of Mt. Ferra. We began the attack on Mt. San Prospero, using the rolling hills in the vicinity for cover from intersecting, grazing fire. At 2105, the hill fell. Two hours earlier the 2nd Battalion had taken Mt. Ferra. The number of prisoners began to rise rapidly.

The speed of the attack on the 17th increased. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 86th launched a coordinated attack down off the prominent ground. The 3rd Battalion, breaking to the northwest, pushed forward towards Mt. Moscoso. The 1st Battalion split to the northeast to take the high ground in the area short of Vignola. Through this gap the 2nd Battalion of the 86th swept down out of the hills to Montepastore, capturing the town at 0945. To the west the 90th Panzer Division was putting up a determined fight. The clearing of Mt. Moscoso was slow; but the attack continued. The 1st Battalion meanwhile had cleaned up pockets of isolated resistance and pushed into Vignola.

The 85th Mountain Infantry was relieved on their defensive positions by the BEF and rapidly moved to reserve positions in the rear of the 86th Mountain Infantry. The artillery battalions were displacing forward in an effort to support to the maximum the advancing infantry.

Both flanks of the Division were exposed well in advance of the nearest divisions on our right and left. We were the spearhead.

THE FIFTH DAY—APRIL 18

The sweep to the Po Valley slowed down under the impact of bitter fighting on the 18th; but it did not stop.

In the general direction of Sulmona, the 86th began another day of attacking. At 1245 the 3rd Battalion of the 86th reported that Sulmona had fallen. West of San Chierlo the 2nd Battalion of Lt. Colonel Cook's regiment (Colonel Tomlinson having been wounded during the third day's action) was meeting much stiffer opposition. Our troops, advancing with armor, were meeting more and more concentrated German fire. Determined, fanatical resistance continued in front of the 3rd Battalion of the 86th. The deep tones of artillery became more pronounced. At 1130 the 87th renewed the attack against heavy resistance over difficult terrain. Gains were slow and painful, but important terrain features were taken and heavy losses inflicted on the enemy. At this time also the 85th completed its regrouping behind the 86th.

There was no more extensive prodding of the ground. The heavy deadly mine fields were behind us; the Germans had no time in which to lay more mines. During the bright but slightly hazy day the air arm had hit the German vehicles hustling to the north. Five days' fighting had netted us 2197 prisoners of war.

As we continued to spearhead the Fifth Army attack in this sector, the 1st Armored Division began to move up on our left and the 85th Division began to move up on our right. The attack would soon spread from the dominating ground which we had taken.

THE SIXTH DAY—APRIL 19

On the sixth day of battle we broke through the left flank of the 90th Panzer Division and seized the last low ridge guarding the Po Valley. Beyond lay the highly coveted valley plain.

The 1st Battalion of the 85th passed through the 86th Infantry and, utilizing armor, launched an attack at 0700. As the attack progressed, it became clear that the bulk of the 90th Panzer Division was defending the heights west of the Lavino River Valley, and that only small forces supported by artillery defended the low ground and the valley road. While one company of the 85th, the 10th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, and the 87th continued the attack against the 90th Panzer Division in the Mt. Saint Michele-Mt. San Pietro area, the remainder of the 85th broke

through the Lavino River Valley, turned the flank of the 90th Panzer Division, and raced for the rich Po Valley.

In the 87th attack the 1st Battalion ran into strong defenses short of Mongiorgio. The attached British 178th Medium Royal Artillery went to work. After bitter house-to-house fighting, the town fell. Thereafter the attack went along more quickly against only spotty resistance. The 3rd Battalion of the 87th took Il Poggio and Sylvestri. There, in house clusters atop a series of pinnacles, the Germans made a last-ditch stand. South of San Pietro there was a strong, well organized delaying action. The Germans were frantic once again. The 3rd Battalion was held up; then finally broke loose and pushed over Mt. San Pietro and Paldi Musico. The Germans were forced to give up that defense. Before nightfall on the 19th, the 3rd Battalion had taken Mt. Avezzano. In front of the 1st Battalion, the Germans still continued to rally enough men and weapons to throw small counterattacks. The 2nd Battalion of the 87th was pressing on the heels of the 3rd. The enemy had lost commanding ground; they could do nothing but harass.

The 85th had met some determined resistance in their attack during the day. Enemy artillery covered the routes of approach. However, the supporting artillery sent over counterbattery and finally silenced the enemy guns. By evening the 85th held the last ridge of the Apennine Mountains. There were no more mountains. The enemy had lost control of the Apennines entirely. The 8th Army was sweeping towards the pivotal point of the Ferrara highways; the Fifth Army was closing in on Bologna, crouched in the foothills. Was the end in view?

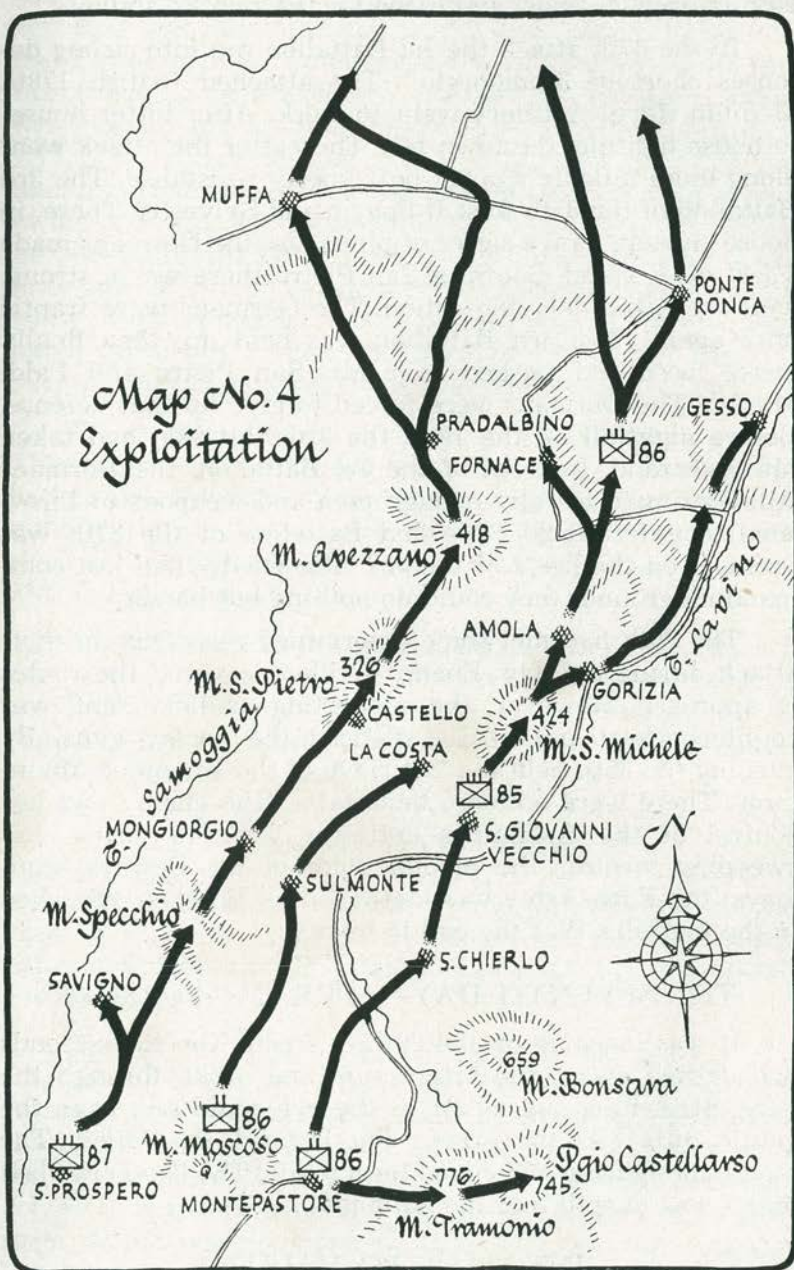
THE SEVENTH DAY—APRIL 20—PURSUIT

It was morning on the 20th of April. The early clouds had drifted away; the bright sunshine broke through the haze. Stretching out, as far as the eye could see, from the gentle hills was the green, dike-latticed Po Valley. The mountain fighting had ended for a while. The flood of Allied might was to spill into the flatlands.

