

Camp Hale Troops Deadly in Rockies —Or in the Alps

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the fifth article by John Stephenson, Rocky Mountain News reporter, describing his tour through major military installations in Colorado. The tour was arranged for Colorado newspapermen by the Seventh Service Command.

By JOHN STEPHENSON

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It came to the knowledge of the 602d Field Artillery—stationed at Camp Hale, Pando, almost a mile higher than mile-high Denver—that the enemy had concentrated in Homestake Valley, eight miles away, in the heart of the impregnable Rockies, capped with snow three to any large number of feet you would like to mention.

It was lucky the 602d Field Artillery was around, because the 602d Field Artillery is peculiarly equipped to take care of things like that, in the Rockies—or in the Alps. The 602d has ski troops, and you've heard about them; the 602d has dog sledges, and you've heard about them, but the 602d also has mule packs, and you haven't heard nearly so much about them.

This time, Col. David L. Ruffner, commander of the 602d, under Brig. Gen. O. S. Rolfe, commanding general of the Mountain Training Center at Camp Hale, decided on the mule pack—and a vehicle that climbs mountains and goes anywhere a mule can go but which falls under the classification of military secrets.

So the 602d went after that enemy concentration with mule packs, four batteries, four 75-mm. howitzers and 20 mules to the battery, and they skirted around and over the mountain to see what they could see.

Whine of Shell Clearly Audible

Come the other side of the mountain, they assembled the "pack hows," as they call them, and spread out, in a line from mountain to mountain, over the head of snowy Homestake Valley. Getting there was bad enough, but when they got there was when things began to happen.

The range was 4,600 yards, about half the maximum range of a 75, and the range of a 75 can be varied not only by the elevation of the gun but by the charge of something that looks like spaghetti but is smokeless powder. You put as much of this stuff as you want into the shell casing, in little bags.

The observation post—the "OP"—was off on the top of the mountain, with a telephone across the snow to the fire direction center, 15 yards to the rear of Battery A. And the commands were barked from the battery executive officer, at the fire direction center, and barked back by the commanders of the seven-man gun crews.

"Battery adjust!"

"Battery adjust!"

"Shell HE!"

"Shell HE!"

"Corrector 45!"

"Corrector 45!"

"Time 16 point 5!"

"Time 16 point 5!"

"Base deflection right 150!"

"Base deflection right 150!"

"Site 300!"

"Site 300!"

"Battery right!"

"Battery right!"

"Elevation 400!"

"Elevation 400!"

Unless the order, "At my command," comes just before the elevation order, the battery fires as soon as possible after elevation, and it did. There's a thunder at No. 1 in your ears—and you'd better keep your mouth open so you don't explode, too—at the firing point, and another lesser thunder at the explosion 4,600 yards away.

It takes 16 seconds for the 75 to arrive at its destination and about 30 seconds for the sound to come back, proving that a 75 travels at about twice the speed of sound.

Up on the mountain on the observation post the officer has a pair of binoculars, the lens of which is calibrated in millimeters, and he puts these calibrated binoculars on the target and measures, right there on the binoculars, how far off the first "registration" fire is. Then he phones the fire direction center the correction.

It's Not Shrapnel—But Splinters

He keeps a map, which is merely a hunk of graph paper, and charts out the enemy concentration and the targets he wants in it by the data, first, of where the successive shots in relation to his commands, second, trigonometric triangulation, and third, observation.

There are three pretty good trends to note in all this:

1: The modern tendency is for artillery to get much closer to the infantry—and its objective—than it ever did before, because it can move up with the troops faster than and attain greater accuracy.

2: The term shrapnel is both obsolete and inaccurate. Shrapnel was originally a concentration of small ball ammunition in a shell, like an overgrown shotgun shell, but they don't do that any more. The correct term for what flies around so bad when the shell explodes is shell splinters.

3: The 602d annihilated the enemy.