



Edward Preble Motley, Jr. (pictured left, Italy, 1945) was born in Boston in 1921. He attended St. Mark's School and was at Harvard College when he joined the 10th Mountain Division in 1944. Following his army service, he moved first to the Pacific Northwest, where he was introduced to the area by and lived for a time with Duke Watson, also from the 10th Mountain Division. In 1948 he married Cecily Jackson whom he met after the war during his brief return to Harvard.

Settling in Cecily's home state of California, Preb completed further studies in English. He then purchased land near the central valley town of Davis which he successfully farmed for nearly fifteen years.

This memoir was begun in 1957 when Preb was recuperating from hip surgery (one of the first "total hip" replacements) following a skiing accident. Recovery took over two years, during which time he wrote, among others, the *Memoirs*, and imaginative stories for his three young children.

Throughout his years in California, Preb pursued and passed along to many others his "first love," which he had experienced so intensely in Italy—the freedom, challenge and beauty of the high mountains and mountaineering. He was involved in veterans ski racing and had climbed Mt. Rainier three weeks before his death in 1973.

*Sarah Motley Fischer*

*E.P. MOTLEY*

## Memoirs of Six Months

THIS IS THE STORY OF THE six months of my life which took me from alpine training in Colorado to Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia, overseas to combat in Italy and back again in a hospital ship. I was a forward observer in Battery B, of the 605th Battalion, 10th Mountain Division.

Our Division was made up of three mountain infantry regiments which had in turn been formed from various ski battalions of winter warfare experimenters from New England, the Great Lakes, and the Pacific Northwest. The infantry personnel consisted of college kids; professional skiers from Scandinavia, Europe, and America; forest rangers; lumbermen; trappers; in a word: *outdoorsmen*. It was not an all-volunteer division, despite claims to the contrary. In our artillery battery, there were no volunteers.

Many of the boys in the 10th were from Tennessee, southern Ohio, and Kentucky. These soldiers hated the Colorado mountains, hated the snow. Then there were the cavalrymen, all Southerners, their beloved mounts replaced by strange white boards called skis, hatefully referred to as "Towcha bodes."

Our artillery units supported the infantry regiments with 75-mm mountain howitzers. Assembled, these guns stood no higher than one's hip. They could be disassembled and loaded on the backs of six mules within two minutes. The mountain howitzers looked like toy cannons some millionaire might give his son for playing war. I later revised this

opinion of these stubby-muzzled howitzers after a few short rounds fell near my foxhole.

The Division's first training as a unit was in a little valley in the heart of the Colorado Rockies. Here the elevation was nearly 9,000 feet with the mountains above us climbing to 14,000 feet. The training was severe. Maneuvers were conducted in the field for three consecutive weeks. Temperatures dropped to 30 below. Fires were allowed only at the end of each five-day training session.

The mountain work gave the Division a peculiar flavor—and there is the essence of morale. Give a body of men some different or dangerous task symbolized by some mark—paratrooper's boots or "Ranger" printed on their sleeves or "Mountain" printed below their insignia—and you will have an exceptional unit. German Intelligence classified us as "elite" troops.

Christmas Day 1944 found our Battalion on a disreputable train lurching through the sodden hills of West Virginia en route to Camp Patrick Henry, our Port of Embarkation for Europe. Morale sagged temporarily in the drizzle of a West Virginia winter, simply because we were given nothing to do. I often wondered how the Army, with its tradition of "keep the men busy," tolerated the system that existed at this particular POE. All responsibility was taken out of our hands (except for some last-minute required training), organized and run by POE personnel. The result was chaos. The officers and the men of our unit were separated, which was just as well, as many of the officers were drunk, and had been, for the five days of travel from Colorado. At one point, when a Division staff required a representative from our Battalion for some conference, we had to reach down to the rank of Second Lieutenant to find a sober delegate.

During December 1944, the Allies in Europe were temporarily on the defensive because of the German breakthrough in the Battle of the Bulge. In the Mediterranean Theater, Rome had been taken by the Allies the previous

summer. However, the attempts of the Fifth and Eighth Armies to break through to the Po Valley stalled during the fall rains of the Northern Apennines. The winter line ran from southeast of La Spezia on the west coast through the mountains to Rimini on the east coast. Known as the Gothic Line, this defense system ran approximately thirty miles to the south of the Po Valley.