INTO THE PO VALLEY

Enemy delaying action prevented our having breakfast in the Po Valley. The first American troops to enter the Po

Map No. 4 Exploitation



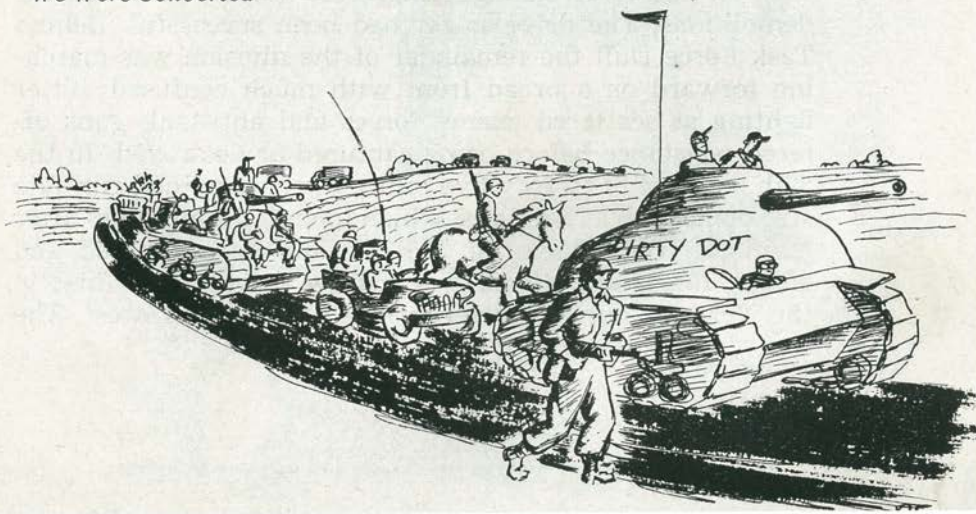
Valley, or as many like to say, "to debouch into the valley", were those of the 3rd Platoon of Company A of the 85th Mountain Infantry. It was but the beginning. By noon we had entered the valley in force. The movement in the middle of our sector became swift. The roads were numerous; the opposition light. The men took to tanks, overriding any resistance that cropped up.

In this attack the 86th had secured important road junctions just short of the valley floor; then had struck out for Ponte Samoggia along Highway 9, the important artery between Bologna and Modena. The armor sped to the main road intersections and set up road blocks. At 1430 Company A of the 86th had cut Highway 9. By nightfall the entire regiment had set up in the Po Valley. The 3rd Battalion of the 86th took Ponte Samoggia at 2255.

Striking out from the high ridge line to the west of the 86th, the 87th pushed forward. The 2nd Battalion of that regiment was aiming for check point 80, the town of Pradalbino. This little village dominated the valley entrances in that sector. Its defenses were closely integrated with support from mortars and machine guns. It was necessary to take Pradalbino. Our artillery batteries launched heavy concentrations. The defenses softened. The Germans, nevertheless, made a last-ditch stand. That alley-to-alley defense failed. By nightfall, after knocking out the delaying forces, the 87th moved into the Po Valley.

The 85th busily set up road blocks and made contact with the 86th units. The first night defense of the Po Valley campaign was established. The front had moved forward.

"We Were Converted"



SPEED

It became imperative to strike as fast as possible against the retreating enemy, to disrupt any organized withdrawal, to insure the complete rout of his troops. We did not have the equipment or mobility with which to transport the entire division. Therefore, General Hays decided in favor of a task force under the command of the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Duff. Speed was necessary.

THE EIGHTH DAY—APRIL 21

TASK FORCE DUFF

The prime mission of Task Force Duff was to capture intact the bridge at Bomporto, which crossed the Panaro River. Otherwise, we would be held up in our advance against the Po River. Made up of the 2nd Battalion of the 86th, Company D of the 751st Tank Battalion, one platoon of the 701st Tank Destroyers, Company B of the 126th Engineers, signalmen from the 110th Signal Company, and the 91st Armored Reconnaissance Squadron, Task Force Duff began its motor march across the Po Valley at 0630 on the morning of the 21st. Paralleling this movement was that of the 87th on the left. Enemy resistance consisted of anti-tank guns and defended road blocks. Sniper fire, occasional bursts of machine gun fire slowed the lead elements. Communications was maintained by radio. Prisoners taken were started down the roads to the rear without guards, to be picked up by the infantry units moving less rapidly up the network of roads.

At 1610 the bridge at Bomporto, primed for destruction, was taken intact. However, in answer the Germans let loose with an half-hour barrage. Engineers quickly removed the demolitions. The drive so far had been successful. Behind Task Force Duff the remainder of the division was marching forward on a broad front with much confused, bitter fighting as scattered enemy forces and anti-tank guns offered resistance before being captured or destroyed. In the 87th advance of twenty-five miles, the column had run into stiff opposition at Bastiglia, which town fell four hours after midnight. Both flanks of the division were exposed and enemy forces attempted to withdraw through our lines to the North as our advance continued to the northwest. The

fighting sparked on into the night as the enemy blundered into our outposts. Unit commanders spent the night planning the next day's operations. We had now split two German Corps and were engaging the enemy trains, supply and anti-aircraft positions, and units in retreat from the hills.

