

## THE COMMANDERS



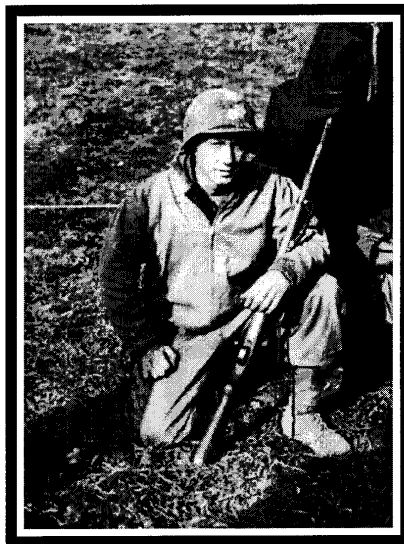
Lt. Colonel John R. Parker  
Commanding Officer  
126th Engineer Mountain Battalion



Major R. Platt Boyd, Jr.  
Assistant Battalion Commander  
126th Engineer Mountain Battalion



Captain Fred A. Nagel receives  
his Bronze Star from  
General Robinson E. Duff.



Captain Fred A. Nagel  
Commanding Officer  
Company D, 126th Engineers

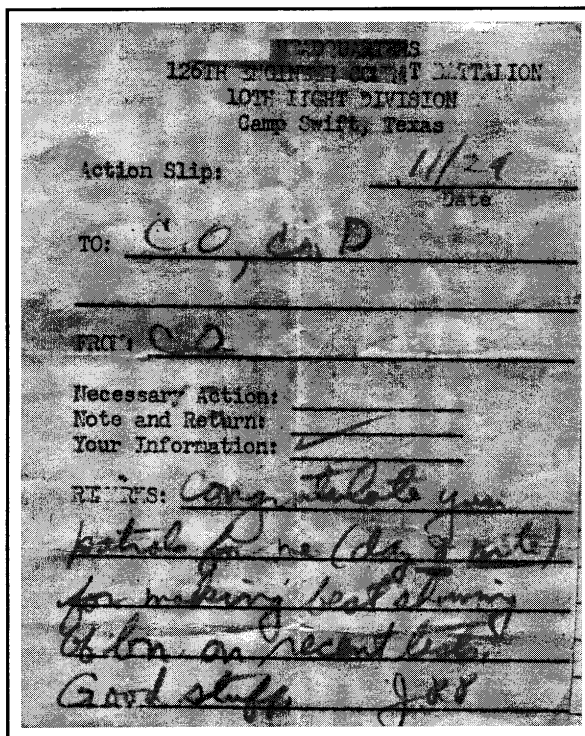
#### Recollections of the Company Commander

My history with Company D began in Camp Swift, Texas when I was designated its Company Commander. As the new Company Commander, I was instructed that discipline and close order drill were to be my first priorities. It was assumed that the months just spent in Virginia had taken the fine edge off the troops in these important areas. ( Author's note - and indeed they had ! )

The Company had a number of commanders since this group of engineers was first commissioned at Camp Carson in August, 1943 as Company A, 126th Engineers. The first commander was Lieutenant Roger Frail who did much of the early testing of experimental aerial tramway equipment in Camp Hale. Next was Captain Burt Kramer who was succeeded by Lieutenant Harold McKay. Lieutenant McKay was the commander while the company was in Virginia. Upon arrival in Camp Swift, the 226th Engineer Combat Company, as it was then known, was absorbed into the 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion and redesignated as Company D. The other companies in the battalion were already in training as mule pack outfits so Company D was considered the battalion's motorized company. As its newly designated commander, I was in charge of 275 men, bull dozers, air compressors, many heavy trucks, light vehicles and, the aerial tramway equipment. The battalion

was commanded by Lt. Colonel John R. Parker and Major R. Platt Boyd, Jr. was Executive Officer , second in command.

During the heavy training schedule at Camp Swift, our company participated in numerous ' Small Unit ' tests. Subsequently, I received a note - memo from Colonel Parker advising me that Company D had not only passed all the tests but, in fact, was rated first among all units of the 126th Engineer Battalion.



Here is the congratulatory note I received from Colonel Parker following the 'small unit' tests - FN.

In December, 1944, the 10th Mountain Division was alerted to ship overseas. We left Texas, moving by train to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia. Our Port of Embarkation was Hampton Roads, Virginia. We disembarked thirteen days later in Naples, Italy and promptly moved by train to our staging area in Livorno. Here, we became a part of the Fifteenth Army Group under General Mark Clark, the U. S. Fifth Army under General Lucian Truscott and the IV Corp under General Willis Crittenger.

The first assignment for Company D when we went into the line was to make a diversionary action with a work force by building and repairing a road at the Division west front near Mammiano de Basso. We took a Platoon out at night in front of the infantry. When we crossed

their outpost, we were told that the password for the night was " Direct Aim ". After working several hours, I was leading the work crew back to camp. As I approached the front line outpost, I was challenged with,

" Who goes there ? - Direct -- ".

Well, I had forgotten the countersign and replied,

" Fire ".

The outpost guard yelled,

" WHAT ? ".

I yelled back,

" Don't fire, I forgot the password. "

The guard then approached and said,

" My God, Captain, you almost got shot. "

I don't think I forgot any more passwords.

The Tenth Mountain's first major assignment was a night attack by the 1st Battalion of the 86th Infantry on Riva Ridge. With this ground secured, the rest of the Division was to mount an attack on Mount Belvedere. Company D's role in this offensive was to find a route and erect its aerial tramway from the valley floor as far up the side of Riva Ridge as it would reach. Its purpose was to provide reliable transportation of men and supplies up to the top of Riva Ridge and evacuation of wounded and dead on the down trip.

When our reconnaissance was completed, the commander of one of our Sherman tanks motioned me to come over. He got me up on his tank and invited me to look down the bore of the cannon. All I could see was that it was aimed at the corner of a building about five hundred yards away on a ridge of Mount Belvedere. The tank commander explained,

" Every morning a Jerry dumps out his helmet at the corner of that building. Tomorrow morning, when he pokes his head out, he won't even have time to be surprised. "

By 4 PM that day, the first tramway ever constructed by the U. S. Army in combat was completed and operating to provide support for the troops atop Riva Ridge. It continued in service for the next three weeks and turned out to be a great success. Company D got reviews from the Army newspaper, Stars and Stripes almost to the point of embarrassment. One of the other Engineer Company Commanders whose troops had really caught hell on Mount Belvedere said to me,

" Hey Fred, we were in that battle too. "

them. I ran back to the nearest field telephone and hollered for them to cease firing. When the shelling stopped, I didn't expect to find anyone alive. But, much to my surprise, a couple of guys stood up, then more and finally, all of them. They had survived by crawling into some German built caves on the island. None were even injured.

Company D participated in the first wave on river crossings by riflemen of the 87th Mountain Infantry. On the north shore, I sat out a barrage of 88 shells with Lt. Fritz Benedict of Headquarters Company and a lone German prisoner. Benedict, who could speak German, reported that the prisoner couldn't understand why Americans wouldn't join the Germans in fighting the Russians. He said,

“ You're going to be doing it soon anyway. ”

That was his astute comment although it turned out to be a ' cold war '.

Later, I attended an Officer's Meeting during which they set up Task Force Darby. I don't remember much about it other than I was tremendously impressed by Colonel Darby. He was all business and determined to capture intact a badly need bridge near Verona before the Germans could demolish it. Later, it made me feel that the most aggressive and successful commanders in our Armed Forces were fated to be killed.

One memorable incident occurred on Lake Garda when we were ferrying a tank to Torbole on the north end of the lake. It was loaded on a big barge and when we reached our destination, I was faced with the problem of unloading it. In desperation, I finally located four wooden walkways which I stacked two deep under each tank tread. As the driver moved forward, the front of the barge began to sink until finally, the tank treads caught hold. I told the driver to gun it and, as the barge continued to sink, the walkways rapidly turned into tooth picks. How that tank came out onto the dock I'll never know but, luckily, we got that job done.

At the end of the war, the Tenth Mountain Division liberated a German warehouse full of liquor. Instead of allocating one truck to load and haul the Company's share to our destination near Trieste, I instructed 1st Sergeant Langer to issue each man a bottle of champagne. When we arrived at our destination, I told the 1st Sergeant to go ahead and set up camp. An hour or so later, I wondered why no camp had been set up and no one was in sight. The 1st Sergeant told me,

“ They are all out in the tall grass sleeping it off. ” ( Author's note - and so we were ! )

The North Apennines Campaign took place from February 18th, 1945 through March 15, 1945. The Po Valley Campaign took place from April 14, 1945 through May 2, 1945 when all hostilities in Italy ceased. During these actions, our company cleared mines, repaired roads and bridges, manned Infantry Assault boats and built the first aerial tramway erected in combat in the history of the U. S. Army. All these missions were accomplished with relatively few killed and wounded.

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I am sure there are other anecdotes to relate but those are the main ones that come to mind for me. We can all take pride that while in Italy, our Company participated in the following actions.

1. Construction of a road way on the left of our Division's front at Bagni di Lucca as a diversionary action.
2. Construction and operation of an aerial tramway up Riva Ridge.
3. Lead Company clearing mines in the Malandrone/Mt. Terminale operation.
4. Capture of many German prisoners in the foregoing March 3, 1945 operation.
5. Construction and operation of the Campidello - Castelluccio cableway.
6. Clearing mines during the April 14, 1945 final offensive drive.
7. Repair of cratered road near Castel d'Aiano, April 15, 1945.
8. In support of Task Force Duff, Sgt. Hull secured a motor launch during a night mission on the Po River.
9. Manned the first wave of assault boats at the April 24, 1945 crossing of the Po River.
10. Cleared blocked tunnels on the east shore of Lake Garda - April 27, 1945.
11. Crewed the big barges used to ferry tanks to Torbole at the north end of Lake Garda - April 28, 1945.
12. Operated 60 - HP outboard equipped assault boats ferrying riflemen to the north end of Lake Garda - April 29, 1945.

Through all the above actions, our Company performed in an outstanding manner. We can all take pride in the contribution we made to the Allied victory in World War Two.

Best personal regards,

  
Fred A. Nagel

September, 1994





Major R. Platt Boyd, Jr.  
November, 1944

### CITATION

#### COMPANY D - 126TH ENGINEER MOUNTAIN BATTALION

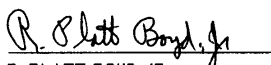
Company D was a unique combat engineer company in several ways. It was the motorized and heavy equipment company in the only mountain division in the U. S. Army in World War II, and the only combat company in the Army that was trained in the construction and employment of aerial tramway and cableway equipment. It built the only aerial tramway ever constructed under enemy fire near Mount Serracicia during the 10th Mountain Division's first attack in Italy on 19 February, 1945. This tramway was built in 10 hours, was 1700 feet long on a slope of 18 to 20 degrees. The purpose of the tramway was to haul ammunition and supplies up the mountain and bring down casualties. Prior to the completion of the tramway, the evacuation of casualties from the top of the ridge was taking about 3 to 4 hours by mule transport. Upon completion, it took only three minutes. Without the tramway, the 86th Mountain Infantry would not have been able to fend off enemy counterattacks and secure the ridge. The company also constructed a 1200 foot cableway near Riola, Italy on 10 March which was vitally necessary to supply the front line troops as there were no passable roads in the area.

Company D performed an admirable job keeping the Main Supply Routes open. To do this the company had to breach many minefields, repair blown craters in the roads, clear blown landslides on the trails and bypass destroyed bridges. Another important assigned task was leading the division tanks and tank destroyers up to the front lines, over almost impassable trails, so they would be in position to support the infantry.

Company D made the first assault crossing of the Po River at noon on 23 April. This was accomplished under heavy 88 millimeter fire using 16- man wooden assault boats and paddles. The mission of the company was to help ferry the 87th Mountain infantry across.

Every task or mission that was assigned to Company D was accomplished in an exemplary manner during the whole Italian Campaign. As the 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion Commander, I was proud to have the company in my battalion.

September, 1994.



R. PLATT BOYD, JR.  
Colonel, Corps of Engineers  
U.S. Army, (Retired)





# THE TRAMWAY BUILDERS

*A Brief History*

*of*

*Company d*

*126th Engineer Mountain Battalion*

*UNITED STATES TENTH MOUNTAIN DIVISION*

*by*

*Philip A. Lunday and Charles M. Hampton*

*Cover Photo*

*Base station of the tramway  
erected up Cappel Buso, a  
part of the Riva Ridge complex.  
Lt. Bob Martin, commander of the  
2nd Platoon, is the soldier wearing  
the helmet.*

*Photo courtesy of  
Denver Public Library*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to express their gratitude to all of the people and institutions that have helped make this book possible. This is, of course, an impossible task. How can you recall that some of the facts buried in your memory that came from Life or Look magazines fifty years ago? .. or the images left from the Fox Movietone News? You simply can't. So the next best thing is to try to remember some of the most recent contributions and hope you did not forget something or someone important.

As you read the book you will see photographs and written recollections from some of our old comrades. Interestingly enough, among the most enthusiastic contributors were the former officers of the battalion with whom the authors had relatively little wartime social contact because they were enlisted men. For example, Lt. Colonel John Parker, our Battalion Commander, his assistant Major Platt Boyd and even our company commander, Captain Fred Nagel, were not frequent visitors to our pup tents unless they were on a tour to see if our fingernails were clean. Their contributions have, however, given us a better depth of understanding of the challenges they were given. For example, the entire division was sitting on the banks of the Po River, surrounded by enemy soldiers, and the general gave an order to go get some assault boats for the crossing. Never mind that neither he nor his staff had planned for this minor contingency. Sound impossible? It most certainly did then but the boats were found and the crossing made with reasonable dispatch. Captain Roger Frail, one of the first commanders of the 126th, proved to be a fountain of knowledge on the early days of Camp Hale and shared many stories that would have otherwise been lost. Colonel Howard Browne, a contemporary of Capt. Frail, has added more interesting sidelights. Some of the platoon commanders like Lts. John Sheahan and Bob Martin, were closer to their charges and really part of the group. Lt. Tom Cole, commander of Company B, and Lt. Bob Greider, a platoon leader in Company C, were able to verify, and in some cases deny, a few of the stories.

Moving down the ranks, it has been most rewarding to renew friendships with our peers that have been dormant for fifty years. It was amazing how long forgotten adventures came to life as we revived these old acquaintances. Bob Langer, our First Sergeant, and Dick Sweet, one of the truck drivers, dusted off many old photographs. Several copies of a day by day account of the Riva Ridge assault were received from these same sources. Old rosters and manifest were provided by Bob Langer. Pete Jackson, Marv Taylor, Al Monroe, Tulsy Davis and Jack Mitchell had a lot of first hand experiences that we had never heard. As we talked with all of these men, common but forgotten experiences emerged. Both of us have verified what we long suspected .. one of the reasons the 126th and the 10th accomplished so much was the quality of our officers and leaders.

It was pure coincidence that we were able to meet Bob Heron, the long sought designer of our aerial tramway. A reunion, of sorts, titled "The Legends of Skiing" was organized in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Bob was invited as one of the pioneering ski lift builders of the post war skiing community. A chance conversation led us to the knowledge that he had been the designer of our tramway as a 1940s employee of Stearns Roger Manufacturing Company in Denver. Not only did he offer his personal experiences but

also provided one of the original manuals, parts of which have been extracted in the appendix.

Old newspaper clippings from scrap books provided some first hand accounts but the source of many are unknown because they were not identified. Nonetheless we can thank Yank magazine, The Saturday Evening Post, Time magazine, Look magazine and the house organ for the 10th, The Blizzard, for there many insightful stories. Possibly one of the greatest champions of the “dog faced“ soldiers was Bill Mauldin, who created the still famous Will and Joe cartoons for Stars and Stripes magazine. No war story can be complete without a mention this man.

Reference books that proved valuable include; 19 Days, from the Apennine to the Alps, published by the 5th Army, Green Cognac - the Education of a Mountain Man by Bill Putnam, The Invisible Men on Skis by Rene L. Coquoz, Soldiers on Skis by Flint Whitlock and Bob Bishop and The Order of Battle by Shelby L. Stanton.

Grant Parr, NBC Radio’s battlefront correspondent in Italy, was there to provide live coverage of some of the feats of the engineers and the tramway. An unknown Staff Correspondent from an unknown newspaper wrote an entire piece on the tramway.

Two libraries were very helpful. First the National Archives in Washington D.C. provided many historical records from the wartime files of the 126th. Included was an “Organization History of the 126th Engineer Combat Battalion” written by our own 2nd Lt. John H, Sheahan on October 14, 1943.

Finally Barbara Walton, who is with the Denver Public Library and manages the 10th Mountain Division Resource Center in the library, provided many photographs, maps and personal records for our review. Barbara also provided a great deal of guidance about where to look for records that were not available in the library.

## PREFACE

Both authors of this story had previously written of their World War II experiences to leave a better understanding of their lives to their children and grandchildren. In doing so they began to understand that their respective experiences in Company D of the 126th Mountain Engineers were unique and worthy of a more formal record. It's not that the soldiers of this company were any braver or contributed more to the outcome of the war but that they had some very unusual and unique assignments.

In order to be as factual as possible, many of the original members of the company have been contacted. We made a concerted effort to reach them all. Because of changes in personnel, it was difficult to reconstruct an exact roster that included all who were assigned to the company at any given time. The names included in the appendix represent the authors best guesses and apologies to anyone missing. Several original rosters and manifests were used as the source of the names. Back in those days there were no computers, or even many electric typewriters, and the army, in all of it's wisdom, usual picked a machinist or mechanic for the company clerk who became very adroit at misspelling things very fast with two fingers. Events may also be slightly skewed in time. There is no doubt that they happened but in some cases they may be slightly out of place chronologically. These are the perils of a reconstruction process occurring fifty years after the fact.

One goal in the research was to learn more about the history of the tramway equipment used. Many press clippings have been uncovered that describe the work company D performed to erect the first and, we believe, only aerial tramway assembled and operated in the mountains under combat conditions in WW II. NBC Radio chose to broadcast its WWII "Army Hour" program from a Command Post near the foot of this tramway on March 4, 1945. Mr. Bob Heron provided the War Department manuals that cover the installation, operation and maintenance of the tramway equipment used. It is doubtful that any other manuals of this type still exist today.

Being a Company D in an engineer battalion in an infantry division is, in itself, fairly unique. Everything in the army to support an infantry division is done in threes .. three regiments to a division, three battalions to a regiment, three line companies to a battalion, etc. With each of these organizations is a headquarters unit. Thus, the 10th Mountain Division was made up of three Infantry regiments; the 85th, 86th and 87th. In addition there were supporting battalions such as the engineers, field artillery, medics, reconnaissance, quartermaster (supplies), signal corps, military police - even a platoon of combat dogs. Companies A, B and C of the 126th Mountain Engineers were the "three" of the 10th Mountain Division .. Company D went where ever it was needed.

The lineage of D Company was also a bit unusual. It started as Company A of the 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion. Later that same company was reformed to become the 226th Engineer Motorized Company (Separate). Next its name was changed to the 226th Engineer Combat Company, when it was assigned to the A.P. Hill Military Reservation in Central Virginia to experiment with new techniques designed to demolish mine fields.

Finally, at Camp Swift, Texas, it became D Company of the 126th Mountain Engineers Battalion.

As the heavy equipment company for the 10th, a great deal of road construction and maintenance was needed in the combat zones. Bulldozers were constantly in demand to clear roads, build artillery gun emplacements and build abutments to protect the infantry.

Sappers from all of the engineering companies were called on to clear mine fields. The engineers provided crews for the assault boats used to ferry infantry soldiers across the Po River and Lake Garda. Company D provided assistance and crews to help ferry tanks across Lake Garda on the Infantry Assault Rafts that were needed to circumvent the blown up roads.

Something made this combat engineering company special. For some reason Company D developed a true esprit de corps. It may have been the leadership or going into combat with some unique assignments or simply because it was a collection of people that clicked as a unit. Whatever it was, "D" Company performed its assignments with great courage and distinction.

Phil Lunday  
Santa Fe, New Mexico  
1994

Chuck Hampton  
Sardis, British Columbia  
1994

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# 1

## MAKING AN ENGINEER

Basic training in the army combines a military orientation, combat simulation, professional training, and lots of discipline. It is mandatory in the making of a soldier. The training for engineers included some similarities to the infantry but was oriented to encompass a different set of skills. Upon completion of this training a soldier was given the title of "basic engineer". Upon 'graduation' there was frequently specialized training for specialized occupations such as; construction foreman, bridge builder, automobile mechanic, carpenter, crane operator, "cat" skinner, heavy equipment operator, rigger, stationary equipment operator, etc.

An Army skill is referred to as a "Military Occupational Specialty". Each occupation is given a code number called an MOS number. A graduate from engineering basic training was given an MOS Code of 729 to represent his "Basic Engineer" status. Most graduates from infantry basic training were classified as "Riflemen" with an MOS Code of 745.

To start at the beginning, most of the soldiers in Company D were routed through Army Induction Centers then to a Basic Training Camp and finally to their unit. Although the logistics and the location of assignments may have varied slightly, most of the experiences for the new inductee were about the same.

### • INITIAL CONTACT

A recruit's first encounter with "the army way" is when he first sets foot in the induction center. Some crusty old noncom will address a new group. This soldier is part of the permanent cadre at the center, has a paunch and is covered with stripes on the sleeve of his uniform. He will always stand above the group when he describes in vivid detail how things are now done the army way (or his way). Deviating from these ways can bring terrible consequences. Everyone must learn to respect rank. No matter how stupid or inept, you must learn to obey your superiors. Officers and cadre in the Training Camps always gave the impression of being hand picked for the enthusiastic way they can make life miserable. Part of the technique was to scare the hell out of the recruits.

Induction centers test, equip, and evaluate the new soldiers. The first order of business is new clothes and a hair cut. Army clothes are issued by the base supply sergeant in random sizes and fit by trial and error. Recruits form a long line and soon learn that everything in the army is done via a long line. Arms are piled high with the stuff that will make up an army wardrobe for the duration of the war. "What you see is what you get", and then the exchange privilege must be exercised until it fits. Civilian clothes are sent

home or burned so olive drab becomes your color of choice for the duration, even on leave. Butch haircuts take about 10 seconds or long enough to make three or four passes across your head with an electric clippers.

The next line is one that will become a regular army ritual; shots and a "short arm" inspection. Most of the common preventative shots of the day were kept up to date; tetanus, typhoid, smallpox, etc. In this line it was common to walk through a door and get hit with a needle in both arms simultaneously. There were always a few 6'-4" soldiers passed out on the floor. Doctors then physically check each man for venereal disease.

All recruits are given what was called the Army General Classification Test or AGCT. This is something like an IQ test. Its results could have a big impact on your future assignments. If you scored less than 100 you were cannon fodder. Over 110 might qualify you to be an officer or high paid cannon fodder. This test is part of the classification process and it is during this time that your next assignment and the branch of the army is tentatively decided. The word 'tentatively' is used because the army was not noted for continuity. Circumstances usually dictated assignments. A restaurant owner was likely to become a "cat" skinner and a "cat" skinner a cook.

Army pay was \$50.00 per month for a private and payments were always in cash. There were some deductions; laundry and dry cleaning cost \$1.50 no matter how much you used the service. You could buy War Bonds with a face value of \$10.00 for \$7.50. A Franking privilege that allowed use of first class mail free of charge (normally 3 cents), but air mail cost six cents. You could also purchase a \$10,000 life insurance policy which, in those days, was a monumental sum of money.

Finally the "dog tags" were issued. These little metal plates were embossed with your name, serial number, religious preference, and blood type and worn on a chain around the neck at all times.

From the induction center, recruits usually board a troop train for their basic training camp. Candidates for the engineers frequently went to Camp Claiborn, Louisiana or Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Upon arrival, your quarters are assigned and you get to meet the permanent cadre. A little manual was provided to describe the things you needed to know to keep out of trouble. For example, it lists 16 different ways you can salute an officer improperly. Recruits learned that it was bad to salute from the prone position. You are also encouraged to maintain an "outstanding personal appearance" by "taking a shower every day during warm weather". It didn't say anything about winter. Later that made some people wonder about the Ski Troops.

All army bases have a Post Exchange or PX where you could buy beer, ice cream, and the basic necessities. Most also had a barber shop. Prices were always very reasonable. e.g. cigarettes were a dime a pack.

Recreational facilities included a "rec" hall for all enlisted men, a non-commissioned officers club and an officers club. There was usually a theater somewhere in the complex. The NCO club was available if you held the rank of corporal or better. When you were in basic training your only access to the NCO club was to clean the johns or wait on tables.

Three months of basic training was intended to give the recruits an idea of what hell must be like. Most training camps seemed like they were in Texas and, if not, they were in the south. The rigors of the training were usually compounded by unbearable heat. The exception to this was, of course, Camp Hale Colorado, where the cold was unbearable.

- **HURRY UP AND WAIT**

Army barracks are not the most homey places to live. Most were two stories. The first floor also had the NCO quarters, which was a private room for the live-in cadre. Latrines, or "Johns", are across from the barracks and consist of open showers, a row of lavatories, and wash basins. You sleep head to foot in bunk beds and each person has a foot locker for storage. They were not insulated and had nothing whatsoever for cooling. If you got your training in winter, they were heated, usually with hand fired coal furnaces.

Dinning is even better. About 1,000 soldiers were served at one seating, in groups that came every 20 minutes or so. The total was 3,000 to 4,000 at each meal. Here you learn another army axiom, "hurry up and wait". It is usually suggested, in a kindly way, that you run to the "mess hall" in formation. Then wait until several hundred soldiers have been fed before you can get your tray.

There were certain staple items that were generic to the army diet. Breakfasts almost always included pancakes. This was nice touch only the syrup was sorghum or molasses. That's the same stuff they use in cattle fodder. About two out of three desserts were bread pudding. On the rare occasions that beef was served, you could be assured that the bill of fare the next day would be chipped beef on toast, more commonly known as "shit on a shingle" or SOS. There were always rumors of having salt peter secreted into the food to keep the recruits from attacking anything with a skirt on. Probably true.

During the summer of 1943 there was a shortage of many foods so some of the camps had rather strange diets. Two meats seemed to be plentiful; chicken and hot dogs (probably made out of chicken). For three months that is the only meat that was served in several of the army posts.

Kitchen Police, or "KP" as it was called, was about the worst thing that could happen to you. You were up before sunrise, worked until the 'Mess Hall' (in the modern army these are known as 'dining facilities') was slick as a whistle that night, usually after 9:00 PM. Think of shelling beans for several thousand soldiers then washing their trays three times. Each recruit took turns at KP a week at a time.

Free time each day was from 5:45 PM to 11:00. During this time rifles were cleaned, shoes shined, clothes pressed, and study for the next days assignments completed. Bed

check came at 11:00 and those not accounted for were considered AWOL. There was an 11:30 curfew in town during the week and 2:00 AM on weekends. Each day started at 5:30 AM, except for weekends.

Army parade grounds and all areas around the barracks are kept immaculately clean. Any cigarettes are field stripped before being discarded. That is done by peeling off the paper, rolling it into a small ball, and scattering all remains so they are invisible. If filter cigarettes existed, they were not very popular. This cleanliness was enforced by making the violators of the cigarette rule dig a hole six feet square and six feet deep to bury their garbage, or a benevolent officer might just give you a weeks extra KP. Strangely enough there were always a few diggers at work.

Most training camps were located near small towns. For many the population at the camp was the larger of the two. On the rare occasions that passes were given it was simply wall to wall soldiers in town. The officers almost refused to walk the streets because their arms literally got cramped and swollen from saluting. Many of the towns were "dry" so you had to find a bootlegger to get either moonshine or the real stuff. A good source of supply was always the shoeshine boy in the local hotel.

- **OH SHIT ..... SIR!!!**

Training was very rigorous. There were several groups of subject matter to cover; basic military practices including discipline, the technical aspects of the army such as the weapons and their use, military tactics, and the specialized training unique to the engineers. Injected throughout all of this was great emphasis on physical fitness. Recruits either ran or marched everywhere, usually ran in formation.

Everyone is expected to become proficient with his rifle. After a lot of technical training on the operation and maintenance of the M1 rifle a week is spent on the rifle range with live ammunition and targets. You fire in the prone position, kneeling, standing and rapid fire. You fire at targets 200, 300 and 500 yards distant. In between times you take a turn at working the targets and keeping score. When on the targets, if a soldier missed altogether, you waved a flag that looked like a pair of red long-johns. At all costs soldiers wanted to avoid seeing "Maggies Drawers".

No matter what the circumstances, a noncom or officer could always find some reason to act like a jerk. A soldier was shooting at the 500 yard targets from the prone position. On about his third round up came "Maggies Drawers". He shouted,

"Oh shit!!!"

An officer standing behind him barked, "what did you say soldier?"

His reply was, "oh shit .... sir"!

And he was promptly given an extra weeks KP.

Every effort was made to make the training close to real life combat conditions. Live hand grenades were tossed out of predug foxholes. To get used to the gas masks, soldiers went on a stroll through a house full of chlorine gas. There was usually an attack on a mockup of a village during which live bullets were fired at moving targets. Orientation movies showed mutilated bodies in combat with lots of blood and noise. Similar movies were used to graphically demonstrate the consequences of venereal disease.

Periodic bivouacs were scheduled to teach recruits how to learn to live in the outdoors and dig fox holes. Mess on these junkets was army "C" rations and on a special occasion you might be asked to live for several days on a special chocolate called "D" rations. Mock battles were staged. Training camps were usually built near a swamp so in the South, the trainees always got to wade around with the water moccasins.

A staple for the army is the infiltration course. Waist high barbed wire was stretched at intervals across a field. This was your guide line because they fired live machine gun bullets over the field at about that height. Dynamite charges were set off to simulate artillery fire. Your task was to crawl through the field with full combat gear and avoid getting some appendage shot off.

Classes were held to help future soldiers learn how to kill and avoid being killed. Bayonet practice would usually pair guys so you could learn to thrust and parry. Different ways to walk are discussed so you know how to silently approach an enemy from behind with a piano wire. Forms of judo are taught for self defense. These classes were always grist for the egos of the officers and noncoms. Perfect to let you know how macho and skilled they were. They sometimes used tactics that backfired.

One company commander wanted to demonstrate his judo skills so the recruits would see that his qualifications to lead were substantial. A man of modest size, he selected a rather large soldier for his demonstration, to greatly amplify the respect he would get. He was to perform a great escape and asked the soldier to grab his arm to show how easily he could release himself. He had selected the wrong man. His arm was clamped in a couple of meat hooks and, after a great deal of kicking, twisting and grunting, it was necessary for him to ask to be released. This humiliated the officer and made a folk hero of the soldier.

- **MINES, BRIDGES AND NITROGLYCERINE**

Infantry soldiers learn how to avoid land mines. The engineers learn how to dig them out and defuse them. Clearing mine fields is, to say the least, very ticklish. There are two basic types of mines used by the enemy; antipersonnel mines and anti-tank mines. Personnel mines are designed to maim rather than kill on the premise it takes more personnel to care for the wounded than the dead. Both mine detectors and probing with a bayonet are used to locate the mines. Once located, they must be carefully defused. Usually a path through a mine field is marked with tape to expedite access by the infantry.



The mock village was also used to practice the detection and clearing of mines. A score is kept of how many mines you explode and too many points can get you some extra KP. These mines are probably better concealed than you would find in combat, but it was a part of the training that got everyone's attention.

All engineers learn how to erect Bailey and Pontoon bridges. A Bailey bridge is sort of like a giant erector set designed to allow you to put up a serviceable bridge in a matter of hours. Pontoon bridges are used to span wider rivers or stretches of water. These use floats that look like big rubber rafts. After the floats are anchored, usually to a cable stretched across the span, treadways are laid on top to allow tanks and other vehicles to cross.

Chemical warfare training was fairly extensive. Gas masks were an integral part of the equipment and carried on most marches. On occasion, during marches, the masks were worn for a substantial part of the time, making the heat and sweat more unbearable than usual. A variety of gasses were released in small quantities to familiarize everyone with their smell and effects.

High explosives are also a part of the engineers kit so proper training is needed. The most commonly used was called "Composition-C". Beige in color, this is a plastic substance that can be molded like putty. This characteristic makes it easier to use than dynamite. Dynamite is very stable. You can shoot it with a rifle and nothing happens. Composition-C burned with an intense flame which made it popular for heating a cup of the powdered coffee found in the field rations. Another strange and wonderful material is called "primacord". At first glance you would take it for a slow burning fuse. This "cord" is, however, a plastic rope filled with TNT, an extremely powerful explosive.

Engineers are supposed to know something about rigging so are given classes in the necessary types of knots used. To assure that you have learned your craft someone designed a "rigging" obstacle course. You traversed this course by rigging the ropes that are to hold you from falling quite a distance to the ground. For example, you need to repair the rungs in a rope ladder to finish climbing to the top of different platforms. The last station is at the top of a 50 foot tower. Here you tie yourself to a pulley mounted over a cable and make a 200 foot slide to the ground.

Another obstacle course was designed to test physical strength and manual dexterity. An eight foot high solid wood wall to climb over; a twenty foot high landing net to ascend and descend; twenty feet of hand over hand over a mud pit; etc. An amazing number of recruits had trouble with even the simplest of these obstacles. Some could only get a few feet up a landing net or could never reach the top of the wall. Of course, some faked it and that was one of the cadre's biggest problems; to expose the fakers and weed out those who were truly incapable.

After three months of this intensive training your spirits were buoyed when it was over. For some, the emphasis on killing was depressing. Others had trouble with the physical stress. Those who had been active in athletics or other physically demanding work were

not particularly effected. Some simply had to be reassigned or discharged. For those who finished there was a great sense of pride.

Now is where "the rubber meets the road", your next assignment. Some, of the more eager beavers, might stay on as cadre at the camp. Others, like Lt. John Sheahan, would go to Officers Candidate School (OCS). Many became replacement troops in the combat zones. There were numerous specialty schools for mechanics, heavy equipment operators, deep sea divers, demotions experts, cartographers, and surveyors to name a few. The remainder went to permanent assignments to specific units such as the 226th or 126th Engineers at Camp Hale.

## 2

### **THE ENGINEERS COME TO THE MOUNTAINS**

Early published photographs of engineers in action during World War II usually showed the Navy Seabees constructing an airfield in some remote Pacific Atoll, or construction work on the ALCAN Highway. However, many new and unique problems began to surface as the war expanded into the mountains of New Guinea and the China Burma, India theater. Just keeping infantry troops supplied could take as much as 30 percent of the fighting force depending on the nature of the terrain. Evacuating the dead and wounded could be extremely difficult.

Army Engineer Headquarters in Fort Belvoir, Virginia recognized the need to take steps to address these problems. Investigation of techniques that could improve transportation and communications in mountainous terrain turned up several options. Among those that appeared most promising were the use of aerial tramways and mountain trail construction that employed the use of suspension bridges. There were virtually no army engineering skills to support these alternatives so a development and training program was mandated.

Concurrently, the War Department was debating the need for specially trained mountain infantry troops. Opinions ranged from "useless" to "indispensable". A civilian named Charles Minot Dole, who was the founder of the National Ski Patrol, soon stepped into the breach. As a tenacious promoter of mountain troops, he was able to convince enough of the military that a need for existed. After much debate, the army made a decision to move ahead with a mountain training program but suddenly realized that it knew very little about the subject; clothing, equipment, training, tactics, personnel, etc. Thus the history of the 10th Mountain Division took many strange turns almost up to the day it was committed to combat in Italy. The engineers were profoundly effected, and, as you will see, the formation of a D Company for the 126th Mountain Engineer Battalion seems almost like a spur-of-the-moment decision.

#### **• A CALL FOR MOUNTAIN SOLDIERS**

Getting under way, the army's first move was to form a Mountain Training Group. As a part of this move it was decided that the infantry should be staffed largely by highly qualified volunteers. A call went out for mountain climbers, skiers, rangers, mule skinnners or anyone with extensive mountaineering experience. Three letters of recommendation were required to show both your skills and good character. This prerequisite did not uniformly apply to the engineers. Engineering skills were of paramount importance in the officers. Men versed in construction, riggers and heavy equipment operators were high on the list of priorities.

Next came the need for a proper mountain training center. The initial training of the

infantry was at Paradise Valley on Mount Rainier in the state of Washington. These facilities were owned and operated by the U.S. Park Service whose bureaucracy was in constant disagreement with the Army. An Army owned and operated facility was obviously required. Several sites, mostly in Colorado, were considered. Barbara Walton, manager of the 10th Mountain Division Resource Center in the Denver Public Library, recently passed along a bit of environmental history;

*“One of the sites considered for a Mountain Training Center was West Yellowstone, Montana. It was turned down because the area under consideration included some of the nesting grounds of the almost extinct Trumpeter swans.”* (These birds are now thriving).

Finally a flat marshy area in the Pando Valley of Central Colorado was selected. This location was between Leadville and Minturn on highway 24, the road over the Tennessee Pass. Construction of the cantonment, named Camp Hale, was started on April 10, 1942. (see Appendix Ten)

#### ● **A SPECIAL AERIAL TRAMWAY IS DESIGNED**

There proved to be only a few alternatives to consider in addressing the tramway equipment design. Three European countries were far ahead of the U.S. in the military use of this equipment, but they were either the enemy or had remained neutral. This narrowed the options to U.S. Companies and any Allies that might help. For projects of this type, an engineering supervisory board was established by the engineering command at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. This board consisted of both field and headquarters personnel. Their job was to specify the equipment, oversee operational tests, and prepare the necessary manuals. One of the major tramway specifications was that the equipment could be broken down in pieces that weighed no more than 250 pounds apiece to facilitate transport by mules or men. A specification for the time of erection and operation is not known but assumed to be a matter of a few hours. This was a pretty tall order for the day. To expedite the task, the engineering board turned to the U.S. mining industry where the use of aerial tramways was not new. Prior to the turn of the century, miners had erected this type of equipment to move ore from the mine to the mill. These "trams" were powered by steam engines, sometimes called "donkey" engines, because of the mode of transportation they replaced. It is still possible to see the rusting remains of these old engineering feats in the more rugged back country of the Rocky Mountains. One such abandoned tramway provided part of the material used to construct the first chair lift at Aspen Colorado. The Stearns Roger Manufacturing Company of Denver, Colorado, was ultimately selected to design the equipment.

Robert Heron, a Stearns engineer, was assigned this task. (Mr. Heron became one of the pioneering chair lift builders for the U.S. ski industry). Ultimately, this equipment was given the military name "Aerial Tramway, Light, Prefabricated, M-2". A war department manual covering the installation, use and maintenance of the equipment was published in November, 1944. Parts were ultimately manufactured and assembled by the Paxton & Vierling Iron Works in Omaha, Nebraska. (see Appendix Three).

There are seven basic modules or components that make up an aerial tramway; track cables, haul cables, the upper terminal, the lower terminal, carriers, intermediate towers, and a power unit. The final design was completed for a prefabricated and portable aerial tramway that looked a bit like a giant erector set. Depending on the circumstances, this system allowed the user to substitute different modules, of his own making, for any of the standard modules. With this equipment, the army engineers could begin field tests and experimentation.

- **MOUNTAIN ENGINEERS ARE ACTIVATED**

On August 27, 1942 the formation of the 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion was authorized to include Companies A and B. A month later the organization was activated in Camp Carson, Colorado as a part of the Mountain Training Center. A small cadre of commissioned and non-commissioned officers was drawn from diverse engineering units then training in other parts of the country. Some of the officers were products of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) program from land grant universities. Others were National Guard officers mobilized for the emergency or regular army officers. As ranking officer, Lt. Roger Frail was the first CO of this unit. He was a regular army officer and had already served 20 months overseas.

These new units were formed specifically to address the new skills envisioned for mountain engineers. They were given training assignments that were both experimental and exploratory. Both companies were chartered to develop skills in the maintenance of communication lines in the valley floors. This meant that they would install and maintain the telephone lines needed in the wooded and mountainous terrain.

Company A was to become a motorized unit that was assigned the task of erecting, operating and maintaining aerial tramways. Their goal was to experiment with the equipment designed by Stearns and test its suitability for military use in the mountains under combat conditions.

Company B's was designated as a mule pack company whose duties would also include the construction of mule trails and suspension bridges. Here again, the use of suspension bridges was not new but the military was not well versed in their construction. Many of the skills needed for both companies overlapped including; rigging and hauling wire cables, construction of cable support frames, anchoring of the cables at terminal locations and techniques used for transporting massive amounts of material in the mountains. This overlap resulted in a considerable interchange of manpower while the two companies were learning and training.

- **THE TRAMWAY COMPANY BECOMES A REALITY**

Construction of Camp Hale was completed sufficiently to house troops by November 16, 1942. Many camps, like Camp Hale, were hastily constructed and as soon as there was a place for a few beds, they were occupied. Constructed almost exclusively of wood siding,

the barracks offered little more protection than a cardboard box. Cold winter nights in the barracks was only slightly better than being outside on the ground.

The 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion consisted of a cadre of 4 officers and 25 enlisted men when it was moved from Camp Carson to Camp Hale in November, 1943. These men were organized into Companies A, B, and Headquarters. They were among the first troops to occupy the camp. A full strength company requires approximately 200 enlisted men and officers so the first order of business was to staff the organization with new recruits.

Men came to the army for a variety of reasons during World War II. Most were draftees. Some were part of the regular army and planned to make a career of it. A few had joined to obtain a regular pay check during the depression years. Others had volunteered for army duty to avoid the uncertainty of the draft.

Men were transferred to the 126th at Camp Hale from army engineering units or training centers around the country. Several came from Camp Beale, California, including Gil Thomure. Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri and Camp Claiborne, Louisiana also provided recruits. Only a few were mountain troop volunteers. They were in the camp because that's where the army told them to be. Many were experienced in the construction industry. Others were sent to various schools to learn the special skills needed. Few of the men had ever lived in the mountains and some had never seen snow.