Naturally, there was the normal amount of conjecture as to our European destination, but Italy seemed the logical place to dispatch mountain troops. We were not surprised when on the second or third day of our crossing it was announced that Italy was our destination. A map of the Mediterranean had been the single map hanging in the Officers' Lounge of the ship. From what I could gather, the original strategy was to keep the pressure on the enemy in Italy with a minimum of casualties to us.

According to Eisenhower in his *Crusade in Europe*, "Our problem became that of forcing the fighting with economy and caution so as to avoid unnecessary diversion of units and supplies that could be used in Overlord (European Operation)." Hence, there was no definite plan to drive through to the Alps. However, Hitler's alleged plan to make a suicide stand in the Alps forced the decision to assault this fortress from the south. The Fifth and Eighth Armies were going to have to break out of the Apennines.

Embarkation was planned, simple, and forlorn. We boarded a train on a raw winter evening for the short trip to the actual port. We were unloaded to bleak wooden sheds and served coffee and donuts by a contingent of over-professional Red Cross girls. A bleating band seemed completely out of place, as did the dampness, the dirty harbor smells, and the bowels of our designated ship. I can't forget the trapped look of the men as they stumbled down the steep companionways with their bulky olive drab dufflebags. They had to be pushed and guided in this unfamiliar environment like bewildered sheep. This was the

moment when the war really closed in around them. The draft notice, the induction center, and even the first trip into the front lines were insignificant compared to the wretchedness of embarkation.

My most vivid memory of shipboard life is the four-hour watches in the hold with the men. They were crammed into bunks that were three deep and about two-and-a-half feet apart. Room also had to be found for their equipment. Since German U-boats were still a threat, absolute blackouts were necessary at night, so all hatches and portholes were sealed. The ventilators failed to air the depths of the ship, and the men became very sick.

The first two or three days out of Hampton Roads in winter are traditionally rough, and this crossing was no exception. Men in the second and third tiers were too weak to make the latrine, so a new and practical use was found for the GI helmet. From their appearance, I thought that some of our men were going to die, but we finally learned to bully them into the chow line. Seasickness is underrated.

I remember the groans of the ship (like an obese woman doing exercises in a corset), heads bumping, eternal pokergames, cigarettes, vomit-covered latrine floors, bitterness, oil smells, and bitching.

The Transportation Corps is not to be commended for its treatment of the enlisted men on troop crossings. The enlisted troops' food was terrible and insufficient, while the officers dined on steaks. The enlisted men were cramped on the lower decks while the officers roamed the sparsely populated upperdecks. It was Army caste and privilege at its worst.

The lifeboat drills were interminable. However, when we heard that a ship had been sunk off Gibraltar, we accepted the rigid drills.

We all had plenty of time to think of the days ahead. In our own airy compartment, holding six officers, the reaction to what the future held was degrading. Fear and tension manifested themselves in adolescent crudity, loud

boastful language, petty bickering, and quick tempers. A bunk inadvertently jostled would bring a man up snarling. I felt let down by myself and by the others about me. I dreamed about hand-to-hand sword battles with the Germans. I worried about my possible conduct in battle.

Along with our nervous pettiness was a strong sentimentality. Most of us were enraptured by June Allyson and the shipboard movie, *Two Sailors and a Girl*. I saw it five times. A Princeton man confessed to writing June Allyson a fan letter; he made it "different," of course.

I remember the snowy outline of the North African coast, the blue Mediterranean winter afternoons, Capri, and then Naples looking murky and sullen under a morning cloud cover. We were immediately transferred to LCIs for our further transportation to Leghorn.

It was on the stern deck of a docked LCI that I had my first experience with Neapolitan civilians. They hovered about us in little skiffs. When we were through with our chow, we scraped the cold remains into little cans they held up to us. Even the dregs of cold coffee were welcome. A cigarette was the height of American generosity. Shocked by such poverty, I helped a hungry-looking kid over the fantail and offered him half of my dinner. "*Demi*," I said, and drew my hand across the middle of the mess kit.