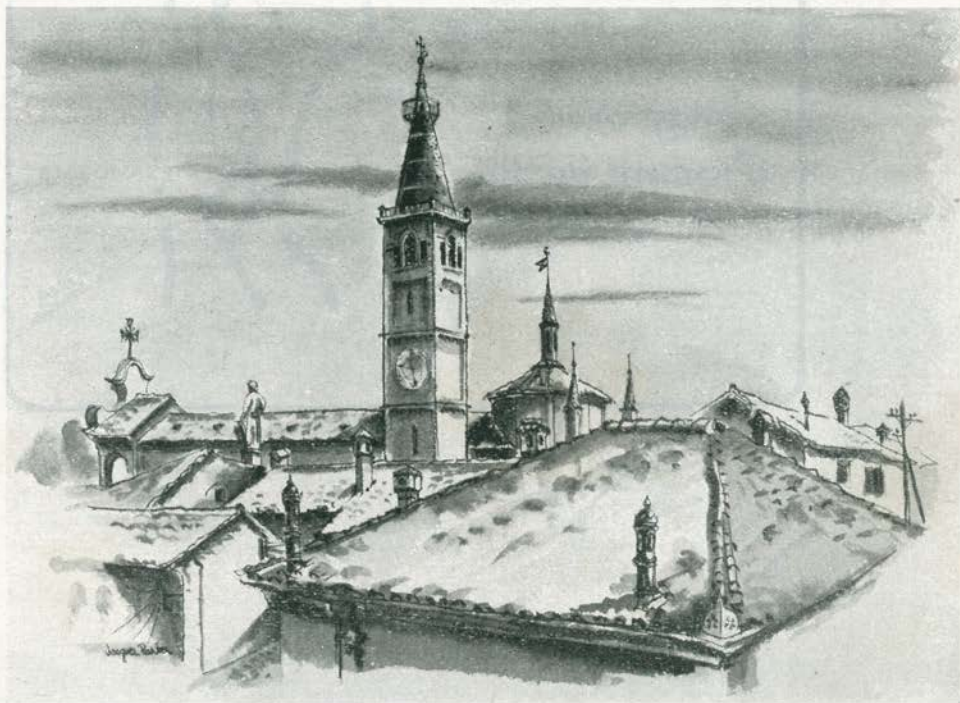
THE NINTH DAY—APRIL 22

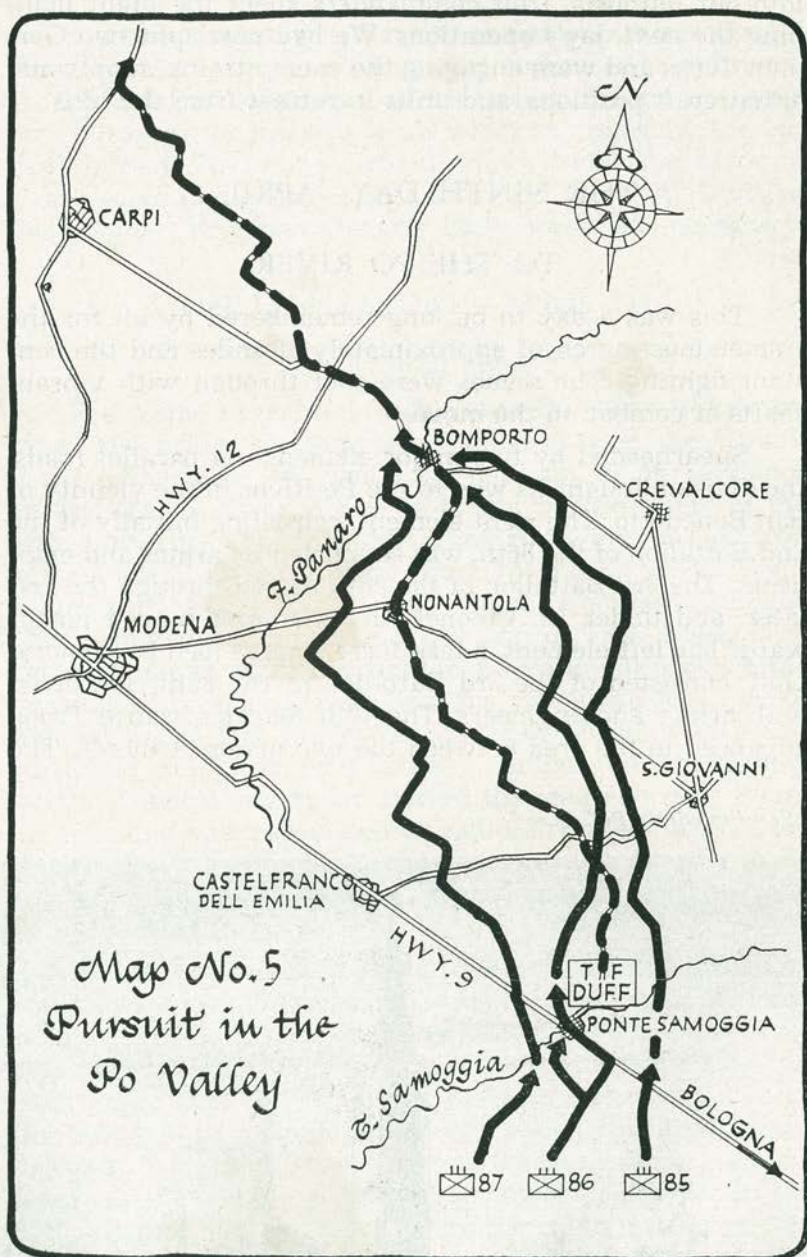
TO THE PO RIVER

This was a day to be long remembered by all for the tremendous march of approximately 40 miles and the constant fighting. The scenes were shot through with vibrant shafts of combat on the move.

Spearheaded by two major elements on parallel roads, the division fought its way to the Po River in the vicinity of San Benedetto. The right element, consisting initially of the 2nd Battalion of the 86th, was supported by armor and engineers. The 3rd Battalion of the 86th passed through the 2nd later, and under Lt. Colonel Hay that unit moved northward. The left element, a task force commanded by General Duff, consisted of the 3rd Battalion of the 85th reinforced with armor and engineers. The 10th Reconnaissance Troop advanced in the area between the two major elements. The

"San Benedetto Po"



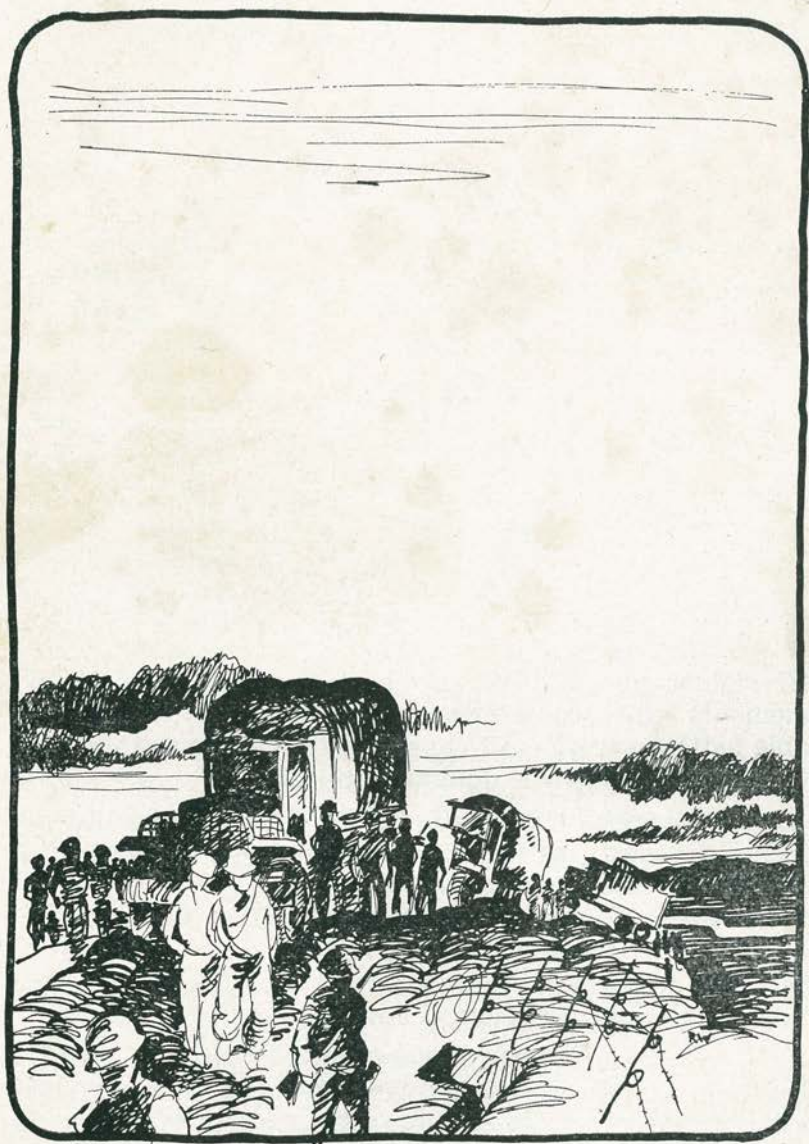


remainder of the 86th advanced behind the right element, and the rest of the division followed Task Force Duff. The 10th Anti-tank Battalion, supported by artillery, guarded the Bomporto bridges.

Just as darkness fell, Task Force Duff entered the town of San Benedetto Po. Its commander, however, had been seriously wounded while attempting to prevent a tank from hitting an enemy mine. Road blocks and all-around defenses were established.