About half of the recruits came from the East and Midwestern states, a quarter from the South and the balance from the West. Many came from small towns with RFD addresses, indicating that they lived on farms or ranches. The army's rationale was to assign people to the engineers that had experience around equipment or construction. There was a large contingent of Pennsylvanians plus a few from other northeastern states. Virtually every one of the forty-eight states was represented.

In early 1944, when the 10th Recon had completed its mission of training the mountain troops at Camp Hale, several of their cadre were transferred to the tramway company. These included Whitey Gilbert, Ed Foss, Bob Cochran and Chuck Hampton. Hampton recalls his first few days as an engineer.

*"I had spent a year in the 10th Recon where about half of my fellow instructors were Tyroleans, all quite recently teachers at Hans Schneiders famous ski school in St. Anton, Austria .. guys like Friedl Pheiffer, Tony Matt, Luggi Foeger, Florian Haemmerle and Walter Prager. So, I was feeling pretty good about going into the engineers thinking that at least I wouldn't need to master a new language to get someone to please pass the butter. Well, I was wrong about that. It turned out these ol' boys from Georgia, Alabama and the Carolina's were talking a whole different brand of English than I was."*

Colonel R. J. Ballard was the first commanding officer of the 126th Engineer Battalion.



Headquarters officers ultimately included; Howard Browne, Knute P. Malm, Sissons, Roger Frail, Leslie G. Gruber, Meyer, and Gaston. Company officers were; Cummings H. McCall, Beck, Constant, Douglas, Harold McKay, Kramer, McPherson, Ahrens, Walls, John Sheahan, Yates, and two Jones brothers.

Lt. John Sheahan came to the Camp Hale as a volunteer from Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. His first year as a soldier was somewhat typical for an officer;

*"I was "abducted" into the service in June, 1942 as a private at \$21.00 a day - once a month. I put in my basic training and we were scheduled to go to the African invasion. They pulled five of us out and sent us to OCS (Officers Candidate School). I was commissioned a Lt. and sent to Camp Claiborne, La. I learned about the ski -troops and was sent to Camp Hale about June, 1943 .... ."*

## ● ENGINEERS TRAIN IN THE MOUNTAINS

One of the tasks confronting the engineers was mountain training. They were not as used to the climate and terrain as the infantry volunteers so had more adjustments to make. Part of their time was also occupied with the tramway.

Tramways and suspension bridges are most productive in rugged country so some rock climbing skills were needed to negotiate difficult terrain. Marv Taylor recalls these days;

*"went climbing just West of Dillon and Frisco on the Gore Range and Ten Mile Range. The bivouac area was at Officers Gulch about 3 miles West of Frisco, Colorado..... One time went to Dillon to fight a forest fire but, by the time we got there, it was under control."*

Trails were constructed over to Vail Pass and up to Ghost Camp just below Mount Holy Cross. A runway was constructed on the frozen Turquoise Lake to provide a landing area for C-47 cargo planes. One of the D-7 tractors fell through the ice during a sudden thaw but it was subsequently recovered.

The entire division went on maneuvers near Turquoise Lake in February, 1943. Temperatures were below zero for the entire time and dropped to as much as 40 below. Roger Frail recalled how the engineers routed the infantry;

*"The 126th ambushed the 87th Infantry at the pass to Vail. We had left camp in a snowstorm the day before and dug in under camouflage. The day of the attack the skies were clear and the 87th even had a private plane trying to spot us. The infantry advanced in two columns right into the center of our horseshoe position. When my red flares went up and we opened fire, it was a rout. They dropped their packs and rifles, jumped off their skis and ran down the mountain. All this in front of observers from the War Department. The engineers weren't too popular with the infantry"*

*at the club that night. As a result, all units had to spend 26 nights a month bivouacked in the snow .. as we had been doing all along."*

On Fridays the engineers went to a ski school. Many did not fare too well. They were sometimes assigned to run the tows for other troops on weekends.

Near the end of June, 1943, the engineers of Company A got some real world experience with high explosives. Two freight cars, loaded with munitions, caught fire while the train passed through Grand Junction, Colorado. The fire touched off many explosions and rained shell fragments about the city. Eight residents were injured, and the fire chief received a serious fragment wound that necessitated the amputation of his arm above the elbow. A report in the local paper describes the actions of Company A of the 126th when they were called in to help;

*"Under the direction of Lt. Col. R. J. Ballard, commanding officer of the 126th, and Capt. Roger Frail, Lts. Phillip Walls and John Sheahan, all of the same organization, the Engineers detonated thousands of high explosive shells some seven miles outside Grand Junction and thus eased the anxiety of the city's 20,000 population, which was near panic stricken Sunday as the high explosive shells screamed over the city in a heavy artillery barrage.*

*Capt. Wence l Szpeinski, camp ordinance officer, rushed to the scene early Sunday morning, and with the aid of Lt. Wayne Fuller of the DEML Detachment, supervised safety and inspection measures until the 126th took over.*

*Cpl. Harry Huett, of Company A, was seriously injured when a shell he was preparing to detonate exploded in his hand."*

This incident brought great praise and commendations from the War Department and commanding officers at Camp Hale. The residents of Grand Junction went to great lengths to welcome the soldiers of Company A whenever they could.

Even Hollywood got into the act at Camp Hale. Darryl F. Zanuck, head of 20th Century Fox Studios, was an avid skier and spent much of his free time at Sun Valley, hobnobbing with some of the famous skiers of the time, who were now soldiers in the 10th. Skiing soldiers provided almost perfect grist for the glamour of the movie industry and for the propaganda machine that got the American public behind the war effort. So there is, to this day, a lot of film footage of the ski troops that has provided a wonderful historical record of this unique division.

Howard Browne, one of the early commanders of the 126th, told how the engineers got into the movie business. Up one of the canyons behind the camp they constructed an 'ice fall' that was to be used for the filming of climbing scenes. Large timbers were used to build a sort of cofferdam that was then flooded with water in the freezing weather to

simulate a giant ice cliff. This bit of construction worked so well that it was used for a short while to train some of the soldiers in the fine art of ice climbing.

- **UP WITH THE TRAMWAY**

With portable tramway equipment available, the engineers of Company A now had the job of evaluating its suitability to the needs of the 10th Division. For example, the full M-2 Tramway, as specified, would require one hundred mules to carry the parts needed. Alternatives to this form of transport included; four 2 1/2 ton trucks or six 1 1/2 ton trucks or 35 1/4 ton trailers towed by 1/4 ton trucks. Clearly some tradeoffs were desired to make the use of the equipment less cumbersome. Also a great deal of assembly time was required for the towers and terminals.

It was also soon learned that tramway construction was no picnic. Roger Frail describes the work required;

*".....the erection of tramways was mostly "bull work". Run a telephone line, blocks and tackle, plus rope haul line first. On steep slopes used "pathfinder" rock expert from 10th Recon with Co to install climbing ropes and select tower sites. Tried "shooting" a line as the German engineers did but worked best from top down. Mostly used "high lines" as in the logging industry. Haul to the top and back down to tower sites."*

Lt. John Sheahan wrote in his 1943 "History of the 126th.....",

*"The first tramway was an experimental one on Sheep Mountain. Many valuable lessons were learned on this. its first tramway. ...."*

After erecting the full set of tramway equipment, as specified, the engineers went to work on alternatives. It is not clear exactly how many versions were tried but a clue was found in a media report about the equipment used in Italy. A March 8, 1945 article Robert St. John quoted, NBC's Battlefront Correspondent, Grant Parr, as saying;

*"They tested nine different types of apparatus. And finally evolved a sky Tramway, suitable for military use."*

Major "Freddy" Roebling, one of the principles of the Roebling Wire Company of Denver, was assigned to guide the engineers in their learning process along with several cable craftsmen. This officer was a member of the famous Roebling family who built the Brooklyn Bridge in New York. He was well versed in the use and installation of steel cables (sometimes called wire rope) and served as the field advisor to the Engineering Board in Fort Belvoir.

The nine different versions were simply variations that substituted alternatives modules invented on the site. The final configuration eliminated hundreds of parts that had to be assembled, allowed for the use of on-site material and greatly improved the portability of

the equipment. About the only module that remained unchanged was the power supply.

The final version was installed and tested two or three times at Camp Hale. Erection time was reduced to a few hours from what had taken a full day. Cables, that included a 1/2 inch track cable and 1/4 inch haul cable, were used. "A-Frames", made of wooden timbers, replaced the "erector set" type of towers. Wooden platforms, built on site, replaced the prefabricated metal equipment for the upper and lower terminals. "Dead men", or buried logs, were used for cable anchors. The metal carrier, or cage, for hauling personnel or supplies was replaced with a basket type of transport that was better suited to the movement of wounded soldiers.

The haul cable was driven by a specially mounted Continental Aircraft Engine, identical to those used in the Piper Cub Airplanes. This was a four cylinder pancake engine that developed forty-five horsepower and was very reliable. The drum used to move the cable was controlled through a special, manually operated, transmission. Three of these power plants, each weighing 650 pounds, were ultimately mounted on special trailers that were used while in combat. There was only one noticeable disadvantage to this power supply; it was crank started and kicked like a mule. A special section of the "Operating Manual" offers cranking instruction that are needed to avoid broken arms or thumbs.

- **THE 126TH GET A NEW LOOK**

While the tramway experiments were in process, Company B worked on its suspension bridges. Then, on May 3, 1943, Company C was activated to completed the "table of organization" for the 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion. With things seemingly going as planned some strange things suddenly began to happen.

Company B departed from Camp Hale on June 11, 1943, with the 87th Infantry Regiment, to take amphibious training at Fort Ord, California. Amphibious training for the Mountain Troops? As it soon became clear, this move was in preparation for the August 15, 1943 invasion of Kiska in the Alution Islands. For the Kiska invasion, B Company was redesignated as the 229th Engineer Combat Company (pack). This action ultimately proved to be unwarranted because the Japanese had secretly evacuated the island, undetected by the U.S. intelligence. Although the infantry soon returned to Camp Hale, most of the engineers remained in the area for several months and never rejoined the division.

Next a move that is difficult to explain occurred. The 226th Engineer Motorized Company (Separate) was created on July 10, 1943 by simply reorganizing Company A of the 126th. The new organization initially reported to the 2nd Army in Kansas City. A month later the it was placed under the command of the military at Camp Hale. This new company retained its skills and mission with the aerial tramways.

Later in the fall a call for tramway engineers came from Camp Claiborne Louisiana. On October 8, 1943, the 1st platoon of the new 226th was sent on 30 days temporary duty to Camp Claiborne. They never returned and were ultimately shipped to Burma to build

tramways used on the Burma Road. Tramways at Camp Hale were built to haul wounded, having a capacity of a few hundred pounds. The Burma tramways were built with a 20 ton capacity and used a 3 inch track cable, at least double the size of the cables on modern ski lifts.

Replacements for troops sent to Caliborne were transferred to Camp Hale in November, 1943. Al Monroe, who ultimately became the company clerk, recalls his transfer to the 226th;

*"My entry into the 226th was in the first week of November, 1943 being sent from Camp Claiborne, Louisiana from basic training. There were 22 of us sent to Camp Hale, Colorado to replace 22 men that were transferred out for one reason or another. Of the 22 men, I only recall Simon Bickel, who was to work in the supply room, he was put in charge of the trip to Camp Hale. We left Louisiana with the temperature at about 85 degrees and arrived at Camp Hale with the temperature at about 10 below zero, still in our "Sun -Tans"."*

Included in this group were the following men fresh from basic training; Privates Simon E. Bickel, Bernard Boyd, Ceciel Edwards, Wilbert Goolsby, "Scottie" Loshbaugh, Al Monroe, Herb Musgrave, Harold Olsen, Art Siebert, Louis Siscoe, Dick Sweet, Earl Utsey, and Herman Wolkowicz.

Now the 126th was almost completely mule pack and the 10th was much less mechanized than most infantry divisions. The new 226th became a service organization to Camp Hale. The men were not subjected to quite the full rigors of the mountain training exercises. Many of the roads around the base were constructed by the 226th. Some of these were for marching or hiking and others for vehicular traffic. Rock or mud slides were a common problem that required their attention. Drivers were also frequently called to haul individuals or groups around the training areas.

#### ● AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

During most of 1944 the plans for the 10th were very much in limbo. Some thought was given to turning the division into a regular infantry outfit. In May 9, 1944 the 226th was ordered to move to Camp Carson Colorado to prepare for an assignment in the South Pacific. At that time the company consisted of 188 enlisted men and 5 officers. Its new command was to be the XVI Corps of the 2nd Army. Transportation to the new location was on the trucks operated by the 226th. Many of the men actually made the move. With this order, the company name was changed to the 226th Engineer Combat Company.

During this period, Minot Dole was again at work in Washington frantically attempting to get a mountain or winter warfare assignment for the 10th Division. He met with many army and military leaders in Washington, including General Marshall. Almost concurrently, the 10th, now called the 10th Light Division, was transferred to Camp Swift, Texas to become acclimatized to warm weather. Army planners had scheduled

massive maneuvers in Louisiana in the fall of 1944 and the 10th was tentatively scheduled to participate.

Suddenly the orders for the 226th were canceled and the company was reformed in Camp Hale to wait for new instructions. In a few days the unit was placed on detached service from 2nd Army for transfer to the A.P. Hill Military Reservation in Virginia. The purpose of this change was to put the company to work for the Engineers Command at Fort Belvoir Virginia to conduct tests of experimental techniques devised to clear mine fields.

This last assignment rounded out a set of skills for the 226th that were ideally suited to the ultimate combat mission of the 10th Mountain Division. More important, it had become one of the two outfits in the U.S. military that had skills in the construction and use of aerial tramways.

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## 3

### A. P. HILL MILITARY RESERVATION

**D**uring the war, the types and use of land mines had become increasingly sophisticated. A prolific deployment of these weapons by the German Army had slowed the Allied European offensive to a snails pace at times. Engineers at Fort Belvoir Virginia had solicited several “think tanks” to study this problem in order to devise new strategies and counter measures. The 226th was selected as the operating group to implement and test these ideas.

Movement of the 226th to another base was no small task because of all of the heavy equipment. The army, in all its wisdom, spells out how such equipment is to be loaded and packed. Most of the men figured that this was one reason the war was taking so long. Ultimately a troop train made up of Pullman coaches and flat cars loaded with equipment departed from Camp Hale.

To the delight of the Southerners in the unit, the train headed due south. They were finally escaping from two years in a frigid hell. Most of the other passengers were also enjoying scenery that was totally new to them. Being summer, however, it soon became very hot and humid making it difficult to adjust after the high and dry climate of the Pando Valley.

The soldiers, especially those from the North, learned that there is a great paradox related to train travel. Much spectacular scenery can be viewed along the rail lines that automobile travelers never see. On the other hand, railroads are almost always routed through the very worst parts of the cities, especially the larger ones. Many of the troops commented about the rows of shacks along the tracks in the larger Southern cities, mostly occupied by black people. Soldiers from the small northern cities had rarely even seen black people. Uncle Sam gave many an interesting lesson in sociology.

A. P. Hill turned out to be a largely vacant plot of brush covered land in the North central part of Virginia, just east of the little town of Bowling Green. A formal entrance and administration building in one corner of the reservation were the only signs of life. Otherwise the base seemed to be occupied mostly by raccoons, possums and wild turkeys. For Civil War buffs, this was truly historic countryside. The Rappahanock River flowed nearby and the area had been bitterly fought over. It was occupied by both Federal and Confederate troops at various times. The principle settlement of the area was the historic city of Fredricksberg, Virginia.

- **TENT CITY**

An operational base was selected that consisted of ten acres of cleared land near an old vacant farm house. All of the equipment was unloaded from the train and moved to the base. Next the trucks returned to the administration building and loaded up the living quarters for the next several months. These loads consisted of planed pine 2 by 4's, eight man pyramidal tents and collapsible canvas cots.

It took a couple days to get the bivouac area in shape. The officers and cooks occupied the farmhouse. Of the 200 odd men in the company about 125 were referred to as the line soldiers, or the grunts, that did most of the work. The other 75 drivers, equipment operators, mechanics, supply, clerical people, and cooks found urgent tasks in the shade to keep themselves occupied.

As soon as the camp was livable the experts from Fort Belvoir began daily visits. These brains soon became known as "boffins", which is a term coined by English soldiers. It became apparent that this project had almost unlimited resources because anything special for an experiment never failed to show up almost immediately.

- **RUBE GOLDBERG WAS HERE**

The goal of the boffins was to devise methods that would quickly clear paths through German minefields without the tedious and highly dangerous work of probing the earth inch by inch with a bayonet. To accomplish this, endless fields of German antitank and antipersonnel mines were buried. Only the triggering devices were left in the mines with the explosives removed. The boffins dreamed up all sorts of Rube Goldberg techniques for exploding the mines. After each test the mines were dug up to determine which had been triggered.

In actual use at the time was a device called a Bangalore torpedo. It was a fairly effective modular set of eight foot by three inch diameter tubes that were filled with TNT. These could be screwed together to make an almost unlimited length tube that could be pushed into a mine field and detonated. The resultant explosion would trigger any mines about three feet on each side of the device. Handling problems usually occurred when more than three or four modules were needed.

One of the most innovative ideas was built with ten or fifteen foot long sections of steel guard rail or corrugated steel. Bangalore torpedoes were laid in the groves and two opposing guard rails were bolted together to make an explosive sandwich. By adding length after length of guard rail, a thin but sturdy column of explosives could be fashioned. A twelve inch disk, painted with target rings, contained the triggering device. This device was installed about thirty feet out from the near end of the explosive column, which subsequently became known as a "snake".

Snakes were constructed and pushed into the previously prepared mine field by Sherman Tanks on loan to the Boffins. When the device was properly positioned, the tank's machine gunner shot the small target which, in turn, exploded the whole thing. Mines within ten to twenty feet on each side of the snake were detonated, clearing a path

wide enough for the tank to proceed. At least half a dozen of these devices were built and exploded, one of which was almost five-hundred feet long. Each of these tests worked to perfection and the snake was later used effectively in the European Theater of Operations.

Many, more imaginative devices, were built and tested. Several experiments used primacord for the explosive. One test involved twisting individual strands of the primacord together to make a two-hundred foot long rope. Here, the innovative trick was how to get the rope across a mine field.

A rocket of, sorts, was constructed from 105 millimeter artillery shells. The impact fuse was removed from the nose of the shell and filled with black powder. A slow burning fuse was attached and the "rope" was carefully coiled and attached to the shell. After setting the shell in a v-shaped launching chute, the fuse was lit, exploding the black powder and propelling the shell into space like a rocket. The theory being that the "rope" would be thrown over the mine field and could then be detonated. Quite a few of these contraptions went off into space before the experiment was completed. No one knew how much black powder to use in the shell. The "boffins" were always very patient with their charges and never hesitated to try just one more time.

Another experiment used a fire hose filled with nitroglycerin. The trick was to somehow drag it across the mine field before it was detonated.

Probably the most unique idea was based on the principle of the New Years Eve noise makers. Everyone has used the rolled up paper whistles that you blow into to make them roll out. Now substitute an eight foot by eight inch paper bag filled with primacord. The bag is rolled up, attached to the exhaust of a tank so it rolls into a mine field. The explosive is detonated by the tank's machine gun thus exploding a safe but narrow path.

A sort of gyroscopic flying wheel was tested as a way to get primacord across the mine field. In this case the cord was attached to a wheel that could be made to turn at a high rate of speed. When the wheel was released into the field it was supposed to drag the explosive after it. With this device, it proved to be impossible to control the direction the wheel moved.

On another occasion a large mine field was planted and bombs with proximity fuses were dropped from B-17's. The crew could then count the number of untriggered mines they had missed, which was most of them.

Ol' Rube Goldberg would have been proud of the modification to a tank that someone dreamed up. A sort of flail was attached to its front. Eight foot long steel arms were extended over each side of the front of the tank. Between the arms was a round steel drum with eight foot long chains attached. As the tank moved forward, the drum rotated and the chains beat the ground in front. The theory being that the chains would detonate the mines. Some thought they ought to use this on the Germans even without the mines. It would have scared hell out of anyone seeing such a thing come at them. Strangely,

several of these were actually put into use in Europe

A lot of problems were encountered due to the heat and humidity. The work was terribly repetitive and boring so the combination did not raise the spirits of the soldiers. Just moving around was enough to make you break out in a sweat. The cooks probably suffered more than anyone from the heat. Their job required them to work constantly with the large gas fired portable stoves.

- **BRING ON THE NITRO**

Another ongoing problem was the danger of incurring a so called "powder headache". These occurred when you absorbed a dose of nitroglycerin into you blood stream. Nitro is insidious in its ability to invade your body. If you were downwind of an explosion, breathing the smoke would do the job. Simply wiping the sweat from your brow with a contaminated hand would bring one on. The nitro relaxes the blood vessels and the extra blood coursing through your head can bring on a headache that is devastatingly painful. This characteristic of nitro is why heart or angina patients carry nitro pills in case of an attack. The headaches last four or five hours and there is, or was, no remedy. The guys just had to tough it out.

Massive amounts of explosives were used in these experiments. Trucks loaded with highly volatile materials, including nitroglycerin, were a common in the camp. The platoon leaders and officers were constantly pushing the safe handling of these materials. To their credit there were no accidental explosions or injuries.

They were not as successful, however, with hangover prevention. A Post Exchange tent was erected and carried a more than ample supply of bottled beer. It was Ballentine's Ale, a mild sort of brew that came in brown stubby bottles that were consumed in enormous quantities, like soda pop at the end of each steamy day.

It was the boffins who scheduled the work and set the pace for the troops each day. The men lounged gratefully in the shade as the experts frequently stopped to take notes and make calculations with their slide rules. As five o'clock approached each afternoon, tools were gathered up and returned to the big boxes in which they were stored. Then, it was back to camp for a wash-up, a cold bottle of Ballentine's and the evening meal.

The kitchen crew deployed the big pans of food on serving tables just outside the kitchen door. On a nearby stove, a G.I. can full of coffee simmered cheerfully while another of soapy water and a third of clean rinse water boiled briskly nearby for washing mess kits. With the approach of six o'clock, a chow line of hungry engineers, each with an aluminum mess kit in hand, started to form up.

These thrice daily chow lines were the occasion for a good deal of rough horse play. It was frequently directed to Tully Davis, our compressor truck operator, who, for unknown reasons, was super goosy. Although he carefully guarded his backside at all

times, it was a rare meal when someone did not try to circumvent his defenses. A successful attack was signaled to everyone by Tulsy's anguished shriek of,

**“LORDAMERCY!!”,**

as he flailed wildly with his mess kit at those around him. It was an unspoken rule, observed by everyone, that if his mess kit contained food, you could not goose him. This was more a matter of protecting his fellow diners than it was a courtesy to Davis. Nevertheless, Tulsy must have dreaded going to every meal.

In fact, there were a few perks that all soldiers appreciate. Virginia Beach on Chesapeake Bay was just twenty miles East of camp. On weekends this charming resort community was teaming with groups of single women, wartime employees of the Federal government in Washington D.C. The motor pool provided a week-end bus service so there was lots of fraternization between the engineers and the pods of cruising bathing beauties.

Herman Wolkowicz had an aunt and uncle living in Washington, D. C., just sixty miles north. He often brought guests to visit his relatives and they were always treated like royalty. Herman's cousin acted as the tour guide and covered all of the standard tourist attractions. Somewhere along the line everyone was also treated to superb Jewish food.

Work at A. P. Hill became fairly routine and was based on an eight hour day, five day week; not the army way. The place was overrun with brass from Fort Belvoir most of the time but they were mostly interested in their pet projects, not the enforcement of discipline. On balance, the troops enjoyed this brief sojourn and left Virginia with many good memories.

In October, just as the summer temperatures began to moderate, the fun times in Virginia came to an abrupt end. Camp Swift Texas and reattachment to the 10th Division was the destination of the 226th. There, preparations were underway to train and equip the ski troops for a tour of combat duty at an unspecified overseas destination.

It was undoubtedly sheer accident that gave the 226th its unique qualifications as an engineering company. It seems probable that the tramway mission was simply assigned to them by default. Building roads and the use of heavy equipment was their designated role. Then came the summer in Virginia living with mines and high explosives. Skills like these fit like a glove with the future combat mission of the 10th Mountain Division. It is not at all clear, however, that someone planned their special training for a specific reason.

## 4

# THE MOUNTAINEERS HEAD FOR THE FLAT LANDS

Camp Swift, some fifty miles Southeast of Austin near the town of Bastrop, was one of many army camps built during the war. These camps, like Camp Hale, were throw away army posts. Built to minimum standards, they had no place in the long range plans of the military establishment. The barracks had no insulation or cooling which makes them like a furnace inside even in October. Heating in the winter was OK if you can get near a stove.

The area surrounding the camp is sparsely populated and the little rolling hills were covered with scrub pines and occasional pecan orchards. White tail deer were rumored to thrive in the area around the nearby Colorado River. As with all Texas Army Camps, there were also copperheads, water moccasins, scorpions and armadillo to look out for. This is part of what is called the "Hill Country" of Texas and, despite some of the inconveniences, it is a relatively pretty part of the state.

Austin is a large enough city to reasonably handle the number of soldiers who made their way to town. It is a College town. The University of Texas campus offering a few diversions for the college boys from the ranks of the 10th Mountain.

Initially, the bulk of the 10th had been transferred to Camp Swift in June, 1944 to participate in massive maneuvers in Louisiana during the fall of that year. Most of the soldiers felt betrayed that there was no assignment for which they had been trained. They were to become just another flat land infantry division. Morale had plummeted to rock bottom.

One soldier from the 85th Infantry went to town and tried to drown his sorrows. He decided to borrow a car to get back to the base. His decision almost cost him his career because the car he took belonged to an Austin resident and the theft was reported before he hit the city limits. The MPs got him coming into the gate and he was put into the stockade to wait for a general court marshal. You will hear more about him later.

Then, like a breath of fresh air, the army changed its plans; give the 10th a mission for which it had been trained. Concurrently orders were cut to add some 2,000 men to the ranks, including reassignment of the 226th Engineers.

The division was ordered to become physically prepared for what was to come. Only a select few actually knew what that was but to the men it meant lots of army discipline,

marching, exercise and hiking. Most everyone was required to go through the infiltration course for some reason. Half the time it was raining so that made the leaders happy to have such a realistic environment. *Got to get used to crawling on your belly through the mud.*

- **JOINING THE ARMY AGAIN**

Every unit was required to go on a brutal twenty-five mile hike and the 226th got to Camp Swift just in time to participate. Full field packs were required and there was an eight hour time limit making them what the army called forced marches. For the infantry this was a piece of cake but for cooks and company clerks and guys who had been chasing girls on Virginia Beach it was pure torture. Chuck Hampton recalls how it went for the 226th.

*"On the day of the company's march, it was amazing how many of the unit's trucks and bulldozers required immediate and urgent attention. About forty of us completed the march within the time limit. The rest of the company strung out for God knows how many miles behind. First aid men really earned their pay treating cases of heat exhaustion, blisters and the like. It was not an outstanding performance although we were later consoled to learn that we had done better than the other engineering companies of the 126th."*

Shortly after the 226th arrived in Camp Swift, (see Appendix One for a company roster), the unit was assigned to the 126th Mountain Engineer Battalion as Company D. The division name was also changed from the 10th Light Division to the 10th Mountain Division and the insignia and shoulder patch were augmented to include the word "Mountain". This was the first time in history that any division of the army had been so designated. A few new recruits were transferred to the outfit to fill empty positions. Some of these commented that they weren't too sure they wanted to be associated to a division that published its newspaper with pictures of "Pinup Mountains" rather than Lana Turner.

During the service in Virginia, the 226th had been under the command of First Lieutenant Harold McKay. Concurrent with the name change at Camp Swift, Captain Fred Nagel of Denver Colorado took command of the company. Captain Nagel was every bit an engineer but also well groomed in the art of military leadership. He was a graduate of Colorado School of Mines and had spent two years working on the ALCAN Highway. His first chore, for which he had very little time, was to build a relationship with his men and still rebuild some of the discipline that had been lost during the Virginia assignment. Most will agree that he did this with considerable skill.

Other upgrade training was implemented when the company went on bivouac for several days to the Colorado River to practice building Bailey bridges. During this exercise, Captain Nagel got everyone down to the edge of the river and gave them a swimming lesson.



Next came the day that every spare man in the division became a mule skinner. These men were assembled at a Camp Swift railroad siding. The Quartermaster and Pack Artillery were taking delivery of their newly arrived mules who were waiting in a long string of stock cars parked on the siding. Without any further advice on mule handling, each soldier was told to take a hackamore from a mountainous pile of the things, get himself a mule and lead it back to the camps barns several miles distant. Most of the men did not have the slightest idea what a hackamore was much less how to use it. They soon learned that it is a sort of bitless bridle that goes over the animals head. It allows the attachment of a lead rope.

Army mules are notoriously stubborn. They are supplied by contractors who attempt to breed them to be about the same size. Their vocal cords are cut by army veterinarians to avoid noise on combat missions. Having been cooped up in cattle cars for some unknown number of days did not improve their disposition. The regular skimmers started the procession and were well on their way to the barns by the time some of the "volunteers" got to their animal.

An experienced skinner was there to help with the hackamore and give advice on handling. Getting the animals out of the stock car did not prove difficult for most. The volunteer "skimmers" were told by the experts,

*"Jes' lead him out 'n don't l ook back at him 'n he'll foller right along."*

Sure enough, that advise worked, at least as far as the stock car ramp. It was when they were on terra firma that quite a few mules just went crazy, probably well aware that their handlers were idiots. It is impossible to hold one of these unruly creatures with a rope if he wants to go somewhere. Before long a substantial number of mules were scattered all over the fifty odd square mile military reservation and surrounding territory. Camp officials finally had to hire a bunch of Texas cowboys to round up the strays and deliver them to the barns.

On the same day as the mule fiasco several new recruits were reporting to the 126th Engineers battalion headquarters for assignment. Efforts were being made to bring all of the units in the division to full strength prior to their overseas departure. Panic reigned supreme on this day in headquarters, probably more so than at the stock cars. Critters were scattered all over Camp Swift and some wandered into nearby residential areas. It was impossible to have any kind of a conversation with the clerk in charge because the phone kept ringing off the wall with people pleading, *"get these #@?! creatures out of our yard"*.

On Thanksgiving day, the Tenth Mountain Division was assigned a new commanding officer. He was Major General George P. Hayes, who had been the 2nd Infantry Division's artillery commander in Europe. As a soldier who had come up through the ranks, he had won a Congressional Medal of Honor during World War I. This was his first chance to command an entire division. Few of the soldiers knew anything about him but, as it turned out, he proved to have been a wise choice for a division like the Tenth

Mountain.

Intense training continued for all of the remaining days in Camp Swift. Company D, with its cadre of experienced engineers and unique compliment of equipment, became the most technically competent in the battalion. The company received the highest tactical rating of the entire battalion during maneuvers and was commended by Colonel Parker, the Battalion Commander. After several sessions, the Bailey bridge was mastered. Six men were sent to the Antiaircraft Company to qualify on the 50 caliber machine gun by shooting at a radio controlled drone. It was rumored that the drone never go a scratch but the men somehow were qualified. The latest examples of German mines were studied with several veterans of the war in Europe, who taught the best counter measures. All of the equipment was carefully inspected and replacements made where needed.

Finally the entire division was restricted to the base and no civilians were allowed in under any circumstances. Preparations were complete and the Tenth lost its identity and became Task Force 45, about to depart for some unknown destination.

This was a very sad time for the married soldiers who were accompanied by their wives. Many were newlyweds. They had taken housing in whatever they could find mostly in small hotels in the area. The soldiers were allowed to live off the base when possible so many got home every night, usually too tired to do much. The fear and anxiety families share with their young soldiers are amplified with combat situations because, from this point forward, there can be almost no real communication. Wives had to return to their homes, some with small children. All correspondence would now be censored so the only real information would be read between the lines in the letters that came from some strange Army Post Office (APO) address or from periodic stories in the media.

On the brighter side, remember our friend from the 85th who was waiting his trial for car theft? He was saved by the bell. Becoming Task Force 45 prevented access to the base by anyone who could testify against him so his cell was unlocked.

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## 5

### TASK FORCE 45

Moving thirteen-thousand soldiers from a training camp to a European combat zone takes a massive amount of preparation. The train cars needed were sufficient to move a small city. An advance party had gone ahead to ensure that the departure from the states came off without too many glitches. They did a masterful job.

First out of Camp Swift was the 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment. They left camp toward the end of November and were in Italy just before Christmas of 1944. All units of the 10th took the same route to Italy. First, on a troop train to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, then to Newport News, Virginia for embarkation on a troop ship and finally to debark at Naples, Italy.

None of this was known to any of the troops. The eventual destination was deemed to be "top secret". There were some clues. Prior to departure, winter clothes were issued and somehow everyone surmised that departure was from the East Coast. It seemed pretty clear that the South Pacific was not the final destination.

- **NINETY POUNDS OF RUCK SACK**

Company D had a lot of extra chores for because of all of the heavy equipment that had to be packed and loaded. Every item of clothing that would be needed overseas had been replaced. One unique new item that was issued to everyone looked like a cotton mattress cover. Initially the troops tried to speculate about the kind of sleeping quarters that might need something like this. Ominously it was discovered that these were "body bags". When your number came up, you were stored in the bag until Graves Registration picked you up. Each man now had a bulging barracks bag, a steel helmet and his personal weapon. With the winter gear, this accumulated to weigh almost one-hundred pounds so all other personal belongs were either dumped or sent home.

Personal weapons varied, depending on the individuals job. Most had the M-1 rifle, which was semi-automatic and used clips that held eight 30 caliber bullets. All M-1 users were issued bayonets that attached to the end of the rifle. Most officers were also issued M-3 carbines. These were 30 caliber weapons but lighter and shorter than the M-1. Some were issued the standard military side arm, called the Browning 45 automatic hand gun or pistol. Another newer weapon was the 45 caliber "Grease Gun" that carried a fifteen shot clip. Some of the officers carried this sawed off little automatic weapon that was almost a cross between a rifle and a pistol. It looked very much like the tools used to

grease military vehicles.

With the rest of the division, D Company moved out on Christmas day. Special troop trains provided the transportation to the East Coast. Each was self contained, including a kitchen and sleeping cars. Troops destined for combat were given priority over all other rail traffic. On this basis the trains made it to Virginia in three days, but few saw anything because a total black out was enforced. Soldiers were strictly forbidden from debarking from the train or even raising the blackout curtains at any time. If the train stopped along the way, Military Police materialized from nowhere to guard all of the exits.

The temperature at Camp Patrick Henry was unbelievably cold. It was a shock to the men of D Company, who four months earlier, had been sweltering in the heat a mere fifty miles North of here. A brisk wind was blowing in off of the Atlantic and little did anyone know how that might effect an ocean crossing. They soon found out.

- **BEANS FOR BREAKFAST**

Camp Patrick Henry served as a staging area. Equipment and personnel were assembled and prepared for shipment. Some training classes were conducted to familiarize the men with travel on a troop ship. D Company was kept on the run transporting equipment to the docks in Newport News. This was probably a blessing because it was Christmas and no one felt very festive. A break, of sorts, came when most of the men got to see a live performance by Red Skelton, one of the reigning funny men of that era.

On January 5, 1945 about six-thousand soldiers boarded the USS General Miags, reportedly one of America's newest and most modern troop carriers. This boat ride across the ocean proved to be unforgettable to most of the men. Boarding and departure were carried out at night to maintain secrecy. A loading officer called out a soldier's last name and, after responding with his first, he was allowed to go aboard. Just getting to the assigned quarters on the ship the first time was a bizarre experience. Most had never been on anything bigger than a row boat. Guides led the soldiers of D Company into the bowels of this huge floating catacomb. With helmets and one-hundred pound packs, it seemed like it took hours through steel passage ways and ladders. More like an animal being put into his cage.

Part of D Company was on "D" deck, four floors down from the main deck, and in the most forward compartment. The remainder were one deck down, all below the ship's water line. Many of the bunks were next to the hull. This was not the best part of the ship for an ocean cruise because all of the rolling and rocking movements were amplified to the maximum.

The troops quarters contained nothing but canvas bunks and a small space to stack your duffel. Every square inch of wall space was used. Bunks were from three to six deep, about eighteen inches apart and roughly that wide. For the first few hours after

boarding, the heat became unbearable. Dressed in winter woolen clothing, there were thousands of sweating soldiers and no air circulation could be had until the engines were going full blast and the ship was moving. To make things worse, orders were issued forbidding anyone from leaving their assigned spaces until all troops were loaded and counted. Already men were upchucking in their helmets and several had to pee in them. At this point the soldiers were asking themselves, *"how many days of this do we have to endure?"*

From the start of the voyage to the finish, motion sickness was the order of the day. Several engineers got sick just walking up the gang plank. Joe Martino honked his dinner over the side while walking on board and spent the entire trip in the ship's infirmary. Harold Weiske never got out of his bunk and was carried off the ship in Naples. Everyone got at least queasy. Many were pretty badly effected. A combination of very rough weather, claustrophobia and just plain nerves took a high toll.

The ships ambiance didn't help matters much. Chow was served a couple decks above the troop's quarters. To proceed to the meals meant climbing up several decks on a grated stairway that was routed past the latrine. Earlier diners returning to their quarters would frequently upchuck their meal at the top of the stairs. This odious mixture would cascade through the grill work onto those on their way up to be fed. Even the latrine was a hazard. No one could do his normal toilet because all of the stalls and urinals were busy with seasick soldiers. It was not unusual to look down the row of stalls and see twenty-five or so rear ends pointed toward the door. At least you could be pretty sure what was on the menu before reaching the galley.

Such enlisted men as could eat were served two meals a day. D Company got the early breakfast and the late dinner schedules so it was almost twelve hours between meals. Mess tables were metal and the diners stood through each meal. Much of the time the ship rocked so much the trays had to be held in place while eating. Often one of the table partners threw up on his tray then collapsed on the floor. Soldiers also learned where the term "navy bean" came from because they were served almost every day for breakfast. After a few days only the hardest soldiers were still eating which actually improved the ambiance aboard ship.

The officers had their own special perks. With rather spacious quarters on the upper decks, they also sat down to eat three meals a day. Their "staterooms" provided space for from four to six men. Nurses and Red Cross ladies were also quartered in the same areas. *Hmm*, enough said. The troops only consolation was that the brass seemed to get just as sick. In fact, strangely, there were a lot of sick sailors.

As soon as the troops were on the ship their pay was increased by 20 percent. This was considered as an overseas bonus and brought a PCFs pay to \$64.80 from \$54.00 .. a sergeant was increased by \$15.60 to \$93.60.

The ships crew included army, navy and coast guard personnel. Some of the soldiers from the 10th were also assigned to a deck watch so lived somewhat like the

permanent crew. The army and coast guard manned the ships guns. The ship's crew became the envy of every soldier on the board. Their duty included a regular route from the U.S. to Europe (usually Italy) then to South America and back to the U.S. Anything you could not get in the U.S. or Europe was plentiful in South America; cigarettes, nylons, watches etc. So these crewmen became a part of the "black market" and really cleaned up. Some literally made thousands of dollars with most of their income from the troops they were hauling.

The General Meigs was part of the convoy for only a small part of the crossing. As a new transport, it was supposed to be fast enough to outrun a submarine so soon broke from the ranks and started its own zig zag path. After several days lessons in Italian were started, tipping off the soldiers about their destination. Little English to Italian translation books were issued. Classes were conducted over the loud speaker. Everyone was taught how to ask for the bathroom, to say "*please*" and other important phrases. "*Where can I get some wine?*" and the more useful phrases came later.

- **LUNCH ANYONE?**

Only a few of the passengers were put to work. These were the sweepers who had the daily job of making "a clean sweep fore and aft" every afternoon. Under normal circumstances this would have been a task that had the same undesirable status as KP. Rather it became a sought after job because these soldiers got three meals a day.

As the days rolled by and the "sea legs" became stable, hunger set in. Soldiers were not used to such skimpy rations and would go to almost any length to hustle some grub. Charlie Pruitt, of the 1st platoon, was regularly assigned as a sweeper. Chuck Hampton asked him how he got into the noon mess. Pruitt showed him his pass card, which looked like a blank postcard with several holes punched in it. For some hungry soldiers, forgery of this pass was duck soup. The toughest part was faking the existing punches with a pocket knife. Hampton and Jonny Johnson did this with some ease and were soon having a noon meal. It worked so well that half the platoon, including Sgts. Waltich and Hull, were soon enjoying a nice lunch every day.

Another new experience for the soldiers was taking showers in salt water. The effect was somewhat like rubbing your skin with sandpaper. No lather ever appeared from the soap but, in the end, they felt a bit cleaner.

Life aboard ship was unvaried in its routine and became monotonous. Following breakfast, the cards came out and the interminable games of blackjack or poker started up. For most such games there was a five cent limit but you would have thought it was more like five dollars.

Special Services had dreamed up a beauty contest that anyone could enter. Hampton and Lunday were both winners. Hampton had entered a nice leather bound picture of his wife Barbara and Lunday put in a photo of a buxom babe he had found in his new wallet.



Many had carried on reading material after being forewarned that something was needed to keep busy. The Red Cross had a supply of pocket books that was gone in a flash except for a few that no one wanted. Even these latter books were ultimately removed and read. One soldier in the company got so bored he read Of Geography and Human Destiny from cover to cover. One of the most popular books was Ernie Pyle's Here is your War.

