

Camp Hale Outfit ³⁰⁻⁴⁵ Fights In Italy

Barnum News (Denver)

(Quoted from the Army and Navy Journal of March 10, 1945.)

With the Fifth Army in Italy, less than a month after arriving in Italy, the rugged troops of the 10th Mountain Division were in combat in one of the roughest sectors of the Fifth Army front. The first increment was committed on January 9, 1945, and by January 28, the entire Division was on the line.

The division is composed of famous American and European skiers and mountain climbers, forest rangers, Park and Wild Life Service men, as well as a liberal sprinkling of college kids, farm lads and city slickers, who have never seen anything higher than a gopher hole until they volunteered for mountain service.

The Division was activated at Camp Hale, Colo., on July 15, 1943; but its origins go back several years to small unofficial detachments that were trained in skiing and over-snow operations at Lake Placid and Old Forge, N. Y.; Camp McCoy, Wis.; Ft. Richardson, Alaska, and Mt. Rainier, Wash., in 1940 and 1941.

By the time of Pearl Harbor, it was evident that Uncle Sam, faced with fighting in all parts of the world, would need specialized mountain troops, a fighting arm long in existence in European Armies. One regiment, the 87th, Mountain Infantry, was activated at Ft. Lewis, Washington, and started an experimental training period. After some memorable weeks of skiing and climbing on Mt. Rainier, followed up a manoeuver at Jolon, California, the 87th moved to Camp Hale, at Pando, Colorado, which is 9,200 feet high on the Continental Divide and more than 100 miles and \$5.00 bus fare from Denver.

Early in 1943 the 86th Regiment was formed from a cadre of the 87th Regiment. Later the 85th was formed from the 86th and 87th.

For the 87th, the trip to Italy was a second overseas jaunt. The regiment spearheaded the U. S.—Canadian landing on mountainous Kiska in the Aleutians in, August 1943. The Japs had evacuated the Island, but the Mountaineers got plenty of experience with mines, boobytraps and under water fox-holes. As a result of this expedition, the 87th has a song to the tune of a well-known G. I. ballad, whose chorus goes, "No Japs at all, no Japs at all—they gave us an island with no Japs at all!"

During this regiment's absence, the 10th Mountain Division was formed at Camp Hale under the command of Maj. Gen. Hays, a 53 year old veteran of both world wars. Gen. Hays holds the Congressional Medal of Honor and the Silver Star for exploits in the Second Battle of the Marne and the Battle of the Argonne in the last war, and he landed in Normandy on D plus 1 in the invasion of France last summer.

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After the 87th returned to join the Division, the entire outfit moved up into the snows of the Continental Divide for D—Series operations which unless the Division storms the Brenner Pass, single-handed, will remain in the unit's folk-lore as its closest approach to Hell. The operation was designed to test the performance of men and equipment under the most adverse conditions of cold and snow. The weather was perfect for this purpose—with deep snow and high winds and temperatures ranging down to 38 degrees below zero. Everything was tactical. No fires. The only defense against cold and wind for days at a time was to burrow into the drifts during brief breathing spells.

A few months after the completion of manoeuvres in the high Rockies, the Division was moved to Camp Swift, near Austin, Texas, in July, where they spent several broiling months. Just as they were becoming acclimated, they were snatched from a manoeuver to prepare for their movement to the Poe. Although the Division has been in action only a short time, men of the 10th Division have already demonstrated their skill in combat."