The remainder of the Division moved forward by marching and shuttling. Supply became an acute problem. Transportation became less acute as the Division accumulated more and more abandoned vehicles. The sight of a vehicle burning on the side of a road, or in a barn or some farmyard became familiar. So rapid was the advance that even hitherto untouched rear elements probed out enemy snipers, engaged in fire fights with the disorganized enemy. On the whole, however, bypassed Germans surrendered. They received little consideration. A shout, a curse, a reminder sent them scurrying down the road. The Italians were delirious. Bread, wine, handshakes went the rounds of each group as they pushed on. The occasional clatter of fire-fights failed to dim the enthusiasm. It was infectious. We were liberators.

We had reached the Po River first. We were winning the race. Out of the Apennines to the Po River in nine days—this drive had constituted one of the greatest advances in the history of the Mediterranean Battle. Yet, there was no stopping until the final victory over Germany was a reality.



We Crossed the Po...

CHAPTER IV

« »

THE PO RIVER

To the West the Po River split on both sides of the sand bar, then swept on down before the sloping banks of Ostiglia-Revere. In front of San Benedetto Po the current was fairly rapid; the breadth some three hundred yards.

The two dikes, running parallel to the Po, afforded the only protection to the infantrymen hugging the ground, awaiting the H-Hour of crossing. To the right of the main road running from San Benedetto Po to the river were twenty 450-pound assault boats. Engineers had braved the observation of the enemy to line them up just prior to noon. On the other side of the road, just short of the last line of trees, were thirty more assault boats. To the rear, behind this initial wave, other infantrymen were assembling. To the right, center, and left, all the artillery except the organic elements still enroute had moved into position. The available batteries were ready to support the projected crossing. Crews were preparing ammunition loads.

It was noon on the 23rd of April. The first assault wave inched forward; the accompanying engineers prepared the boats. At three minutes after the hour, the Germans cut loose with a very heavy 20 mm and 88 mm barrage. Time bursts sprayed the ground where the 1st Battalion of the 87th was drawn up. The soft dirt of one foxhole collapsed, burying alive its occupant. We waited no longer.

We had had a busy morning on the 23rd of April; the Division had regrouped from march columns into tactical positions for attack. Task forces were sent out to engage the enemy on both of our flanks. The 86th had closed in and assumed positions to protect our rear. Reconnaissance of the Po River had been made. Assault boats had been sent for. The plans had been made, and orders issued for the crossing. The Division was to engage in an unique operation, that of crossing a major river while fighting on both flanks and protecting its rear.

CROSSING

We started across the river, two hundred-to-three hundred yards wide at the spot. Twelve men and three engineers crouched low in each assault boat. The Germans kept flak flying in on the crossing areas. Our artillery and tanks engaged in a duel with these hostile guns.

The crossing never hesitated. Smithville, Texas and the Colorado River came back vividly. The boats began to return for succeeding waves. Most of our casualties were suffered on the south bank prior to launching the boats. In the crossing there were few casualties. Up and over the north bank we dashed. We suffered more casualties on that bank; but we moved on, expanding that initial beachhead. By 1300 the beachhead was well enough secured that the shuttle of other troops could safely begin. With this information in hand, the 2nd Battalion of the 87th began to cross the river. The 3rd Battalion of the same regiment followed. By 1745 the entire 87th was across on the north side of the Po. We were disrupting the enemy's plans of forestalling the pursuit which had been initiated at Crespellano.

EXPANSION

As the 87th battalions fanned out, the 85th began to cross the river. By early evening we had two regiments in strength across the Po. The job of artillery became more important as our beachhead became more vulnerable. The 86th continued to clean out remnants of the enemy still on the south side. The Germans had yet to surrender entirely. To the East the 85th Division was moving into Ostiglia-Revere.

We were the first to cross the Po River. As night came dual-engine Messerschmidts came over the area singly to machine-gun the routes of approach, to find the exact location of our crossing and proposed bridge sites. We held firm. The winding, diagonal communications trench had served us well. Yet, there were some who only saw the Po River.

The next day we began to expand. The 85th and 87th pushed out from the small beachhead against varying resistance, mainly in the form of anti-aircraft artillery. The 86th meanwhile had crossed the river, using the newly arrived DUKW's. As the expansion went on, the Division's



“Crossing”

Artillery Battalions moved across the river to support more closely this exploitation of the beachhead and to protect against any counterattacks.

BRIDGING

We watched the DUKW's and the ferry pour the men and supplies across the river. We remembered the pictures of pontoon bridges across the Rhine.

On the 24th the 410 Treadway Battalion, the 404th Quonset Barge Battalion and the 154th Engineer Heavy Pontoon Battalion moved into San Benedetto Po. They began to go to work establishing the bridge sites and gauging the current. Across the river the infantry continued to expand the beachhead, awaiting the order to break through and race to the north. We had pushed out to two miles in depth by the night of the second day. The Germans had offered especially strong resistance in the west. We had, however, caught the enemy in a weak position. We would soon again be ready to pursue.

CONFERENCE

While the engineers worked at the bridges, General Hays laid the plans for another Task Force at a meeting of organizational commanders and his staff, in the fields outside the castle walls of San Benedetto Po. The purpose of this group was to reach Verona and capture that communications hub before the Germans could evacuate troops to the

"Moving Up"



south of that city. To assume the post of Assistant Division Commander, Colonel William O. Darby, famous founder and motivator of the Rangers, joined the 10th Mountain Division. To work under him as a task force were the 13th Tank Battalion, the 86th Regiment, Company B of the 701st Tank Destroyers, Company B of the 751st Tank Battalion, the 1125th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, and elements of the 126th Engineer and 10th Medical Battalions.

During the night we patrolled in all directions, in order to find the best route for Task Force Darby. We were ready to race again.

AN AIRFIELD

During the early morning hours of the 25th of April, the 1st Battalion of the 85th set out on a 30-mile march to clear the route for Task Force Darby. Initial resistance consisted of road blocks, which were quickly reduced. We skirted the city of Mantova, only to find that the center had been secured by Partisans at 0900. The bridging across the Mincio River we found in poor shape, having been blown in several cases by the Germans. However, the battalion kept moving forward. By 2200 we had reached the objective, the airfield at Villafranca, which was held by the enemy in considerable strength. We deployed and within two hours cleaned out the enemy defending the base. One bewildered German pilot of a Focke-Wolfe recalled the scene most vividly. He landed to be greeted and captured by an American sentry. We consolidated.

"Moving Back"



TASK FORCE DARBY

Unfortunately the difficulties of the Po River caused the bridging to be delayed until 1800 on the 25th. Once the treadway bridge was ready, the component elements of Task Force Darby moved across the river and headed northward to Villafranca.

At 2000 the task force reached Villafranca. At 0400 the task force attacked Verona, encountering road blocks, demolitions, and scattered snipers. By 0600 we had cleared Verona and crossed the Adige River. The welcome by the people of Verona had been tremendous. Meanwhile, to the rear, along the main routes, the other regiments and special battalions of the Division were moving, mopping up bypassed areas and establishing road blocks at the important road junctions. It was time for a decision as to what route to follow in continuing the pursuit of the Germans.