Outside of the weather, the crossing was uneventful. There were a couple of submarine alerts but nothing came of them. About two days out from the Straights of Gibraltar, the weather turned pleasantly warm. Everyone was getting cabin fever from being penned up for nine days below decks when suddenly without warning the loud speaker announced "*the smoking lamp is lit top side*". This is the Navy's way of saying you can go on deck and have a smoke. The exodus up the stairway was instant and massive. Fresh air and sunshine at last. Many removed their shirts to bask in the sun while others just laid on the deck for a catnap.

- **OVER THERE**

When the ship passed through the Straights of Gibraltar, the character of the ocean changed instantly. Huge white capped waves were replaced with giant swells. Motion on the ship changed from bumpy to a more sickening rolling movement. The snow clad Atlas Mountains of North Africa were visible to the south and, for a while, the soldiers felt like tourists on a cruise ship. Gibraltar looked to the troops just like Prudential said it should.

Having been without any escort for most of our trip, a naval convoy greeted the General Miags as soon as it entered the Mediterranean. These waters were much more confining and there was further danger from air attack. During the day, the smoking lamp continued to glow so the soldiers luxuriated in the warm sunshine. At sundown, it was total blackout.

On January 18, 1945 the ship docked in Naples. All of the troops got their first intimate picture of war. The harbor was littered with sunken vessels of all types. There were several barrage balloons moored over the dock area. These were large helium filled air bags that were tethered to the ground and supported hanging cables that were supposed to discourage low flying aircraft. Most devastating and shocking were the bombed buildings and the impact on the civilian population.

The unloading process was just the reverse of loading. Level by level the troops struggled up the passageways with their duffel bags and equipment. As an unloading officer called off each name, the soldiers stepped off the gang plank onto Italian soil. Red Cross girls were there as greeters as the men literally staggered off the ship. Coffee and donuts were offered to anyone who didn't otherwise have his hands full. Being on terra firma again caused a very strange sensation. It felt like the ground was rolling. Some of the troops literally fell down. Others chased the Red Cross girls.



Walking on foreign soil seemed like a dream to many of the soldiers. In almost no time the division had been transported into a fantasy world. Nothing seemed real. A new reality about the war made subtle changes in attitudes and dispositions. The troops were "over there" and apprehensive about what the future held.

## 6

### THE FINAL PREPARATIONS

With their feet on the ground once more, Company D was split up a bit. Most of the troops went North immediately while several were singled out to remain behind to guard the equipment being unloaded from the ship.

Those heading to Pisa marched to the rail yard through parts of Naples. En route they learned their first lesson about protecting their belongings in a war torn country. Both Captain Nagel and T-5 Tulsy Davis were marching with a carton of cigarettes hanging out of their pocket. Ragged little street waifs darted into the ranks and quickly disappeared with a commodity that was more valuable than money.

Next came the first glimpses of the troop train north. Freight cars were made comfortable with a layer of straw on the floor. European troop trains have been famous since World War I when American soldiers were introduced to the "forty and eights". These were small box cars that were supposed to accommodate forty men or eight mules. It was closer to "fifty and eight" in this case. Bathroom facilities were either the door or a crack in the floor. Space was so limited that soldiers lay down in shifts.

Anywhere there were Allied troops there were the ragged Italian civilians who were bartering or selling anything they thought some soldier might take in exchange for cigarettes. Mostly they were hustling for prostitutes or looking for a chance to steal something. Every time the train stopped, these desperate people appeared. They were everywhere. Some soldiers purchased wine but soon found that it was so watered down that it was worthless. Later it was learned that the vendors were not above urinating in the bottles to get a better color.

On the journey north, when the train finally stopped in a city that boasted bathroom facilities, the troops got another shock. First, the facilities were all unisex. They consisted of a wall with a one foot wide trough at its foot and several open stalls. To relieve yourself you leaned against the wall and hoped to hit the trough. Every few minutes, supposedly, water was flushed through the trough to wash the excrement into the sewer. Ladies selling bathroom paper, about the consistency of newspaper, patrolled the stalls.

The Italian rail lines were still a patchwork of bombed out road beds, trestles, and tunnels. Most of the time the train seemed to be going in the wrong direction but after a

couple days the Leaning Tower of Pisa became visible, and the soldiers unloaded to set up a bivouac. Equipment and weapons had to be assembled in preparation for action against the formidable defenses of the German Gothic or winter line.

- GUARD DUTY IN NAPLES

Among those left in Naples were PFCs Lunday and Cochran. During the first few days these newly appointed guards remained on the troop ship and learned what had been suspected; the ships crew really ate well. Three meals a day, pie for desert and even a steak or two.

Food for the civilian population was very scarce. Germans took most of what was produced to feed their armies. The "bread basket" of Italy, in the Po River Valley, was still in their hands. Almost the entire population of the country was close to starvation.

Military authorities decided to allow people to collect table scraps from the chow lines where ever they may be. This, surprisingly, included navy vessels. All of the leftovers from the meal trays were shoveled into buckets held by the scrap collectors. No one wanted to contemplate what they did with the stuff.

Lunday described his efforts at being a good Samaritan when he offered his collector a special treat.

*"Dinner included an extra piece of cherry pie that I carefully wrapped in a napkin. Instead of letting the person scrape that pie into his slop bucket I handed it to him. He proceeded to deposit his treat with all the rest of the stuff in his bucket, including the napkin".*

Chain link fences and Military Police were used to secure the Naples dock area. Access to the outside was limited so the guards mostly had to content themselves by roaming around inside the fence. An MP from the 34th division guarded one gate and seemed starved for news direct from the states. He had survived the North African campaign and was in his fourth year overseas.

After talking to this MP for a while it became clear he was also hustling on the side. Outside his gate was a building that had been blown in half. One side was rubble and the other still standing. In ten foot high white letters, the initials "VD" were painted on the standing wall. The MP asked the group if any wanted a "piece of ass" and whistled to some gal standing on the roof. She gave a nice wave but, under the circumstances, no one got very enthused.

When the General Miegs was finally unloaded it departed with no delay. The equipment was to be reloaded onto an Italian freighter destined for Leghorn in northern Italy. While this loading was being completed the guards were housed in another staging area in the town of Bagnoli near Naples.

The guards were never quite sure exactly what it was they were supposed to do or even what they were guarding against. MPs were on duty 24 hours a day all around the dock area. There was some thought that the professionals in the black market might attempt the theft of almost anything, but having two sets of watchmen seemed redundant. Nothing is more boring than sitting on a packing crate for eight hours from midnight to 8:00AM in a Bay of Naples fog. It was cold and damp and dozing off was not at all difficult.

Finally, in about a week, the freighter was loaded and ready to start cruising up the west coast of Italy. This ship, named the Cestria, was red from rust but seemed to be functional. Sleeping quarters were on the deck. Toilets, or outhouses, had been constructed out of wood and secured to the deck. The outflow from these was just dumped over the side.

It only took a day or two to get to Leghorn (Livorno on Italian maps). It proved to be a much nicer trip than for those on the forty and eights. Leghorn was worse than Naples for sunken ships. The barrage balloons were also present. All the way from Naples flights of B17s passed over the ship en route to or from Northern Italy or Germany. Reminders that there was a war not far away.

- BIVOUAC IN PISA

Company D was bivouacked in a rather pastoral setting, the former hunting grounds of an Italian nobleman. Pup tents were erected in neat rows within view of the Leaning Tower. The same depressing poverty was everywhere. Local children were dressed in rags. Some had burlap wrapped around their feet in lieu of shoes. They were real hustlers. Most had learned pretty good English and would sell you anything from their sister on down. It was sad to see their sunken cheeks and the sallow complexions of the malnourished.

One afternoon a lone B-17 came over the camp. Smoke was pouring out of the side and it was very low in the sky. Finally several parachutes appeared. This was a first glimpse of real battle casualties for the newly arrived troops of the 10th Mountain.

Headquarters platoon spent most of its time in Pisa cleaning cosmoline off of everything. The army packs its equipment in this sort of greasy substance to keep it from rusting. Everyone had to do some of the cleaning and that was one messy job. Several of the trucks and cats were new and they were not left out of the rust treatment.

Once the company was settled, training picked up again. As a diversion from the cosmoline, many of the line squads were trucked to the coast near Livorno. A German mine field had been laid to slow down a coastal invasion and was still very much active. These were big Teller antitank mines. Except for being fully armed, they were the same as those used for the A. P. Hill experiments. Several hundred were located by probing, dug up and deactivated.

Passes were easy to get so some sight seeing was possible. There wasn't much else to do. Pisa was, of course, a major attraction. Entrance to the "Leaning Tower" was free so most of the guys had a walk up the stairs that winds around the inside tower wall. The "lean" of the tower gave the stair climb a very strange sensation. On one side it felt like you were floating and on the other as if a 100 pound load had been added.

Money had little value because there was not much to buy. A soldier's pay could easily be augmented with a little black market activity. A 10 cent pack of cigarettes would bring as much as \$2.50. Two cigarettes would buy a haircut and almost any merchandise could be had by bartering for smokes. Soldiers were paid in "invasion currency" that was printed by our government in various denominations of the Italian Lira. It gave the appearance of Monopoly money. Real Italian currency was almost useless going for something like 100,000 Lira for a dollar.

One afternoon, pilots from the British Air Force seemed to want to play games. A squadron of Spitfires returning from a days work somewhere peeled off one by one and buzzed the bivouac area. They flew so low that some of the tents were blown over. This happened a couple times but someone got word to them enough was enough. If ammunition had been available for the machine guns it is likely that the troops would have offered up some of their own arguments.

Mail call was, by any measure, the most popular of all army institutions. Traditionally it occurred right after lunch each day. The Mail Clerk emerged from the Orderly Room bearing a sack of mail. He would bellow "*mail call*" and was soon literally surrounded by news hungry soldiers. Mail was removed piece by piece from the bag and each recipients names was called. After a response the mail or package was passed to through the ranks to the lucky G.I. There were usually packages and always a few perfumed love letters. Some got very clever at sending booze through the mail illegally. A loaf of bread could be hollowed out to accommodate a quart of scotch, and, in most cases, the scarce hooch got through in one piece. Cookies and cake were fairly common, but, sometimes, the weeks it took en route could turn that commodity into hard tack. Frivolous comments were always the order of the day because so many handled missives. As the items were passed from hand to hand you might hear; "*man has she got the hots for you; mom must have been baking again; Palm's going to drink another loaf of bread tonight; gee, now we will learn how the war went last month* "; etc.

After the clerk indicated that his load for the day was distributed everyone went to his foxhole or tent and silence descended over the area. Each soldier digested the contents of his mail. Food was almost always shared. Some got almost no mail and you could always tell of their dejection. Others had to pick a buddy to read a letter for them, and later to write a response. A little bit of home had come to the front lines.

- WELCOME TO THE FRONT LINES

During January the 10th Mountain Infantry units were gradually committed to the front line. In the dead of winter, things were generally quiet for the moment.

Occasionally there was contact with the enemy, mostly because of patrols set out by both sides. As in most mountain terrain, weather conditions varied; snow, rain, and fog. Units of the 86th were in position on the front and under artillery fire by January 9. The first fire fight with enemy troops occurred on January 16. Casualties were suffered for the first time on January 22 by Company F of the 86th. One of the few times skis were actually used took place on a three day patrol that departed January 21.

Company D moved to a small town called Mammiano. From here the sounds of war could now be heard. It was just over the hill from where the infantry of both sides was dug in. Most of the homes were made of stone. In fact, the trees and forests in this area had long since been destroyed for fire wood. This town was built on the side of a relatively steep hill and divided into two parts; an "up" and a "down" town. The company quarters were in a three story stone house in the lower village called Mammiano Basso, meaning Mammiano Down. Several of the rooms were shared by soldiers while the Italian owners occupied those remaining.

Soon after getting settled into new quarters, several soldiers headed for one of the local saloons. The place was full of smoke and very crowded. Most of the customers were American soldiers who were armed to the teeth and pretty rowdy. An enlisted man from some other outfit made a lot of snide comments about the 10th. He was challenged and suddenly pulled a loaded 45 automatic. About that time the MPs got there so no blood was spilled. For a while it looked like there would be a good western shoot out until Sergeant Hampton, that night's sergeant of the guard arrived. The offender quieted down pretty fast when his jaw was broken by a crisply thrown right cross.

The veil of secrecy invoked for Task Force 45 was unmasked by the Germans about this time. They set up loud speakers and welcomed the 10th Mountain Division to the front. Part of the broadcast included comments naming many of the officers and their units, the departure dates from Camp Swift, the stay in Camp Patrick Henry, and even the names of the troop ships. They also dropped propaganda leaflets showing lewd pictures of what were supposedly loved ones in the arms of a 4F civilian. One such leaflet carried the following message;

HELLO! Boys of the 86th and 85th!

Welcome to Europe and the Italian Front!

Hope you like it! Though there may be some doubt because you might not find some things too comfortable around here. No this isn't the time when it was just pleasant and fashionable 'Go to Italy for the Winter'. Cooks got the tickets and arranged everything. Then off on the 'Southern Route' to Europe for a cruise in the Mediterranean.

THEN SUNNY ITALY - with fine hotels, good food an lots of fun. = Altogether: A swell time and the best of it: Whenever you don't like it anymore or had enough of it, you could just take the next boat home.

Well, well if this isn't different! This time you picked ...

## THE WRONG TOURIST AGENCY!

There is just a bit too much 'conducting' on this trip. No choice where to go and where to stay. No sights, no comforts, no smartly dressed girls -

NOTHING!

But a fine chance of getting killed and just be buried and forgotten. Or (if you are lucky) to finish up in a prisoner's camp to be among those who survive the mess and get back home as soon as the war is over! It was a long way from Camp Hale and Abetone! You will find out that it will be even longer to get back = if you ever do get back.

You know the Italians say: "See Naples and die!"

Well, you did see Naples and the rest will also be yours unless .

During this stay in Mammiano a tramway was erected as a training exercise and to check the equipment. All of the engines were carefully tuned and kinks were worked out of the installation procedures. A few bridges were repaired and some mine fields cleared near the front lines. Sporadic mortar fire was encountered by Company D engineers for the first time.

Jack Mitchell vividly recalls the practice tramway;

*"It's purpose was to prepare us for the assault on Riva Ridge. The tram cite was a few miles from Mammiano, a mountain town, where we were staying. The road we had to travel was narrow, rough and slow going. At one point we had to pass through a short open area en route to the tram site. We heard a "splat, splat, splat," sound coming from a nearby rock retaining wall. We soon realized it was German small arms fire. We continued to the tram cite and made several trips without further incidents.*

*We cleared a right of way and assembled the tramway in two or three days. Before full operation the tram had to be tested for cable sag. Myself and another engineer (Bill Flynn?) took the first ride. All went well until the carriage, before reaching the first A frame, struck the top of a short tree snag, causing the carriage to strike the ground. The fall caused severe pain in my back. I don't recall of any injuries to the other engineer. Two engineers assisted me back to the company medic who suggested that I should be checked at the hospital. Not knowing the severity of the*



*injuries I opted to remain with my group. The medics wrapped me with a wide elastic bandage and treated me for pain. I spent two weeks on light duty, before returning to full time duty. I toughed it out for the rest of my enlistment knowing something was wrong. I decided I would deal with it after discharge. At that time my priority was getting out of the army and going home. A few weeks after discharge I was again having severe back spasms and kidney colic. The doctors I saw found I had compression fractures of five vertebrae below my neck and three in the lumbar area. They also found a prolapsed right kidney with kidney stones.*

*The V.A. doctors would not consider the risk of back surgery, but did repair the kidney and remove the stones. The remaining aches and pains frequently remind me of the first tram we built in Italy."*

Another, and now more urgent priority was to zero in the rifles before going to the front lines. This had been done before leaving Texas. Now, after the banging around these weapons had been subjected to during the journey, no one could be really certain of hitting what he aimed at.

A small field, about a hundred yards long and butting into the hillside, was designated as the rifle range. Targets were set up at one end and the distance carefully measured off. Rifles were to be sighted in at one-hundred yards exactly. The field was wide enough to accommodate about a squad of ten men abreast at a time. Each man was issued a clip of eight rounds, deemed sufficient to do the job.

Headquarters platoon, the cooks, supply, and motor pool personnel, were first on line. This was not a test of marksmanship but a matter of finding out at a range of one-hundred yards, how much, if any, your rifle was shooting low, high, right or left. Knowing this, the rifle sight could be appropriately adjusted to bring you right on the bull's eye.

Headquarters platoon was soon satisfied with their test so the 1st squad of the 1st platoon came to the firing line. When half their rounds had been fired, sight adjustments made and results noted, one of the riflemen, unable to resist the temptation, cut down on a big green glass insulator perched atop a nearby power pole. It was the power line supplying Mammiano Alto. The insulator exploded in a shower of pulverized glass. Quickly, several more blew up as other riflemen joined the game. Loud and urgent cries of

*"CEASE FIRE, GODDAMIT"*

immediately came from the company officers and senior noncoms who were observing the exercise. Luckily, the power to the neighboring village was not interrupted, which no doubt, saved the 1st squad from a lengthy tour of guard duty and kitchen police.

Many of the engineers got acquainted with the Italian residents of Mammiano.

They were just as poor as elsewhere but this was their small village and they treated everyone very well. A young girl, probably about fifteen, was always present with her bucket for the evening table scraps. One soldier took her fancy and she invited him to her home for dinner one evening. He describes the evening as follows;

*"Their home sat higher up on the hill. Like all the others it was stone and looked almost medieval. The floors and walls were bare except for the religious objects. On the first floor was a sort of sitting room and a large kitchen. In the center was a wood burning fireplace and stove. They didn't use fire wood as we know it. Sticks were gathered from somewhere. We would see people carrying these huge bundles of twigs that were ultimately burned. There seemed to be just bedrooms on the second floor but I could only guess at that. Mama watched like a hawk. Present for this meal were the girl, her mother, grandfather and a younger boy. The bill of fare was a platter of roast chestnuts and two fish that grandfather had caught that day. One of the fish looked like a sucker and the other was a trout.. both about six inches long. As the guest of honor, I was given both fish, cooked exactly the way they came out of the stream. After dinner they filled metal pots with coals from the fire for use as bed warmers. Their only heat came from the kitchen. When I departed they all shook my hand and mama gave me a hug. I felt honored to have been their guest".*

The one staple food that seemed to be plentiful was chestnuts. Almost everything the Italians cooked used these nuts. They even ground them into a flour that was used to make bread. This bread was very bland because they had no sugar or shortening.

German artillery activity seemed to pick up for a few days and the mechanics of Company D soon encountered some unexpected problems. One morning a jeep with four flat tires was discovered. All four tires were full of shrapnel picked up from the roads. When a shell bursts on or near a road it has about the same effect as dumping a keg of nails. It became a major problem keeping vehicles fit for service. Tires soon became a very scarce commodity and a constant headache.

As time went by, the newly arrived soldiers became exposed to military people from all over the world. Many were surprised to find that troops from the Latin American Brazilian Expeditionary Force were mostly black. There were Hindus from India, huge dark skinned men who spoke impeccable English and wore turbans. Sikhs, from the middle east, were tall, handsome men and fierce fighters. Later some of the Japanese Americans who made up the 442nd Infantry regiment fought in our sector. These Japanese soldiers were part of the most decorated unit in the army. The 92nd Infantry Division, which was the only all black infantry unit in the US Army was always close at hand. Ever present were Italian Partisans who, in their shorts and red neckerchiefs, mostly looked like they were headed for Boy Scout Camp.

On January 29, PFC Lunday was selected to drive a group from the 126th down the West Coast of Italy to a Bailey Bridge school near the city of Caserta just north of

Naples. The route took the group through Rome where they spent the night in one of the big hotels on the plaza. Lunday, being in charge of the vehicle, spent the night guarding the Weapons Carrier because they were told that an unguarded vehicle would be gone by morning or, at best, in a great many pieces. In the morning a brief sight seeing trip was made to the Vatican. While parked in front of this historic place, one of the young local thieves ran up to the weapons carrier and grabbed the strap of a camera hanging out of the jockey box. He was gone with his loot in a flash. About dusk the next evening the vehicle came over a rise to find a Jeep and an Italian Donkey cart driving toward them, neck to neck and directly in their path. There was just barely room between the Jeep and cart for the truck and no way to stop. Fortunately, the only casualty was a long crease put down the side of the truck by the axle of the cart and a very irate Italian farmer.

During January the entire division was slowly being conditioned to combat situations. Casualties were suffered with increasing frequency. Prisoners became valuable commodities for the intelligence they could provide. In a period of about two months over thirteen-thousand men had been moved from Texas and assembled for combat in Italy, almost without a hitch. An assault was forthcoming in the middle of February but few knew how vital it was to the 5th Army or that it was the reason that prompted General Clark to ask for the 10th Mountain Division.

The Germans had been fighting a largely defensive war in Italy for the last two years. They were masters at the techniques used for defending the high ground especially the in the several mountain ranges that lie across Italy. Rome had been bypassed but the enemy fought at the Arno River in Florence, before retreating into the Apennines to previously prepared positions known as the Gothic Line. Here they perched on mountain tops, holding the Allied Army at bay for three months. The Germans were prepared to tenaciously defend the high ground. Now it was our turn as the 10th prepared for its first major offensive action, the capture of Mount Belvedere.

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## 7

### RIVA RIDGE

Most of Company D pulled out of Mammiano on February 17. Many of the people in the town came down to say good-bye. Some had tears in their eyes. They seemed to know something was up.

It was night and very cold. Six inches of fresh snow covered the ground. A truck convoy was formed. The route was through a valley and partly up a mountain in territory occupied on three sides by the Germans. No lights could be used so the drivers felt their way along. If the lead vehicle went over a cliff the rest would probably have followed. Most of the soldiers didn't have the foggiest idea of what was going on and it was probably just as well.

- MOVING TO BELVEDERE

D Company headquarters were set up in the town of Vidiciatico, a small village at the base of Mt. Belvedere. Most of the Motor Pool found shelter in a partially destroyed saloon in the downtown section. One wall was blown out but the roof was intact. One could almost get high from the smell left from the spilled wine. The safest place to sleep seemed to be behind the bar; it made several of the soldiers feel at home. A barber shop across the street gave haircuts for two cigarettes but you had to find the barber. It was not business as usual for the locals.

Sergeant Hampton's squad was housed in a farm house on the edge of the village that was still occupied by the old farmer and his wife. Rations were shared in exchange for the considerable inconvenience being caused the family. These proved to be excellent quarters except for the cooking facilities used by the Italians. They heated their food over a glowing pile of charcoal. Before each meal the old lady put a handful of charcoal into a little cast iron hibachi-like grill, got it started and then fanned it vigorously until it glowed. This process generated dense clouds of carbon monoxide and smoke so acrid that it became unbearable for the soldiers. The only recourse was for the guests to beat a hasty retreat to the front porch with watering eyes and a burning nose and throat.

The 3rd platoon was dug in near the village of Pianaccio, a picture postcard town on the top of a hill next to Vidiciatico. The only road into town was a donkey

**path or trail. Many of the villagers were in hiding for fear of their lives.**

**The division's target on this mission was the capture of the dominate peak in the sector called Mount Belvedere (one of several Mt. Belvederes in Italy). A few weeks of preliminary planning and reconnaissance by infantry, engineering, and artillery units had been conducted with great secrecy. The infantry made several probes to determine the German positions and strength. This was the hub of the German Gothic Line. Three previous assaults had been made on this mountain by troops of the 5th Army. All ended in failure. The Germans had been plotting their defenses for several months and held what were nearly impenetrable positions.**

**While the 10th Mountain Division was moving up to the battle line, probes and scouting parties were being sent out to better understand the nature of the terrain . Most of these reconnaissance missions were carried out under the cover of darkness and with extreme caution. Bob Parker, of the 87th Regimental I & R platoon (Intelligence & Reconnaissance) led one such patrol that went out on February 17 or 18. He recalls the help provided by an engineer who was assigned to scout for mined areas;**

*"We were to examine an area near the little village of Corona on the slopes of Mount Belvedere. Our route took us right under the nose of the defending Germans so it was necessary to move by either crawling or walking in a low crouch. Communications were either with hand signals or very low whispers. Near the end of the mission, I was squatting on a mountain trail when my hand accidentally brushed a fine wire that seemed to run between my legs. This gave some pause for concern so I sent word to have the engineer move forward for consultation. He carefully traced the wire to the left and found it anchored to a stake. Moving to the right he found something that scared hell out of us .. the wire was attached to the triggering mechanism of a 'Bouncing Betty', one of the Krauts dirtiest little booby traps. In the pitch black of night the engineer had the skill to disarm the device by feel. Our mission was accomplished without further incident thanks in part to our engineering friend. I do not remember which Company lent us this soldier but thank heavens we had him along."*

**An assault was also planned on a series of smaller mountains just west of Mt. Belvedere that became known as Riva Ridge. These mountains included; Mt. Serrasiccia, Mt. Mancinello and Mt. Cappel Buso. Tactically, Riva Ridge provided the Germans with an ideal observation post that could direct artillery on the assault force moving on Mount Belvedere. While planning the Belvedere assault, General Hayes concluded that the capture of Riva Ridge prior to the main objective was mandatory.**

**The main assault on Riva Ridge involved rock climbers from the 1st Battalion of the 86th Infantry and Company F of the 2nd Battalion who scaled the**

rugged and relatively unprotected back (south) side. They had about 1,500 feet of rock to scale. Earlier, climbers set ropes for the assault force to use. These tactics were designed to surprise the enemy. The climb was started during the evening of February 18, 1945 and followed by a dawn attack the next morning. Mount Belvedere was attacked the following evening by elements of the 85th and 87th Infantry.

- **PICKING THE TRAMWAY SITE**

Company D's role was to support the infantry assault on Riva Ridge with an Aerial Tramway. In terrain this rugged the evacuation of wounded would be very difficult and the tramway would reduce the time by up to four hours. This time factor could mean the difference between life or death. On return trips the tram would speed the resupply of assault troops by hauling ammunition, grenades, and rations.

After years of planning, this was to be a first use of a tramway in combat in the history of American warfare. Engineering a tramway is difficult under ideal circumstances. Under severe combat conditions the task borders on the impossible. It is necessary to survey and physically examine all of the terrain. After the data is available, calculations are made to prepare an installation and operation plan. Germans could watch every move that was made from their positions above while a survey crew examined every inch of the site. Then brute force manpower was used to move in the equipment and cables.

Carriage loading, slope of the terrain, and the length of the cable are the prime factors that go into the calculations. The number and location of A-frames must be determined. Cable deflections are computed to assure that the carriage will not bump the ground or obstructions. The power of the engine determines the load that can be handled. Proper anchorage is required to secure the cable and A-frames, and loading ramps are needed at both ends of the cable. Mix these engineering jobs with artillery and mortar attacks, rifle and machine gun fire, and the potential for encountering mined areas and you have a lethal assignment.

A reconnaissance party consisting of Capt. Nagel, Lt. Martin, Sgt. Hull, Pfc Virgil Burch, Pfc J. D. Bailey, and Pvt. Harold Olsen moved out at 4:00 AM on February 19. They were given the job of selecting the site. Available maps, which were studied earlier, proved to be inaccurate. The first site physically studied by Lt. Martin, Hull and Olsen was too steep and offered poor anchorage for the main cable. At a second location, the distance was too great for available cables. Finally a site was pointed out along the ridge to Mt. Cappel Buso. This is a 3,798 foot peak that directly faced the west slopes of German held Mount Belvedere. Company B of the 86th Infantry, commanded by Capt. Ken Siegman, was assigned to take Cappel Buso.

The Cappel Buso site looked favorable so plans went forward. A large rock



would provide a good lower anchor. About halfway up the ridge was an orchard. Martin, Hull, Bailey, and Burch took off up the ridge to survey the route and find a proper upper anchor. Small arms and machine gun fire was heavy in the area. The best location for the upper terminal ultimately proved to be in the orchard, a distance of about 1,700 feet with a slope of 18 to 20 degrees. The Infantry had reached the top of Buso about midnight and had caught the Germans completely by surprise. There was a machine gun nest and group of Germans located on the adjacent mountain that had the proposed site directly in their line of fire. This would pose a problem for the tram's erection crew as well as the defenseless tramway passengers so the infantry was notified to undertake removal of the threat.

- **BLOCKED BY A LANDSLIDE**

The tramway equipment had previously been moved to Vidaticco and was ready to haul up to the selected site. A fairly intense shelling directed at Company D occurred during the afternoon of February 19. Ten or twelve 88 shells came quite close to the equipment but fortunately did no damage.

A landslide blocked the road needed to haul up the tramway equipment, so the first order was to make the road passable. German artillery units zeroed in on the work crew and particularly one of the R4 bulldozers. The driver was Tech-5 Rod Rodriguez. While attempting to get out of their line of sight he managed to back over a cliff. Fortunately he was able to bail out and walked away unharmed. The mud got so bad that even one of the big D7 bulldozers got stuck.

The 1st platoon started clearing the road. By nightfall it was still blocked. Trucks carrying the tramway got to within 3/4 miles of the installation site. A jeep trail was cleared but they got bogged down in the mud. Finally toboggans or skids were made. The equipment was moved with brute force. The trailer with the power supply for the tramway was moved intact by getting about six men to pull the whole rig through the mud. Parts of the 1st platoon worked all night to get the tramway equipment to the site and by sunrise of February 20 almost everything was ready for the final assembly and erection.

The 2nd and 3rd squads of the 3rd platoon relieved the 1st platoon at sunrise on February 20 to finish the bypass road. S/Sgt. Trexler, of the 1st platoon, and Sgt. Altman, of the 3rd platoon, conscripted some Italians to help with the manual labor. These were hard working mountain people who lived off the land and were used to hard work. They disappeared almost instantly when enemy shells landed near the work area. Nevertheless, the bypass was completed by night fall.

After a brief rest, the 1st platoon spent all night on February 20 moving the tramway equipment to designated spots on the ridge in preparation for the final assembly. At an NCO meeting that evening each squad leader was instructed about his responsibilities for the final assembly the next day.



- **THE TRAMWAY JOB IS DONE**

At 0530 on February 21, the 2nd and 3rd squads of the 3rd platoon left Pianaccio to relieve the 1st platoon. Erection of the tramway was underway. Sgt. LaCaille's squad had the job of pulling the "haul" cable to the upper platform and then back down. This would allow the crew to pull the 1/2 inch steel cable, which weighed over a ton, by using the power of the engine. Sgt. Tierney's squad fixed the "dead men" at the top and bottom. The actual anchorage was done by Pfc Atwood Sterner, a veteran rigger. Sgt. Skramstad and Cpl. Chariffs squads erected the "A" frames.

Henry LaCaille was the "John Wayne" of Company D. He spoke with the accent of his homeland, French Canada. By most standards, he was not a big man but was solid muscle. His arms were as big as the calves of most of the men's legs. If he ever feared anything, it never showed. One of his favorite pastimes was challenging the new replacements to arm wrestle. He never even came close to a loss.

Within ten hours the tramway was operating. It was necessary to clear some of the brush on the low spots and build landing platforms at both ends. Trip flares were set out in the draws for security purposes. Squads from the 2nd platoon started operating the tram on alternating eight hour shifts.

On the first day the tramway operated 30 wounded and 20 dead soldiers were carried down the mountain. On return trips over five tons of supplies, mostly ammunition, were delivered. It has been said that not a single wounded soldier who went down on the tramway later died. That alone made the experiment worthwhile.

Tech-5 Marv Taylor worked at the top platform to help load the dead and wounded. His first few encounters with battle casualties are still vivid in his mind. Handling body bags, many consisting of mutilated parts, were sickening to all of the crew members. Finally, the reality of the situation took over, and the job became more or less routine.

NBC's Battlefront Correspondent, Grant Parr, wrote,

*"The courage and skill of the men that built that queer little lift have helped the Allies take and hold a very important, strategic position on the top of Mt. Belvedere. Yes thank God for the Engineers."*

On March 4, 1945 an NBC radio program called "The Army Hour" was broadcast from a command post near the tramway. Although little was said about the tram, many of the folks back home now new for sure where the 10th Mountain Division was fighting and press coverage of the battle became extensive.

A New York paper printed an account of the tramway operation under the

## headline

*"1700-FOOT CABLE EVACUATES BELVEDERE WOUNDED QUICKLY, ....Feb. 21 (Delayed) ..... The slender steel basket suspended on near taut cable slowly descended from the mountain, crossed the chasm and came to a stop. Out of the basket medics carefully lifted a stretcher case, completing what would have been a three -hour laborious hand carry in four minutes -thanks to the first combat tramway ever to be used in this theater of operations. ....Company D was the original and only "Tramway Company" in the army..... Capt. Fred A. Nagel (correctly spelled Nagel) of Denver, Colo., and Sgt. Charles Hull of Westwood, N. J., were among those to select the site. Pvt. Atwood Sterner of Danville, Penn., a veteran rigger, was in charge of anchoring the cable while Sgt. Henry LaCaille of Marysville, Calif., headed the crew that sweated and toiled to haul the primary cable up the mountain."*

**With the mission of getting the tramway installed and operating completed, the company was now taking alternating shifts running the equipment. It was shut down for two hours each day for maintenance but no major problems were experienced.**

- **THE GERMANS FIGHT BACK**

**After vicious counter attacks had increased the casualty load, Sgt. Hampton took three men from his squad to the top of Riva Ridge to see what the engineers might do to help. They came under fire from a fanatic lone German soldier. Taking cover they made their way to the American positions and asked what was going on. An infantry soldier said he was some crazy Nazi who had been wounded on the initial attack and was holed up in the rocks shooting at anyone who came near. When asked if they weren't going to flush him out the soldier said,**

*"Hell no, Why risk anyone's life on that bastard? Give him a couple of days and he'll get cold or hungry enough to surrender."*

**And, that's what happened. A few days later two engineers and an aid man came down the mountain with the wounded German. He had been shot twice in the right thigh which was gangrenous and swollen the size of a mans body. Now delirious and in severe pain, he remained an unrepentant Nazi, still muttering threats and curses.**

**This was the beginning for Company D. Almost everyone was baptized to the horrors and fear that permeate the mind of a soldier in his first real exposure to combat. Fields littered with bodies, the constant sound of nearby battles, and the ever present artillery barrages changed everyone; some for the better and some for the worse. The fierceness of the German artillery spoke of the success of the infantry in dislodging them from these strategic mountain peaks. The Germans**

**counterattacks were fierce. One paper wrote;**

*"...In their first major counter thrust at the allies newly won positions on the left flank of the Fifth army front, German troops have attack savagely in the Mt. Belvedere sector ...".*

**Another reported;**

*"...The Fifth army's local successes in the Mount Belvedere area also were bitterly contested and forward elements of the Tenth Mountain Division were being subjected to heavy harassing artillery fire. One concentration of 270 rounds of heavy artillery shells were laid on an area of Mt. Della Torraccia."*

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## 8

### **MALANDRONE PASS AND BEYOND**

After Belvedere was fairly secure there came a brief lull in the action. Portable showers were brought in so every one got a bath and felt better. Company morale was high. The temperature was warming to spring like weather, and the sun came out most of the time. Like sunny Italy was supposed to be.

The company moved out of Viviciatico and shifted east to Gagio Montano. A bivouac area was set up in a large field a mile or so behind the front lines. Several peaks just north of the area were still held by the Germans.

In this peaceful and pastoral setting, many of the troops did not dig foxholes. Pup tents were pitched and the engineers relaxed by playing blackjack all day. Early one morning, just before sunrise, a German shell hit very near the mess tent. It was not the result of any orchestrated attack but merely harassing fire to let you know they were still there. Pfc Lunday woke up and his blankets were covered with dirt. That didn't bother him much, but sleeping next to a truck loaded with high explosives did. He soon moved to a different bedroom. All of the cooks dove into the garbage pit thinking there was more to come. One of the officers was seen crawling out of a culvert under the road. A couple days later a shell burst over the area and showered the men with propaganda leaflets.

Personal possessions included several jackets and two army blankets. For a bed soldiers usually dug a slit trench that was about a foot deep and as long and wide as your body. When close to enemy action, a fox hole was used. Jackets were placed on the bottom as sort of a mattress. The blankets were folded to form an envelope that held them tight and boots were used for a pillow. No other clothing was removed. If the weather was bad "pup" tents were erected for shelter. All of this stuff, rolled into a pack, weighed about 100 pounds.

Early in the morning of the 3rd the Allied forces opened up an unusually heavy artillery barrage. Guns from as far as ten miles behind our lines were brought to bear on specific targets including the German rear areas. Little Piper Cub spotter planes were flitting around over the German positions directing the fire. The objective was to soften up known hard points and inhibit redeployment of reinforcements from reserves in their rear. The Germans reacted with fierce counter measures by firing, mostly their 88s, on our troop concentrations and artillery positions. Much of their artillery was directed at the Allied batteries of 155 millimeter howitzers and the British five and eight inch cannons. As the reserve Engineering company, the men of D sat in their fox holes waiting for a

call.

- **WORKING AT THE SHARP END**

The emergency came almost immediately; lead the tanks through some heavily mined roads. The Germans had blown a strategically located stone bridge. This deprived the 86th of badly needed Sherman Tank support. Company C of our battalion was erecting a Bailey Bridge and under heavy direct fire from the Krauts. Stuck in this spot until the new bridge was in service, they were unable to assist the 86th Infantry troops with clearing services now desperately needed to force the attack through Malandrone Pass. Every member of the 1st and 3rd platoon had butterflies in his stomach as they contemplated their first direct confrontation with the enemy.

The platoons moved out in trucks, escorted by Lt. McKernan. Sgt. Drwal and McKernan proceeded forward in a Jeep over the Bailey bridge and dismounted about two-hundred yards above and within 300 yards of Abetaia. The troops followed and double timed across country to the infantry dug outs. German observers had direct sight on the engineers and kept up a fierce barrage. With packs loaded with TNT, rolls of primacord, Bangalore torpedoes, and C-4 (Composition C) explosive, a direct hit on almost any one of the engineers would have made one hell of a bang.

Company C had taken a terrible pasting and made courageous progress pushing the bridge between a steep but narrow little canyon. As the Company D troops came up on the bridge, Sgt. Hampton commented;

*"I noticed three dead engineers piled to one side. It was like suddenly coming upon a bad traffic accident. My stomach did a little flip flop and I kind of ducked my head and looked out of the corners of my eyes as I went by."*

Lt. Tom Cole, commander of Company B, had the job of building a bypass across the stream before the bridge was completed. They brought up an R4 Cat (bull dozer) and knocked down the bank. Then manually carried rocks to build a ford that would allow passage of a Jeep; with a little luck. They got hit almost as hard as the bridge builders because the Germans honed in on the noise from the bull dozer.

Sgt. Clark and his 1st squad started up the road acting as security. They were armed with M-1 rifles, grenades and one bazooka. Sgt. Drwal, equipped with a mine detector, started up the road with the three leading probers. Cpl. Charrif and three men followed and Sgt. Altman brought up the rear.

A hundred yards up the road 88's and mortar shell started dropping all around. This sudden direct attack caused the troops to drop everything and hit the ditches along the road. TNT and Bangalores flew all over the place. Pfc Edwards remarked;

*"We're catching hell now and they don't even know we're coming."*

*What's going to happen when they see us?"*

After a few minutes the men gathered their equipment and took off again. Soon the entire group turned off the main road above Abetaia and walked into another German barrage. Terra Firma never felt so good as they hit the ground. Pfc Burch had a piece of shrapnel bounce off his steel helmet. As soon as the fire let up, Cpl. Charrif and his crew took the lead until they hit the crossroads. Here there was some confusion as to which way to go. Sgt. Clark took over and lead them up the route he was told. The 3rd squad got there a few minutes later and took the wrong road that led to the ford next to the Bailey bridge. The 1st platoon proceeded to their section moving up toward Iola.

The majority of the men in the 1st and 2nd squads of the 3rd platoon crossed a 6000 yard open field and took cover in a ditch on top of a hill. About this time our own artillery started a barrage in that vicinity. Sgt. Drwal and Pfc Flyn were in the middle of the field when the shells started to fly and they hit the dirt unharmed.

The 3rd squad of the 3rd platoon caught hell crossing the ford and walking in front of the tanks, which are prime targets for the German artillery. They finally joined the rest of the platoon and were pinned down for almost thirty minutes. An air burst exploded right over Sgt. Tierney's head and Cpl. Thomure, his assistant squad leader, took a piece of shrapnel in the chest. Staff Sgt. Trexler rushed to his aid and cut the clothes away from the wound. Trexler could not stay because of his other duties but Sgt. Clark left cover and carried the wounded man to safety. Medics were summoned and soon carried Tom back to the aid station.

Lt. McKernan reorganized the platoon as soon as things quieted down. The tanks were ready to be lead up the road and drivers pleaded with the engineers to do a good job of clearing the mines. McKernam, Trexler, Drwal, Altman, Wagner, and Flyn started out in front of the tanks sweeping and probing for mines. The remainder of the men were to sweep and probe the road shoulders while those with Bangalore torpedoes were to remain behind until needed.

Now in clear view of the defending Germans the enemy did not like to see the engineers and tanks moving up the road. They let go with everything they could muster. Despite the fire the tanks and engineers kept moving. A mine field was encountered just to the right of Mount Terminale. This field had been zeroed in by the Krauts and every time the men moved into the mined area they would let go with a barrage.

McKernan, Trexler, and Wagner went into the mine field despite the shelling and uncovered some Teller and Schu mines. Digging was taking too much time and the tanks were badly needed in Iola. To speed things up, half pound blocks of TNT were placed on the mines to blow them up. The tanks proceeded through the mine field safely with the probers still in front.

- **SOME OF THE GERMANS CALLED IT QUILTS**

Capt. Nagel kept ahead of the 1st platoon to keep them informed of what lay ahead. He had spotted two Krauts in a culvert but it later turned out to be six or eight .. they surrendered. On one occasion Lt. Sheahan glanced at the ridge and saw German infantry coming over it. He and Sgt. Waltich ran for the nearest building to wait for them to pass. The balance of the sweeping crew hit the dirt. In a few minutes Sheahan emerged from the building with five German prisoners, who were quickly searched and sent to the rear. Mine sweeping continued and the Krauts came from every ridge in droves, many bent on surrender. A captured German remarked about the morale of the American soldiers.