"*Capito?*"

"*Demi, demi.*"

He nodded, smiled gratefully, and when I turned my back, wolfed down everything. I am ashamed to say I soon learned to send the kids scurrying with a harsh "*Via!*"

We pulled out into the bay of Naples on the next afternoon into the teeth of a north wind. I crept up into the bow to avoid some of the wind and spray. I revelled in the cold hard wind, the glittering clear light, and the snow-capped peaks rising from the shoreline of antiquity. The bleak, domineering medieval fortresses close by on the shore, the eternity of the sea, and the proximity of death

all combined to tie past, present, and future together. I recaptured the pure emotion of a joy of living I had not experienced since childhood. I recalled the spirit of adventure I had felt as an eight-year-old when I used to first row my little boat out of the confines of a little Massachusetts cove into the slap and chop and challenge of the open sea.

During the night, a freshening wind kicked up the sea. With their flat bottoms designed for beach landings, the LCIs were soon having a hard time of it. When heavy head-on seas hit the bottom of a rising boat amidships, it set up vibrations through the long axis, as though the boat were a plucked guitar string. This, combined with the ordinary pitch and roll of a small craft in a heavy sea, was too much even for the crew. Seasickness again reigned.

The convoy of LCIs depended on one leader for navigation. With the deep swells, the black night, and the unmanageable behavior of the craft, the separate boats of the convoy had difficulty maintaining contact. Two LCIs finally collided, with no serious consequences, but it was decided to run for port. We spent a day and a night in some little harbor and then pushed on in quieter waters up the coast past Anzio and Elba to Leghorn.

We disembarked and were immediately trucked to a staging area near Pisa. There we were to receive our weapons and equipment before going to the front. The staging area was on the grounds of the former King's summer palace. I only remember the flat green grounds and the formal lines of evergreens along the road. The trees were pruned and clipped to an umbrella shape, giving overhead shade but allowing a view from the sides.

After training for eighteen months with our wonderful Missouri mules, we were equipped now with motorized transportation. For eighteen months, we had been packing our personal effects into the simple, efficient Army rucksack. Now we were issued the damnable Army jungle

pack, an incomprehensible mess of straps and canvas. We were also given an additional battery of unfamiliar 105-mm howitzers. Most of the climbing ropes, pitons, snaplinks, crampons, and other mountain-climbing equipment were safely warehoused in the States.

Then there was censorship. We officers had to censor the outgoing mail of our own men. We either cut out the offending passages ourselves or handed the letter back to be rewritten. I suppose it was necessary, but the men resented it a great deal, and it was a time-consuming and annoying job for the officers, especially later when we were at the front. As an officer, you had to do the job thoroughly, for your censoring was censored.

Some of the letters were amusing, however. There was one fellow who wrote passionate but identical letters to his wife and two other girls. Then there was the man who wrote from the peaceful staging area how he was going to have to go outside again where the fighting was hot and heavy. There were the constantly expressed worries of unfaithfulness by those who had been the most unfaithful. But for the most part the letters ran to a dreary routine pattern that made me wonder about our educational system.

We heard that the 10th was in disgrace security-wise, because the first prisoner taken from us gave complete information to "Jerry" in spite of the intensive training to reveal only "Name, Rank, and Serial Number."

We were also told that our Division Infantry had been welcomed to the front by German propaganda leaflets. See *Naples and Die. Now you have seen Naples . . .* stated some of the leaflets. Most of the propaganda dwelt on the corpulent and wealthy munitions manufacturer seducing the soldier's girlfriend in the States. The leaflets were directed at a very low mentality, and I think they were quite ineffectual.

The war was much closer at the staging area. Stubby P-47 Thunderbolts and the sleek P-51 Mustangs flew back and

forth from strikes. We could hear the rumble of artillery 20 or 30 miles away. We heard of four men who were killed by a mine near their staging area, as well as a chaplain who triggered another mine as he rushed to help the others. We heard of a daring five-day ski patrol which penetrated deep into enemy lines, never to return. That was all, but little bits of such episodes were enough to make us aware that our Division was already suffering casualties.