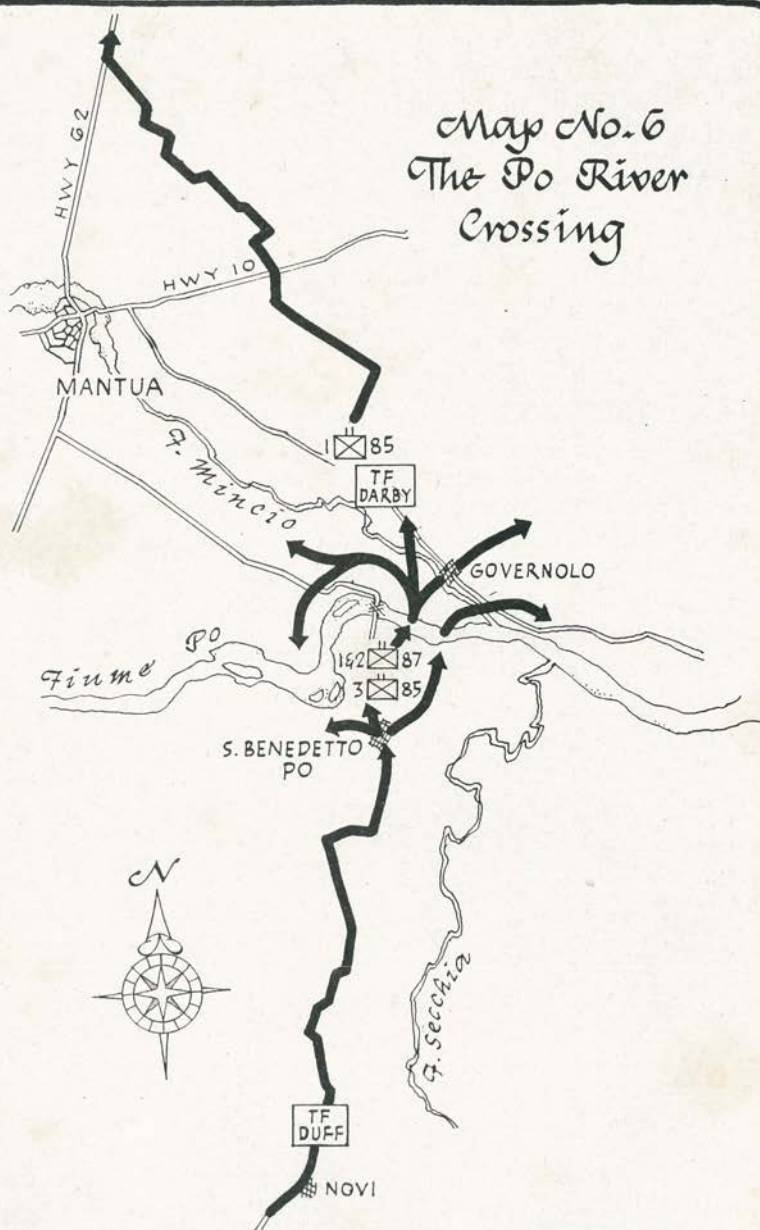
The Alps shoved their white peaks upward in the distance. The race across the verdant, fertile Po Valley had ended. Six days of rapid advance made a startling story. The impressions were fleeting. We had ridden the tanks, received the Italian welcome, and swept on somewhat flushed.

DECISION

The Germans were withdrawing as quickly as possible in the direction of Brenner Pass. On the East they were using the two routes flanking the Adige River. Committed to this line of approach was the 88th Division. To the West the Germans were using both roads running along Lake Garda. At a conference on the 26th with his staff and organizational commanders, General Hays determined to swing to



Map No. 6
The Po River
Crossing



the northwest and strike up the road on the east side of Lake Garda, headed for Trento. We were to go into the mountains again. A new system was devised whereby a battalion of each regiment was designated as the leading element. That regiment would push forward on foot as fast as possible for eight hours; then stop and rest for sixteen hours before moving up in trucks to resume the march. This method would give each regiment some rest between spurts.

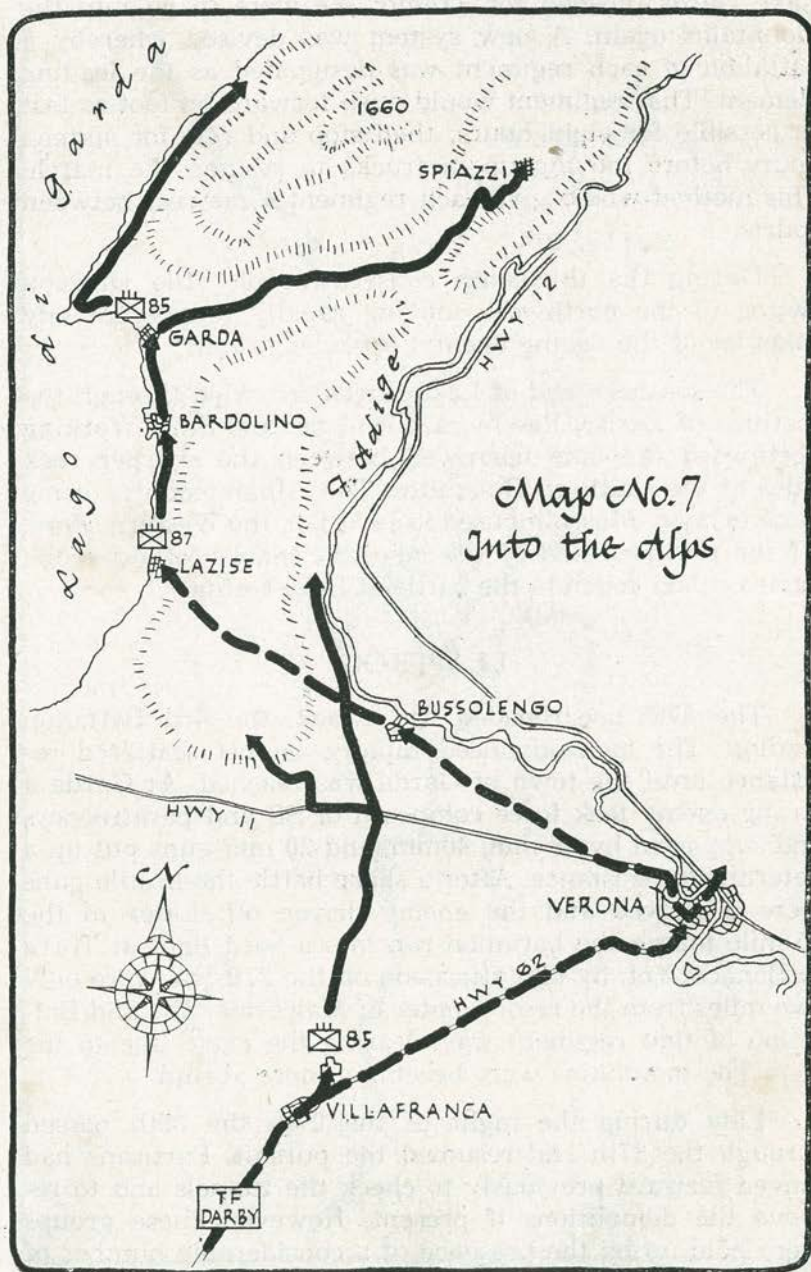
During the thirteenth consecutive day the Division swung to the northwest, moving rapidly to prevent any juncture of the fleeing enemy. Bussolengo fell.

The southern end of Lake Garda sprawled through the foothills of Lazise, Peschiera, Sirmione, and Salo. Working northward the lake narrowed between the sharper rock sides of the southern Dolomites. The Alpine country came close to hand. Mussolini used to cavort on the Western shore. At the northern end of the lake, the glacier of Adamello gave a colder touch to the battle of Lake Garda.

LEAPFROG

The 87th spearheaded the attack, the 3rd Battalion leading. The men advanced rapidly against scattered resistance until the town of Garda was reached. At Garda a strong enemy task force composed of SS and paratroopers and supported by 88 mm, 40mm, and 20 mm guns put up a determined resistance. After a sharp battle the hostile guns were destroyed and the enemy driven off. Later in the 15-mile march the battalion ran into a hard fight at Torre di Benaco. Yet, by late afternoon on the 27th we were only two miles from the resort center of Malcesine. The 2nd Battalion of that regiment was clearing the ridge line to the east. The mountains were becoming more abrupt.

Late during the night of the 27th the 85th passed through the 87th and resumed the pursuit. Partisans had moved forward previously to check the tunnels and to remove the demolitions if present. However, these groups were held up by the presence of a considerable number of Germans. By 0700 on the 28th the 2nd Battalion of the 86th was beginning to pass through the 85th. At the same time the resistance was taking form.