*"They fight like hell but make a joke out of everything that goes on".*

It was during this action that Capt. Nagel was awarded his Bronze Star. Not only did he act as a spotter for his own company, he became the focal point for the entire 126th, by communicating the progress or position of each company back to headquarters. Ironically, he was later reprimanded for security violations. He was guilty of communicating too much.

Meanwhile, the 1st platoon, working below Iola, came up out of a fold of land and around a corner. They could clearly see the road over Malandrone Pass a mile or so ahead. Troops of the 86th were maneuvering along the ridge line, firing at an enemy still invisible to the engineers. Up the road and on the right, perhaps a half a mile away, were a couple of war damaged farm houses with a big hay stack in an adjacent field. As the sweepers continued up the road, an occasional mortar shell exploded near by. Each squad took turns taking the lead while watching for telltale disturbances in the road which would signal the presence of mines.

Shortly after the 1st squad took the lead, several well-aimed mortar shells exploded very close to the squad. The infantry appeared to have control of this side of the pass but Sgt. Hampton surmised that the Germans had a near-by observation post that was directing the mortar fire that was too close for random shots. With his attention on the hay stack, Hampton told Pfc Charlie Pruitt, one of the best shots in the company, to shoot up the stack. Charlie set up and promptly let go with a full clip of eight rounds into the hay. Sure as hell, out came three straw covered Germans with their hands up.

As the Germans approached, Hampton summoned Pfc Herman Wolkoicz, who was somewhat more comfortable speaking German than he was English. The captives included two ordinary soldiers and a particularly arrogant Major. As Herman interrogated them, the Major, who turned out to be a thoroughbred hard-assed Prussian, was insisting that he wanted to surrender to an officer and required transportation to the prisoner's cage. Hampton relieved him of his black leather map case and a 35 mm cameras, then gave him a hard kick in the butt and said;



*"there's your transportation you sonofabitch."*

With that the prisoners headed for the rear, followed by hoots of laughter from the engineers.

An examination of the hay stack uncovered a small stock of food and a German combat radio. In full view of the advancing Americans, the German observation crew had been directing the deadly artillery and mortar fire that had been plaguing the engineers all morning.

The camera proved to be an excellent product that was unaffordable to Sgt. Hampton. Film in the camera was later traded to a Stars and Stripes reporter in exchange for one-hundred feet of black and white film. The German Major contributed many photos to this document taken with the Sergeants new toy.

After the "hay stack" spotters were discovered, Company B came into the area and they ran right in to the German Mortar Squad that had caused so much damage. Lt. Cole switched his troops into an infantry mode and took out the Germans.

Part of the men took cover in a barn along side the road until they were needed. Sgt. Altman took his squad to help probe the road to Iola. Four tank destroyers followed them. Altman and Pfc Lewen left the remainder of the squad in a well concealed location along with the tank destroyers and went ahead to do the probing. A Sergeant from the tank destroyers went along to see that they did a thorough job. They worked the road clear past Iola and on the return stopped in town for a smoke. Sitting on the front steps of a building to light up, they suddenly heard an infantryman way down the road yell;

*"Get the hell away from that building! It's lousy with Jerries".*

They took off in one hell of a hurry toward the tank destroyers and protection, just as machine guns and mortars opened up directly at them.

Sgt. Altman informed the Tank Destroyers that the road was clear and they were on their own. The remainder of the tanks were ready to go at the crossroads down the hill, labeled cross road 898 on the military map. Company B moved in to relieve the Company D soldiers. The leading probers started back to the barn with Sgt. Drawl bringing up the rear. Everyone got into the barn except Drawl when there was a terrific explosion on the road. Someone shouted;

*"they got Drawl get the medics".*

Pfc Joe Walceski, the platoon aid man, rushed out even though mortar shells were landing everywhere. Drwal was found uninjured, probing his way to a B Company man whose foot had been blown off by a Schu mine. He dragged the man to the middle of the road where Walcheski gave him first aid. A Jeep finally arrived and took the wounded engineer to the aid station. Walcheski earned a Bronze Star for his actions.

After a brief rest, Hampton's 1st squad continued up the road. The infantry was now clear of the pass that ran between Mount Terminale and Della Casellina. Shortly the sweepers discovered a string of fifteen or twenty Schu mines on the shoulder of the road. When about a third of the mines had been disarmed, half a dozen mortar rounds bracketed the area. Seeking safe cover in a shallow ditch was made more difficult by the knowledge that the troops were in the middle of a mine field.

When the shelling ceased, a squad from Company C joined Hampton's squad. They had completed the Bailey Bridge and were picking up their secondary mission. As the squad leaders finished a discussion of what had been accomplished in the mine field, Hampton turned to the rear to gather up his squad and leave the area. Just as he turned, the Company C squad leader took one step and triggered a Schu mine. The explosion of a quarter pound of TNT in the midst of the soldiers was deafening and those closest were knocked down and covered with dirt and gravel.

Sgt. Hampton's fellow squad leader was lying next to him minus most of his right foot. Joe Walceski, the platoon's first aid man was near by and jointly they administered treatment. Shortly another mortar barrage hit all round and Hampton and Walceski sheltered the wounded man with their bodies. Soon a Jeep arrived and the wounded Sergeant was on his way back to the aid station with a guaranteed ticket back home. For him the war was over.

Proceeding over Malandrone Pass, the 1st platoon had a good view of the valley below. The infantry was deployed across the fields and the tanks were using the road leading to the village of Sassamolare. Germans still held the village and were plastering the tanks and engineers who were leading them through the mine fields. On the left and right, other infantry units were securing the peaks of Terminale and Della Vedetta. The engineers took a short break and watched the war, like spectators at a football game.

When the tanks were out of sight, the platoon moved further into the valley and ran into the 3rd platoon. Staff Sgt. Eddie Drwal, the platoon Sergeant, had a couple of enemy soldiers in his custody and said rather casually;

*"hell, these guys aren't Germans, ..... they're Pollacks."*

Ohio born Drwal was fluent in Polish and had interrogated them extensively in their native tongue and discovered that there was an entire company of them just ahead. They didn't really want to fight. When the Germans overran their country in 1939, they had been drafted into the army. This was their first chance to quit. Eddie was on his way back trying to find an officer who could pass this news along to the attacking infantry. About this time, the German artillery spotted the little gathering and lobbed in three rounds so the party promptly split up.

As more prisoners were taken, the soldiers found or confiscated souvenirs or valuables carried by the German prisoners. Many had several watches and cameras. One

soldier displayed a six inch role of Italian money, and said he was going to send it home and buy an new Buick after the war. This was, of course, illegal but who in hell cared. In addition to his camera, Hampton found an elaborate first aid kit in an abandoned German headquarters building. Thinking it might be useful to our medics he kept it and later traded it for a Colt 45 Automatic.

- **A WORD FROM THE BOSS**

On March 10, 1945 a "Letter of Commendation", signed by General Hays, was issued to "The Officers and Men of the 10th Mountain Division". Included in this memorandum were praise from the following officers;

Field Marshal Alexander; Supreme Allied Commander of the Mediterranean Theater of Operations

General McNarney; US Commander of the Mediterranean Theater

General Mark W. Clark; Commander of the Fifteenth Army Group

General L. K. Truscott; Commander of the Fifth Army

General Willis D. Crittenger; Commander of the IV Corps.

General Clark's comments probably best summarized the contents of these commendations;

*"MY CONGRATULATIONS TO THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE 10TH MOUNTAIN DIVISION ON THE SUCCESS OF THEIR FIRST MAJOR OPERATION, THE CAPTURE OF MT. BELVEDERE.*

*YOUR DIVISION, IN ITS INITIAL BATTLES, HAS ACQUITTED ITSELF WITH THE COURAGE AND DARING OF A VETERAN COMBAT UNIT. THIS SPEAKS MORE ELOQUENTLY THAN WORDS OF THE EFFICIENCY OF YOUR PRE -BATTLE TRAINING AND THE SPIRIT OF OFFICERS AND MEN."*

- **SPRILLA ROAD**

The front was now somewhat stabilized so most of the battalion returned to their road building tasks. The 1st platoon went to work on Sprilla Road, attempting to make it more passable. Sections of this road were nothing more than muddy donkey trails. Culverts were installed to help drain the wet spots. In all, four culverts were needed and nineteen loads of rock were spread over the road. Initially German shells were still flying overhead. A road grader showed up and soon the road was beginning to look like something.

While working on Sprilla road, General Hays paid the engineers a visit. He stopped at each job and chatted like an old friend. There were also lots of compliments on the job they had done.

The road went through the front into German territory before looping back into ours. Thus, it could not be used as a contiguous supply route. A plan was then suggested to attempt a tramway to connect the ends of the road that were in our hands. This would provide an alternate, and faster, route to supply the front lines with food and ammunition.

On March 10, Capt. Nagel appeared on the road repair site accompanied by Pfc Bailie and a transit. These two left the road work accompanied by Lt. Martin, Pfc Gilbert and Sgt. Hull to see if a site could be found for the tramway. After careful reconnaissance of a ridge, located on the other side of a deep gully, an excellent site was located. Both take off and landing sites were ideal and only two "A" frames would be needed.

Early the next morning, the 2nd platoon was at the tramway site. Sgt. Lacaille, assisted by Capt. Nagel and Pfc Matczuk, again took the lead to carry the haul cable across the ravine and up to the other side. Within six hours a 2200 foot cableway was operating. This tram was used to evacuate over 200 wounded soldiers and carried as much as thirteen tons of supplies a day. It was operated until April 2 between the villages of Castellaccio and Campidello.

Most of the 126th worked on Sprilla road into the month of April. The existing road was so poorly constructed that a complete rebuild was necessary. After several days of work, the 3rd platoon of Company D had reconstructed one stretch but found that the center was entirely too high. The battalion did not have a grader to correct this problem and could not locate the one used earlier. A substitute was found in a wrecked German tank. The turret was dismantled to make a "drag line" which was then rigged behind one of the six by six trucks. That plan worked perfectly and the road was soon properly leveled.

Intermittently some of the engineers were called on to instruct the infantry on mines and booby traps. Sgt. Waltich and Pfc Cobo held a class right on the front lines. Waltich was a short stocky person who was as good as anyone in the company with explosives. In fact he usually scared hell out of his students based on the casual way he handled his live examples.

On April 3 the 3rd platoon saw a little more action with the enemy. They were working on a bypass road around Canevacchia when a dozen or so mortar shells hit within their perimeter. Our own artillery let fly with six shells for everyone the Krauts had fired. Then the platoon had some improvised target practice with their rifles and 30 caliber machine guns. The next day, working under Lt. Gorman, the platoon took another mortar attack. This time the shelling was more intense and one shell landed about fifteen feet away on the bank above. Moving to a safer location the platoon was about a half a mile away when Cpl. Chariff found a piece of shrapnel embedded in the hand guard of

his rifle.

- **A. P. HILL REVISITED**

Preparations were being made for a major offensive. Lt. McKay rounded up the NCOs to review a priority job for the infantry that harkened back to the days at A.P. Hill. They wanted 36 primacord devices to clear mine fields. Unfortunately division supply could not supply all of the materials so some improvisation was needed. Only 5,000 feet of primacord was available and no friction tape, caps, or fuse lighters were available. Somehow forty 105 mm howitzer shells and two-thousand rounds of 30 caliber ammunition were scrounged.

Three groups were formed. One group laid out the 150 feet, 13 strand, primacord to finish two lengths of "rope". A second group disassembled the howitzer shells and deactivated the nose fuses. The third group made powder bags of empty bandoleers of M1 ammunition. The powder was obtained by dismantling the 30 caliber shells with about 40 shells per powder bag. Slow fuses were fashioned by Pfc Grigory with caps and fuse acquired from the supply room. Twenty foot lengths of rope were cut to attach the primacord to the shells.

As with the A. P. Hill experiments, several ideas were tested and finally the "ropes" could be launched. The shell made its flight and dragged the primacord 138 feet from its firing position.

A demonstration and lecture was arranged for officers of the infantry, including some British officers. Cpl. Underdahl, Tech-5 Holland, and Pfc Burch went across a creek and set up a device to fire for the observers. Sgt. Hull and Pfc Cobo assembled another device as Lt. McKay described each operation to the observers.

Next Cpl. Underdahl and his crew fired their shell. It flew in its arch, dragging 150 feet of primacord in a straight line, 250 feet from its launching point. The cap and fuse were set in the primacord and the entire cord blew with a hell of a noise and an immense flame, clearing a 4 to 8 foot path through the mine field. All of the observers were very enthusiastic.

- **THE OTHER GUYS**

Possibly the most overworked and vulnerable soldiers in Company D were the "Cat" skimmers. Both the Allied and German Field Artillery did their best to destroy the roads. When not on the roads the skimmers were digging gun emplacements for our howitzers. Where ever they went there was a high possibility that they would be exposed to German artillery fire. The "cats" make a lot of noise that, not only drowned out the sound of the incoming artillery fire, attracted it. To counter this, a signalman was sent out with each driver. By using a series of arm signals, the skinner could be warned of any activity with the hope that he could get off in time.

One of our companies early casualties and, as it turned out, the only fatality occurred while in this area. Alvie Allen, a cat skinner, was out working and spotted a bivouac area that had been occupied by Germans. Lying in conspicuous view was a highly prized "burp gun". When he attempted to retrieve the gun, a booby trap was triggered and he was blown to pieces.

Rod Rodriguez, who had backed his "cat" over a cliff, soon had another close call. He hit a mine and it blew him off the back of his "cat". Again, he was not injured, in fact landed on his feet. Mechanics had to work around the clock for two days to repair the equipment.

Shortly after that incident some officer decided that the "cats" should have armored cabs on them. Sheets of bullet proof armor plate were gathered from a supply depot and Sgt. Carver started cutting and welding the cabs on a D7 "cat". When installation was started the drivers suddenly realized what was going on, they revolted. They said our friend Rod would probably have broken his back on such a cab. They would prefer to take their chances and refused to work in any such equipment. No cabs were installed.

A few tanks, that had bulldozer blades attached, were brought into the area. Some of the motor pool personnel were able to drive one and proclaimed that it was pretty spooky. Only a small slit provided visibility and with the blade down it was impossible to see where you were going. The Company D cat skimmers thought they were a waste of money and almost useless.

Almost all of the company vehicles were put to use in these actions. Roads were literally covered with shrapnel and just keeping up with the flat tires was close to impossible. On one day during this period of intense combat every single Company D vehicle had at least one flat tire. Truck tires were almost gone from supply. Sgt. Carver, the chief mechanic, finally got frustrated from being turned down by the division supply depot for more tires. He requisitioned one of our trucks, got a couple bottles of precious booze and came back from the depot with a full load of tires. Word had it that he just drove in, left a deposit with the guard, loaded up and left. Sometimes that's how its done in the army.

Sgt. Carver was one of those "Texas" cowboys who could do almost anything. Actually, he was from New Mexico but his slight frame was carried by two of the most "bowed" legs you ever saw. It was said; "you could roll a Jeep tire down the hill at him and he wouldn't even break stride when it went between his legs."

Tech-5 Al Monroe was our Company Clerk. He was also the messenger and was constantly moving around to Battalion Headquarters or to the combat areas. Capt. Nagel and Sgt. Langer never let him sit down. He wore the same clothes, night and day, for almost six weeks. Once he stopped to chat with some of the guys and a four inch piece of shrapnel hit right at his feet. Picking it up, he found it was too hot to hold.



All of the drivers were going constantly. Whether they were handling the six by sixes or Jeeps, they were out where the action was. Some of these drivers were not content to just park their vehicles and have a snooze when not needed. They would pitch in to help with almost anything they could.

- **A BRIEF REST**

Everyone was getting a little rank so mobile field shower units were again set up. Freshly washed uniforms and clean underwear were issued. Dressing rooms and showers were in tents but the troops dried off in a field plainly visible from the road. While drying, a group from Company D were honored by a visit from Clare Booth Luce, the lady Senator from Connecticut. The engineers watched her arrive while standing in a field in their birthday suits. Didn't seem to bother the lady at all but most of the soldiers were embarrassed. Some brilliant aid, no doubt, worked out that schedule.

Capt. Nagel decided to move our campground to a vineyard on the side of a hill near Riola. As it turned out, the bivouac area was just above a battery of British five inch guns. Artillery units did a lot of work at night so the troops had to learn to sleep with "cannons" firing over head. It is impossible to describe the arm positions used to block out the noise but the soldiers finally figured out ways to sleep.

Some of the soldiers got to know the "Limies" who did all of the firing. They were pretty crusty characters and talked funny. It was a sort of hard cockney and most, especially the Southerners, need translators to understand them. British soldiers got regular rations of booze and there were some exchanges for our cigs, which seemed to be in short supply to them. This same outfit was associated with the 10th division all the way through Italy.

All things considered, the food was pretty good. "C" rations provided the bill of fare about half the time. These cans, with an olive drab label, could contain almost anything including ham and eggs. The stuff was warmed up when possible but most was eaten cold. The cans were usually opened with bayonets. Biil Mauldin was the cartoonist for the army newspaper called "The Stars and Stripes". He became famous for his "Willie and Joe" characters. One such cartoon depicts the boys opening a can of "C" rations along with the comment,

*"I'll be dawgoned! Did ya know this can opener fits on the end of a rifle?"*

When it was possible during lulls in the action, such as now, field kitchens were erected and warm food was served. Chicken was one of the most popular, probably because it could be obtained locally. Fresh milk was full of disease so was never served. You could float nails in the coffee. It was so strong that some used it to clean out their mess-kit. In the evening you could fill the canteen cup and both halves of the mess-kit with fresh brewed coffee. By morning the liquid had turned coal black and the aluminum mess gear shone like it was new.



Company D had the some of the best mess cooks in the division and got a reputation for serving good grub. When it was possible to set up a kitchen, word usually got around and lots of guests would show up for chow.

Not only did the dining improve during this lull, but passes were issued a few at a time so the tired soldiers could go on a rest leave. Either Florence or Montecatini were the destinations that the army had selected for a few days away from the war.

Most of Company D went to Florence. Many were surprised to find that even the Germans had at least some respect for the antiquities of this beautiful old city. When they evacuated Florence, all but one of the bridges over the Arno River were blown. The one remaining is known as the "Ponte Vecio" (Old Bridge). It is a historic landmark in Italy, having been the home of the craftsmen of the middle ages. Buildings on both approaches were demolished to block-off access and preserve the bridge. This was, however somewhat superficial, because they had also looted as many of the famous art treasures of Italy as they could get their hands on.

Florence is, of course, famous for its art. Possibly the most famous is the statue of David by Michaelangelo. This is truly a massive work in marble. Also the first work of art that the soldiers had seen that exposed all of a man's "privates". Every church is full of beautiful sculptures and paintings.

One group accidentally walked into the slums. Pretty bad area that could easily remind you of "The Hunchback of Notre Dame". Full of beggars, narrow streets and unbelievable filth.

Florentine artists are known for their delicately fine mosaics. Only natural stone is used in the really fine pieces. One, 16 by 24 inch portrait of an old man, was so realistic that it looked like a painting from a distance. Prices were too high for most but this particular work was listed for \$300.00. Another piece was a half inch oval shaped ring setting of a rose that the artist claimed used sixteen stones for each petal.

Many ate at the Red Cross canteens. Wholesome meals, consisting of fried Spam and a few potatoes, cost 25 cents. "Country fried Spam" was one of the favorites!! Who needs pasta when you have Spam?

Some of the beer gardens and trattoria were operating but their offerings were somewhat limited. The booze offered was not reliable. Italian beer was strange stuff, especially when compared with Coors back home. Someone said it was chemically aged but judging by its taste, it seemed more like the waste product of an Alpini mule. Grapa is a hard liquor that is common in Italy. Some of the street versions were known to have blinded soldiers.

Everyone with a camera was in heaven. Photos of the Cathedrals and art in Florence abound, always with a buddy in the foreground. St. Mary's Cathedral is a

massive and beautiful structure. Climbing to the top of the adjacent bell tower you could see the whole city while looking at some of the most famous frescoes in the world.

Most of the troops were housed in a large dormitory like facility. Cots had been provided and were neatly arranged. When the lights went out the dorm became black as pitch. One night, about midnight a violent fight erupted at the end of the dorm. It seems a soldier had come home drunk, went to bed and then decided he had to go to the bathroom. In his drunken state, what appeared to him as a urinal was, in fact, the occupied cot of a sleeping soldier.

Beer was an overstocked item in this theater of war, all because of the 10th Division. Pack mules were to be used in some of the mountain terrain to transport artillery pieces and telephone cables. Their vocal cords were cut to help maintain security in combat. Shipped from New Orleans, accommodations had to be made so the mules could be housed on the upper decks of the cargo ships. This made the freighters top heavy. Ballast was needed for the lower decks. Apparently beer makes good ballast, because that's what was used, and it took a lot. Seems like the troops had beer coming out their ears. Not too many complaints were ever heard though. Hard liquor, on the other hand, was in short supply and rationed to only the officers.

It was early in April morale continued to be high. Almost without exception the engineers in Company D had performed their jobs without equivocation. Very few showed any fear and did what needed to be done. All were apprehensive and nervous about what was to come next.

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## 9

### THE FINAL ASSAULT

By early April, the 5th Army was spread out over about 90 miles along mountainous terrain that made up the front line. Roughly 10 divisions were involved. In addition to the 10th Mountain were the 442nd regiment (made up of Japanese Americans), the 92nd (an all black division), the Brazilian Expeditionary force, the 1st Armored Div., the 6th South African Armored Division and finally the 88th, 85th, 34th and 91st Infantry Divisions. A major offensive was planned and finally the date was set for April 13. A push across the entire front was to be launched.

An attack of this magnitude takes a massive amount of planning. Each front-line division had its own plan but all had to be coordinated and approved. One of the most difficult tactics was that each fighting unit stay in its own lane, so to speak. Otherwise Allied troops could find themselves fighting each other.

Another vital component is the air and artillery support. Either can raise havoc with their own troops by simple miscalculations. With the expectation that the Allied forces could move very rapidly at times, some means of identifying friendly troops from aircraft was needed. Otherwise a pilot could inadvertently strafe or bomb his own soldiers. Two partial solutions were implemented. First, all units were equip with yellow smoke bombs that could be used to warn off attacking Allied aircraft. Second, each vehicle was provided with a foot wide colored banner to drape somewhere over its chassis so that it was visible from the air.

The front lines of the 10th Mountain Division were about a mile wide. On the left was the 85th regiment, which was to descend the western slope of Moute della Spe. Moving up the center was the 87th, assigned to clear the village of Torre Iussi. Rocca di Roffeno was to be the job of the 86th on the right. Engineering companies were divided among the attack groups to ensure timely and safe removal of the mine fields. No tramway work was anticipated, so Company D was assigned to the 3rd Battalion of the 87th Infantry Regiment. This placed the engineers in the center of the attack straddling the Castle d'Aiano road that bisected the front.

The 1st and 2nd platoons were selected to start off with the infantry on D-day. Lt. Sheahan accompanied by Sgts. Waltich, Hampton, Hull and a Sergeant from the 87th scouted the front on April 11. Concealed among seasoning chestnuts in the attic of a

strategically located little shepherd's shack, they scanned the now peaceful little valley which would soon become a no man's land. From the shack, a little mule trail wandered down through a big stand of chestnut trees. It continued until it reached Roffeno Russo, a group of small farm houses that was doubtless occupied by German troops. The scouts were looking for evidence of mine fields that they were sure the Krauts would plant. A couple suspicious areas were spotted and marked for checking.

The sergeant from the 87th briefed the engineers on the infantry's plans. A two pronged attack was planned, with two companies attacking abreast. They were expecting the Germans to let them into the valley bottom with only modest resistance. This would concentrate our troops among the mine fields so their mortars and artillery could blunt or break up the offensive. He pointed out that Rocca Roffeno, a prominent rocky hill on the far side of the valley, was sure to be defended tenaciously. For now the valley looked absolutely harmless, although it was ominously deserted, even lacking any livestock. The natives had abandoned the area.

While this was going on, the 2nd platoon moved to Sprilla to do some cleanup work on the road. They took an unexpected and very heavy shelling. Shells came in so fast that they were exploding three or four at a time.

Back in the bivouac area the 1st platoon reviewed their plan. Each squad was assigned a specific task, based on the progress of the infantry. The goal was to check out probable mined areas. Weapons were stripped, cleaned and assembled several times. Then came the long wait. Clear weather was almost demanded to assure the air support planned. D-day, scheduled for April 13, was delayed for 24 hours due to fog. To break the monotony, the 1st squad was sent to Division Headquarters to dismantle and load General Hay's personal outhouse. Finally the day came, April 14, 1945.

The shelling started not long after midnight. According to an AP release *"the whole Italian front was ablaze"*. The Fifteenth air force sent 1,223 heavy bombers to drop 2,374 tons of bombs on tactical targets. Artillery fire came from everywhere. You could read a newspaper at night. Sleep was impossible so many soldiers spent the night sitting in the edge of their fox holes just to watch.

At sunrise the P47s came over the horizon like a swarm of bees. These planes provided close in low level support. There was relatively little German air force to respond; they were out of gas. Antiaircraft fire was intense.

Piper Cubs, called "Rover Joe's". were used as artillery spotters. They could spot targets, then direct our artillery units or Air Force airplanes. Anyone who piloted these craft had to have nerves of steel. There was almost always antiaircraft fire and sometimes they got so low ground troops could fire at them. On this particular morning, the troops watched one get caught between a flight of B-17s and the German antiaircraft. He looked like a halfback making a broken field run trying to dodge the fire. He made it though safely.

- **THE QUICK FIX**

While the 1st platoon was contemplating its mission, the 2nd platoon was placed into a quandary. Capt. Nagel received orders to clear another road by 6:00 AM to allow an infantry unit to move into position. Unfortunately these orders came in the middle of the night. When they were discussed with Lt. Martin he couldn't believe his ears, "*clear a mine field in pitch black darkness!!*" . After more discussion both officers decided to move the 2nd platoon into position long before sunrise and then start the job with the first light of day. That would give them about 30 minutes to clear 200 yards of road.

Capt. Nagel returned to the scene just a few minutes after sunrise. He could see that progress was not going fast enough to make a 6:00 AM deadline so had to figure out a new plan. Why not use his Jeep as a mine sweeper? So the driver was ordered out, the troops were cleared off the road and the Capt. floor boarded his Jeep. He flew up over the hill and down the other side and never even got a flat tire. Mission accomplished.

Next the platoon moved forward with the infantry. Further down the road a mined area was encountered. Pfc Joe Perrault, a Jeep driver who always pitched in to help where he could, was up next to a mine field when Sgt. Clark got wounded. The sergeant went down in the middle of the mine field but Perrault went to his aid. He treated his wound as best he could, got him into the Jeep and drove right through the field to get the sergeant back to the aid station. This action earned Joe a Silver Star.

So it was within a few hours on the same day that two D Company soldiers had risked their lives by driving a Jeep through a mine field.

- **OUR LONGEST DAY**

The 1st platoon was up at 4:00 AM. After a hot breakfast, trucks moved the men to the line of departure. All of the back packs were loaded with explosives. For a while there was nothing to do but watch the show. Some found they could watch the artillery shells go by overhead. There were so many this "bomb" watching became a fascinating diversion.

About 9:00 the platoon moved just behind the brow of a hill. A flight of P-47s roared in, just barely overhead. The noise was deafening. They were attacking Rocca Roffena to soften it up for the ground attack. Each plane fired eight 50 caliber machine guns at four rounds per second. Empty shell cases were scattered all over the assembly area. These beautiful fighter planes were like a gift from heaven.

At 9:45 AM precisely, the close support artillery stopped firing and a couple of infantry companies deployed over the hill. This was to be the bloodiest single day of the war for the division. Immediately, small arms fire could be heard attacking a small forward enemy outpost right under the troops noses. While the engineers were still in position, a group of enemy prisoners came over the hill carrying one of the wounded. About then, Lt. Sheahan, the platoon commander, waved his men forward.

Moving down the hill, the goal was to get to the valley as soon as possible. This part of the action was new to the "road builders", who were not used to moving into action like an infantry soldier. Strangely, they were anxious to get to the mine fields. That's their bag.

About 300 yards down the hill, the infantry was setting up a heavy machine gun section in the grove of Chestnut trees. They were firing to support a rifle company now moving into the farm houses of Roffeno Russo in the valley bottom. The engineers moved as far away from the machine gun as possible to avoid the mortar fire they would attract. Artillery fire supporting the rifle company was also intense so the engineers felt like they were trapped in the Chestnut trees for a while.

When the barrage lifted, the engineers hustled down the hill, out of the trees and into a nearby field. Behind them the 50 caliber machine gun was opening up. White trails of the tracers floated down the hill and right into the window of one of the farm houses. Out of the back of the house three or four Germans ran, ducking and dodging among the buildings until the gun chased them into a small creek where they disappeared. Now the engineers knew that the infantry was moving very fast and there would likely be some enemy soldiers left behind for them to clean up.

Hampton's group of five men followed the little trail to one of the areas that had been spotted previously as a potential mine field. Two dead riflemen lay along side the cart path, victims of a mortar shell whose impact zone was marked by a small crater and some loose gravel. The sergeant suddenly remembered that he had failed to put any food in his pack and was searching the packs of the dead riflemen, when another mortar shell landed twenty yards away. The whole party dived into a small creek running beside the trail. At least they were safe from anything but a direct hit but now were in some danger of drowning. Three more rounds exploded in the path, then things seemed to get quiet. Emerging from the creek and covered with mud, three boxes of K-rations were extracted from the infantryman's pack. Now the group moved carefully toward the farm houses.

Close to the houses, a suspicious plot of land was approached with great caution. Sgt. Hampton was preparing for the worst when one of the men realized that they were looking at a vegetable garden. The evenly spaced and slightly raised mounds of earth turned out to contain the farmers potato crop. Now and forevermore, this became known as Hampton's "potato mines".

Retracing their steps, the engineers moved in the direction of the village of Torre Iussi. Still occupied by the Germans, it was under vicious all out assault by our infantry. Closing in on an adjacent farm building, they noticed a dead infantryman lying near a small crater in the middle of a small field. He was obviously the victim of a mine. Using the farmhouse as shelter from the Germans, the field was marked and a path cleared and marked with white plastic tape. About 20 Schu mine and 2 S mines were uncovered and disarmed.

The S mines are also called "Bouncing Betties" and they are lethal and very difficult to disarm. They are about the size of a big tomato can and filled with 1/4 inch ball bearings. A six foot wire tether is attached so when they are triggered, they jump into the air six feet and explode, spraying the area with balls of steel. Engineers hated these things worse than the infantry because they are easy to boobytrap. Digging them required extreme caution and the steeliest of nerves.

Shelter was found in a farmhouse that had been set up as an aid station. Shortly the battle in Torre Iussi slackened somewhat, indicating a German pull back. Checking the town for booby traps was the next order of business. Approaching the town offered up a scene of ghastly proportions. It was war in its most appalling brutality.

Lying in the trail were five or six dead infantrymen. It appeared that one had taken a direct hit and there was little left of his body. The remainder were probably killed by the same shell. A little further on was the body of a dead rifleman, sheltered behind a small but venerable stone obelisk with its crucified Christ. It was on this same day that, now Senator. Robert Dole was wounded, He was a replacement officer in Company I of the 85th Infantry.

The principle road in this sector ran through Torre Iussi. It had taken a terrible pounding and was impassable to the Sherman tanks. Signal Corps wire teams were moving through the area stringing their phone wires up to the advancing infantry. Mules carrying a roll of wire on each side of a special saddle were walking along unrolling the wire as their handlers moved ahead. Just when the leaders of this procession passed, a furious barrage of mortars landed right on top of us. The Germans had a clear view of the village and were dumping all the shells they could muster, knowing they would hit something. Everyone hit the deck but the mules just stood there placidly waiting for someone to pick up their lead rope. No mules were hit but one of the signelman caught a piece of shrapnel in the shoulder. He was patched up temporarily and sent back to the aid station.

Next the squad members searched four of five of the buildings for booby traps. Finding none the physically and mentally exhausted engineers, stopped and ate their K-rations surrounded by the bodies of the dead German defenders.

Lt. Sheahan found his troops and gave them a new assignment. Adjacent to the aid station was a cultivated field that the infantry wanted to cross to reinforce the troops now attacking Rocca Roffeno. Mines were evident in the field so a cleared and taped path was needed. The job took about twenty minutes. Soon the infantry was crossing in well spaced columns and, just as the lead squad got across, a barrage of mortar shells enveloped the area. Again the Germans had a clear view and had these soldiers right in their cross hairs.

Two men went down and as the aid man was ministering to the first, he got hit. There were no stretcher teams in sight so Sgt. Hampton rushed in to their aid. The aid man directed the operation and told the sergeant to take the man wounded in the hip.



Working like a three legged racer with the infantry man dragging one leg they hippity hopped to the shelter of the farm house. Returning to the other wounded man, Hampton asked the aid man where he was hit and learned that he had been creased in the upper arm. Together they carried the rifleman to the aid station, with a piece of shrapnel in his head just above his ear.

- **BACK TO THE ROAD WORK**

Twilight was approaching so the squad followed Lt. Sheahan back to Torre Iussi to find the farm houses now fairly full of infantrymen. The 87th had bogged down, in part, because the 85th had failed to uproot the enemy from the high ridges on the left flank. This gave the German gunners clear view of the movements of the 86th in the valley. To complicate matters, the Germans had blown several large craters in the main road North of town preventing the tanks from advancing past the destruction. One of Company Ds "cats" was on its way and the 1st squad of the 1st platoon was given the task of guarding the perimeter while the road was being repaired.

Sgt. Hampton choose Charlie Pruitt, Floyd Grigory and Ray Cleverly to act as point guards for the "cat" skinner. They wanted to position themselves between the road work and the Germans to prevent a direct attack. It was now pitch black outside. The guards moved North passed the outline of a smoldering Jeep. The first of, what proved to be three craters, was about 200 yards past the burning vehicle. There was no sense of where any German attack might come from. The terrain was obviously quite steep making the Germans selection of a road block typically effective. Guards were placed in the front, rear and West side of the damaged area. Each soldier was clearly instructed on the days password.

Sitting alone in a no mans land is almost as bad as it gets. Minute sounds become clear and almost cacophonous. Your eyes play tricks on you and stumps or rocks take on the shape of a man and, at times, you can see it moving. The soldiers came close to shooting up a "man shaped" rock and were suddenly startled by a man strolling down the road from the front lines. When asked the password, the soldier replied, "Kamerad". He was a Germans soldier who had enough and was giving himself up.

Shortly the D-7 showed up and the work began. Surely everyone in the area knew something was going on but fortunately no attack was launched. Working in the dark, the road was repaired sufficiently to get the tanks through in about an hour. After four had moved forward, the two squads of engineers returned to their bivouac area shortly before midnight; exhausted, hungry and emotionally drained.

Morning brought more of the same. The 85th had dislodged the Germans from the high ground so the division continued to move forward. Road repairs were improved and the tanks could now move in force. Gradually the 10th began to move past the supporting Allied troops on the flanks.

- **THE ENEMY AND THE MOUNTAINS START TO GIVE**

For three days the fighting was bitter but the terrain began to moderate permitting expanded use of the tanks. Word had it that General Hays had been ordered to hold his position to let replacement troops to move through his lines. That was the last thing he had in mind. His strategy was to move so fast that none of these troops could catch him.

On about the fifth day Company D moved its bivouac area. Now nearly out of the mountains, a field surrounded by woods was selected. The company was somewhat split up with people going where ever they were called. The new bivouac was near a road junction so Pfc Lunday and another mechanic were sent forward to direct traffic. Company D vehicles were to go one way and all other, mostly tanks, were to continue through the junction straight for the Po Valley. This was near a town called Castle de Anno. The dust was unbelievable and traffic cops were covered from head to toe with silt and no place to bathe except a helmet.

One of the tanks broke down and had most of the road junction blocked. Along came a jeep carrying General Hays. He was furious about the road block and stood up in the seat and started directing traffic himself. The first thing he did was get another tank to push the offender off into the ditch. When things got flowing again he went on his way and waved as he went by. Lunday commented *"I wonder what would have happened if a Pfc had attempted that maneuver?"*

At the new bivouac, the Company Clerk, Al Monroe, cut a hole through a hedgerow to set up the orderly room tent. With fox holes dug in the ground outside the tent, the soldiers moved into the tent for the night. Nearly asleep, they were shook up pretty bad when a shell landed about thirty yards away, putting several holes in the tent. Two shaking soldiers spent the rest of the night in their fox holes.

As the push forward began to accelerate, soldiers started to appropriate anything that moved. Some found horses, others had German vehicles and there were even a few bicycles. The protective colored banners for the vehicles were divided in two pieces, then two more, etc. Soon some vehicles had little more than pieces of ribbon showing. They were hardly visible from twenty feet, much less five-hundred. Then came the word that the 86th had been strafed by Allied Aircraft. So much for the well laid plans. But, the word had it, the yellow smoke bombs did the trick.

About this time General Hays put the Assistant Division Commander, Colonel Duff, in charge of Task Force Duff. Made up of a highly mobil group of units, these special forces were organized to move very rapidly in much the same way German Panzer Divisions operated. It was made up of the 2nd Battalion of the 86th, Company B of the 126th Engineers, parts of the 110th Signal Corps., motorized troops from the 91st Recon, a company from the 751st Tank Battalion and a platoon from the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion. Their first objective was to capture a strategic bridge across the Mincio River near Bomporto. It was some twenty miles past the front lines.

The first penetration of the Po Valley came on April 20. The 10th was the first of any 5th Army unit to break out of the mountains and this seemed to signal the end for the Germans. On the same day, and about the same time, the 1st squad of the 1st platoon under Sgt. Hampton got their first glimpse of the beautiful Po Valley. They had just cleared a small field of Schu mines from the side of a road and, walking to the top of a hill, there it was stretched out as far as the eye could see.

Prisoners of war had started coming in such volume that frequently they were just pointed in the direction to go. Some of the Company D truck drivers were assigned to haul them to compounds in the rear. One came back with wrist watches from his wrist to the arm pit. Prisoners were searched and anything valuable was confiscated before they were loaded. This does not sound like something "the good guys" would do but no one could work up any sympathy for people who, just hour ago, had been trying to kill us.

Not far from Bologna, just before leaving the Apennines, a cat skinner went on a short assignment to dig gun emplacements. He failed to return for a couple days. Finally Sgt. Carver and Pfc Lunday had to go and search for the lost "cat". Not too sure where enemy troops might be located this was a bit spooky but, almost by accident, the searchers came up behind him on a country road. His "cat" was weaving back and forth and the throttle was wide open. He finally missed a sharp curve, simply drove into the ditch and stopped by lowering his blade. He was slumped over as if dead but he was "dead" drunk from the time he decided to spend on vacation sampling the "vino" in one of the friendly little villages.

Within a very short time everything just started to go. There was no real front line. If there was a line it was where you were.

In the May 18, 1945 issue of "Yank" magazine an article described the action;

*"The advance on both coasts was swift from the start. The knockout, in fact, came so fast that all of the final blows of the Fifth and Eighth army must be calculated in days and hours. Before the fifth day of the offensive was over the 10th Mountain Division - a newcomer to Italy but a division rated as "amazing" and the "cat's whiskers" by the highest ranking generals in the theater - jumped off southwest of Bologna to start the drive."*

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## 10

### UP TO THE PO

Early in the morning, after one night in its last bivouac area, the company moved out again. Suddenly the mountains were gone and up ahead the level green Po Valley spread out like a carpet. There are no words to describe the feeling everyone experienced when that view came in sight. The Apennine Mountains had been home to the 10th Mountain for several months. These are not terribly rugged by most standards but nearly every minute had been full of tension. Now, suddenly, the terrain was flat, full of orchards and blooming cheery trees. It looked a lot like California. Now there were no peaks for the Germans to fortify. Tanks could move with much greater ease and the weather had turned to the typical sunny warmth of Italy.

Our first stop in the flat lands was at a small farm complex, possibly a village but the name is unknown. It was just South of highway 9, one of the main East/West Highways across the Po Valley, and on the edge of one of the last hills bordering the valley. There were half a dozen buildings. Most seemed to be homes with the usual scattering of utility structures that the farmers used.

The Company orderly room was set up in the main group of buildings that had obviously been a German headquarters. Their hot dinner was still on the table. Soon after moving in, a German convoy was spotted traveling directly toward the bivouac area on the highway. Somehow the Krauts began to realize that they were headed for trouble and turned around. Then they got blasted by the 87th and simply evaporated. This was to be a common occurrence for the remainder of the move across the Po valley.

- **THE MOTOR POOL TAKES A PRISONER**

Three members of the motor pool were soon out looking for a place to bunk for the night. Bernard Boyd, Tulsy Davis and Phil Lunday took off to explore some of the nearby buildings. First came a root cellar dug into the side of the hill. Next to the entry to this dugout type cave was a table. A calling card had been left by the departing Krauts, an armed Italian Mercury fused hand grenade was resting on the table as a tempting bit of loot. It would have exploded if touched but fortunately the explorers knew better and marked the door with a warning.

Inside the next building the soldiers got the surprise of their life. This was a two story house, almost split level. Boyd, who was pretty short, had elected to go into the top floor. Tulsy and Lunday entered the lower level with some trepidation. This turned out to be an almost barren living quarters. A sheet hung down the center as a room divider. A chest of drawers, standing next to the door, was inspected first. Tulsy found an Iron Cross just as Lunday pulled back the sheet. Both men were staring into the eyes of a German soldier. He was fully dressed in his gray uniform. His hands were behind him, pressed into the bed on which he was sitting.