Using picked paratroops and SS men mixed with regular infantry, the Germans began a determined stand; for to the north the fleeing, disorganized Germans were being corralled and prepared to make a stand. They needed time to reorganize their defenses. To the end of preventing our advance, the Germans blew the tunnel above Navene. The approaches to the tunnel on both sides had been badly blown also. The rock had cascaded into the opening and across the road, finally slipping down the cut- and blown-away sides into the lake. It would require two days' hard work to clear the tunnel. SP guns were firing down the lake from the mouths of successive tunnels. The fight looked hard.

ALTERNATIVE

We were stopped—but only temporarily. The sharp rock cliffs, too steep to climb without special equipment and devoid of cover, were to the East. The west side consisted of open water. This was the alternative. We took to the water. The DUKW's, acquired back at the Po, were still with us, carrying miscellaneous loads.

Company G of the 86th, supported by the 701st Tank Destroyers and three 105 mm howitzers of the 1125th in direct fire positions, made an amphibious assault. In seven overloaded DUKW's the unit moved out to the middle of the lake, where enemy 88's took them under fire. Our supporting artillery silenced the 88's and placed heavy fire on the enemy holding-positions. The DUKW's headed toward the shore between the third and fourth tunnels. There was a brief fire fight between our men in the DUKW's and the enemy ashore as we closed in. The enemy was caught off guard, however, and capitulated. The stone-cut embrasures of bypassed tunnels were soon silenced. In a daring operation we captured an almost impregnable position with only two slight casualties sustained.

By 1545 the 2nd Battalion of the 86th reported that the first four tunnels had been completely cleared. But the battle was not over. The other battalions of the 86th meanwhile moved through the water to join the leading elements.

The 87th took to the mountains. During the 28th the 1st Battalion of the 87th moved to Presina and Caprino. The going was tough. Meanwhile, driving for the head of the lake, the 2nd Battalion moved north up the valley east of

and parallel to Lake Garda. The battalion then bypassed 200 SS troops at Spiazzi by crossing a high mountain ridge during the storm which settled down over the mountains in the afternoon. That night a circular defense was set up within the hard ground. Before dawn on the 29th the 1st Battalion of the 87th moved out to break through Spiazzi and thereby

open the road in support of the 2nd Battalion. Against fanatical resistance we finally surrounded the town and eliminated the German defenses. Both Battalions then withdrew as soon as communications were re-established and the progress along the lake shore made known. Down on the lake the 86th had buttoned down and prepared for counter-action. There were no counterattacks.

TARGET

Farther south along the eastern shore, British 5.5's swung into action. Across the lake the Germans were frantically trying to push a convoy north along the lower road. As the vehicles appeared from between the numerous tunnels (seventy-two in number between Gargnano and Riva) the British artillery opened up on them. It was good target practice.

AGAIN

At 0600 on the 29th the 86th renewed the attack along the road on the eastern side of the lake. Enemy artillery caused numerous casualties. From the fifth tunnel came heavy machine gun fire. However, by 0930 that tunnel had fallen. The 3rd Battalion of the 86th moved forward. The German shelling of the road made that movement slow and



*"Amphibious
Artillery"*

dangerous. By noon the last two tunnels had been cleaned out. The battle was becoming more fierce; the Germans were more fanatical in their defense. The war had not ended.

Carefully the Germans took advantage of every defense which was available. The lack of growth on the rocky mountain sides made the camouflage of movement practically impossible. The attack was up the one possible road route. From concealed positions the Germans pounded our advancing units. We hoped to break away from this type warfare soon.

TWO TOWNS

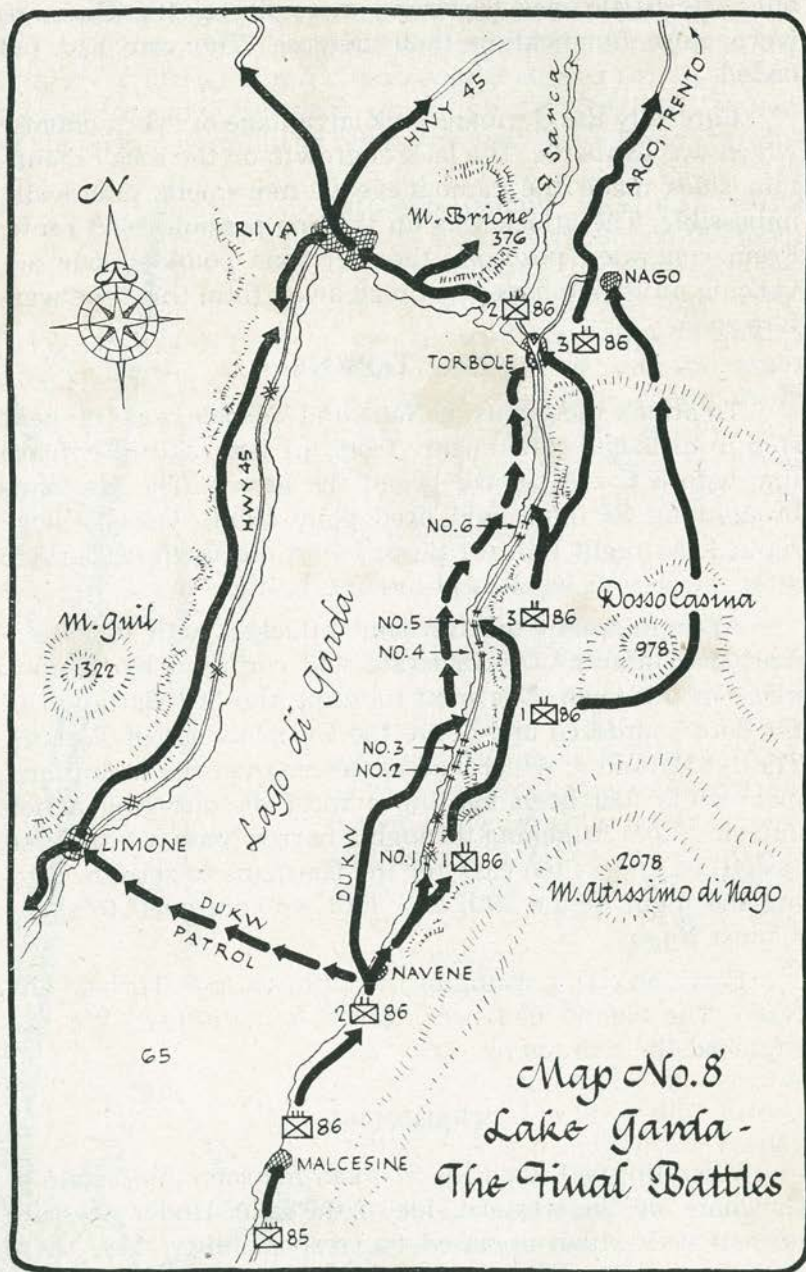
To attack the towns of Nago and Torbole was the next step in dislodging the enemy from his last natural defense line before the Alps. We began the attack. The Germans brought up SP guns and fired point-blank. Our artillery replied. As night fell, we pushed into the town of Torbole after a series of hard hand-to-hand battles.

After midnight the Germans attacked with tanks, armor, and infantry. A desperate and confused battle took place in the town. The next morning the 3rd Battalion of the 86th countered and drove the Germans out of Torbole. The 1st Battalion, which had advanced over the mountains, meanwhile had been fighting a most discouraging action outside Nago. Attacking through a narrow pass, we suffered casualties. It was too easy for the Germans to zero in. During the night of the 29th and 30th we continued to shove against Nago.

Early on the morning of the 30th we took Torbole and Nago. The enemy had been forced to withdraw. We had captured the two towns.