None of the men were armed but Lunday carried a knife and, while trying to get it out, started yelling upstairs for Boyd. The prisoner waited patiently while the knife was removed from its scabbard. Then, with hands on head, the German was marched outside. About this time Boyd came roaring around the building with a butcher knife in each hand, ready for action. This brought a lot of pleading from the Kraut, who was almost as frightened as his captors.

The prisoner was marched back to the main camp with his hands held behind his head. On the way the path crossed a little stream and he asked for "wasser". This particular German was quite young and not in the least interested in fighting any more. His request was honored and he visibly relaxed after a drink from the creek.

#### • OUR CAPTAIN LEADS THE WAY

Within a couple hours of our arrival in the farm complex, Capt. Nagel returned from a briefing and the company moved out again just as everyone was about situated for the day. In the words of Capt. Nagel;

*"We were moving up to the Po and stopped at a place we thought would be our destination, and everybody started to unload. Suddenly we got orders to load up again .. we were moving further forward. So all of the troops loaded into the trucks and suddenly I heard a shot fired. I ran back to the trucks and really chewed out the soldier whose gun had discharged accidentally. I said I didn't mind if we killed Germans but sure didn't want us to kill each other.*

*So then I rushed around to the front of the column and got into my Jeep. I was carrying what was called a 'grease gun'. I told my driver, 'Okay, let's go,' and he jerked forward and the heavy bolt on my grease gun jerked back and came forward and chambered a cartridge. It went off and fired right through the glove compartment of my Jeep. I felt kind of embarrassed about that."*

Our next stop was to assemble almost the whole outfit at Bomporto. Task Force Duff had achieved its first goal by liberating the town before the critical bridge could be blown. The bridge was loaded with TNT and ready to blow but the engineers were able to

disarm the explosives before they were detonated.

- **THE GERMANS DROP SOME DUDS**

The Germans had lined up many of the city leaders and shot them just before Duff got there. Italian partisans had been playing an ever increasing role in the Allied activities and it is likely that was a factor. British Spitfires also made a single strafing run on Duff's troops before the yellow smoke bombs warned them off.

A mess kitchen was set up so the company could get a hot meal. Dining was interrupted by intermittent German artillery. They dropped a few shells and the hungry soldiers would hit the deck. After several minutes of quiet the chow line was reformed. It was almost like they were watching and having fun because no sooner was the line moving again when they would repeat. This went on until the food was cold.

An amazing number of these shells were duds. In this case the explosion of the guns could be heard when they were fired. Then the sort of whistling noise as the shells came overhead, followed by either an explosion or a thump. Several fell in the company perimeter but fortunately there were no casualties.

- **OFF TO THE PO RIVER**

Most of the company moved out that afternoon to head for the Po River. Part of the motor pool was left behind to guide some of the stragglers due in later that night. They spent the night in a German bunker and only got a little sleep because of the sounds of war that surrounded them. This was still "no mans land". Clearly there was no front line.

The company assembled and formed a convoy headed by Capt. Nagel. Al Monroe and Sgt. Langer were in a weapons carrier in roughly the middle of the string of trucks. After traveling a few miles their tail gate popped open so they stopped to secure it. A slight problem caused the fix to take longer than expected and when they started again the front part of the convoy was out of sight. They came to a road junction and the lead vehicles were still not in sight so, making a guess, took the rest of the convoy in the wrong direction. Shortly a German Staff car was seen coming straight toward them. Monroe stopped and asked Langer if he should let them have it with the machine gun mounted on the cab. Langer, wisely deferred, and suggested that they were not in a good position for a fire fight. The Germans stopped at about the same time Capt. Nagel came roaring up to get his charges headed in the right direction.

The strays now had to turn around one at a time on one of Italy's narrow little roads. It was more or less paved but had deep ditches on each side. Smaller vehicles had no problem but the vehicles bringing up the rear had no idea what was going on when they suddenly started to see their buddies whizzing past them in the wrong direction. Tulsy Davis drove the air compressor and always pulled a trailer. When he got to the head of the column he suddenly realized why everyone was going in the other direction ..



he spotted a bunch of Germans in the ditch ahead. It's still not clear how he managed to turn a thirty foot vehicle on a fifteen foot road but turn it he did and was soon honking at those ahead of him to move along faster.

Further along, John Warchol and Walter Burns continued to ride in the headquarters truck. Warchol was sitting in the center of the rear seat next to Burns with his rifle across his lap and pointed at Burns. Suddenly the firing pin on Warchol's gun clicked. Warchol took the bullet out of the chamber, looked at it, threw it over the side and exclaimed, "dud". At the next stop, a noticeably pale Burns changed trucks.

The company finally reached the Po River near the town of San Benedetto. A bivouac area was set up in a field close to the main north/south highway across the river. All bridges had been blown so the commanders were busy trying to figure out how to get across. Supply lines were already stretched to the limit and the pontoon bridges and assault boats were still far to the rear. Both options were to be used but General Hays was fuming at the delay.

Later that afternoon an intense firefight occurred at the nearby intersection of two main highways. Our recon had spotted a large German convoy headed for the intersection. Four of Duff's Tank Destroyers were deployed in the trees facing the on coming vehicles. A large cluster of trees about one-hundred yards down the road obstructed the view of the approaching Germans. As it turned out this was a heavy artillery outfit that was attempting to find a way across the river. The lead vehicle in the convoy was a large prime mover pulling a huge artillery piece, probably a 170 mm howitzer. In the front seat were three Germans. When they came into sight a couple warning shots were fired at them and they opened up with machine gun fire. That set the stage for complete carnage. All four TDs let go right at the Germans as they came into view. Destruction was amazingly swift. The three Germans were burned to a crisp before they could get out of the vehicle. An American sergeant appeared from somewhere and wound up in a ditch with the top of his head blown off. There were other bodies all over but that one sergeant was the only American casualty.

Getting across the Po resulted in two assignments for Company D. One group was assigned to man the assault boats if and when they became available. Another detail was organized to erect a tramway crossing.

- **THE GERMAN AIR FORCE FINDS COMPANY D**

A scouting party was sent out to check an island in the river which might have provided some anchorage for the tram. They had no sooner made it to their destination than a fierce artillery barrage dropped right on them. Capt. Nagel, who was watching closely, thought they were all dead when he suddenly realized the fire was coming from our own guns. He got that stopped within a few minutes and was much relieved when people started popping up one at a time. Not one man was even wounded because they took refuge in some caves they had discovered.



That night the tramway detail set out just after sundown with Lt. Martin in charge. It consisted of part of the 1st platoon and mechanics Boyd and Lunday. Everyone loaded into the back of a truck that was also pulling the tramway engine. A full moon lit things up, and, just as the truck entered a main road junction, all hell broke loose. A fighter plane overhead turned out to be a German. He had the truck spotted and was coming straight on at full speed. It was possible that he was the only German fighter aircraft flying in Europe that evening.

Lt. Martin had some instinct that prompted him to realize that the plane was a Messerschmitt the instant he saw it. He also instinctively ordered the driver to stop so the soldiers could bail out. That is probably what saved them. Tracer bullets from the plane came right over the truck and hit about 40 feet in front. The pilot was leading his target as a moving vehicle. You shoot where it will be, not where it is.

It would have looked like a Max Senate movie to anyone watching soldiers pile out of that truck. Everyone was standing in the back. Lunday was about in the middle and all he remember is his feet hitting the ground running. He still thinks that he jumped over several people like Superman. Watching tracer bullets coming directly at you can do strange things to your adrenaline. Troops scattered like Quail to the woods or wherever seemed safe. Several got very intimate with the stone wall of a nearby house. Sgt. Hampton dove under a barbed wire fence and lost the back of his pants and his wallet. (he came back the next day and found the wallet). The plane made two more passes down the ditches then left. A tank was parked down the road and got a few rounds off with his machine gun. A few rifle shots were fired but sounded sort of pathetic.

The tank driver then stopped by the truck for a brief chat after the plane left. He had a case of Schnapps that had been confiscated from the enemy so gave the engineers a bottle. That proved to be just what the doctor ordered so after this short delay the crew again headed for the river at least slightly fortified.

The first stop was in a barn or farm yard while someone scouted out the area near the river. With Germans dug in only a few yards past the other side of the river everyone was afraid to light a match for his cigarette. Lunday pulled out his prize lighter that was designed to let you light up with no flame. It was built so all you had to do to get a light was put the cig to the platinum screen and suck. Shielded by the barn, all that was needed was to duck out of sight to have a smoke.

The tramway engine was unhooked in a field close to the water. It was pulled by hand as near to the water as was considered safe. During this process Lunday crushed his left ring finger between the towing bar and the trailer tongue. Fortunately it was just smashed but hurt like hell. Then he got stuck with the guard detail while the rest of the crew went home to bed. Stuck on the banks of the Po wasn't exactly what he had bargained for and it proved to be a very long night;

*"Once again I'm alone and don't have any idea what makes all of*

*those night noises. In this case I huddled up next to the engine so no one could get me from behind. There was a lot of machine gun and rifle fire from the river which, in a way, was almost comforting. Besides this I couldn't smoke, even with my magic lighter, and was afraid to move. Finally about dawn they came to relieve me. What a night! To top that off, I don't think the tram was ever put up".*

Next morning Lunday made his way to the nearby aid station to get his finger tended to. The pain was relieved when the medic punched a hole in the nail to let the blood squirt out. About this time Pfc Louis Siscoe, one of the company D drivers, reported to the medics that he had been shot in the chest. They opened his shirt to find a slight scratch on his left breast and promptly awarded him the Purple Heart. Siscoe's story is one for the books;

*"I'm driving down the road and suddenly hear a thump and feel a burning on my stomach. Reaching in my shirt I pulled out a spent bullet. Now my breast starts to hurt and I stopped to check further. There was a hole in my plastic cigarette case and blood started to appear on the pocket. What was either a stray bullet or a sniper had hit me and fortunately it was virtually spent on impact."*

#### • THE GREAT ASSAULT BOAT CAPER

When the 10th Mountain initially arrived at the Po, there were no assault boats available for the crossing. This was not necessarily an oversight because General Hays had arbitrarily revised the plans of the high command when he decided, on his own, to go into high gear on his way to the Po. Now he badly needed the boats to keep going. To avoid the General's wrath, his Engineer officers pulled off one of the great scams of the war in Italy.

The boats are called Infantry Assault Boats. They look a bit like an old fashioned cement mixer, where you dumped all of the ingredients into this flat bottomed container and use a hoe to mix it all together. Each one is made of ply wood and weighs about five-hundred pounds. Twelve fully armed infantry soldiers could be carried along with a crew of three.

Having no idea where he would get his boats, General Hays called Major Platt Boyd, the Assistant Commander of the 126th Engineers, to the Division Command Post for a conference. Initial plans called for the 85th Infantry Division (not to be confused with the 85th Regiment of the 10th) to cross the Po. They had been scheduled to receive the boats. The 10th got to the river first and Hays wanted desperately to get across.

Major Boyd was given the task of getting the boats. He dispatched Mister Heller, Supply Warranty Officer, Capt. Gray and Lieutenants Greider and Benedict to the rear of our area to find some boats. They thought, at the time, they would have to go all the way back to an Engineering Depot at Bologna. Proceeding South, Mr. Heller came upon a

convoy of five trucks loaded with ten boats each headed for the 85th Division. Heller convinced the convoy commander that he would lead him right where he wanted to go. The Warrant Officer, of course, lead them to the 10th Division's position on the South bank of the Po rather than their scheduled destination. It was after midnight when the boats were delivered. Everyone piled in to get the trucks unloaded and headed back before they discovered how badly they had been snookered.

Someone roused out most of B Company, which had been part of Task Force Duff, and got them to help expedite the movement and unloading of the purloined convoy. The 85th Division could have the next shipment. By then the 10th Mountain would be well on their way to the Alps.

Major Boyd recalled how things proceeded after the boats were delivered;

*"It was then midnight when the boats were delivered at the Po. We all piled in to get the trucks unloaded and headed back before they discovered how badly they had been snookered. The 85th Division could have the next shipment. By then we planned to be well on our way to the Alps. When the boats arrived, I told Colonel Parker we had secured them and that General Hays had directed that he be personally notified. Colonel Parker said;*

*'He did not tell me, he told you so you go wake up the General.'*

*I went to Division Headquarters and awakened Colonel Irvin, Division G -3 and told him that we had the boats and that the General wanted to know immediately. I thought Colonel Irvin would tell the Chief of Staff who would inform the General but said;*

*'No .. the General said for you to tell him and I'm not going to wake him up in the middle of the night.'*

*So, off I went and knocked on the door of the Generals command trailer. He yelled out;*

*'Who the hell is it and what do you want?'*

*I told him it was Major Boyd and I had his assault boats. He told me to stay and his aide went to get Colonel Irvin and the Chief of Staff. When we were assembled, he announced that he wanted to start the crossing at 0600. I put my tongue in my cheek and spoke up saying there was no way in hell that we could get the boats placed and engineer crews assigned by then and I doubted that the Infantry commanders could organize the assault forces either in that same period. General Hays grunted and said;*

*'All right, when can we start?'*

*I said probably not before noon and the General replied;*

*'All right, that's it, we cross at noon.'*

*.....and that's what we did."*

The assault boats were procured in time for an April 23 crossing.

- **THE ENGINEERS MAN THE BOATS**

The Germans had fortified the other side of the river in preparation for a holding action. They wanted to stop our relentless advance and were putting up heavy resistance mostly by using anti-aircraft and artillery fire on the river. Shells were set to burst just over the water or aimed at the staging areas on the South shore.

Foster Handy, one of the cat skimmers, was building embankments on our side of the river to shelter the infantry preparing for the crossing. He got blown out of his cat at least once but finally got the job done. He also got a Bronze Star for his work under heavy fire. Although the thrust over the Po was to the north, most of the casualties at this time were on the south side of the river due to the intense enemy fire.

The Saturday Evening Post issued 12/8/1945 wrote;

*"On the morning of April 23, part of the 87th arrived at the town of San Benedetto Po. The bridges had been blown so thoroughly that not even a skeleton upright was visible. It was decided to cross the 300 foot stream by assault boats .. combat engineers had been cut to pieces up the river when they attempted to set up a bridge .. and the men of the 87th began gathering beside the sand dikes that lined the Po."*

When the boats were drawn up along the shore, the Germans on the opposite bank opened up with everything they had.

*"The shelling was so intense,"* said a rifleman who spent five hours in a foxhole with a decapitated friend and a mortally wounded signal lineman, *"that hot molten metal was rolling into the foxhole."*

The ski troopers dug in until the worst was over and then hit the boats. Strangely, the actual crossing was not costly. And yet it was one of the most daring tactical moves of the Italian campaign; for at the time the 10th was not only crossing the river but attacking on its right and left flanks and defending its rear.

Company D provided a number of the three man crews for the first wave of boats to cross. Twelve infantry soldiers were ferried across in each load then the engineers

returned for more passengers. There was an amazing lack of German infantry on the far shore but one enemy machine gun was spotted by the engineers. Henry LaCaille crept as close as he could and adjusted his sights for the perceived distance. Puffs of dust could be seen creeping toward the machine gun when the German crew just picked up and dived over a nearby dike.

Capt. Nagel went over in the first wave to scout the far shore. Taking cover in an abandon German dugout, Nagel and Fritz Benedict, another engineer, captured a German prisoner. Fritz spoke some German and the prisoner was arrogantly saying;

*"I can't understand why you Americans aren't fighting with the Germans against the Russians .. Just wait and they'll be your enemies before long."*

Sgt. Hampton, Charlie Pruitt and Ray Cleverly were crew for a boat in the second wave across. Feeling naked and vulnerable was a normal fear in such an assignment because the river is so wide, varying between one and two-hundred yards. It seemed like an eternity getting across and about half way one of the infantry soldiers started paddling with his rifle butt .. he didn't like being a sitting duck. This inspired the rest of the soldiers and this boat broke the record for the crossing.

As this boat neared the far shore, an 88 shell exploded overhead and shrapnel splattered all around. One of the passengers gave a little lurch, stood up and tumbled over the side. Obviously wounded and weighted down by his pack and rifle, he was in imminent danger of drowning. Hampton describes what happened next;

*"As we floated past him, I reached out and got my hand under the shoulder strap of his field pack. Still underway, I dragged him along until we were some twenty yards from the beach. Then I jumped over the stern of the boat into shoulder deep water and dragged him to shore. His wound was not life threatening, a piece of shrapnel in his thigh but he was sputtering and spitting Po River water. Thinking to take him to an aid station, I asked if he wanted a return trip."*

*"Not for a million dollars", he painfully replied, "I'll take my chances over here."*

Company D suffered six wounded but no fatalities in this encounter. For the battalion there were twenty-six casualties, two of which were fatal. Some of the engineers, including Joe Perrault, made six or eight trips across the river and back. By the time the infantry was all deposited on the north shore there were only ten of the original fifty assault boats left floating.

The South shore of the Po was cluttered with German material. Included was an entire base hospital unit in a convoy that got caught after the bridges were blown. Panic must have reigned supreme because only the people were missing. All of the materials

were left just as they had been packed. One bus carried a regimental band full of musical instruments. Another vehicle contained a payroll worth several thousand dollars in Italian Lira (probably forged). Two German soldiers were found hiding under one vehicle. They wanted to surrender and were very frightened so gave no trouble. A couple company D soldiers picked out German staff cars to drive around the area. These proved to be a nice toys until someone reminded them that Allied aircraft love to practice their gunnery on lone enemy vehicles.

The German demise was in no small part due to their lack of air coverage. There were plenty of airplanes but gasoline was in very short supply. The Allied Air Force had concentrated for months on destroying the oil fields and supply lines. No doubt, some of the now critical river crossings had, in fact, been destroyed by our own air force. German morale was undoubtedly at an all time low. General Hays had our division on a roll and had made sure he was leading the 5th Army's march across the Po Valley. With the infantry across the river, the next step was to move the tanks and heavy equipment forward.

Word of a new menace then began to filter back from forward elements of Task Force Duff. The more fanatic German SS troops were playing an ever increasing role in the defense of their positions as panic set in with the retreating armies.

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# 11

## LAKE GARDA AND THE ALPS

Company D undertook the task of finding a good spot for a pontoon bridge. With not much experience in this sort of thing, a group set out across the river in an assault boat. Their plan was to drag a haul cable from the tramway across the river so they could then attach a larger anchor cable and work it across. Things went fine until they got about a third of the way across. There the current put so much drag on the cable that the boat started going backwards. This crew gave up and left the job to a more experienced and better equipped unit.

- **BRIDGING THE PO**

Finally, by April 25, an engineering outfit completed a pontoon bridge. Now tanks and heavy equipment could cross the river. Colonel Duff had been wounded South of the Po River and was replaced by Colonel Darby, former commander of Darby's Rangers, a famous World War II commando unit. The original Task Force Duff remained in tact with its new commander. Task Force Darby had crossed the Po earlier with no tank support. With virtually no resistance, the town of Villafranca was taken on the same day as the new bridge opened. Word came back that a German fighter plane had landed at the captured airport. It was probably the same one that strafed the tramway crew. The pilot was never found.

With the bridge complete, a big traffic jam developed at the South shore of the only river crossing for miles. Company D remained with the main body of 10th Division troops that were assembled in the area and, once across, headed fifty miles north to Verona. One of the companies Weapons Carriers had a .50 caliber machine gun mounted over the cab so the 1st squad of the 1st platoon loaded into that vehicle to help man the gun if needed. The "cats" were loaded on the big flat bed trailers. All of the trucks, jeeps, troop carriers, and trailers full of equipment were interspersed to make up the convoy. Two-hundred members of the outfit were riding where ever they could find a spot. This was to be a trip that went almost as far north in Italy as you could go. The military tactics were to cut the road between Verona and Lake Garda to block the Germans from retreating into Brenner pass.



Division MPs were directing traffic at the river. It was the first time any of us had seen them do anything but it is likely they had their hand full trying to figure out what to do with the thousands of prisoners. Each unit had been assigned a priority for the crossing. Our turn came only after a long wait.

Capt. Nagel lead the company in his Jeep followed by the armed weapons carrier. Each driver had received strict instructions about vehicle's spacing to make sure the bridge did not sink. None of the trucks pulling the cats could be on the bridge at the same time so they were interspersed with the lighter vehicles. Even so the bridge was undulating up and down like the troop ship on the ocean. A few of the bridge engineers were sitting out on the pontoons in midstream ready to make adjustments to the anchor lines as needed. No one felt very safe on this thing and heaved a great sigh of relief when on the other side.

- **THE ROAD NORTH**

Tactics north of the Po were for the infantry regiments to "leap frog" each other but they were still moving so fast they had problems catching up with each other. A mountain division is not highly mobil, having little mechanized equipment to move the troops. The General gave orders for the foot troops to commandeer anything that moved so the convoys included troops on horses, riding ox carts, motorcycles and anything else the could be found.

Each of the engineering companies was assigned to an infantry division and Company D was held in reserve so that our tramway and heavy construction equipment could be utilized where needed.

So, again, it was full speed ahead into virgin country. As the soldiers moved into the little towns their welcome was often quite moving. In some cases the road would be lined with the townspeople. Often they had wine .. of the kind they had been hiding. Lots of kisses were exchanged by the local bells and some of the grandmothers too. There was less poverty here because of the rich farm lands and orchards .. in the "bread basket" of Italy. Most five gallon water cans were now filled with wine. The mood became almost festive.

In Verona a snaggle toothed old man approached our armed weapons carrier. He grabbed a sergeant's hand and started kissing it. When the embarrassed soldier withdrew his hand, the old man reached into his overcoat pockets and pulled out an ornately labeled bottle and poured a large glass of amber liquid for the sergeant to drink. The gift drink went down in two gulps and suddenly this poor man thought he had been poisoned. His eyes watered and throat felt like it was on fire. The crowd saw the reaction and burst into laughter. This gift drink was industrial strength grappa which is produced with pride in most of the little villages by distilling brandy of various sorts.

One infantry soldier got tired of the horse he had appropriated and decided to swap it with a farmer for 2500 gallons of wine that was stored in a huge vat. After taking

all his unit could carry, they put up a sign in front of the house that invited everyone to share his treasure. Word of that offering spread like wildfire and half of the division participated. Several Company D GI Cans were soon full of good red Italian wine.

Italian Partisans were encountered more frequently every day. Many had been active during the German occupation and deserved a lot of credit. Now the "grandstanders" seemed to be coming out of the wood work. Most wore something akin to a boy scouts uniform with khaki Bermuda shorts and shirt. All wore a bandanna with green standing for Republicans and red for Communists. Usually a bandoleer of ammunition and a rifle hung over their shoulder and many carried one or more pistols. Most were willing to barter with Americans for almost anything they carried.

Tactically the division was still completely surrounded by German troops. About halfway to Verona, the column came to a halt. Word had come down that a body of enemy troops was moving toward our convoy from the West. Capt. Nagel ordered the machine gun set up in a large drainage ditch and the troops were deployed with their rifles along the bank. After a couple of tense hours, the emergency was canceled without a shot being fired or an enemy soldier sighted.

It was also somewhere in this area that a fully loaded German Troop Train chugged into a station that our infantry had just captured. The commander of our troops didn't have any idea what to expect and had to do some fast thinking. He got the station master to order all of the German officers forward then confronted the assembled enemy through an interpreter. During this confrontation armed soldiers were slowly ordered to appear from their hiding places along the tracks. The confrontation was almost choreographed but proved to be sufficient to avert a potential battle.

Each little town the convoy entered provided a place for a German ambush so, despite the heart felt welcome of the natives, all of the troops proceeded cautiously. Machine guns and most weapons were held in a ready position and pointed at second story windows or other potential hiding places.

- **A QUICK STOP AT VERONA**

Verona did not resemble what one would expect of the home of Romeo and Juliet. As a major rail center, it had been heavily bombed and the rail yard was totally destroyed. Fires seemed to be everywhere. Fields were pock marked with bomb craters. Some had a years new growth of grass so one could visually tell of the length and intensity of the Allied attacks.

Company D got there about the same time as the 85th Infantry Division. There were snipers all over but organized resistance was spotty. A couple of the infantry companies got hit pretty hard but managed to survive with very few casualties.

The Company D convoy parked part way into the city and sent several squads off to check the bridges across the Adige River. Almost immediately they encountered three

Germans that suddenly popped out of a culvert with their hands over their head. A search of the prisoners yielded a nice Omega wrist watch which was being pocketed by the sergeant when a 2nd Lieutenant, who no one recognized, confronted him about taking the watch. He seemed upset and suggested that confiscating the personal property of prisoners was against the Geneva Convention. The sergeant, deciding that the Lieutenant was a new replacement, asked what war he had been fighting and suggested that if he did not take the watch some rear echelon bastard would get it. A properly chided officer decided that was OK and went on about his business.

The five or six bridges over the Adige River proved to be a twisted pile of girders lying on the bottom. They were passable on foot if you were brave enough to risk walking over the twisted steel. Repairs were out of the question for anything the company was equipped to do so the scouts returned to the trucks.

- **THE ROAD TO RIVA**

Suddenly the divisions plans changed and all units took a turn to the left and headed for Lake Garda. Thousands of German soldiers had been cut off from their retreat and our commanders had concluded they could completely bottle them up by cutting the exit routes from northern Italy.

The sound of hard fighting came from the direction Company D was heading. German armies were funneling into the Alps through the few main access routes so the concentration of troops increased considerably. A stand of considerable strength had been made at Buselengo. Suddenly, as the convoy left Verona, an enormous explosion was heard from the Northern outskirts of the town signaling the destruction of a major German ammunition depot. A huge mushroom cloud nearly blacked out the sun.

On April 28 the division moved up the main road North on the East side of the Lake and into the Italian Alps. Everyone in Company D was tired and dirty but the scenery was inspiring. To say it was spectacular would be an understatement. The Alps towered over this shore line. They looked awesome .. like nothing most of the troops had ever seen. Storm clouds seemed to be permanently attached to the tops .. sheer rock cliffs dropped almost straight down for thousands of feet directly into the lake. The highway was cut through solid rock. Most of the short distance to Riva, a resort city on the North shore, was through tunnels or over bridges and trestles.

This type of terrain made it easy for the Germans to demolish enough of the road to prevent its use. By destroying the first tunnel and demolishing the exit road, the division had been effectively stalled. Only an assault force of limited size could move forward by scaling the mountain and tanks and heavy equipment were completely blocked. In fact the terrain was so rugged that it was very difficult to get artillery pieces placed into forward positions.

If the division was to continue its forward momentum an amphibious assault was again called for. The first vehicles to be used were called DUKWs (pronounced Ducks).

Ducks are 2 1/2 ton special utility trucks that could travel over both land and water with 25 or 30 passengers. Some of the assault boats used to cross the Po were equipped with 75 horsepower Mercury outboard engines to augment the Ducks. Larger barges, called Infantry Support Rafts, were hauled in by truck to help move tanks and heavy equipment. These barges came in two pieces that were bolted together in the water. Each "Raft" was equipped with a Chrysler marine engine. Before these vessels came on site, some local barges were commandeered to haul artillery and tanks.

Our British friends who manned the five inch guns near Roil did a little scrounging of their own. They were unable to get their guns up to the front until one of their officers discovered some sailing barges used by the Italians to haul grain and such. These proved to be just the ticket and a number of these big guns were soon in use destroying German Tanks, almost at point blank range, near the town of Torbole.

Infantry units made the first assault toward the north shore using Ducks to get around the blown road. They encountered very heavy resistance at each of the several tunnels and were running into more German SS troopers. Enemy troops were hidden in caves and tunnels making it difficult to penetrate their positions.

- **CLEARING THE ROAD**

Company D went to work immediately. Some were again assigned to the assault boats to help get the infantry to the north end of the lake. The cats and road crews started clearing the tunnels and repairing the roadbed. Some of the mechanics were assigned to ride the Infantry Support Rafts in case the engines acted up. Meanwhile the Germans still held the West side of the lake and were holed up in caves to the north. They were constantly firing at anything that entered the water.

Clearing the tunnels proved to be a nauseous task for the "cat" skimmers. Not only were some of the boulders as big as automobiles but, when the entrance to one tunnel was cleared, a truck full of dead German soldiers was uncovered. Apparently the explosives set to blow the tunnel discharged prematurely or they were hit by our artillery and trapped. The German bodies were partially decomposed and the stench was almost unbearable. Foster Handy, who was operating the "cat", pleaded for something to block out the smell. Even a gas mask would have helped but all he had was a handkerchief over his face.

Several trestles had been destroyed so Bailey Bridges were used for replacements. Getting the road open was a monumental task and the crews worked around the clock. Colonel Parker, commander of our engineering battalion, was fired by General Hays when he told him it would take five days to get the road cleared and open for traffic. Hays would not accept this answer and blew his stack. The work took five days despite the good general's demands.

- **THE ALPINE NAVY**

Before any of the barges could be used to ferry tanks around the blown tunnels, Company D was assigned the task of building a sturdy loading ramp. The site selected was near company headquarters on a level and shallow spot on the lake as could be found. Wooden timbers were lashed together with cable from the tramway to create a serviceable but somewhat unstable ramp. Much of the time the engineers were standing in waist deep water while working. At least they got a nice cold bath .. the first in a few weeks. Loading the first Sherman Tank gave all concerned a few butterflies. The driver was not too anxious to test this contraption but finally crossed his fingers and started for the lake shore. Very slowly he eased the tank onto the ramp and the barge. The ramp somehow hung together while the barge bobbed up and down violently .. the contraption worked well enough to use.

While this was going on the engineers could watch the artillery duels that were directed at the town of Torbole, on the north end of the lake. Over the years the Germans had tunneled into the granite cliffs of Mount Brioni in positions that gave them a commanding view of almost everything from Torbole south. About a hundred yards above the engineers position was a battery of 105 MM howitzers that were lobbing shells directed toward the town and the German 88s that were firing from the caves. The engineers watched helplessly when a German shell scored a direct hit on one of the 105s of the division's artillery battalion. From time to time, flights of P-47s would zoom in and make bomb and strafing runs on the German positions in the caves.

When the time came for the barge to move out, some of the Company D engineers were assigned as crew. This barge was not self propelled so two Ducks were lashed to it to provide the power. Drivers of the Ducks had to rely on the engineers for directions and it was pitch black night. Commands were delivered to the drivers by dashing back and forth across the barge and shouting. A particular jetty on the north shore was the destination. When the vessels were about a hundred yards from the jetty the DUWK engines were cut and haul lines were thrown from the drifting barge to waiting infantry soldiers.

Unloading the tank was another matter. At this time there was no ramp so the driver had to simply drive onto the jetty. When the tank pulled forward to unload, the front of the barge sank so that it was several feet below the jetty. It looked like the tank might just push the barge out from under it and drop into the water. Everyone in the tank got out and the driver unstrapped himself for a quick bail out. As he slowly moved forward the shore lines tightened up like guitar strings. Finally the tank was pointed upward about sixty degrees and the driver panicked .. he just pushed down the throttle. The tank lurched forward, one shore line parted and the barge moved out from under it. Teetering on the brink, the tank finally flopped down level on the jetty and dry land.

The next crew decided they could use some wooden foot bridges to act as unloading ramps. The same type of barge was used but this time Fred Nagel was in the crew and recalls;

"We were able to load some tanks on the barges and take them up to the northern end of the lake to Torbole to outflank the Germans. When we went to off-load the tanks, we had a hard time figuring out what to take them off with. So we used these little wooden foot bridges that had been set up for the infantry disembarking from small boats. I remember a tank coming off and just grinding these foot bridges into toothpicks, and I thought, 'this tank is going to go right into the drink.' But somehow the cleats of the tank caught hold and it came up onto the shore and we got him to dry land."

A short time later some trucks arrived with the self propelled barges. These were easier to handle and an experienced driver accompanied the equipment. These vessels were bolted together in the water and engine was dropped into place with a crane. Soon the tanks were moving across the lake with few problems. There was always a Company D mechanic riding along for emergencies and frequently a crew to help with the cargo. Fortunately these strange craft were needed for only a couple days until the road was opened.

- **A NEW KIND OF BIVOUAC**

Company D headquarters and most of the company was housed in or near a lovely old villa on the lake shore. These accommodations were owned by an aging opera singer who was still in residence. On the second floor was a beautifully decorated music room which contained an immense grand piano and shelf after shelf of sheet music. One wall was covered with signed photographs of her in the company of elegantly clad and distinguished people, including one that some thought was of a youthful Arturo Toscanini. The room, which looked out over the lake, was further equipped with numerous comfortable chairs and lounges. It had the appearance of having been used for intimate gatherings of music lovers .. or opera buffs as the case may be. What must that lady have thought to have a bunch of dirty and coarse American soldiers cluttering up her property?

One afternoon, the hostess, who was of heroic Wagnerian proportions, decided to give these bums some culture. A few were invited to the second floor where she proceeded to sing that strange music that few had ever heard. Most were sort of awed by the lady who was obviously very cultured and wealthy. Later Company D responded when Bob Cochran sang to the good lady and Chuck Hampton treated her to a operatic aria played on a captured German cornet.

Almost everyone worked night and day. Getting the road open, carrying troops across the lake and keeping the barges running allowed little time for rest.

On April 28, 1945 Benito Mussolini and his mistress were captured and killed by Italian partisans near Lake Como in the Italian Alps. Their bodies were taken to Milan and hung by the feet in the town square for all to see. Adolf Hitler and his mistress, Eva



Braun, committed suicide in his Berlin bunker on April 30, 1945. Two of the men most responsible for the most destructive war in history were dead, strangely, within two days of each other.

*The boast of heraldry , the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth, e'er gave  
Await alike th' inevitable hour; --  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.  
Gray's Elegy , 1883*

Word came to Company D one day that a freak accident had killed Colonel Darby. He died with a piece of shrapnel in his chest from an artillery shell. This occurred three days before the war ended. After the war, a movie about his groups exploits, was released under the name "Darby's Rangers". His home town, of Fort Smith, Arkansas, has set aside a major portion of their historical museum in his honor. He was one of our greatest World War II heroes.

Company K of the 87th was in the town of Solda, near the Swiss border and discovered some huge caves that were full of excellent French champagne and cognac. General Hays ordered the loot sent to our division supply depot and bottles were issued to everyone. It took 55 truck loads to empty the five caves and Company D provided most of the vehicles and manpower .. definitely a labor of love.

- **THE WAR IS OVER IN ITALY**

Although the troops didn't know it at the time, the war in Italy was almost over. That romantic villa proved to be the last stop for Company D. The Germans headquarters were now in Bolzono, near the Swiss border. Plans for its capture had been finalized as a joint assault using both the 10th and 88th divisions. Surrender negotiations had been in process for a few days. The German capitulation was finally noted from their radio broadcasts to their troops ordering a cease fire at 6:30, May 2.

For several days rumors had been flying around about the end of the war in Italy. Finally on May 2, at about 18:30, some official word came to the soldiers of Company D in an informal way. As this incredible news spread among the men, weapons were fired into the air until it sounded like a real battle. This brought Captain Nagel and Sergeant Langer running from the villa shouting demands for a cease fire. All that lead had to come down somewhere and there could have been tragic results. The troops were then assembled and given the official word. Everyone clapped but most suddenly felt an overwhelming sense of relief. The soldiers of Company D were simply exhausted.

The May 22, 1945 Blizzard described the soldiers reaction as follows;

*"At about 1930 the church bells in Riva started ringing wildly, and word passed from official sources that the war in Italy was over. The soldiers were not demonstratively jubilant. They felt awkward, it seemed,*



*did not know what to say an English speaking Italian remarked, 'You Americans don't seem too happy about the news. You take it all so calmly'".*

An AP article in the St. Paul Dispatch on May 1 stated;

*"General Mark Clark, Fifteenth Army Group Commander, Monday announced the virtual end of the long and bloody campaign in Italy. Declaring that the German armies in Italy have "been virtually eliminated as a military force", he said 25 enemy divisions have been torn to pieces in the 22 -day offensive of the U. S. Fifth and British Eighth armies.....An Allied communiqué today said the Germans are fighting desperately north of Lake Grad, near the Brenner Pass, but said THE ENEMY LINES WERE DISORGANIZED."*

It was a blessing that no further fighting was to take place. From Riva to the Swiss border there were many fortifications. On the edge of the lake were block houses and gun emplacements that were under 20 feet of reinforced concrete. All of the mountains were filled with caves or tunnels that held everything from artillery to factories.

During these few months the 10th suffered almost 1,000 dead and four times that were wounded. There were almost as many noncombat casualties as wounded. Accidents were common, being caused by such things as careless handling of weapons, people jumping out of trucks, smashing fingers, etc. But the accomplishments of the 10th were far beyond what had been expected. The 10th Mountain alone routed five German divisions. The assault on Mount Belvedere and Riva Ridge are now considered classics in mountain warfare. General Hays made sure that the division raced 157 miles across the Po Valley and into the Alps as the spearheads for the Fifth Army. Possibly one of the greatest tributes was recognition, by seasoned German officers, who praised the 10th as an elite corps of soldiers.

In the May 22, 1945 Blizzard General Hays wrote;

*"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.. The Lord had us by the hand."*

Company D did more than its share. Erecting two aerial tramways in combat remains a first in American military history. Probably of greater significance was the direct support of the infantry that was given by all of the engineers in the 126th. Forty-three Company D soldiers were awarded Bronze Stars for bravery, one got a Silver Star and one Legion of Merit was awarded .. all in a lifetime that lasted 114 days.

The record of the entire 5th army was no less spectacular. Over 150,000 German prisoners were taken .. roughly the equivalent of 12 divisions. In doing so the casualty rate was unusually high at 12,059 losses. Almost 30 German divisions were encountered and smashed.

Our air force had almost eliminated the German's use of aircraft, mostly by destroying their oil supplies. They also severely hampered ground troop movements by destroying the railroads. The close in tactical support, particularly by the P-47 Thunderbolts, played a large role in breaking the firmly entrenched German Gothic Line.

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## 12

### THE LONG ROAD HOME

**W**ith the war over, the tunnels clear and a passable road, the company moved to the north end of the lake. A new billet was located near Riva in the remnants of a resort hotel that looked out over the water. Some sections of the structure had been hit by artillery but most of the rooms were still usable. Sergeant Carver, in addition to all of his other skills, turned out to be a fairly good journeyman plumber. These new quarters had a non-functioning bathhouse complete with showers and a hot water heater. Carver, and some others, went to work and soon had the wounded plumbing system functioning like new .. heaven only knows what a hot shower felt like to men who had not had a real bath for several weeks.

- **THE LIFE OF LEISURE**

There were lots of beds complete with mattresses so each man got his own sack and a room to share. For a few days the orders were to just relaxed and enjoyed life. The Red Cross set up a place in town so they could sell their famous fried Spam dinners and donuts.

It was springtime and the weather was idyllic. Assault boats with the big outboard engines now became sporting craft. Cruising the lake became a popular sport. A 75 horsepower engine on a flat bottomed boat with a couple passengers could almost be stood on end at full throttle.

On May 8, 1945 the Germans capitulated so the war in Europe was over. This opened a few more frontiers for soldiers everywhere in Europe. Some were given passes to go to Austria or other countries if a vehicle was available and sufficient gas for a round trip could be carried. A ski meet was organized on Mount Mangart in Austria. There was still enough spring snow for a slalom course but, even in the mountain troops, there was a shortage of skis so those from Company D who attended were mostly spectators. Walter Prager was the winner, as could be expected.

Touring the local area provided some interesting sights. The German bunkers were all over the place. Most looked like they could have withstood a direct hit and still be undamaged. On the west shore of the lake was a tunnel that was occupied by a German pistol factory. Their famous P-38 automatic was produced there for most of the war. Stories had it that cases of these pistols were dumped into the lake just before we got there.

Both Riva and Torbole are tourist towns and located on the lake shore. Each had several nice hotels with boat docks and swimming beaches. The shops were starting to open and, as could be expected, carried mostly junk. A few saloons had opened but about all you could get was wine .. wasn't so bad though. Some got to see a villa on the west shore of the lake that was supposed to have belonged to Mussolini.

Despite the cessation of hostilities, there were lots of problems confronting the Allied armies even though the war in Italy was over. The civilian government was in a shambles. Partisan armies were heavily armed and could be dangerous. Much of the country was still starving. It was estimated that over 200,000 partisan weapons were ultimately confiscated. One D Company stalwart ran into a partisan and traded a new pair of dress shoes, found in a German dugout, for a 32 caliber Italian Baretta Pistol.

- **GUARDING THE YUGOSLOV BORDER**

The Allies began to expect trouble with Yugoslavia. Early in the war, as one of the axis powers, Italy occupied Western Yugoslavia. In the process, they came close to annihilating parts of the population. There were also very bad feelings between different factions within the country. Tito, commander of the Communist partisan army, who had some clashes with the democratic Italian partisans, had only tenuous control over his own country. To counter this potential problem a decision was made to have the 10th Mountain Division and part of the British 8th Army patrol the Yugoslavian border in Northeast Italy and to remain poised there to put down any insurrection.

On May 19, Company D was to move to the outskirts of a city called Udine. This city's chief claim to fame was being the home of Primo Carnerra, a beer guzzling giant, who, before the war, fought Joe Louis for the heavyweight championship of the world and got pulverized. Second, it had been the World War One rallying point for the Italian Army who had suffered a massive defeat at the hands of the Austrians in nearby Caporetto.

German convoys had become a common sight. There were about 270,000 allied troops in the 5th Army and at least as many Germans. When the division moved out of Lake Garda and the Alps, many were transported by Germans. Most of the Kraut officers were arrogant even in defeat but the enlisted men seemed more subdued. One officer told an engineer, in very good English, that America could expect to be fighting the Russians in 10 years. Arrogant German officers soured a lot of relationships between American soldiers and their former enemies.