REMINDER

Mussolini had liked his 37-room mansion and estate at Gargnano on the western side of the lake. Under pressure he had fled. Milan assumed the responsibility. Yet, there were records. On the night of the 29th Company K of the 85th and members of the staff crossed in DUKW's and took the villa. We saw there another reminder of Fascism.



FOLDING

On the first of May, as the 87th continued clearing the ridges of infiltrating Germans, Company E of the 86th took Riva. The main battle of Lake Garda was finished. The work was not done though. The engineers busily continued clearing the wreckage caused by the enemy demolitions. Supply remained a problem. The war had not ended.

Other units pressed northward; patrols kept contact with the rear of the retreating German columns. We prepared for the Alpine phase. German artillery continued to hit our positions—Colonel Darby, who was buttoning up the attack on Trento and Bolzano, was killed in such a barrage. Arco and Albergò were taken by the 86th.

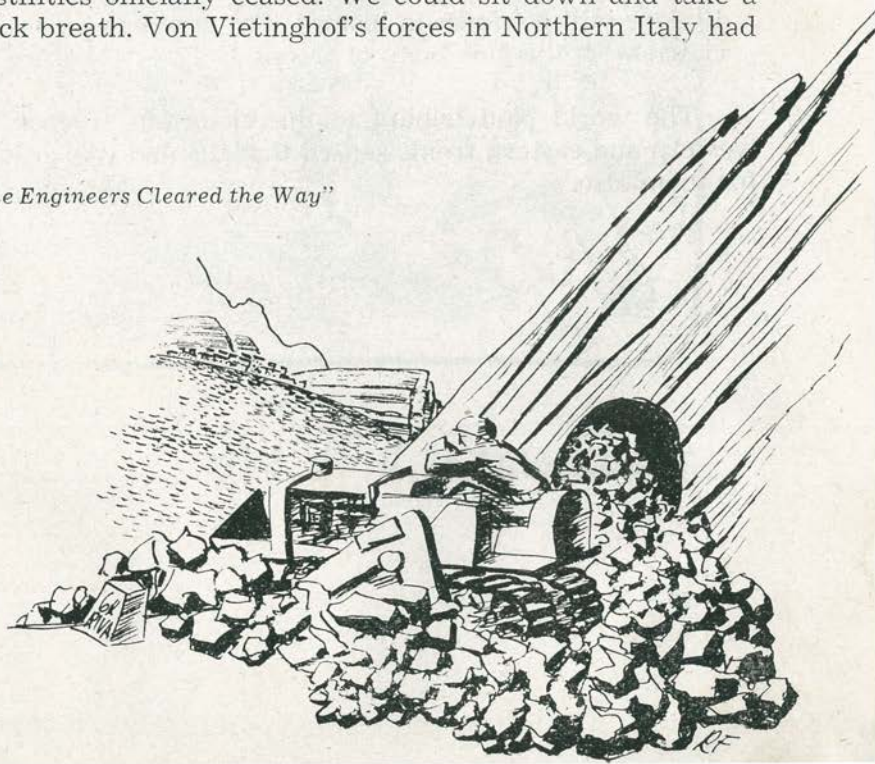
2ND OF MAY

The 2nd of May was the 19th consecutive day of fighting. We were becoming tired. Another day of strain was expected. Was the end in sight? The weary troops maintained visual contact and looked tiringly at the boulder-strewn mountains—the Dolomites. We were resolved.

... It was 1840 — Army time ...

Hostilities officially ceased. We could sit down and take a quick breath. Von Vietinghof's forces in Northern Italy had

"The Engineers Cleared the Way"



cracked and surrendered. It was simply—victory. The late evening sun of the 2nd of May seemed softer. A stirring, great chapter of history closed on its own pages. Was there a visible finality?

“I am proud indeed that the knockout thrust has been spearheaded by the 10th Mountain Division. . . . When you go home, no one will believe you when you start telling of the spectacular things you have done. There have been more heroic deeds and experiences crammed into these days than I have ever heard of. . . .

“You were pushed to the limit, but we got the Krauts off balance so they could never reform or reorganize. . . .

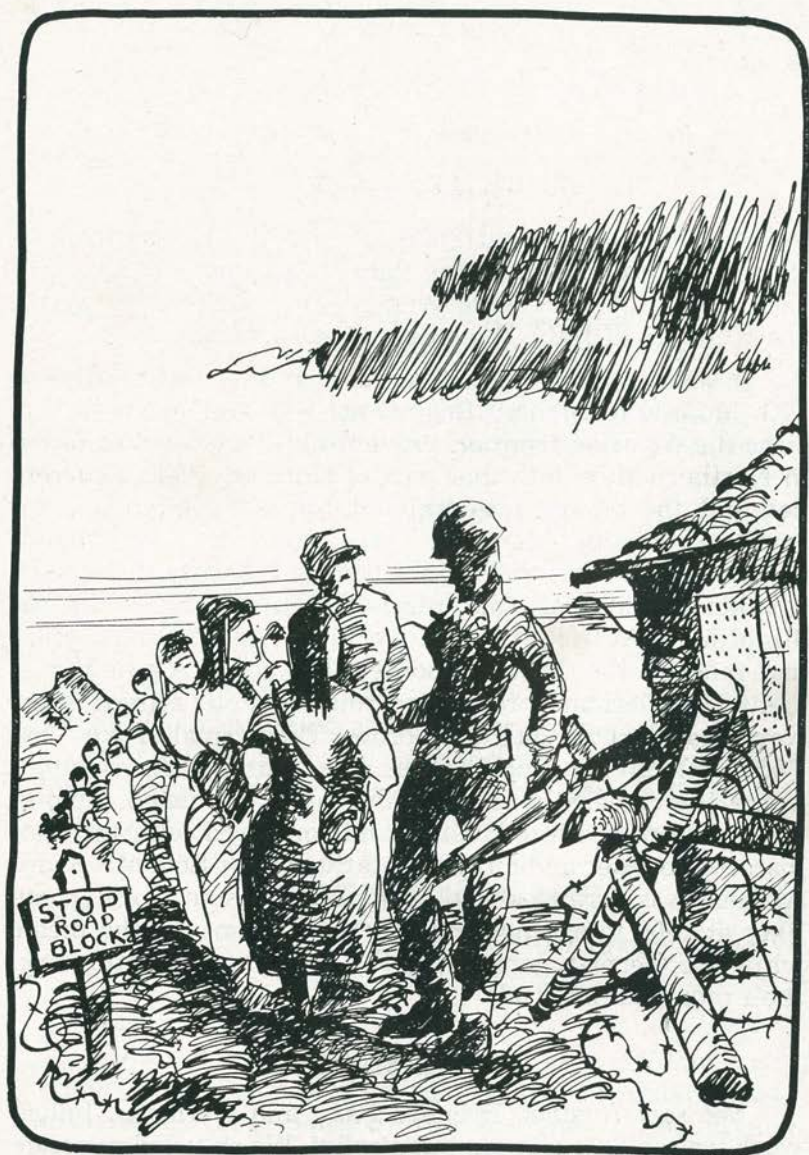
“I have been privileged to participate in many actions that were considered important and fierce battles.

“Many times we stuck our neck out with exposed flanks. The Lord had us by the hand.”

The men of the Division shared that victory with their Commanding General. Later, on the 3rd of May, General Hays said:

“We have achieved final victory over the German armies in this theater and in southern Austria. These 19 days will go down in history. I’m proud to be associated with this fine body of troops.”

The world paid tribute to the victorious troops. The western and eastern fronts sensed that the end was at hand for them also.



We Will Remember..

CHAPTER V

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MORE TASK FORCES

Negotiations for the surrender of the German Armies in Italy were initiated. But the fight in Europe was not over. The German Armies were pressing back against the northern frontiers of Italy. We still had work to do.