Headquarters and the camping area for the company were set up in a pasture near the

village of Salt, roughly 15 miles from the border. The troops had quite a bit of freedom but were told to always carry a loaded weapon even on passes to the city. Yugoslav soldiers were entrenched on the border and in, some cases, on Italian soil. Squadrons of Allied war planes made frequent passes over the trouble spots. 10th Mountain Division Infantry and tanks were positioned opposite the Yugos. This massive show of strength cooled down their nationalistic flames in short order.

High army brass now felt the need to inflict a little civility on the rough living style that had been adopted by the rank and file. Instead of using slit trenches or the nearest bush for calls of nature, it was decided that outhouses would be more elegant. Company D got a new assignment .. building the facilities. Soon rows of two and four holers were lined up at the back of the company area ready for delivery.

One ration of the captured booze had been made at Riva and another came at Udine. On the appointed day, GI cans were filled with ice and champagne. Bottles of cognac were also issued and the party was underway. Most thought they were drinking soda pop when they first tasted the champagne so they drank it accordingly. Many were soon either out or out of control. Some chased a farmer's daughter around a barn with a furious old man looking on. They came closer to being casualties than they had during some of the battles. Almost to a man the hangovers next day were monumental. Many could not face champagne for years to come.

Soon, all sorts of extracurricular activities were implemented to keep the soldiers busy. A baseball league was organized. Passes into Udine were easy to get. They had a movie house, a couple saloons and a goodly group of willing and able young ladies. This part of Italy had been liberated by the British 8th Army so competition with ski troopers for available companionship was spirited.

Almost everyone in the company got to visit Venice. Trucks provided a bus service for one day, 125 mile, trips. Venice was one of the few cities that was almost untouched by the war. One group of Company D engineers was probably typical .. they rode gondolas in the canals, visited Saint Marks Square, fed the pigeons, took lots of pictures, watched a Scotch military drill, complete with bagpipes and kilts, and toured St. Marks Cathedral. Intermixed with the antiquity were stops at the local saloons. There were always a few who came close to missing the last truck home including our leader, Capt. Nagel.

An elementary school teacher made her nearby classroom available and offered to teach Italian to any soldiers interested. She was paid in "C" rations for her services. She was a plumpish motherly type lady who spoke no English. A few engineers from D Company attended school a couple afternoons each week, sat in seats designed for 7 year old kids and learned all about Italian grammar.

The teacher was a very gentle lady. There were lots of laughs from everyone in the class but they didn't improve their Italian much. Teacher wanted her Army students to learn Italian grammar just like her kids. The soldiers really didn't care about "pasato antquo" .. one of the many "tenses" in Italian so the program folded pretty fast.

Sergeant Hampton was shipped off to a one week Bailey Bridge school in Rome. As could be expected, little attention was paid to building bridges with all of the attractions of Rome easily accessible.

Corporal Johnson and several others were sent to become a part of the staff at a WAC (Woman's Army Corps) Rest Camp in one of the large hotels at the Lido in Venice. Tough duty .. probably more than they could handle. PFC Lunday and one soldier from each battalion in the division were enrolled at the Army University in Florence. This school was established in a fascist military school on the Arno River and some of the classes were taught at the University of Florence. Their best moment came when they got to spend a few minutes with Jinx Falkenberg.

One of the best deals involved a platoon sized group of mountain troops specially chosen to accompany the Brazilian Expeditionary Force back to Rio for a heroes welcome. From Division Headquarters, word was passed that any soldier a minimum of six feet tall would be considered for the trip. They were guests of the Brazilian government and treated like visiting royalty.

- **OFF TO JAPAN**

Toward the end of July the good life came to an end. The 10th Mountain Division was selected to participate in the war in the Pacific. All of the scattered personnel were suddenly assembled in preparation for three months of redeployment training in the U.S.

Company D moved to the outskirts of Florence and bivouacked in a field on the banks of the Arno River. All of the "pup" tents were aligned in precise military fashion. Regular army regiments had again set in and no one, including the officers, could get very enthused about that. The troops knew that their destination was Japan but none of the details were discussed. In fact, they were known to only a select special few. Some soldiers with special skills were sent directly from Italy to the Philippines.

Much later, the detailed invasion plan was made public. All of the troops were scheduled to get more amphibious and assault training in the U.S., followed by a trip to the far East. The 10th Mountain Division was to be a part of the "Coronet" phase of the invasion of the main Japanese island of Honshu. This offensive was scheduled for the spring of 1946. The Mountain Troops were to be the floating reserve nine miles above Tokyo Bay supporting landings by the 3rd Marines, 9th Infantry and the 2nd Armored Divisions.

- **THE RETURN HOME**

The return route was to be the same as it was moving into Italy. It started with a ride on the forty and eights. Most of Headquarters platoon were assigned a freight car that had its floor covered with powdered sulfur .. it really smelled bad. Straw had been spread over the noxious material but didn't help much. There was insufficient room so the soldiers took turns sitting or lying down. A scheduled departure date from Naples, of July 26, was

achieved with no problems except for a lot of sore muscles.

The homeward passage was on the converted luxury liner Mount Vernon now renamed the USS West Point. This was a very nice trip. It took only seven days on calm seas with sunny blue skies. Enlisted men even got to eat sitting down in a dining room the size of an auditorium.

On the trip across the Navy held gunnery practice. Helium filled balloons were launched from the stern of the ship for the machine gunners to use as targets. Watching from the deck above were a bunch of nurses. Some wise guy soldiers thought it would be funny if they launched some balloons of their own to entertain the girls. Soon there must have been over a hundred GI condoms gently floating in the air.

Again, the destination was Newport News, Virginia. The first sight of land was welcomed by cheers from every passenger. Some of the soldiers, from other divisions, had been overseas for over four years. Many of them broke down and cried. The date was August 1, 1945.

Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia was home for the next few days. On the first day a steak dinner was served by German Prisoners of War. Fresh cold milk had been totally missing in the overseas diet so it was consumed in copious amounts. Soldiers were allowed to eat as many steaks as they could eat. The plan from here was for everyone to go to his induction center and, from there, to start a 30 day redeployment furlough. At then end of this time, the division was to be stationed in Camp Carson in Colorado Springs for training.

About half the troops were across the country on August 6, 1945, when word came that an atomic bomb had been dropper on Hiroshima. None of the troops or civilians understood completely what kind of a weapon this really was.

One group of men from the 10th were destined for Fort Douglas Utah. At the Salt Lake City station the train was surrounded with MPs. Buses were waiting and guards were all over the place. At Fort Douglas, the troops were assembled in a quarantine area and given the news. It was to be complete isolation for some undetermined number of days. A case of spinal meningitis had been diagnosed at Camp Patrick Henry and these men were considered carriers. How naive can some people be?

This was just the news that soldiers returning from combat want to hear. There was simply no way this group could be isolated. Within minutes they were all over town. None had passes and they simply climbed the fence or walked out of camp. For the first time in its history the Ft. Douglas PX, which was also off limits to these soldiers, was out of beer .. it was cooling in the wash basins in the barracks. About every half hour the MPs would return a group from the city. Some of the same soldiers came back three or four times. Within a day the medical people gave up and the quarantine was lifted. Another battle won.



Going home could be very traumatic for many of the soldiers who traveled any distance on the trains. The mood of everyone in the country was festive and all of the travelers wanted to party .. including most of the civilians. Lounge cars were jammed and soldiers were treated as heroes by the civilians. Many of the returning veterans were so hung over when they got home their families likely thought they had been shell shocked.

On August 9th, before most had completed their leave, a second atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki. That finished the job so on September 9, the Japanese surrendered unconditionally. With this news the army , caught unprepared for the quick surrender, began disband its largely civilian armies. Most of the troops went to Camp Carson, Colorado where the division was to be demobilized. A point system was established based on length of service, medals awarded and overseas time. Those with sufficient points were immediately sent to a separation center. Others were reassigned to other still active units in other parts of the country.

It was a time of mixed emotions for the men of Company D. Many of them had soldiered together through thick and thin for almost three years. For most, a return to civilian life couldn't come soon enough. However, with each new day, solid relationships that had been built over a period of years were dissolved by nothing more than a simple hand shake and a promise to keep in touch. Everyone seemed to unconsciously realize that a milestone had been passed. The innocence of youth had, long since, been irrevocably dispelled and the recent shared experiences, had left their lives indelibly marked.

There was little to do while the soldiers of the 10th Mountain were waiting at Camp Carson. Military discipline had virtually ceased and an early winter had brought snow to the Rockies. The quartermaster was well supplied with ski outfits and almost every day a truck was available to go to one of the ski hills. Bethoud Pass, west of Denver, was about the closest so that became a popular spot.

Finally, on November 22, 1945, the 126th Mountain Engineering Battalion was decommissioned. As an organization it ceased to exist. After that day, soldiers who still had army skis in their possession were told to simply ship them home because the division quartermaster no longer existed.

Discharged soldiers got a bonus called "mustering out" pay .. most were about \$300.00. All of the soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division were awarded service medals that included; American Service Medal, European African Middle Eastern Service Medal and the World War II Victory Medal. There were also two battle Stars for the North Apennine and Po Valley campaigns. Most also had a Good Conduct Medal and then there were the Purple Hearts for those wounded in action and the medals for valor such as the Bronze and Silver Stars. The final award was nicknamed by recipients, "Ruptured Duck". This was a little gold colored eagle, the badge worn by discharged service personnel. No one had civilian clothes so this was the badge of a civilian in army clothes.

The Tramway Company had melted into history. Few of its members even gave a thought to the fact that they had participated in a small segment of U.S. Military history. As

citizen soldiers their goal was to get on with their lives. That's exactly what they did. Many stayed in the construction business, some finished their college education and others became successful businessmen in a variety of industries. To a man they are proud of what they accomplished in a few short months. If you don't believe it just ask one.

***END***

## APPENDIX 1

### COMPANY D ROSTER

Members of Company D are listed below by platoon. The city, if listed, is from the last known address. The job assignments are based on the Military Occupational Specialty Code where they are known. Not all information, such as rank or platoon assignment is known for each soldier.

#### Headquarters platoon;

**Tech-5 Lee E. Ables;** Baldwin Park, California; Cook.

**Tech-5 Alvie Allen;** Walron, Arkansas; Cat skinner; Killed in action.

**Simon E. Bickel Jr.;** Cincinnati, Ohio; Camp Claiborne; Supply Clerk.

**Staff Sgt. Raymond (Ray) A. Biernbaum;** Illinois; Motor Sergeant; Bronze Star medal and Legion of Merit.

**Tech-4 Bernard H. Boyd;** Gary, Indiana; Mechanic; Camp Claiborne; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Walter j. Burns;** Decatur, Illinois; Cooks Helper;

**Staff Sgt. Nelson E Carver;** Bagley, Minnesota; Chief Mechanic; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Robert F. Cochran;** Huachuca City, Arizona (formerly Stowe, Vermont); Driver.

**Tech-5 Virgil (Tulsey) Davis;** Coweta, Oklahoma; Air compressor operator and driver.

**Tech-5 Emerson H. Dudley;** Grand Junction, Colorado; Driver

**Tech-5 George J. Finley;** Helena, Montana; Cook.

**Pfc Edwin (Ed) J. Foss;** Bay City, Michigan

**Pfc Clarence A. Fritz;** Elkton Michigan; Cooks helper.

**Tech-5 Allen R. Green;**

**Tech-4 Vernon L. Grove;** Tractor mechanic.

**Tech- 5 Foster C. Handy;** Pearce, Arizona (formery Detriot, Michigan); Car skinner; Bronze Star.

**Tech-5 E. R. Hannah;** Rogersville, Alabama; Driver

**Cpl. James A. Harris;** Seminole, Oklahoma; Clerk.

**1st Sgt. Robert (Bob) G. Langer;** Erie, Pennsylvania; 1st Sergeant for Company D; Bronze Star.

**Tech-5 Carroll (Scottie) A. Loshbaugh;** Columbus, Nebraska; Camp Claiborne; Driver.

**Victor L. Loy;** Cleveland, Ohio; Cook

**Clem W. Lubers;** Point, Texas; Cook

**Pfc Philip (Phil) A. Lunday;** Santa Fe, New Mexico; Mechanics helper.

**Tech-5 John G. Mackey;** Hibbing, Minnesota; Cat Skinner/driver.

**1st Lt. Harold McKay;** Sacramento, California; Company & Platoon Commander.

**Tech-5 Tod R. Mikesell;** Stratford, Missouri; Driver.

**Tech-5 Alvin (Al) L. Monroe;** Carlsbad, New Mexico (formerly Goodrich, Michigan); Camp Claiborne; Company Clerk and Messenger.

**Pfc Owen O. Morehouse**; Olympia, Washington; Cook.  
**Tech-5 James W. Morgan**; Enid, Oklahoma; Camp Claiborne; Driver.  
**Tech-5 Fred E. Muller**; Saddle River, New Jersey; Mechanic.  
**Tech-5 Herbert (Herb) L. Musgrave**; Hutsonville, Illinois; Camp Claiborne; Driver.  
**Capt. Fred A. Nagel**; Denver, Colorado; Company Commander; Bronze Star.  
**Tech-4 Chester C. Napier**; Hazard, Kentucky; Radio Operator.  
**Tech-5 Alfred Nason**; Stevens, South Dakota; Driver.  
**Tech-5 Lawrence J. Prodhomme**; Driver, Colorado.  
**Cpl. Simon G. Salus**; New York, New York; Supply Clerk.  
**Staff Sgt. Matt A. Sanpaka**; Stonington, Michigan; Mess Sergeant.  
**Pfc Joseph F. Sedlacek**; Basic Engineer.  
**Tech-5 James R. Seip**; Englewood, Colorado; Cat Skinner; Bronze Star.  
**Tech-4 Herschel L. Simpson**; Radio Operator.  
**Pfc Louis H. Siscoe**; Lansing, Michigan; Driver - Truck and Motorcycle; Camp  
**Sgt. Arthur S. Stankovich**; Shingleton, Michigan; Mechanic Wounded in Action; Bronze Star.  
**Tech-4 Joseph C. Strzyz**; Buffalo, New York; Cook.  
**Tech-5 Edgar Thibodeau**; E. Merrinack, New Hampshire; Cat Skinner.  
**Tech-5 John A. Warchol**; Coatsville, Pennsylvania; Mail Clerk.  
**Tech-5 Harold J. Weiske**; Joliet, Illinois; Radio Operator.  
**Tech-5 John L. Williams**; Morton, Texas; Heavy Equip. Oper.  
**Pfc Marvin C. Withrow**; Frankfort, Kentucky; Cook.  
**Staff Sgt. Michael Yevchak**; Sharon, Pennsylvania; Supply Sgt.; Bronze Star.

**1st Platoon**

**Pfc Charles L. Bailey**; Knoxville, Tennessee; Bronze Star.  
**Pfc Virgil L Burch**; Springdale, Washington; Rigger.  
**Pfc Karl J. Caster**; Toledo, Ohio; Rigger.  
**Pfc Raymond (Ray) Cleverly**.  
**Pfc Ernest B. Cobo**; Denver, Colorado; Repairman.  
**Pfc Clifford (Cliff) C. Craig**; Basic Engineer.  
**Pfc John P. Foley**; Driver.  
**Tech-5 Edward H. Foster**; Philpot, Kentucky; Electrician.  
**Tech-4 Guiel (Fritzie) H. Fritz**; Leavenworth, Washington; Weapons Repair.  
**Pfc Lloyd F. Gibbons**; Kelso, Washington.  
**Pfc Clarence (Whitey) Gilbert**; White River Junction, Vermont; Carpenter.  
**Pfc Lyly L. Gillispie**; Rigger.  
**Pfc Floyd (Greg) Grigory**; Caruthersville, Missouri; Repairman.  
**Sgt. Charles (Chuck) Hampton**; Sardis, British Columbia (formerly Tacoma,

Washington); Squad Leader; Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster.

**Pfc William H. Hardin**; Basic Engineer.

**Pfc Leslie A. Hirschfeld**; Los Angeles, California; Water Technician.

**Tech-5 Norris R. Holland**; Rocky Mount, Virginia; Carpenter.

**Sgt. Charles B. Hull**; Westwood, New Jersey; Squad Leader; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Robert J. Jameson**.

**Cpl. Cleveland (Johnny) Johnson**; Mation, South Carolina; Asst. Squad Leader.

**Pfc Carroll L. Johnson**; Madison, Wisconsin; Basic Engineer; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Hormisdas G. Lambert**; Basic Engineer.

**Pfc Charles W. Lampert**; St. Louis, Missouri.

**Pfc James M. Larue**; Hinchey, Michigan; Basic Engineer.

**Tech-4 Charles F. Lockart**; Wichata, Kansas; Bridge Builder.

**Pfc Edgar A. Logan**; Marianna, Arkansas; Driver.

**Pfc Harold J. Lustig**; Cook, Minnesota; Carpenter.

**George L. Lytle**; New Plymouth, Idaho.

**Pfc Joseph (Joe) Martino**; Glendale, Arizona; Electrician.

**1st Lt. Donald McKernan**; Platoon Commander; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Howard A. Mettling**; Bridge Builder.

**Pfc Soloman Miller**; Supply Clerk.

**Tech-5 Wilson (Willie P.) P. Miller**; Craig, Colorado; Tool Supply Clerk

**Pfc Ole H. Oseth**; Fort Lyons, Kansas.

**Pfc Charles (Charlie) H. Pruitt**; North Carolina; Carpenter.

**Tech-5 Noise (Rod) B. Rodriguez**; Louisiana; Cat Skinner; Bronze Star.

**Tech-5 Leo J. Schultz**; Mechanic.

**Pfc Walter P. Seremet**; Light Machine Gunner.

**1st Lt. John H. Sheahan**; Ridgewood, New Jersey (formerly Brooklyn, New York); Platoon  
Commander; Bronze Star.

**Cpl. Frank L. Simpson**; St. Louis, Missouri; Asst. Squad Leader; Bronze Star.

**Tech-5 Ollie Smallwood**; Marietta, Georgia; Driver.

**Pfc Eugene Stewart**; St. Frances, Arkansas; Driver.

**Pfc Richard (Dick) E. Sweet**; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Camp Claiborne; Driver.

**Staff Sgt. James P. Trexler**; Spencer, North Carolina; Platoon Sgt.; Bronze Star.

**Cpl. Rakph O. Underdahl**; Minot, North Dakota; Asst. Squad Leader.

**Earl O. Utsey Jr.**; Camp Claiborne; Abbeville, South Carolina.

**Pfc Bruce Volb**; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Repairman.

**Sgt. Mark M. Waltich**; Tunkhannok, Pennsylvania; Squad Leader; Wounded in Action.

**Staff Sgt. John R. Williamson**; Ben Hills, Georgia; Platoon Sgt.

**Pfc Herman Wolkowicz**; Monogahela, Pennsylvania; Electrician; Camp Claiborne; Bronze  
Star.

## 2nd Platoon

**Pfc J. D. Bailey**; Owensboro, Kentucky; Bridge Builder.  
**Pfc Keith R. Bailie**; Waukesha, Wisconsin; Repairman.  
**Pfc Irvin C. Bohl**; Cincinnati, Ohio; Bridge Builder.  
**Pfc Clarence L. Burgess**; Des Moines, Iowa; Basic Engineer.  
**Tech-5 Ansel C. Carroll**; Brigham, Utah; Carpenter; Bronze Star.  
**Sgt. John J. Clark**; Winchester, Tennessee; Squad Leader; Wounded in Action.  
**Pfc Anthony (Tony) J. Collava**; Racine, Wisconsin. Carpenter.  
**Pfc Bernard Conway**; Berlin, New Hampshire; Rigger; Bronze Star.  
**Cpl. Herbert W. Easterling**; Mansfield, Ohio; Asst. Squad Leader.  
**Tech-5 Joseph L. Everhart**; Winston Salem, South Carolina; Driver.  
**Pfc Edward J. Farrell**; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Basic Engineer.  
**Pfc John Futo**; Cleveland, Ohio; Basic Engineer.  
**Pfc James B. Galloway**; Denver, Colorado.  
**Tech-5 Francis X. Haas**; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Electrician.  
**Pfc Edward G. Hayes**; Bronze Star.  
**Staff Sgt. Peter Jackson**; Fort Scott, Kansas; Platoon Sgt.  
**Pfc William C. Jackson**; Emerson, Washington.  
**Pfc George R. Johnson**; Washington, DC; Repairman.  
**Pfc Joseph A. Kurowski**; Brooklyn, New York; Electrician.  
**Pfc August E. Kiwimagi**; Everett, Washington; Basic Engineer.  
**Pfc Bernardus M. Kos**.  
**Pfc Ralph E. Kreittler**; Carpenter.  
**Pfc Henry L. Layden**; Hertford, North Carolina; Basic Engineer; Wounded in Action.  
**Pfc John A. LeFevre**; Basic Engineer.  
**1st Lt. Robert (Bob) B. Martin**; Los Alamitos, California; Platoon Commander.  
**Pfc James R. Morgareidge**; Buffalo, New York; Basic Engineer.  
**Cpl. Nils H. Nelson**; Aptos, California; Asst. Squad Leader.  
**Pfc Mervin G. Nyborg**; Proctor, Minnesota; Carpenter; Bronze Star.  
**Tech-5 William (Bill) M. Palm**; Enola, Pennsylvania; Driver.  
**Pfc Winfred F. Payton**; St. Louis, Missouri; Driver.  
**Pfc George A. Poswell**.  
**Pfc Thomas O. Rauls**; Benton Harbor, Michigan; Carpenter.  
**Pfc Robert L. Roland**; Antitank Gun Crewman.  
**Sgt. Gene L. Skramstad**; Cooperstown, North Dakota; Squad Leader.  
**Pfc James. D. Sparks**; Jenkins, Kentucky; Repairman.  
**Pfc Elroy J. Spatchek**; Reedsville, Wisconsin.  
**Pfc Robert (Bob) C. Stough**; York, Pennsylvania; Driver.  
**Tech-5 Marvin (Marv) E. Taylor**; Denver, Colorado; Tool Supply Clerk; Bronze Star.  
**Sgt. John J. Tierney**; Spokane, Washington; Squad Leader; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Danial B. Toews**; Enid, Oklahoma; Driver.

**Tech-4 Edwin D. Welch**; Castle Rock, Washington; Carpenter.

**Cpl. Earl F. Willey**; Liberty, Nebraska; Asst. Squad Leader; Wounded in Action.

**Tech-5 Oscar J. Wimberley**; Meminnville, Tennessee; Driver.

**Pfc Douglas Winningham**; Oregon; Carpenter.

### 3rd Platoon

**Pfc Sam C. Adkins**.

**Sgt. Lewis M. Altman**; Cripple Creek, Colorado; Squad Leader.

**Sgt. Glen Avry**; Elmira, New York; Squad Leader.

**Pfc Harrison D. Barnes**; Terre Haute, Indiana; Driver.

**Tech-5 Robert Bingham**; Toolroom Keeper; Bronze Star.

**Tech-5 Robert L. Bjornstad**; Sparks, Nevada; Electrician.

**Cpl. William E. Blanchard**; Thermopolis, Wyoming; Asst. Squad Leader; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Clifford J. Bode**; Rifleman.

**Pfc Eugene J. Busch**; Commac, New York; Basic Engineer; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Sam Cathcart**; Endree, South Carolina; Repairman.

**Sgt. Bernard M Charriff**; Miami, Florida (formerly New York City); Squad Leader; Bronze Star.

**Pfc David E. Dellinger**; Buntontown, Tennessee; Repairman.

**Pfc Benjamin H. Dennis**; Rifleman.

**Staff Sgt. Edward Drwal**; Parma, Ohio; Platoon Sgt.; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Ceciel M. Edwards**; Norfolk, Virginia; Basic Engineer; Camp Claiborne; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Ernest Farley**; Buskirk, Kentucky.

**Pfc William Flynn**; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Bronze Star.

**Tech-5 George N. Franz**; Mt. Morris, Michigan; Carpenter.

**Pfc Wilbert E. Goolsby**; Tucson, Arizona; Camp Claiborne; Driver: Wounded in Action.

**2nd Lt. Frank J. Gorman**; Elmhurst, Illinois; Platoon Commander.

**Tech-4 Voy A. Hendrickson**; Woolley, Washington; Carpenter.

**Tech-4 Cecil Howard**; Sherrills Ford, North Carolina; Bridge Builder.

**Pfc Andrew S. Hudnall**; East Bank, West Virginia; Basic Engineer; Bronze Star.

**Sgt. Henry A. LaCaille**; Pond, California (formerly Onterio, Canada); Squad Leader; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Edwin M. Lein**; Mesa, Arizona; Basic Engineer; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Woodrow F. Livingston**; Winona, Minnesota; Basic Engineer.

**Pfc Jewel F. Magee**; Sun Louisiana; Driver.

**Pfc Jack Mitchell**; Portland, Oregon; Asst. Driver.

**Tech-5 Irwin Mushnick**; Carpenter.

**Pfc Norman O'Hara**; Tennessee; Carpenter.

**Pfc William O'Neal Jr**; Basic Engineer.



**Cpl. Harold Olsen**; Ocala, Florida; Camp Claiborne; Asst. Squad Leader.

**Paul J. Perrault**; Ishpeming, Michigan; Driver; Silver Star.

**Pfc William G. Rouse**; Chico, California.

**Pfc James A. Sanborn**; Electrician.

**Pfc John A. Santoro**; Follansbee, Virginia; Carpenter.

**Pfc Robert (Red) C. Schaefer**; Bohemia, New York; Cat Skinner.

**Pfc Arthur H. Siebert**; Spring Valley, Illinois; Electrician; Camp Claiborne.

**Pfc Staley J. Szarwila**; Chicago, Illinois; Carpenter.

**Cpl. Gilbert (Tom) A. Thomure**; St. Genevieve, Missouri; Asst. Squad Leader;  
Wounded in Action.

**Pfc Lester E. Trimble**; Joplin, Missouri; Basic Engineer.

**Tech-5 Vern S. Tucker**; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Driver.

**Pfc Walter L. Wade**; North Carolina; Basic Engineer.

**Pfc William A. Wagner**; Waterloo, Iowa; Rigger; Bronze Star.

**Pfc Charles R. Waneke**; Colorado; Driver.

**Tech-5 Harold A. Washam**; Bronze Star.

**Pfc David M. Yager**; Downingtown, Pennsylvania; Heavy Machine Gunner.

—

## APPENDIX 2

In June, 1940, C. Minot Dole wrote to President Roosevelt volunteering the services of his organization, The National Ski Patrol, in the development of a body of specially trained mountain soldiers. The French had their Chasseurs, the Germans the Alpen Jaeger and the Italians their Alpini. It was becoming increasingly clear to some that America could soon be facing these elite troops on their own terrain. There the matter rested for some months until Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, a member of the American Alpine Club, again broached the subject. Shortly thereafter, two Army Colonels were detailed to study the feasibility of ski troops. Almost immediately it became apparent that winter operations would be impossible without an adequate supply of suitable clothing and equipment. Thus, the Army Quartermaster General established a special unit known as the Office of Research and Development. It was headed by a civilian, George Doriot, a professor of Industrial Management from Harvard University. Working with him was an elite group of America's alpinists who were joined by Australia's prominent Arctic explorer, Sir George Wilkins and the Norwegian Arctic survival expert, Vilhjalmer Stefanson.

Additional impetus for a winter strategy and equipment came from General Simon Buckner, Jr. then head of the Alaska Defense Command. He had been pleading, so far fruitlessly, for appropriate equipment to allow his men to function outdoors in that climate. With England and France already at war, a still neutral United States found, plenty of research and development work to be done. Given the international nature of the team, it is not surprising that ideas were coming from everywhere,

The cleated rubber soles now seen on all hiking boots were the invention of Vitale Bramani, an Italian manufacturer of climbing equipment. Since Italy was the enemy, importation of the soles was impossible. A pair of his boots were found in New Hampshire and were promptly dissected. Soon two rubber manufacturers were turning out soles for American mountain boots.

Climbing ropes presented another problem. Supplies of hemp, an essential rope ingredient, were now unavailable from Italy and the Philippines. Fritz Wiessner, a German immigrant and chemist, knew about a German patent on a product that was called Perlon. This was cross licensed to the Dupont Corporation and was being manufactured into a product called nylon. It was being used for parachute cord and towing gliders. The Plymouth Cordage Company was asked to make up some climbing ropes from nylon. They did so using the same construction pattern as was used with hemp. The nylon ropes proved to have far too much stretch and the weaving formula was revised accordingly.

A tracked vehicle, later called the 'Weasel' had been invented by an Englishman named Geoffrey Pike. The Studebaker Corporation, an American automobile manufacturer, built the first models that were tested on the Athabaska Glacier in Canada. It won out in competition with a Canadian model built by the Bombardier Corporation. The machines undercarriage underwent several design changes to alleviate an alarming tendency to throw the tracks off at the most inconvenient times.

A most critical need was for skis. America had accumulated supplies of the seasoned hickory blanks needed to fabricate skis for the civilian markets. The Europeans, however, had been trying without success to find a satisfactory substitute for hickory, a tree unknown on the Continent. Using ash and a variety of other hardwoods, they had been unsuccessful in laminating a useable product. The glues employed weren't sufficiently strong or durable and the laminated wood tended to split and twist. Now the Army wanted skis and they wanted them in a hurry. The initial order of 70,000 pairs was spread among Northland, Groswald, Flexible Flyer (of sled fame) and the Anderson and Thompson Company of Seattle.

Equally essential was the need for ski wax. There was only one source in America. It was Fritz Wiessner, the aforementioned German immigrant who was a veteran of the Kaiser's First World War.

The Army's initial order was for 600,000 tubes of ski wax to be delivered to Seattle.

And so it went. Also needed were tents and a variety of special clothing. All were subjected to vigorous testing prior to orders being placed. Although much of such testing was carried out by the civilian research and development teams, as the war progressed, soldiers continued doing their favorite thing, carrying out tests on company time.

Concurrent with the equipment acquisition, the matter of a formal ski troops organization was going on. Prior to Secretary of War Stimson's decision to go ahead, skiing was an informal activity on several army posts. These were Fort Deven, Massachusetts, Fort Custer, Michigan, Fort Snelling, Minnesota and Fort Lewis, Washington. The most skiing, by far, was going on at Fort Lewis. Here, a group of soldiers in the 15th Infantry Regiment had been organized into the 15th Infantry Ski Patrol under the command of Captain Paul Lafferty of Eugene, Oregon.

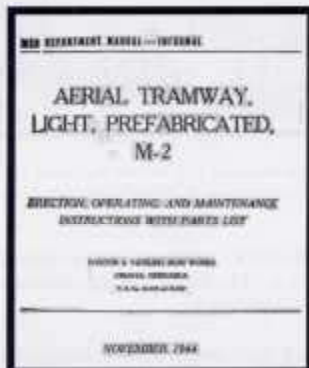
In the meantime, lessons from the current war were being learned by the Army's high command. During the winter of 1940, the Italians suffered 10,000 dead and 20,000 incapacitated by frost bite when they sent flat land troops into the mountains of Albania. The British had suffered a bitter defeat while trying a winter liberation of German occupied Norway. Within the high command, there was a push for camps to train mountain troops for probably battles in Europe. Finally, over the objection of General Leslie McNair, Commander of the Army Ground Forces, the War Department affirmed the need for ski troops. The word quickly reached Fort Lewis where Captain Lafferty started gathering skiers from within the Army's ranks wherever they were. Some even came from Texas, where in its wisdom, the Army had them training for desert warfare.

Eventually, some 55 men were collected and they would become the cadre for the 1st Battalion of the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment. Immediately, an effort was initiated by the War Department to lease Paradise Lodge on Mount Rainier from the National Park Service. The objections of that bureaucracy finally overcome when the army promised not to use fire arms for training within the park.. not even firing blanks. So, after a difficult period of gestation, 1941 the ski troops were born.

Meanwhile, a separate unit had been established at Camp Carson, Colorado that was called the Mountain Training Group. At the time of its formation, their operation was kept independent of the ski troops. During 1942 part of the group worked at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin and late in the year two special companies of Mountain Engineers were among the first to move to Camp Hale, Colorado. Finally, in July, 1943, the 10th Division was formally activated, this unit was shipped to Camp Hale where they formed the Mountain Training Group.

### Appendix Three

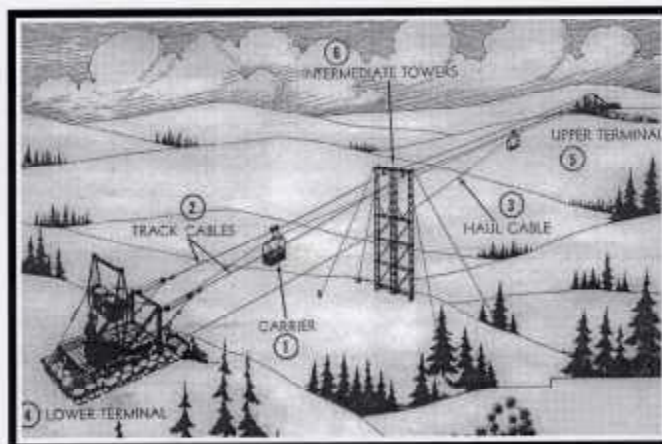
The application and use of aerial tramways goes back over 100 years. Early mining operators erected these devices to move ore from the mine to a mill or processing plant where the terrain was too difficult for ground transportation. Military tramways have been used in Europe since before World War I, and possibly earlier. Most of these were devices for permanent or semipermanent operation with their towers and platforms set in concrete. The tramway being discussed here is described by the Army as "Aerial Tramway, Light, Prefabricated, M - 2".



Above is the front cover of an official tramway manual published by the War Department. It is dated November, 1944, long after all of D Company's training had been completed and just a few short weeks before they shipped overseas to Italy.

Not long after the U.S. got involved in World War II some attention was given to mountain warfare and experimental units were established on the West Coast to evolve and evaluate the military needs. Later the 10th Mountain Division was activated and a training facility constructed at Camp Hale, Colorado. Part of this process was the development of a portable aerial tramway that could be erected in a matter of hours.

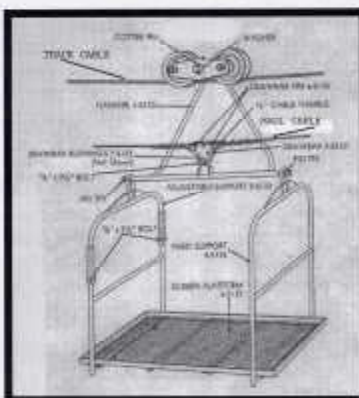
The task of designing this device was assigned to the Stearns Roger Company in Denver, Colorado. Stearns would be classified as an engineering company and worked extensively with the extraction industries in both the mining and oil business. One of their tramway experts, Mr. Robert Heron, was assigned this task. Mr. Heron ultimately became one of the major providers of chair lifts for the ski industry.



In the official manual, this is how the Army pictured a typical tramway installation. It doesn't look much like Riva Ridge.

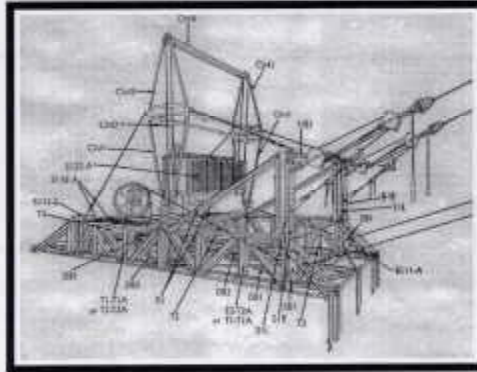
The designer and builder's challenge was to provide modular equipment that could be usefully applied in a wide variety of circumstances. There are seven basic parts or modules to an aerial tramway:

1. One or two carriers that are used to transport men or materials over the terrain spaced so that one is at each end of the system when it is stopped for loading or unloading.
2. Track Cables that support and allow the carriers to move either up or down the cable.
3. A Haul Cable that is attached to the carrier to impart the desired motion from the power supply.

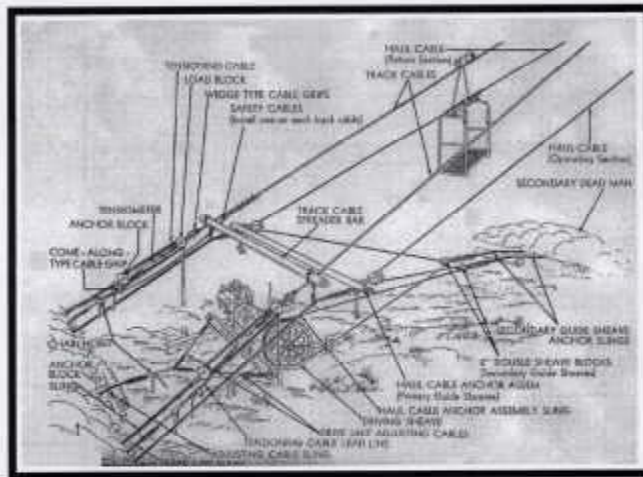


We used a carrier modified to a basket. It was more suited to carrying wounded soldiers and loose supplies.

4. The Lower Terminal provides anchorage for the track cables, a guide for the haul cable and an accommodation for the power supply and operator.



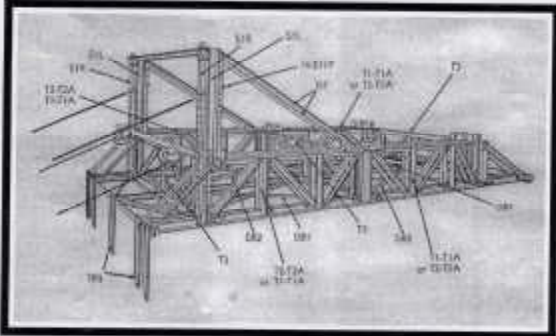
The lower terminal of what the Army called a "light" tramway. There were not enough mules in all of Italy to haul this much iron anywhere. Luckily, they didn't decide to build a "heavy" tramway.



Manual shows a lower terminal set up without the above pictured steel assembly installed. This arrangement was successfully used at both the Riva Ridge and Campidello installations.

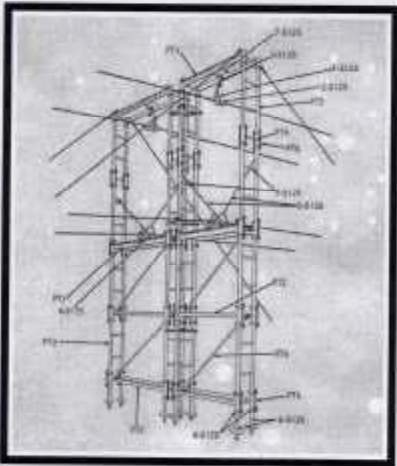


5. A Upper Terminal provides anchorage for the track cables and a guide for the haul cable. Alternatively, the power supply may be mounted in this terminal.



We never used this steel Upper Terminal assembly. Instead, we made up an 'A' frame from logs, suspended the carrier cable from it and then anchored the upper end of the cable.

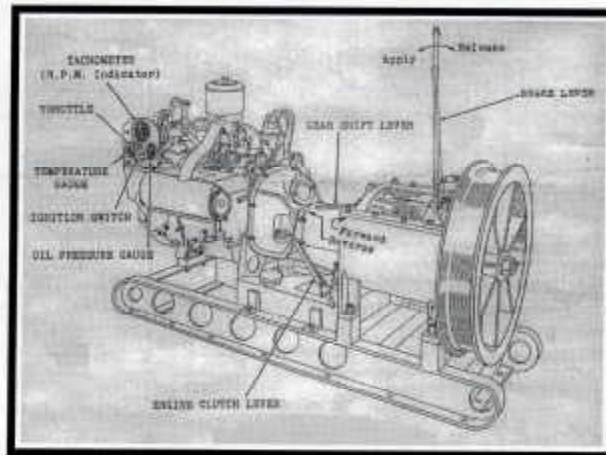
6. Intermediate Towers are erected where needed to support the track cable. The number of towers may vary, depending on the terrain and ground irregularities.



At Riva Ridge, we used log 'A' frames for the Intermediate Towers. At Castellacio, it was all clear span so no Intermediates were needed.



7. A portable, self contained power drive unit.



This is pretty much the same unit we used overseas. It is a Continental air cooled, four cylinder, 45 horsepower aircraft engine almost identical to those used in Piper Cub airplanes. We had three of them, each mounted on a special trailer and maintained by our motor pool mechanics.

One of the primary difficulties of erecting an aerial tramway is the selection of the site. Certain physical conditions can preclude the effective installation of the equipment so considerable experience is needed. Section II of the military manual for the M-2 Tramway describes these requirements;

" A visual survey of the proposed site should be conducted by those who will be in charge of the tramway erection. The selection of the site will be determined by the following technical requirements;

A. The chord slope on the track cables between any towers or tower and terminal must be no greater than 40 degrees from the horizontal.

B. The site should be such that the tramway travels in a straight line between terminals, or deviates only slightly.

C. The site must be accessible by either motor or pack train for transportation of the tramway modules to the site and for movement of supplies to the lower terminal. The upper terminal must be located so supplies can be delivered to the desired objective.

D. Concealment and protection of terminals and right-of-way from enemy observation and action. A site where little or no clearing has been done is less noticeable to aerial observers.

E. Availability of natural anchorages such as trees, stumps, etc., or suitable soil in which anchors can readily be driven.

F. There should be no vertical rock faces, which would greatly increase the difficulty of distributing parts of the tramway along the site.

G. Overhanging or unstable rock or snow ledges should be avoided, due to the possibility of slides.

H. The site must not require location of towers on concave slopes, since this tramway is not equipped with hold-downs for track and haul cables. Convex surfaces can be crossed by the use of several towers.