A special task force, including elements of the 86th and 87th Mountain Infantry Regiments, was sent northward to close the Austrian frontier, preventing withdrawal of forces in Northern Italy into that part of Germany yet to surrender and the escape into Italy of forces fleeing from our armies in Europe. The Task Force, under the command of Colonel Thomson, who was acting as Assistant Division Commander at that time, reached Bolzano at 2100 on the 4th of May. At 0400 the next morning Task Force Thomson had reached the Austrian border. It was a propitious moment. The German forces retreating from our armies in the North had just reached the border. The arrival of our Task Force, effectively blocking the pass, was the straw which broke the camel's back. A white flag was hoisted. Colonel Thomson crossed into Austria and conferred with the German commander and a representative of our Seventh Army. A truce was arranged and an envoy was sent through our lines at 1000 to arrange the surrender terms. In the meanwhile the German generals to the South were turning over their men and materials.

AFTERMATH

We saw Austria, Brenner Pass, and Germans. Police-work was an anti-climax; but a relief. We shuttled prisoners south to Ghedi. We captured champagne. V-E day on the 8th of May made relaxation easier, more complete. We moved around—partly business, partly pleasure. We shifted into the Alps, others farther south into Riva. The calendar changed color. There was a new measure to the success of a day.

It appeared as if we would guard the prisoners for a while. We moved southward towards the wide end of the lake. We began to settle down. How many points do you have? There were varied responses. The Far East had a closer ring than ever before. Italy was not forgotten. The Poretta cemetery belonged to the Division, to those less fortunate than we.

BALANCE

The end of war does not settle a world, or a part of the world. The problem of Trieste was to bring home to each of us the need for cooperation, the need of peaceful consideration of problematical disputes. It provoked questions—then and later. The long trip across the northern edge of the Po Valley to Udine, the weeks of sitting along the Isonzo River or in the Julian Valley were part of the Division's history.

MEMORY

The story of Italy was completed. We moved from Venezia-Guilia to Florence for staging. Then we separated; some units to Leghorn, others to Naples to ship back to the United States. It was August, 1945. Three months after the fall of Hitler's Wehrmacht in the Europe we were leaving, Japan was weakening at the knees on the other side of the world. On shipboard we heard of the Soviet Union's declaration of war and the introduction by our air forces of the most powerful secret weapon of the war, the atomic bomb.

... 1900, 14 August, 1945 ...

President Truman announced the unconditional
surrender of Japan.

One hundred and ninety weeks of terrifying war had ended; the tension of that last week had broken. It was an enormous event, charged with joy and sorrow, with certainty and doubt, and with gratitude and questioning. Whether in a camp, on a train, at a station, or luckily at home that hour, we celebrated. Our emotions ran high. The hand we were prepared to lend in effecting that Pacific victory would not be needed. As individuals our future came close to hand. Tremendous responsibilities lay on us, the victors.

A month in the postwar world made a difference... Camp Carson, Colorado... As we drifted back, we found that already many of the officers and men had been discharged, others transferred. Then came the word that the 10th Mountain Division was to be inactivated. On October 15th the process began. We had completed a war record. The pages were folding.

We can look back across the Po Valley to the Apennines, to Mount Belvedere. The roads are not new to us; we have known them. The hills or flat stretches of green to each side are not new. Writing a story along these roads had been varied.

The cost was high; the results had given hope to millions. Humanity was proud; and sometimes sad. . . .

WE WILL REMEMBER . . .

"IT IS FITTING . . . "

"The splendid performance of the officers and men of the 10th Mountain Division while a part of IV Corps attack in the Fifth Army offensive from 14 April to 28 April inclusive, was such as to evoke unqualified praise in all military circles, and it is my desire hereby to commend you and your officers and men in the very highest terms."

—Major General Willis D. Crittenberger, IV Corps

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"Upon the conclusion of the first full scale offensive operation against the enemy carried out by the 10th Mountain Division, I desire to extend to every officer and man in the 10th Mountain Division my sincere congratulations of the magnificent manner in which you have accomplished a very difficult assignment."

—Lieut. General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr. Fifth Army

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"Our great offensive which ended in the unconditional surrender of the German forces was spearheaded by the 10th Mountain Division under your brilliant leadership. Will you please convey to all your officers and men the fact that I look upon the action of the 10th Mountain Division as one of the most vital and brilliant in the campaign."

—General Mark W. Clark, Fifteenth Army Group

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"In your first major action at Mt. Belvedere, you defeated elements of eight different enemy battalions by night assault. In the spring offensive in Italy, which culminated in the enemy's surrender, you spearheaded the attack. . . . In behalf of all the American forces in this theater, I congratulate you for your fine battlefield achievements."

—General Joseph T. McNarney, MTO

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"It is fitting at this time, with the 10th Mountain Division scheduled for inactivation, to pay tribute to soldiers whose valor, willing sacrifice and staunch devotion to duty won the undying esteem of a grateful Nation. I consider it a privilege to commend your organization for a job well done."

—General Jacob L. Devers, AGF

VICTORY IN ITALY

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THE STORY OF A CAMPAIGN IN MILES

- April 14: $\frac{3}{4}$ mile —M. Della Spe to Rocca Roffeno
April 15: 2 miles—Rocca Roffeno to M. Le Coste
April 16: $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles—M. Le Coste to M. Croce
April 17: $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles—M. Croce to M. Ferra
April 18: $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles—M. Ferra to Sulmonte
April 19: 3 miles—Sulmonte to San Pietro
April 20: 8 miles—San Pietro to Ponte Samoggia
April 21: $14\frac{1}{2}$ miles—Ponte Samoggia to Bomporto
April 22: $23\frac{1}{2}$ miles—Bomporto to San Benedetto Po
April 23: $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles—San Benedetto Po to Mincio River
April 24: none
April 25: $20\frac{1}{2}$ miles—Mincio River to Villafranca
April 26: $22\frac{1}{2}$ miles—Villafranca to Verona to Lazise
April 27: $21\frac{1}{2}$ miles—Lazise to Malcesine
April 28: 5 miles—Malcesine to Buon Porto
April 29: $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles—Buon Porto to Torbole
April 30: 3 miles—Torbole to Riva
May 1: $\frac{1}{2}$ mile —Riva to Albergo
May 2: 3 miles—Albergo to Arco

10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION

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MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE P. HAYS
Division Commander

BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBINSON E. DUFF
Assistant Division Commander

BRIGADIER GENERAL DAVID L. RUFFNER
Division Artillery Commander

COLONEL EARL F. THOMSON
Chief of Staff

« »

85th Mountain Infantry Regiment
86th Mountain Infantry Regiment
87th Mountain Infantry Regiment
604 Field Artillery Battalion
605 Field Artillery Battalion
616 Field Artillery Battalion
10th Mountain Anti-tank Battalion
10th Mountain Quartermaster Battalion
10th Mountain Medical Battalion
10th Mountain Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop
126th Mountain Engineer Battalion
710th Mountain Ordnance Company
110th Mountain Signal Company
10th Mountain Military Police Platoon
Headquarters, 10th Mountain Division
Headquarters, 10th Mountain Division Artillery

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SKETCHES:

M/Sgt. Robert Willis

S/Sgt. Robert Fels

Sgt. Jacques Parker

« »

MAPS:

Sgt. Armand Casini

« »

NARRATIVE:

T/4 Theodore Lockwood, *ed.*

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MOUNTAINEERS: If you are interested in additional copies, please send request with remittal at one dollar per copy, to: ARTCRAFT PRESS, 1863 Arapahoe St., Denver 2, Colorado.

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For information concerning the addresses of former members of the Division, send inquiries to: 10th Mt. Div. Alumni Assn., 632 Park Road, West Hartford 7, Connecticut.



Jacques Parker