I. There must be working space at the terminal sites. Where possible level ground, or at least level at right angles to the center line of the tramway, should be selected for the locations. "

Once a site is selected, the erection process can start. The tramway parts and special equipment should arrive at the site in approximately the order they will be used. The military manual suggests the following sequence;

1. Surveying equipment.
2. Communications facilities.
3. Clearing equipment.
4. Tools.
5. Skid hoists and toboggans.
6. Rope fittings.
7. Lower terminal parts.
8. Tower parts.
9. Track cable.
10. Haul cable.
11. Upper terminal parts.
12. Drive unit.

The manual for the tramway contains about 60 pages of detailed instructions and suggestions to help in the erection of the equipment. It is not necessary to cover this information in detail but a little bit has been included to convey the notion that it is no small task to erect such a conveyance under the best of circumstances. Many commentators marveled that it was even attempted on Riva Ridge.

APPENDIX FOUR

RESTRICTED

ARMY SERVICE FORCES  
Engineer Unit Training Center  
Camp Claiborne, Louisiana

Serials }  
Number 302 }

E X H I B I T

28 October 1943

14. Following are 20 enlisted men transferred from the 226th Engr Co (Sep) Camp Hale Colorado so as to arrive c/a 3 Nov 43.  
 (In Charge)  
 Pvt Simon E Bickel Jr 15353297 (480)  
 Pvt Arthur H Siebert 36762381 (383)  
 Pvt Terrance J Jarrett 33998665 (363)  
 Pvt Cecil H Edwards 33645673 (478)  
 Pvt Jefferson B Thomas 37822601 (322)  
 Pvt Herbert L Musgrave 36866449 (345)  
 Pvt Earl O Utsey Jr 36841916 (114)  
 Pvt George F Yuhns Jr 35916083 (114)  
 Pvt Carroll A Lashbaugh 32963796 (152)  
 Pvt Frank Torelli 32994850 (101)  
 Pvt Hermann Volkowicz 33609637 (114)  
 Pvt Gilbert E Goolbsy 39417779 (383)  
 Pvt Harold M Olson 36574310 (383)  
 Pvt Bernard H Doyle 35592868 (322)  
 Pvt James W Morgan 30564331 (345)  
 Pvt Richard B Sweet 36868973 (114)  
 Pvt Beverly J Weaver 36841914 (114)  
 Pvt Jack M Herenberg 32963796 (152)  
 Pvt Alvin L Monroe 36572667 (101)  
 Pvt Louis H Sisco 36671087 (101)

In accordance w/... 30-2216 the 226 will issue eight (8) meal tickets to twenty (20) men for two and two-thirds (2 2/3) days. TC will furn T. TEN, 1-5060 I 431-02 & 0425-26. Auth: 6th Inf Hq 5th Svc 22 Oct 43 file AG 353.3 (General) (9 Sept 43) AG 230.3 and 1st Inf Hq 5th Svc file AG 300.4 (Travel O) 23 Jun 43.

By command of Brigadier General SHIPLETT

JOHN E. MILLER  
Lt Col., A.G.D.,  
Adjutant General

OFFICIALS

*John E. Miller*  
JOHN E. MILLER  
Lt Col., A.G.D.,  
Adjutant General

DISTRIBUTION

45 - CG 361st Engr Regt  
 10 - CG 226th Engr Co (Sep) Camp Hale Colo.  
 5 - En. Hq concerned  
 5 - Camp TC  
 25 - Total

The foregoing order transferred twenty enlisted men who had just completed Basic Training, from Camp Claiborne, Louisiana to the 226th Engineer Company ( Sep ) then at Camp Hale, Colorado. Most of these men remained with Company D until the end of the war.

APPENDIX FIVE

HEADQUARTERS  
126TH MOUNTAIN ENGINEER BATTALION  
APO #345 U. S. ARMY

27 March 1945

CIRCULAR :

NO. 8 :

SECTION I

1. COMPLIMENTATION: The following letter of commendation was received by this organization from Major General George P. Hays, Commanding General, 10th Mountain Division:

\*Subject: Commendation.

To : Commanding Officer, 126th Mountain Engineer Battalion, 10th Mountain Division, APO #345, U. S. Army.

1. I commend you and all members of your command for the recent and exceptionally fine performance of duty in the construction of a road from SPRIILA, Italy, (600238) to point 663 (619234), under most difficult terrain conditions.

2. I am fully cognizant of the all important role that engineers play in any division operation and desire to take this opportunity to extend my appreciation to each and every member of the 126th Mountain Engineer Battalion for the part they played during the recent successes of the 10th Mountain Division.

GEORGE P. HAYS  
Major General, U. S. Army  
Commanding

The foregoing Circular Notice was passed along to Captain Fred Nagel. It was his company that did most of the road building. Initially, it was sent to Major Boyd, Acting Battalion Commander while Colonel Parker recovered from the sniper's wound he sustained during the Mt. Belvedere offensive.



APPENDIX SIX

R-E-S-T-R-I-C-T-E-D  
HEADQUARTERS  
15TH DET., SPECIAL TROOPS, 2ND ARMY  
Camp Hale, Colorado

9 May 1944.

SPECIAL ORDER )  
: E-I-T-R-A-C-T  
NUMBER 106 )

4. The 226th Engineer Combat Company, consisting of five (5) Officers and one hundred eight eight (188) Enlisted Men, is transferred to Camp Carson, Colo., for permanent change of station.

Movement will be made in accordance with the provisions of Letter, Hqs Secor Army, file AG 370.5 (Gen)(GNMBS), dated 22 March 1944, subject: "Instructions Governing Domestic Troop Movements."

Movement will be made without delay.

Movement will be made by Motor.

Movement will be made with authorized equipment on hand.

Upon arrival at destination, Unit is relieved from attached Headquarters 15th Det., Special Troops, 2nd Army, Camp Hale, Colorado and is assigned XVI Corps Secor Army.

1st Lt DONALD R DODSON, O-1104126, is detailed as convoy commander.

1st Lt DODSON and 1st Lt McKay with thirty seven (37) Enlisted Men, (Drivers & Advance Party) to Camp Carson o/s 9 May 1944 for the purpose of transporting equipment. 1st Lt DODSON will return with fourteen (14) EM (Drivers) for the purpose of transporting personnel.

TDN: 1-5200 P 433-01-02-03-04-07-08 A 212/40425

Auth: Ltr, AG 370.5 (Misc 2nd A) (GNMBS) Hqs 2nd Army, subj: Transfer of 226th Eng Combat Co to Camp Carson, Colo., dated 3 May 1944.

By order of Colonel SPALDING:

M. M. TORRES,  
Capt., F. A.,  
Adjutant

OFFICIAL:

*M. M. Torres*  
M. M. TORRES,  
Capt., F. A.,  
Adjutant

DISTRIBUTION "C"

R-E-S-T-R-I-C-T-E-D

The company was in the process of complying with the foregoing transfer order when it was abruptly cancelled. A new order was issued sending us on detached service to A. P. Hill Military Reservation in the the State of Virginia.

## APPENDIX SEVEN

### Company D .. 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion

The 126th was officially created by an order issued April 1, 1942. The first cadre was assembled at Camp Carson on September 14, 1942. On November 25, 1942 the unit was moved to Camp Hale, Colorado. At that time, the battalion consisted of Company A and Company B plus a medical detachment. Company C was activated on May 3, 1943. Company D, made up of personnel from the 226th Engineer Combat Company, was assigned to the 126th on November 1, 1944.

Company D, as were most military combat companies, was made up of four platoons; Headquarters, 1st, 2nd and 3rd. Headquarters included the Company Commander and his staff, supply, cooks and bakers, the motor pool, the company clerk and the First Sergeant. Noncoms in headquarters mostly carry the designation of a technician's rank. For example, a technician 5th grade (Tech-5) is the same rank and pay as a corporal.

Each of the three line platoons consisted of a commanding officer, a platoon sergeant (staff sergeant), and three squads of twelve men each. Each squad was lead by a buck sergeant with a corporal as assistant squad leader. Most of these troops were given combat missions such as mine clearing, repairing roads and crewing assault boats.

All the equipment assigned to Company D was technically under the control of Motor Pool Staff Sergeant Ray Biernbaum. Drivers and machine operators were scattered among the different platoons. Four fully qualified mechanics and about the same number of grease monkeys worked under the supervision of Staff Sergeant Nelson Carver. The following approximate numbers list the company's equipment that was routinely maintained and operated.

Bulldozers .. 2 - D7 Caterpillars and 1 - R4 Caterpillar. The D7's are larger machines and the R4 is considerably smaller.

Prime Movers .. 3 - Extra large six by six trucks with fifth wheel arrangements to pull trailers.

Flatbed trailer .. 3 - used for transporting the Caterpillar tractors when pulled by the prime movers.

Truck Mounted Air Compressor .. 1 only complete with receiver and air powered tools such as jack hammers and even a power saw.

Arc Welder .. 1 only trailer mounted.

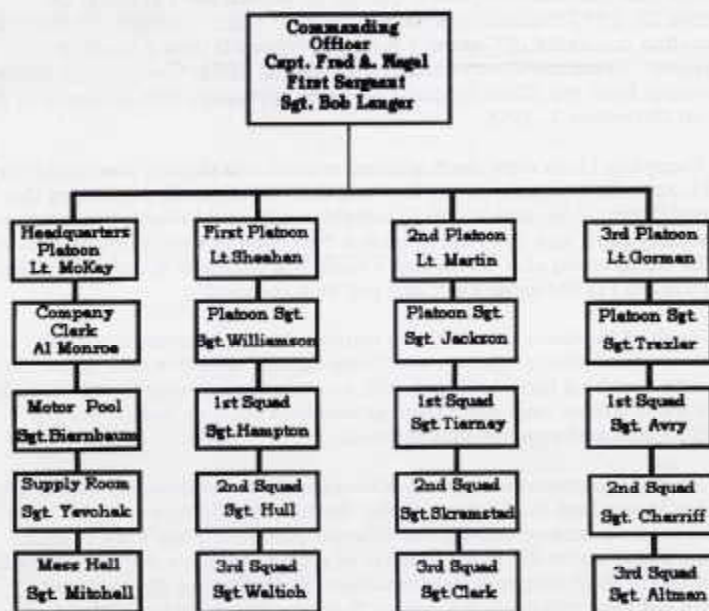
Jeeps .. Approximately 12 including the one that Captain Nagel shot in the glove compartment. The drivers were dispersed among the squads.

Weapons Carriers .. Approximately 6 one ton four by fours.

2 - 1/2 ton four by four trucks .. approximately

Utility trailers .. approximately 12 used for hauling fuel, spare parts and general cargo.

Tramway Power Units .. Three each, trailer mounted.



The roster for Company D is found in Appendix One. When the 126th Engineers were transferred with the 10th Mountain Division to Camp Swift, Texas on June 28th, 1944, it was officially called the 126th Light Combat Battalion. When the " Mountain " designation was authorized for the Division on the 10th of December, 1944, the name was changed to the 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion.

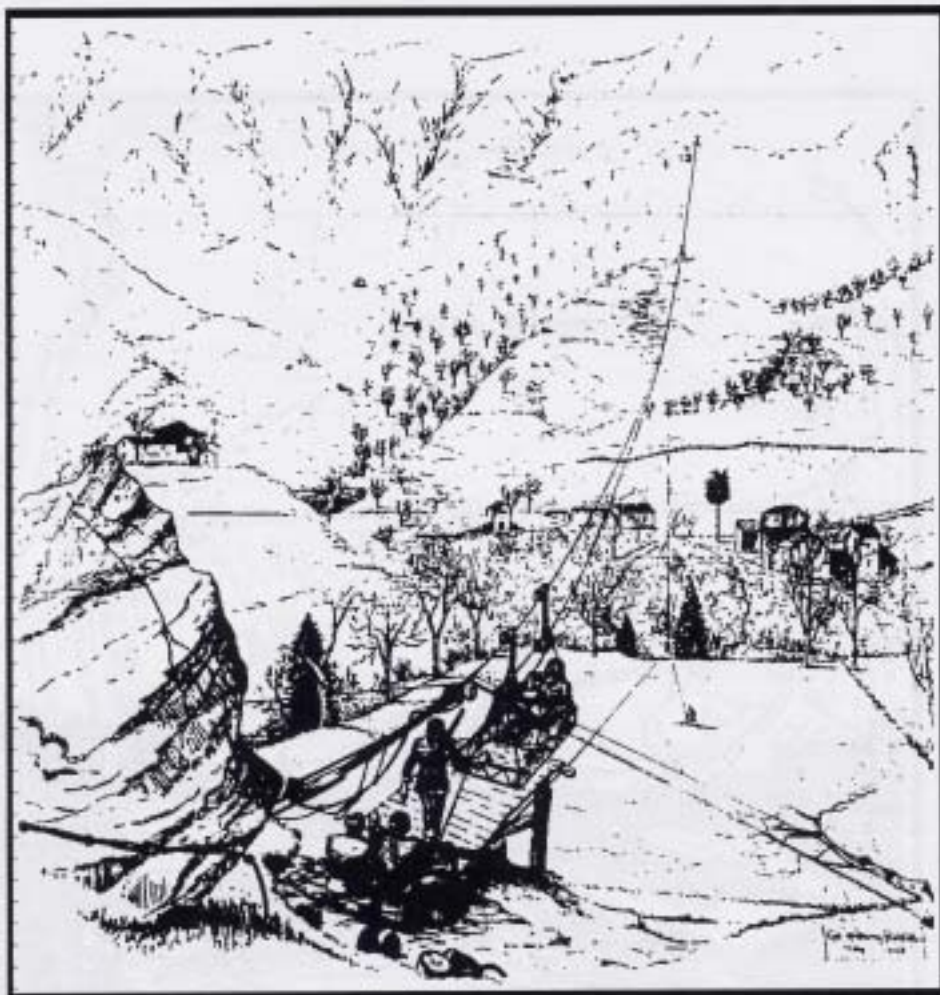
Of the 78 casualties suffered by the 126th Engineers, eleven ( 11 ) were soldiers from Company D. One was killed and ten were wounded. In the Engineer battalion, Companies A and B had the most killed and wounded .. 19 for each company.

Medals for valor included the Bronze and Silver Stars. Of the 169 medals awarded in the battalion, forty four ( 44 ) went to Company D personnel. This included one ( 1 ) Silver Star.



## APPENDIX EIGHT

### The Riva Ridge - Mt. Cappel Buso M - 2 Light Tramway ( The first combat use of an aerial tramway in U. S. Military history. )



#### Statistics

Approximate slope distance - 1700 feet	Maximum rated distance - 2000 feet
Vertical rise - 602 feet	Round trip time - 12 minutes
Maximum rated tons/day - 20	Average load - 400 pounds
Construction time - 2 platoons/8 hours	Operating crew - 12 men/shift

First Day's Operation: Delivered five tons of supplies and evacuated 30 wounded and 20 dead. Reduced time of delivery and evacuation by two hours and eliminated about 40 % of the mule haul.

( Litho from Bob Langer collection )

## APPENDIX TEN

### THE CONSTRUCTION OF CAMP HALE, COLORADO

The following information is taken from "The Invisible Men on Skis" by Rene L. Coquoz, a pioneer resident of Leadville, Colorado.

On February 27, 1942, the following item appeared in the Leadville Herald Democrat.

A U.S. Army winter training camp at Pando - a project considered once before, then dropped - today loomed as a very definite possibility. Senator Ed Johnson in Washington, D. C. advises that he has succeeded in getting Pando back in the picture for winter training. Prospects for its selection appear excellent. About ten days ago, a group of Army officers was in Leadville for the purpose of looking into the possibilities at Pando and stated that there was a good chance of locating a winter training camp there.

Leadville swung into immediate action to bring the proposed camp to their area. It is estimated that the camp would attract some 30,000 new citizens to the district. The City Council and County Commissioners therefore established full time health units to regulate sanitary, water, milk and other health conditions in recognition that Wyoming and Washington states were still in the competition.

On March 31, 1942 the Herald Democrat reported a telegram received from their Senator Ed Johnson. It read

**War Department just advised that cantonment at Pando to cost in excess of five million dollars was approved.**

With this announcement, city and county officials began the task of complying with the numerous federal regulations governing the operation of these facilities. Construction would employ large numbers of outsiders so the city asked for state help in providing a trailer park to include a children's playground, garbage disposal and an adequate potable supply of water. The Army is also looking for an emergency landing field site.

Announcing the new camp triggered an immediate influx of outside workers. Leadville's mayor appealed to the public to provide room and board for those who otherwise had no place to stay. Many of the mines around Leadville had long since stopped producing so there were a number of boarded up company houses available. Due to a shortage of materials caused by the war effort, a limit of \$500.00 was placed on each remodeling job. Later, Eagle County was declared a defense zone and this restriction was lifted.

As a boom town from its very beginning, Leadville supported a full time Red Light district. The lights were ordered turned out forthwith but this only caused the hookers to spread out into the city. The recently reinforced police department, ever vigilant, quickly rounded up most of these ladies who were escorted out of town. Those few remaining were compelled to report every three weeks for examination by the county physician. Gambling, an enduring institution in mining camps around the world was shut right down - heavy fines were imposed to get the message delivered properly. At most City Council meetings, new laws were passed to bring Leadville into compliance with U.S. Public Health or Colorado State Health regulations.

The site at Pando was a sheltered natural bowl on land owned by the U.S. Forest Service. The Eagle River, here near its headwaters, was a modest stream that traversed it from one end to the other. Some ten miles north of Leadville, it enjoyed access by both highway and rail. Adjacent power lines would provide electricity. Near the Continental Divide, it was surrounded by mountains over 14,000 feet tall and enjoyed plenty of snow each winter.

Construction started in April, 1942 and it was completed November 16, 1942. The construction crews were housed in some 15,000 trailers scattered in every direction. Five thousand men and women were employed at the height of construction. On June 14, 1942 it was designated Camp Hale in honor of Brigadier General Irving Hale, a Denver boy and an honors graduate of West Point Military Academy. When completed, it consisted of some four hundred separate buildings, barracks, churches, theaters, recreational buildings, maintenance shops, hospitals and the like. Given the wartime constraints and high altitude, getting it build in a bit over six months was a magnificent achievement. The enormous numbers employed at the new camp quickly overwhelmed the ability of local merchants to supply basic needs. By 11:00 A.M. every morning, stores were sold out of milk products, bread and eggs. Stores established ration lists so that families with babies could, at least be assured milk. In spite of nation rationing, in fact shortages persisted throughout the war years. In late November, 1942, the War Production Board banned the sale of whipping cream. It was total war indeed.

The first troops occupied the new camp in December, 1942. They were the men of the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment who transferred in from Fort Lewis, Washington. In spite of the conscientious clean up effort mounted by Leadville's officials, the Army's vigilant brass declared the town out of bounds. Leadville cried 'foul' and scheduled meetings of protest with their Army counterparts. As civilians, they were unaccustomed to the 'molasses in January' pace at which the Army decision process functioned.

It was not until February 24th, 1943 that Leadville was declared safe enough for the ski troops. The following Saturday night, several hundred intrepid mountaineers occupied various bars and restaurants lining main street. Later, city officials declared at the exemplary behavior during the evening. No fights, disturbances or anyone looking for trouble. These soldiers were not like the rambunctious hard case miners that had populated Leadville in the past.

Now that mutual good will had been established, on March 12, 1943 the Army proposed to entertain willing young ladies in the area to a dance to be held at the camp's commodious Service Center. Music would be provided by a select group of musicians from the Division's brass band. They were joined by additional mountain bred beauties from nearby Buena Vista, Eagle and Red Cliff. The evening was a great success and the Saturday night dance subsequently became an institution at Camp Hale.

The citizens of Leadville faithfully entertained and otherwise supported the men of Camp Hale until their departure in July of 1944 for Camp Swift, Texas where the final touches of their training were applied. The camp was mothballed shortly after departure of the ski troops. It was reactivated again in 1953 to be periodically used for winter training exercises until 1965 when the Army turned it over to the General Services Administration for disposition. Today, at the Pando site little evidence remains of the thousands of eager soldiers who passed through. However, at the foot of the Cooper Hill ski slope is a large bronze plaque mounted on Rocky Mountain granite upon which are inscribed the names of nearly 1000 ski troopers who died in the service of their country.



## APPENDIX ELEVEN

### 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion Chronology

- April, 1942 Started construction of Camp Hale.
- August 27, 1942 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion authorized. Assigned to Mountain Training Center, Camp Carson, Colorado. Previous lineage was the 41st Engineer Battalion.
- Sept. 14, 1942 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion activated. Started with Company A & B. Frail was ranking officer.
- Nov. 16, 1942 Construction of Camp Hale completed.
- Nov. 25, 1942 126th Engineers arrive at Camp Hale.
- Feb. 19, 1943 Fire destroyed Company A garage and 30 vehicles. Unknown Aerial tramway modified .. tested by contract to Stearns Rogers Company in Denver .. Cable provided by Roebling Wire Rope Co. also of Denver .. as many as nine versions may have been tested by Company A later at Camp Hale.
- May 3, 1943 Company C of 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion is activated.
- June 11, 1943 87th Mountain Infantry and Company B of the 126th Engineers to Fort Ord to take amphibious training in preparation for Kiska invasion.
- June 27, 1943 Two rail cars of artillery shells catch fire and explode in Grand Junction, Colorado. Company A aided officials in removing and detonating the ammunition.
- July 10, 1943 Co. A of the 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion is redesignated as 226th Engineer Motorized Co. ( Sep ).
- July 15, 1943 The 226th is detached from MTC and assigned to 2nd Army. Roger Frail was first Company Commander.
- July 15, 1943 MTC redesignated 10th Light Division ( Alpine Pack ). The 126th redesignated 126th Engineer Light Combat Battalion.
- August 10, 1943 226th is reassigned - attached to 10th.
- August 15, 1943 87th Mountain Infantry invades Kiska with Co. B of 126th Engineers. Company B now called the 229th Engineer Company ( Pack ).

October 8, 1943	First Platoon of the 226th transfers to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Transfer not to exceed three months .. men to return to Camp Hale.
September, 1943	Transferred platoon sent to Burma as instructors for tramway erection on the Burma Road. Erected a tram with twenty ton capacity.
November, 1943	Twenty two men directly from Basic Training in Camp Claiborne, Louisiana transferred to 226th.
March 31, 1944	226th reorganized and renamed the 226th Engineer Combat Company.
April 30, 1944	226th ordered to move to Camp Carson, Colorado. Move was to be over roads with company equipment. Order was rescinded May 13, 1944.
May 14, 1944	226th ordered to A.P. Hill Military Reservation in Virginia. Move was executed by rail. Job was to test experimental techniques for the destruction of mine fields
May 29, 1944	226th arrived A.P. Hill.
June 28, 1944	126th Light Combat Engineer Battalion moved to Camp Swift, Texas. Entire 10th Light Division moved to Camp Swift to prepare for extensive maneuvers in Louisiana that fall.
Sept.27, 1944	The 226th Engineer Combat Company arrived at Camp Swift, Texas.
November 1, 1944	The 226th becomes Company D of the 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion.
November 6, 1944	" Mountain " designation assigned to 10th.
November 25, 1944	General Hays appointed Division commander.
December 25, 1944	The 126th Engineers depart Camp Swift for Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia. All movements now under the code name Task Force 45.
December 28, 1944	The 126th Engineers arrive at Camp Patrick Henry.
January 5, 1945	The 126th Engineers depart Newport New, Va. for Europe, transported on the USS General Meigs.
January 18, 1945	General Meigs arrives in Naples, Italy. Engineers transported north on Italian Rail freight cars called " 40 and 8's " ( 40 men and 8 mules ).
January 20, 1945	Company personnel arrive at Pisa staging area. Heavy equipment still being off loaded in Naples.

- January 27, 1945 Company D moves to Mammiano Basso on the Winter Line (Gothic Line ). Erected a practice tramway .
- February 17, 1945 Company D moves to Vidiciatico. Move made at night in truck convoy.
- February 18, 1945 1st Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry climbs and successfully attacks Riva Ridge at night. Captain Ken Seigman B/86th was assigned the Cappel Buso assault.
- February 19, 1945 The 85th and 87th Mountain Infantry Regiments attack Mount Belvedere. Company D selects tramway site. Landslide blocks road to base of site. Road clearing starts. Chosen site will route tramway up M. Cappel Buso on Riva Ridge.
- February 20, 1945 Tramway equipment moved to site by hand. Wooden skids used to move equipment over the mud. R4 cat backed over cliff to avoid German artillery fire.
- February 21, 1945 Tramway up Riva Ridge operational. Operated around the clock .. squads rotated on 8 hr. shifts
- Feb. 25/26, 1945 Move Company D bivouac to Gaggio Montana. Germans lob in a few rounds of harrassing fire. 3rd Platoon leads tanks through minefield on 2/26.
- March 3, 1945 Malandrone Pass attack. Company D clears mines on road to Iola. Company C hit very hard while erecting Bailey bridge.
- March 5, 1945 Company D starts work on Sprilla Road.
- March 10, 1945 Letter of commendation from commanders in Italy for Belvedere operation.
- Moved company bivouac to old vineyard on hillside near Riola just above a battery of British 5 inch guns. 3rd Platoon leads tank s through mine field.
- March 11, 1945 Campidello cableway operational. Company D repairing the Sprilla road.
- April 3, 1945 Road work near Cannevechia. Troops rotate to rest camp in Florence.
- April 13, 1945 Broad Allied attack across entire front canceled by fog.
- April 14, 1945 Allied forces launch spring offensive. Tenth Mountain targets .. Mount Della Spe, Torre Iussi and Rocca di Roffeno. Company D supports 87th Mountain Infantry



in attack on Torre Iussi. 1st platoon clears mines .. bulldozer repairs cratered road near Torre Iussi at night.

April 20, 1945 10th Mountain Division penetrates into the Po Valley.

April 21, 1945 Company D moves to area near Castel D'Aiano. Bivouac in field surrounded by trees. Task Force Duff to Bomporto.

April 22, 1945 Moved to farm complex on edge of Po Valley. Stopped briefly .. hot food left on table by Germans. Move to Bomporto .. Captain Nagel shoots his Jeep. German artillery shelled the field mess kitchen during lunch.

April 22, 1945 Move to San Benedetto. Convoy got split up .. last vehicles ran into Germans. Major Boyd's search crew steals 50 assault boats from 85th Infantry Division convoy.

April 23, 1945 Start tramway across Po. Tramway not feasible .. erection crew strafed by German fighter. Crewed assault boats ferrying the 87th Infantry troops across Po River. Bulldozer built abutment on south bank to protect infantry but cat skinner blown off his dozer..

April 27, 1945 Cross Po River on pontoon bridge. Italian villagers out in force with warm welcomes on road to Verona.

April 28, 1945 Move into Verona and then to Lake Garda. Move into lake shore villa owned by opera singer.

April 29, 1945 Work to clear blown tunnels and cratered roads. Encountered tunnel full of dead Germans. Crewed assault boats and barges transferring tanks to north end of lake. Got 75 horsepower outboard engines and big barges for tanks. Built tank loading ramp for barges.

May 2, 1945 War in Italy ends. Move to Riva. Nagel had to stop troops from firing weapon into air. Took over lake shore hotel near town .. repaired showers and had hot baths.

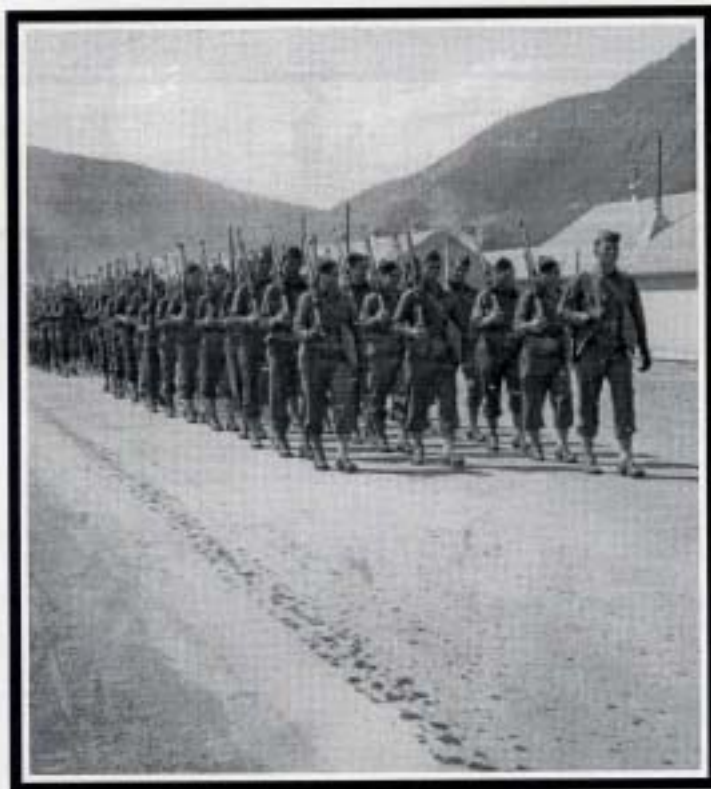
May 19, 1945 Move to Udine to patrol the Yugoslavian border. Some troops transported by German convoys .. set up bivouac near the village of Salt. Built outhouses for the division. Lt. McKernan and the 3rd platoon on Temporary Duty to Venice. Worked with Don the Beachcomber of Hawaii to rehabilitate the Lido Beach Hotel.

July 20, 1945 Company D assembled in field near Florence for return home for further training. Ultimate goal was the invasion of Japan 9 miles above Tokyo Bay.

July 26, 1945	Departed Naples on the USS Mt. Vernon ( West Point )
August 1, 1945	Arrived in Camp Patrick Henry. Got steak dinner served by German POW's.
August 6, 1945	A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima.
September 9, 1945	War with Japan ends.
November 22, 1945	The 126th Engineer Mountain Battalion deactivated at Camp Carson, Colorado. Soldiers discharged based on a point system.

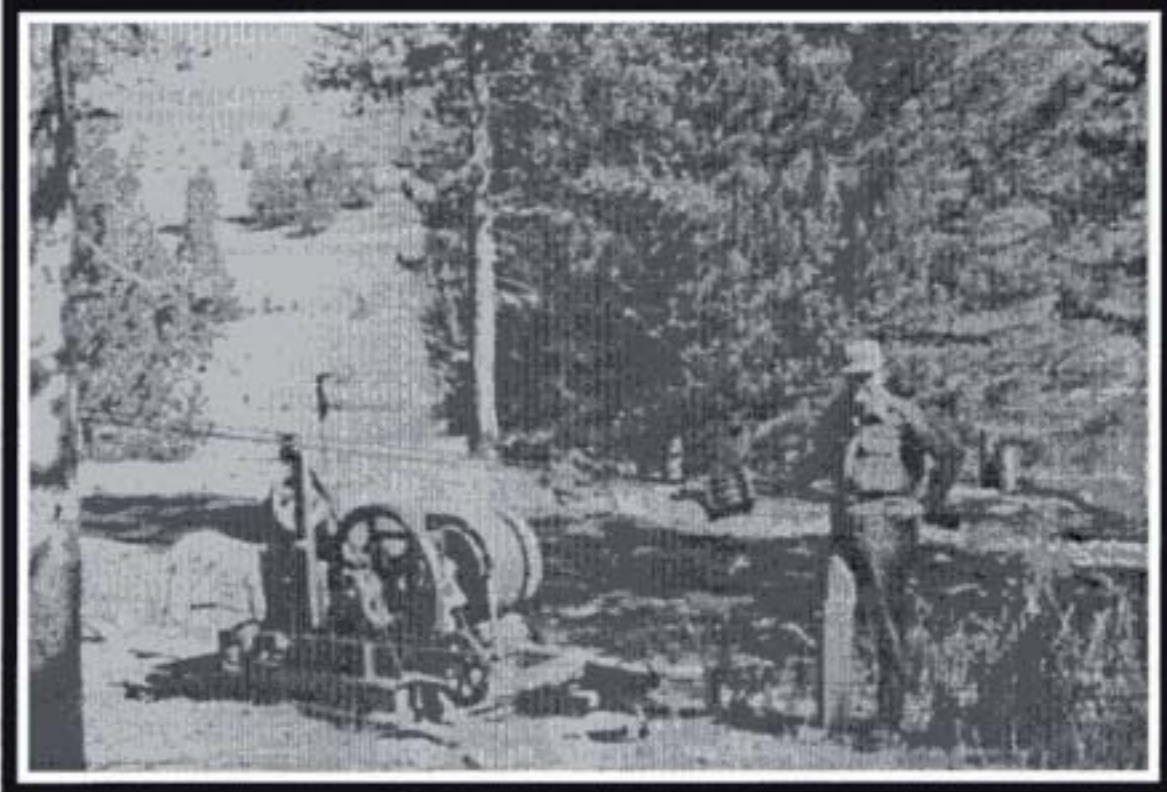


From left - Winfred Payton, Ed Drwal, Pete Jackson  
John R. Williamson and Voy Hendrickson.



S/Sgt. Pete Jackson leads the 2nd Platoon, Company D.

( Pete Jackson collection )

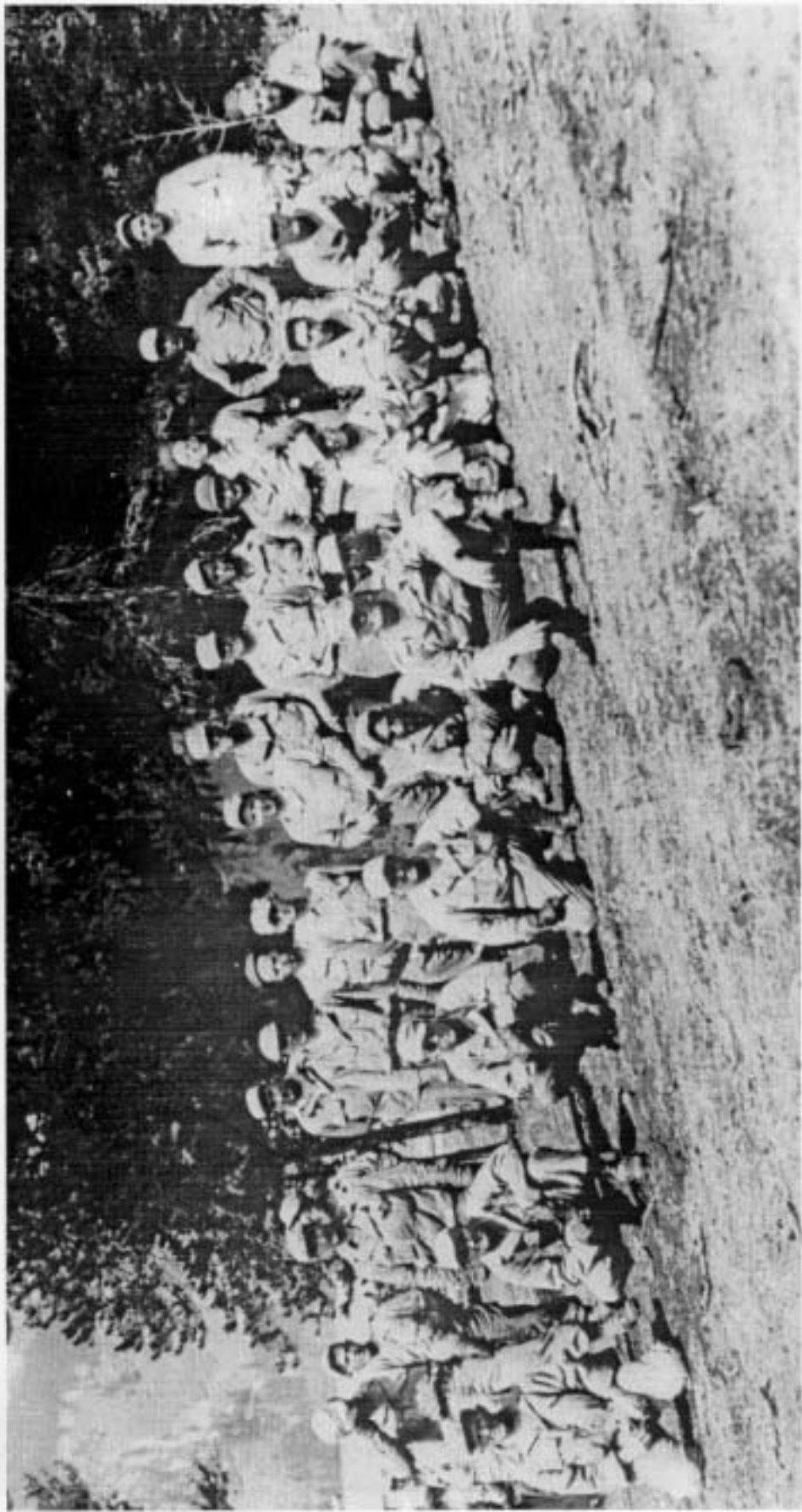


Lt. Harold McKay with one of many experimental tramway winches tested at the Camp Hale site.



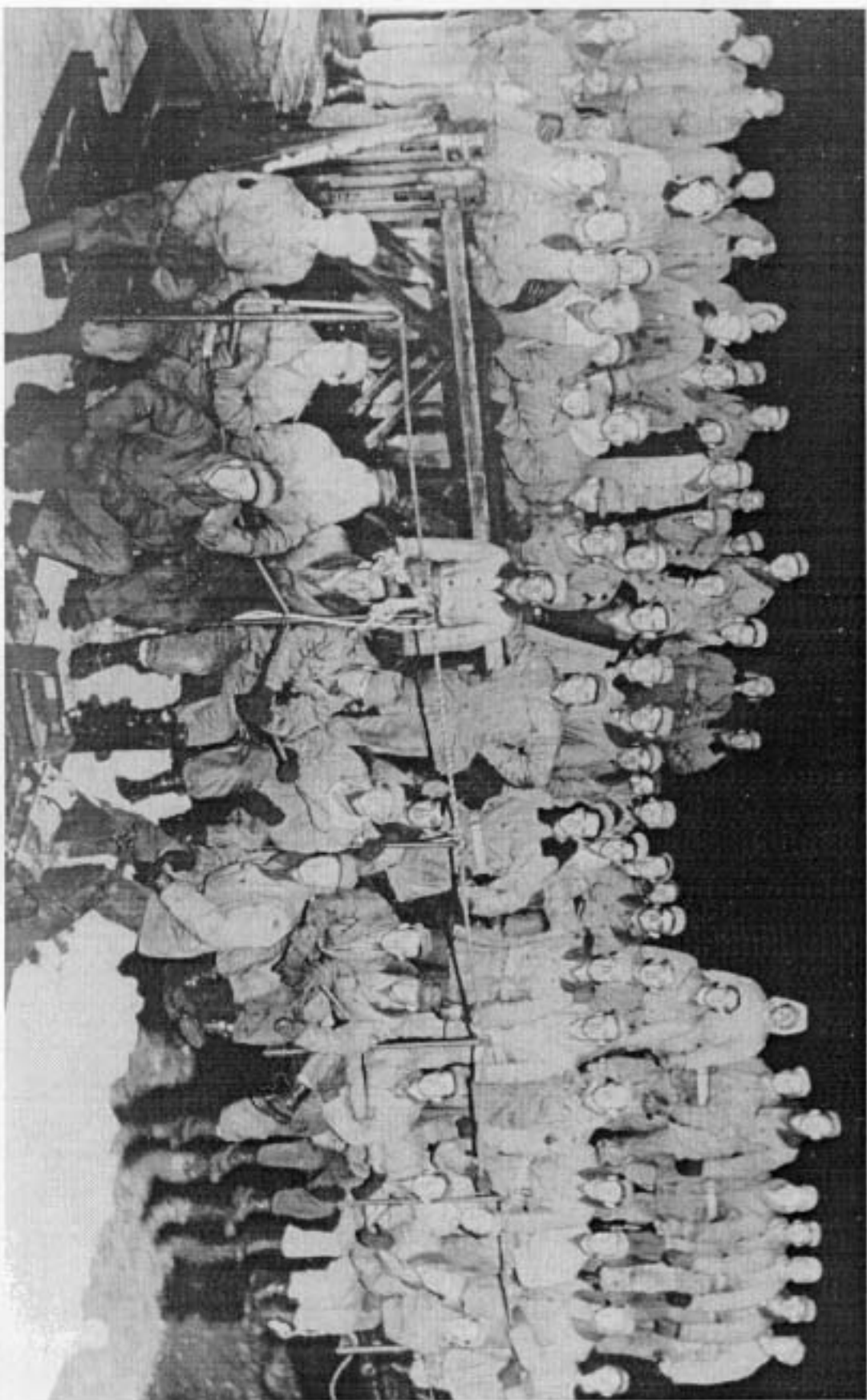
Company B, the original Pack Engineer outfit in the 10th Mountain. Here, they are loaded and moving out on a Division winter maneuver.





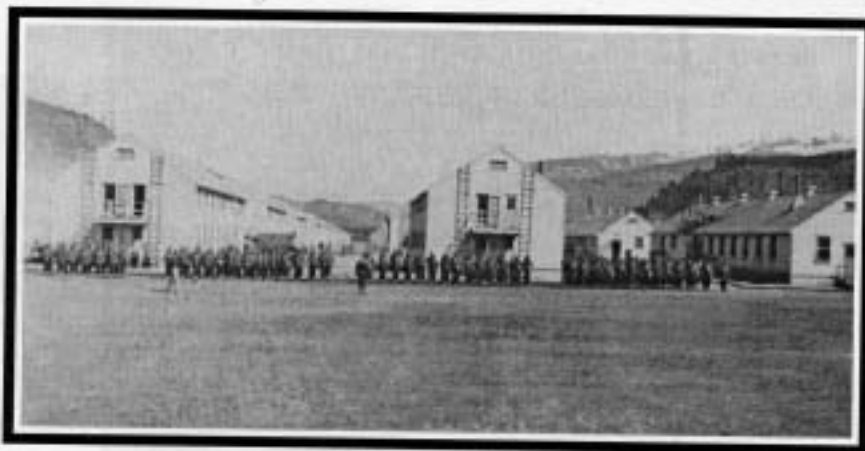
Camp Hale, Spring 1944 - Staff Sergeant John R. Williamson rests his First Platoon.

The 226th set the record putting up this single/double Bailey bridge at night.





226th ENGINEER MOTORIZED COMPANY ( SEPARATE )



The 226th in Company Formation on their Camp Hale parade grounds.



Bob Langer and Jim Trexler at Camp Hale.

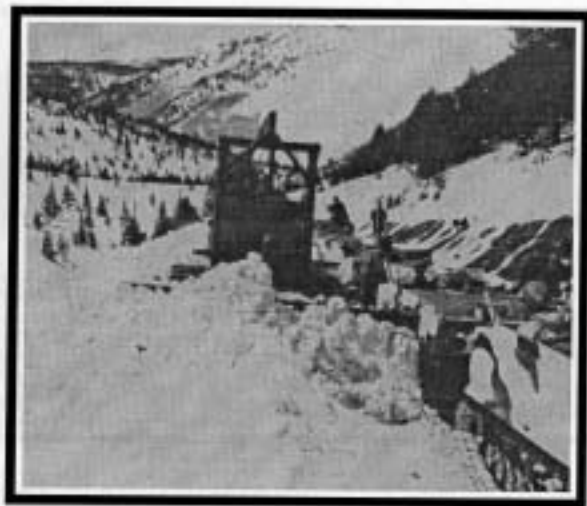


John R. Williamson leads his 1st Platoon.



Close Order Drill for the 226th at Camp Hale.

( Bob Langer Collection )



Clearing the roads on a Division winter maneuvers.



Dick Sweet checks out the 226th's power shovel.



Good luck riding that sucker in the snow.



Home, sweet home for the 226th at Camp Hale.

( Dick Sweet Collection )



Lieutenant Harold McKay



Lieutenant Don McKernan

( Bob Langer Collection )



Al Monroe always drew a big crowd for his ever popular -- MAIL CALL.

( Dick Sweet Collection )



Lt. Martin and Capt. Kramer cheer on their favorite.

( Bob Langer Collection )



First Sergeant Bob Langer anxiously watches another pint of Coors disappear knowing he has to get some work out of these guys in the morning.



IN THE BEGINNING

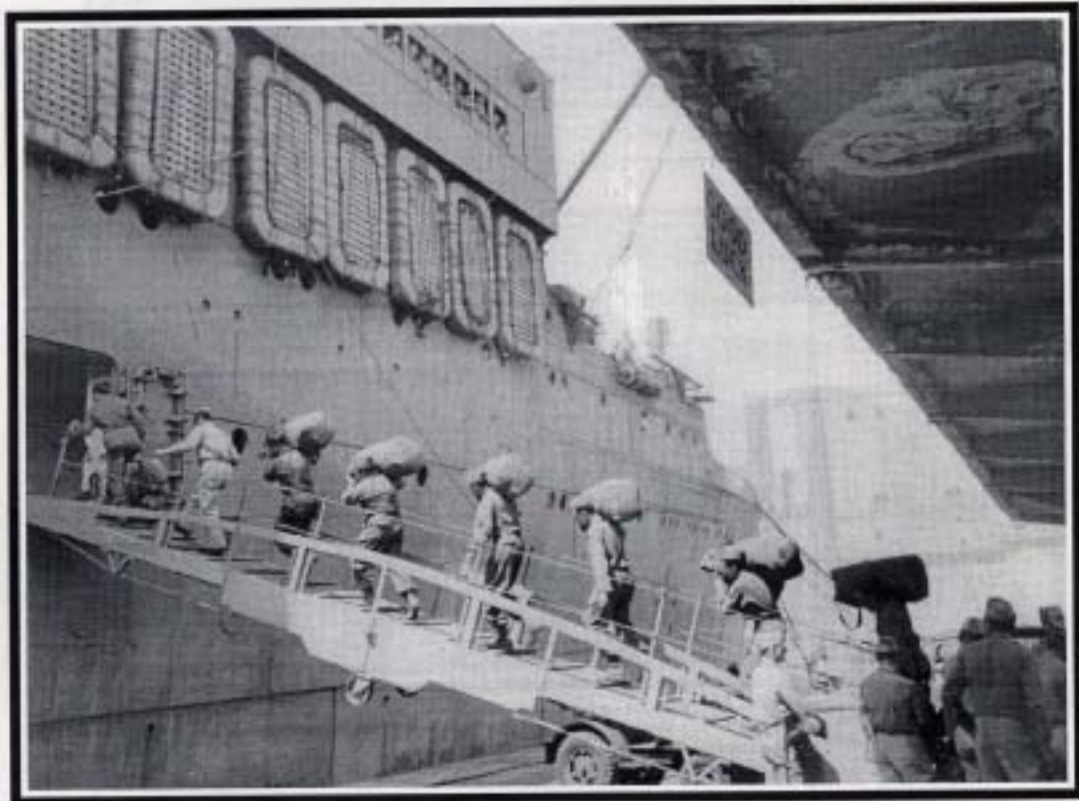


Company A, the original tramway outfit.  
Loaded up and moving out on a Division maneuvers.

( Roger Frail Collection )



Lt. Harold McKay and Captain Roger Frail consult with a civilian  
tramway expert at their Camp Hale field office.



On July 26th, 1945, the Tenth Mountain Division troops boarded the U. S. S. Mount Vernon for the trip back home.

( Courtesy of the Denver public Library. )



## ITALY, 1945



Pisa citizens of all ages gathered at our bivouac three times each day to collect the kitchen scraps. You had to feel sorry for the youngsters as Bob Cochran demonstrates.



We all visited the Leaning Tower and adjacent cathedral including Nelson Carver and Bill Palm on the left and by Karl Caster, Bobby Stough and Bob Cochran on the right.

( Phil Lunday Collection )

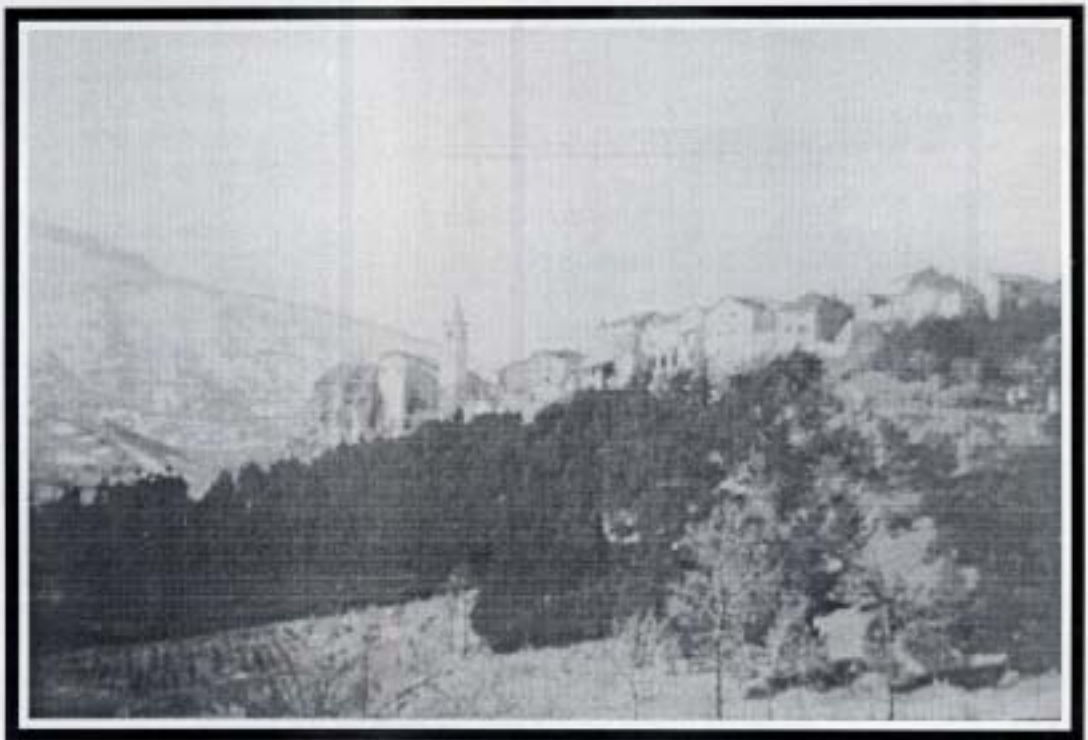


Hill Town peasant women still spin wool by hand.



Company D occupied this three story house in Mammiano Basso.

( Phil Lunday Collection )



Typical Appenine Mountains hill country village.



**The Apennines can be very forboding in the winter**

Photo from the Lunday collection



## THE GAGGIO MONTANA BIVOUAC



March, 1945 - With no farm houses available, the Company had to dig in. Here, Joe Martino starts a new home.



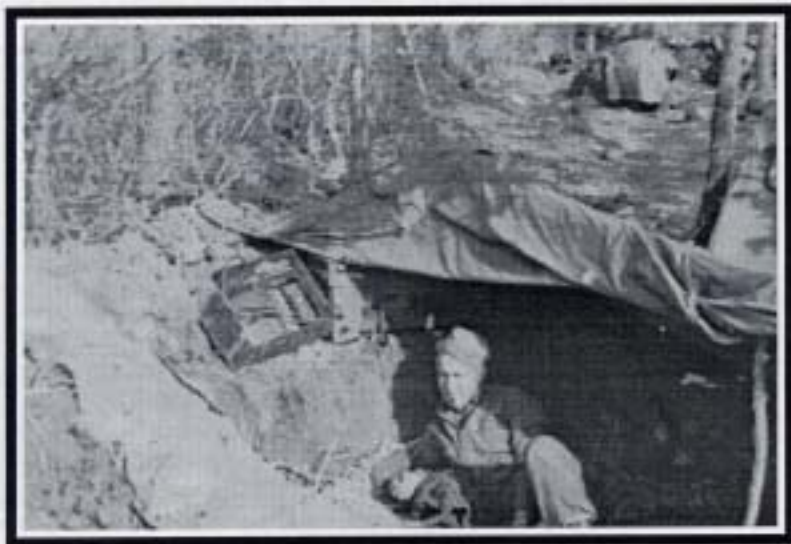
Room-mates Earl Utsey and Joe Martino enlarge their living room.



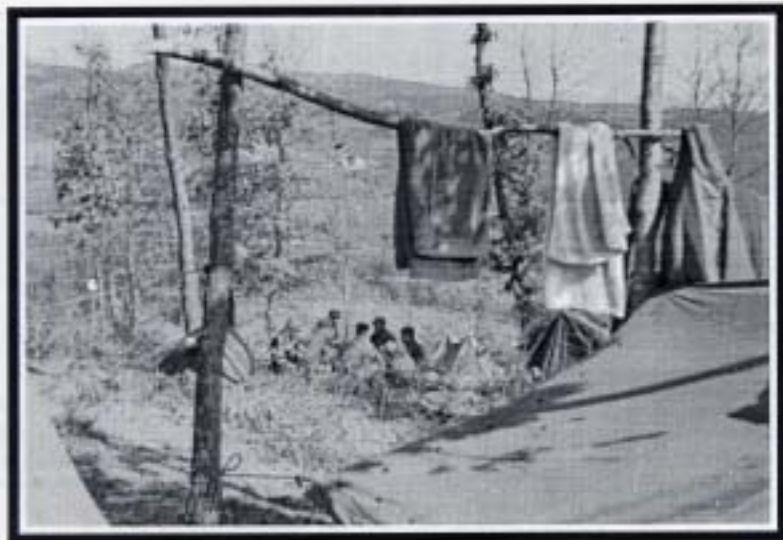
Floyd Grigory checks out the design of this dug-out.



Johnny Johnson logs a few ZZZ's in the early spring sunshine.



A cozy two man dug out.



With dug out homes complete, the non - stop  
Blackjack game started up.

( Chuck Hampton collection )



T/5 Wilson Miller preparing to hit seventeen  
as he invariably did.



Musgrave, Utsey, Wolkowicz, Pruitt, Martino, Hull and  
Grigory at the Gaggio Montana open air casino.



Corporal Ralph Underdahl, assistant squad leader  
for Sergeant Charlie Hull.

( Chuck Hampton collection )





A new box of C rations is opened and everyone wants the wieners and beans.



Loading up at Gaggio Montana for a day's work on the Sprilla Road rebuild project.



We widen Sprilla Road by filling it in with rocks at this narrow curve.

( Chuck Hampton collection )



A load of ammunition heading for the front lines.

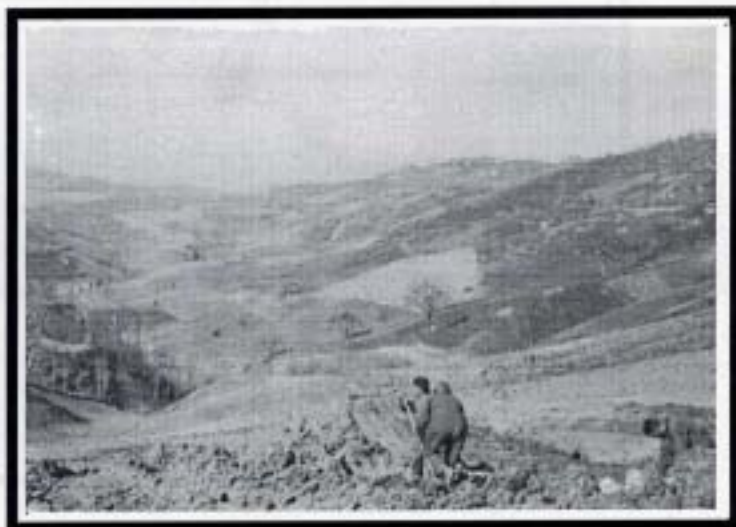


These young ladies rarely missed a day watching us work.



Joe Martino never missed a chance to improve his Italian vocabulary.

( Chuck Hampton collection )



The Sprilla Road was the main route to market for the mountain villagers.



S/Sgt. John R. Williamson and T/5 Alvie Allan



Alpini pack train mules proceed to the front over the Sprilla Road.

( Chuck Hampton collection )



THE RIOLA BIVOUCAC



Chuck Hampton at home in Riola.



PFC. Raymond Cleverly



PFC. Charlie Pruitt



Kneeling - Fritz, Johnson, Miller, Cleverly, Craig.  
Standing - Pruitt.

( Chuck Hampton collection )



Lt. John Sheahan, 1st Platoon's boss, checks out the morning Blizzard on the Sprilla Road job.



Johnny Johnson models an alternative helmet.



Typical Apennine farm house on Sprilla Road.

( Chuck Hampton collection )

**THE MOTOR POOL AT RIOLA**



Back - Barnes, Mackey, Towes, Birnbaum and Lunday.  
Front - Carver, Rodriguez, Muller, Loshbaugh and Tucker.

( Phil Lunday Collection )



Back - Lunday, Carver, Birnbaum.  
Front - Grove, Shaeffer, Rodriguez.





Riva Ridge, 1945. View of the south side. Cappel Buso, up which our tramway was erected, is the dark shoulder on the right.

( Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library )



Johnny Johnson scrapes off a few whiskers at Riola.



These three girls appeared regularly at the Campidello end of our cableway to watch the operation.



Virgil Burch has a good washup before supper at Riola.

( Chuck Hampton collection )



Jim Morgan, Dick Sweet and Bernie Boyd at Riola.



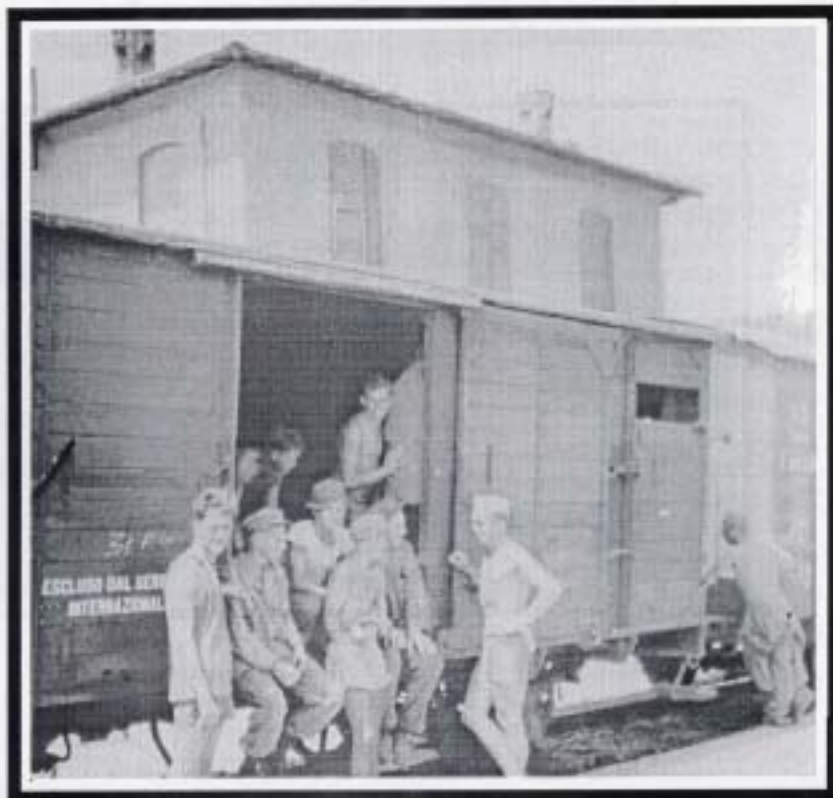
Some Company D men await the trip home in Florence.  
Included kneeling - Hull, Wolkowicz and Burch.  
Standing - Sweet and Gilbert.



Back - Rodriguez, Dudley, Carver, Simpson.  
Front - Sweet, Davis, Mikesell.

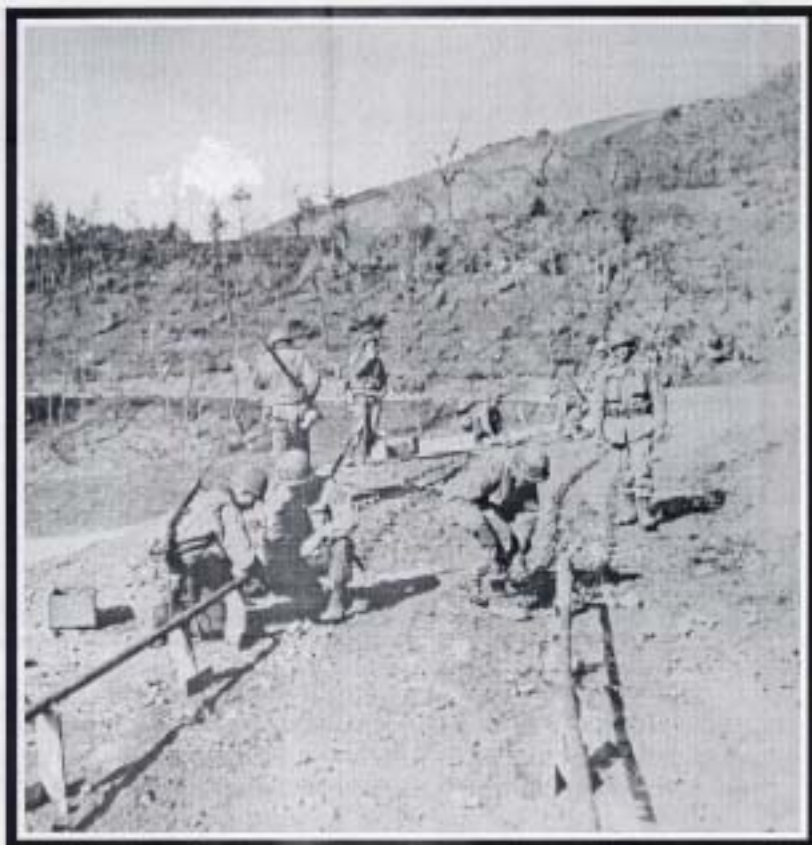
( Dick Sweet collection )



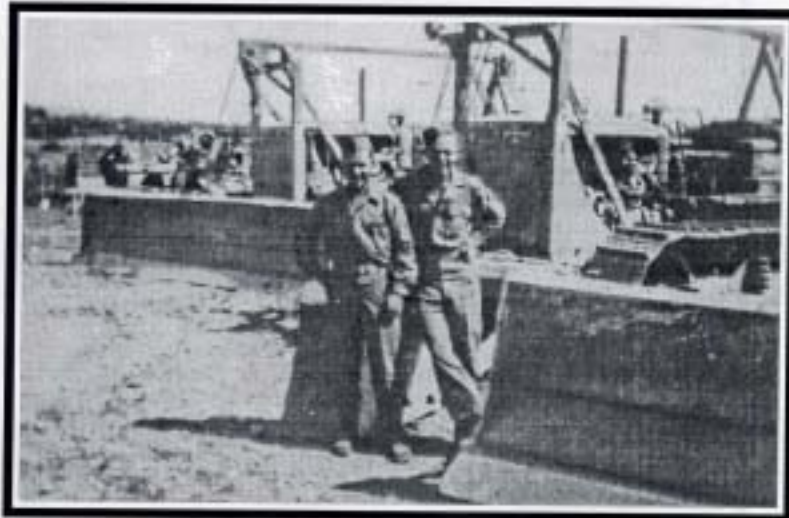


This is what a "40 and 8" box car looks like. Most of Company D rode north from Naples to Pisa in one of these in January, 1945.

( Courtesy of Denver Public Library )



Engineers set up Bangalore torpedoes to explode mines buried in this road bed.



Cat skidders Rod Rodriguez and Red Shaefer with their machines at Gaggio Montana. Rod got blown off his D-7 when he exploded a mine.

( Phil Lunday & Chuck Hampton collections. )



March, 1945 - Jim Seip working his bulldozer " Miss Colorado " on the Sprilla Road repair job. Company D was up-grading this mule trail to accomodate movement of supplies and troops behind our front lines following the Malandrone Pass offensive.



Rover Joe, the artillery spotter passing over the front lines.



Captured Germans carry a wounded comrade back to the prisoner's cage.



Torre Iussi under attack by the 87th while the 85th tries to dislodge the enemy from the high ground in the background.

( Chuck Hampton collection )





Torre Iussi after the 14 April, 1944 battle.



Gillispie, Underdahl and Craig discuss setting a road block.



A view down the valley from midway across the  
Campidello - Castellaccio cableway.



On the run up to the Po River, Ralph Underdahl ate a bit of dust.



Capt. Nagel in his Jeep crosses the river followed by the 1st Platoon.



At a crossroad outside Verona, a German convoy smolders.



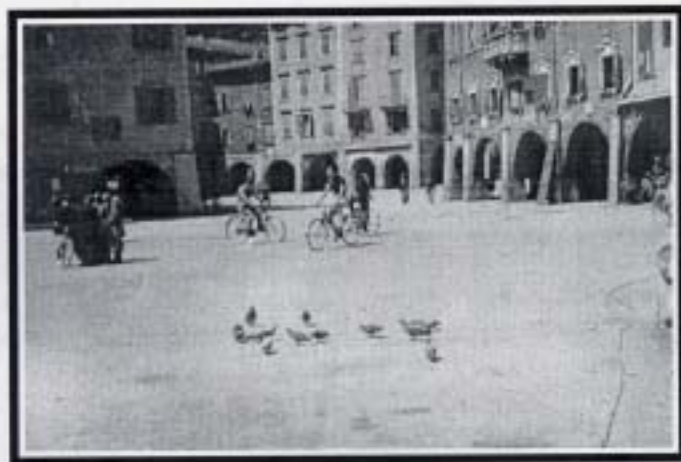
The pontoon bridge across the Po River looking south from the north shore.



Looking northwest across the Adige River, an ammunition dump in Bomporto goes up with a huge bang and cloud of smoke.

( Chuck Hampton collection )





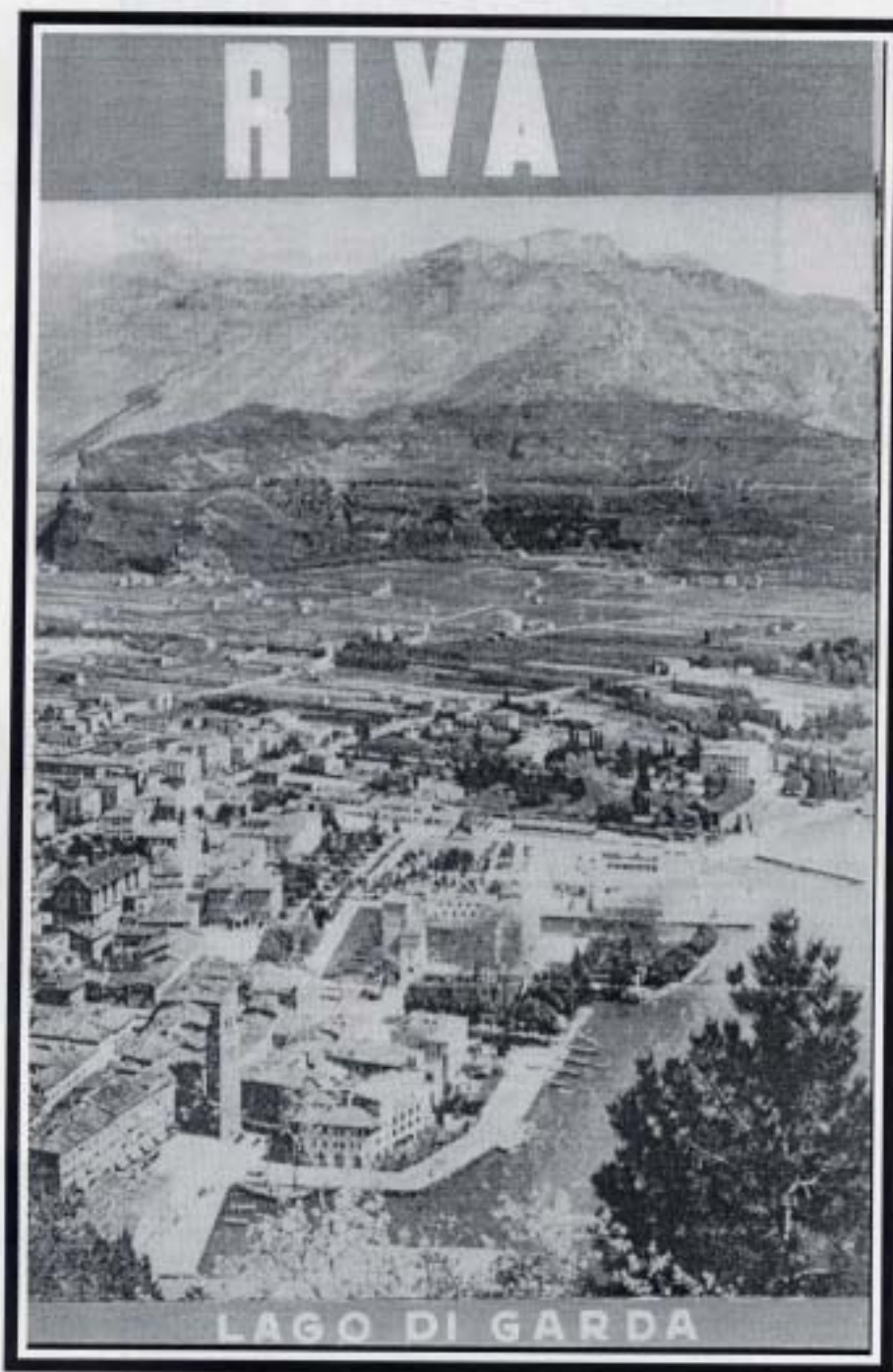
Riva's main plaza on the day after the Italian war ended.



Company D lived here just prior to the move east to Udine.



Assault boats and big outboard motors did double duty.



A view of Riva from the Italian travel brochure collected by Phil Lunday. The Germans did not defend Riva with the same tenacity as Torbole so, it escaped relatively unscathed. The town's main plaza is lower left in this picture.

( Phil Lunday collection )

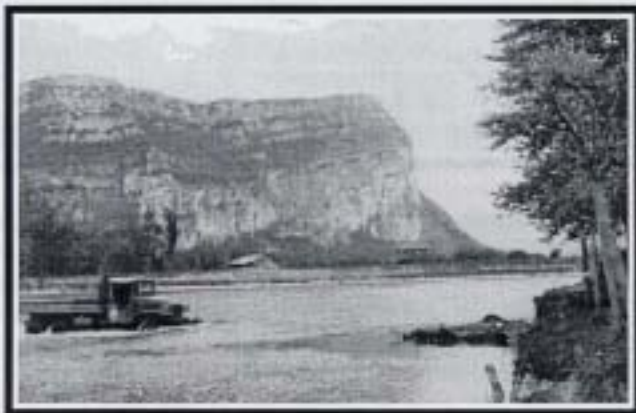




Tunnel # 1 on the east shore of Lake Garda, blown  
by retreating Germans, before it was  
cleared by Company D.



After it was cleared.

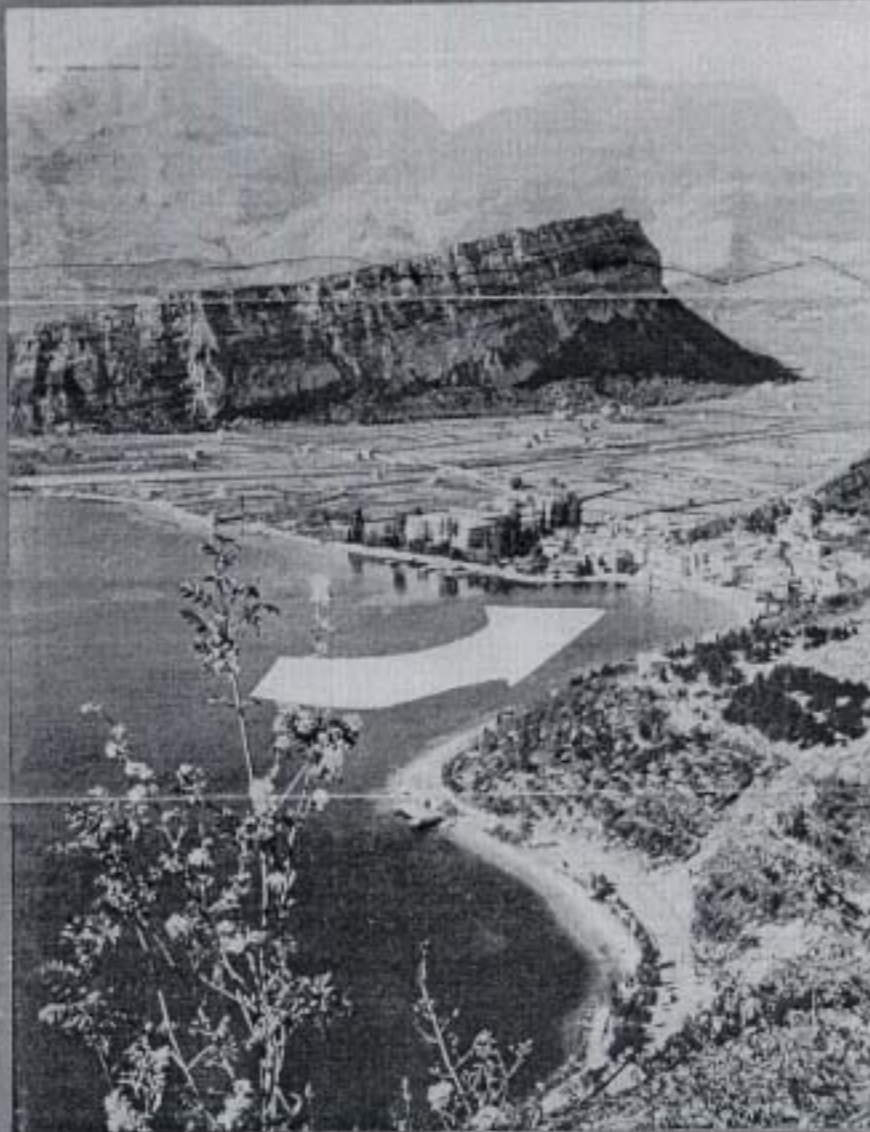


Fording the Sarca River at the north end of Lake Garda  
in the shadow of the German stronghold of Mt. Brioni.

( Chuck Hampton collection )

# TORBOLE

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A pre-war view of Torbole and Mt. Brioni at the north end of Lake Garda. The photo was scanned from an Italian travel brochure collected by Phil Lunday. The 86th Inf. Rgmt. attack on the town was from the right side of the picture. Because of blown tunnels and cratered road, the riflemen had no support from the division's tanks. Company D loaded some on big barges and ferried them up the lake to land in the area of the picture indicated by the arrow. All the apartment buildings and most of the houses shown here had been reduced to rubble when we got there. Colonel Darby was killed near this beach at the end of the lagoon .

( Phil Lunday collection )



The Ponte Vecchio above was the only bridge spared by the Germans in their defense of Florence. However, they destroyed all buildings on all access roads.

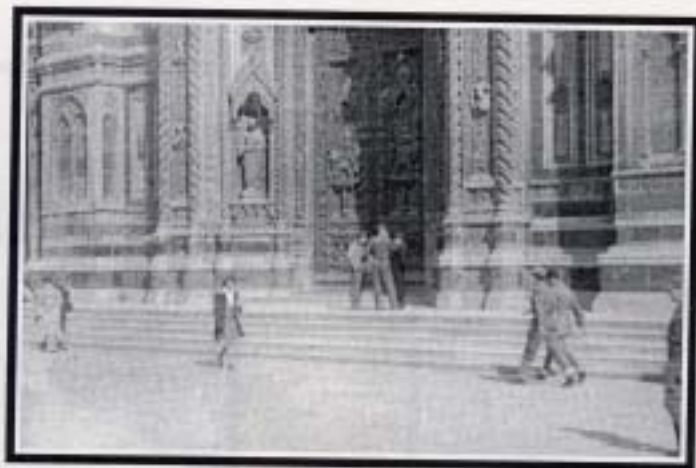


Total destruction along the Arno River in Florence where the Germans mounted a desperate defense in the late fall of 1944.

( Hampton and Lunday collections )



FIRENZE



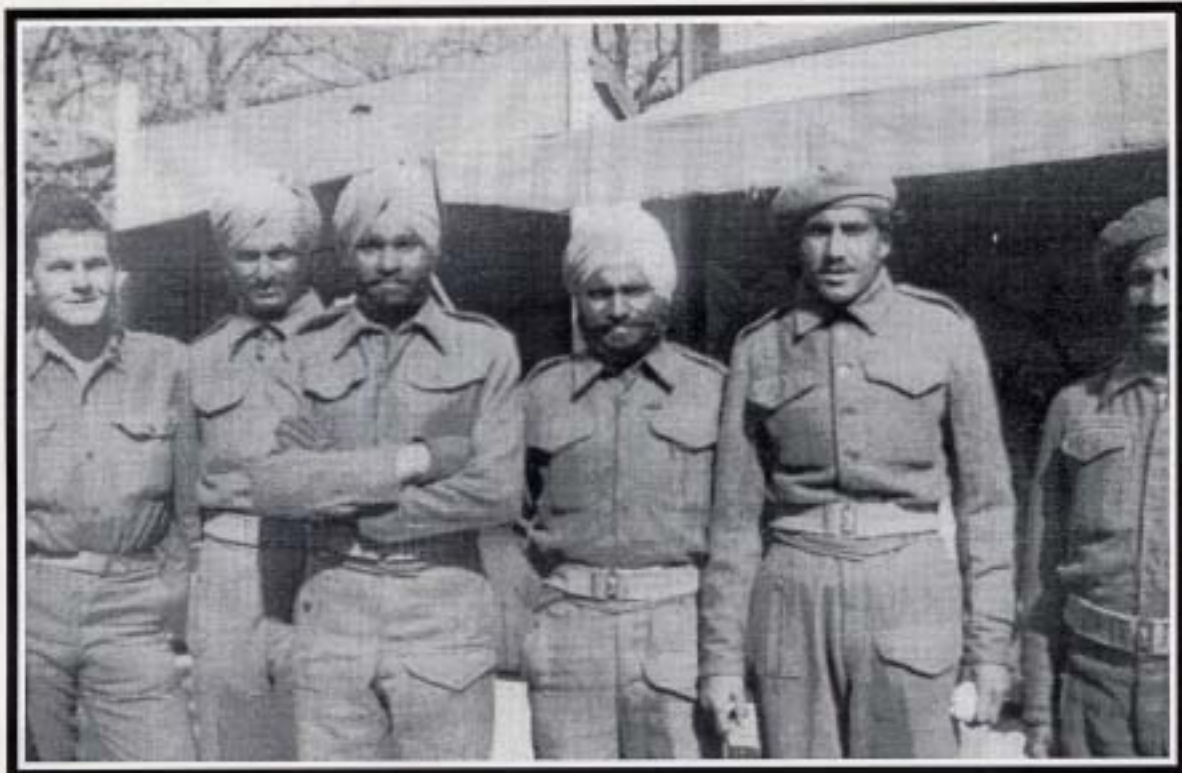
The Michaelangelo cast bronze doors of Saint Benedict.



Saint Benedict's cathedral and bell tower.



A view of Florence from the bell tower of Saint Benedict.  
( Hampton and Lunday collections )



Phil Lunday and friends. British Army Sikhs from northern India above  
and Italian Partisans below. Where does he FIND these guys ?



( Phil Lunday collection )





Saint Benedict's Cathedral in Florence



( Phil Lunday collection )



Company D loads up for the trip to Udine in northeast Italy.

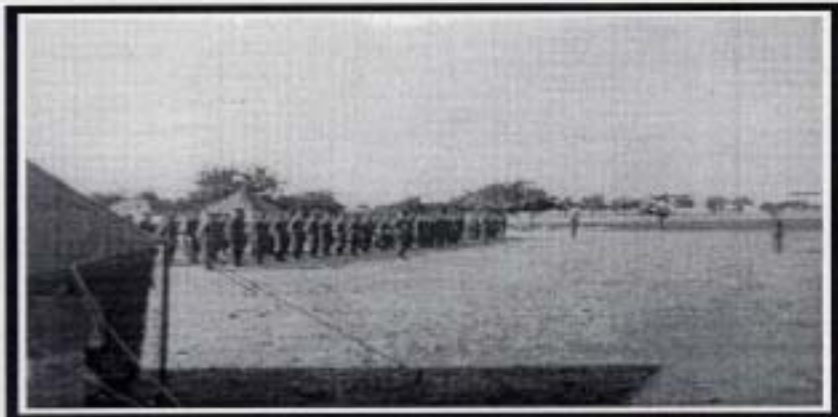


Rodriguez and Napier display their champagne and cognac ration.



Wilson Miller and Floyd Grigory sample the champagne enroute to Udine.

( Lunday and Hampton collections )



Company D stands Retreat at the Salt, Italy.



The Company D bivouac at Salt, Italy.



Company Headquarters and the Supply tent at Salt.

( Phil Lunday collection )





Doughnut girl Debbie Bankhart calls on Company D.  
Later, she married 10th Mountain soldier Roger Eddy of K/87th.



Company D mail call at Salt.



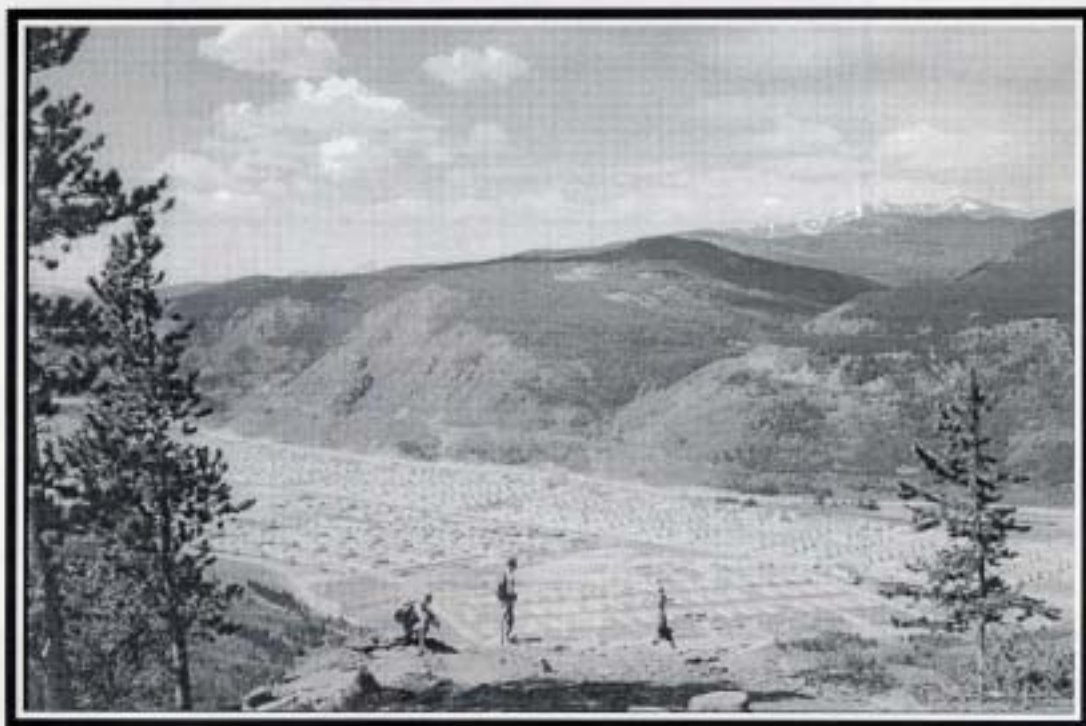
Johnson and Hampton helping with the surplus beer problem.

( Lunday and Hampton collections. )



Camp Hale, 1943 - Looking North down the Pando Valley towards Red Cliff.

( Photos courtesy Denver Public Library )



Camp Hale, 1943 - Looking West across camp at Mt. Massive in the far right background.