Our commander, Colonel Pearson, came back from a reconnaissance of the front.

“What’s it like up there, sir?” I asked.

“It’s pretty quiet now, but it won’t be that way for long.” The Colonel looked pleased when he said that, which gave us all a feeling of confidence. Action, it seemed, was inevitable.

In two or three days, we were ready to go up to the front line. The Battalion was dispatched at intervals. Our Battery Commander and Executive Officer had gone on ahead to prepare the gun positions. I was left to lead the convoy. There was no problem, for convoy speeds were preordained and the roads were clearly marked. Nevertheless, I felt important that afternoon as our jeep led the Battery out of the staging area.

The highways were in remarkably good shape, and it was a mild and sunny winter afternoon. The valleys and hills in the first part of the trip were similar to the Coast Range country north of San Francisco. I remember the ancient Roman viaducts which frequently crossed the roads to descend to the valleys.

Towards late afternoon, signs warned us to chain up. We snapped up the canvas sides of the jeep and wound our way up the terraced foothills. Soon after nightfall, we came to the light line. From this point forward, our headlights could attract enemy artillery, so we used the little blue dim-out lights on the vehicles. There was only the pale gleam of the dim-out lights on the indistinct snow-packed road, vague outlines to the sides, the sound

of a mountain stream below, the hum and whine of the jeep, motor stink, and a closer feeling of companionship with the driver. Cigarettes tasted good.

At about 2200, we were stopped in a small village by a stomping, grinning, dark-skinned soldier. I couldn't understand a word he was saying, but after a few moments I caught "*mucho bombardo*" out of the torrent of words. This was my first acquaintance with the Brazilian Expeditionary Force.

I must confess that I was quite thrilled by "*mucho bombardo*" on our first night; the news seemed quite fitting and, strangely enough, calmed me down. The great unknown of the front was becoming known. Imagined fears were replaced by a reality that one could manage. After a half-hour or so the Brazilian's field telephone rang, and he waved us through with a toothy smile. He seemed a most amiable sort of fellow.

We drove on. Evidently this section of the approach was under observation by the Germans from their positions on Mount Belvedere. They had the road zeroed in, and, at night, they would sometimes throw shells in at the sound of a convoy. We were ordered to maintain large intervals between the vehicles. Nothing happened.

After a bit, the road was hidden from observation by the defilade of the hills near Belvedere. At this point we caught up with the convoy ahead of us, which was proceeding slowly. The snow was two or three feet deep on the sides of the road. The whine of the low gears and the tantrums of skidding chains above us foretold of hard going ahead.

We got out to stretch. I remember how good it was to hear the squeak of dry snow under my feet, to see the black indistinct outline of wooded hills rising high above me, and to feel the exhilaration of the dry mountain air. Around 2400, we reached the little village of Lizzano in Belvedere, where I was to contact my Battery Commander.

Villages near the front were dark and muffled at night. Communication wires strung overhead, a tank squatting in the shadow of a building, or an occasional half-concealed sentry huddled in a doorway were among the few signs of habitation. Civilians did not risk leaving their homes.

Our convoy pulled over to the side of a narrow street. I stepped out into this hushed new world of night snow and gray-black buildings. The cold slapped me after the warmth of the jeep cab. I found a sentry. "Anybody know where Baker Battery's supposed to go?"

"Who?"

"Baker Battery, 605th."

"Never heard of them."

No one appeared to lead us to the gun positions as we had been briefed. I couldn't find out a thing. I hated to think of the results if the enemy decided to shell the town with our convoy jammed together in the open.

After almost an hour, one of the sergeants in my convoy came up. "Lieutenant Motley, the men are getting pretty cold. We've got to get them inside." It must have been about 15 degrees that night.

"Where'll we put 'em?"

"Some of the 26th Armored has given us some coffee. They said we could sack it in there for the night. The rest of the sections can take care of themselves."

"O.K.," I said, "but know where everybody goes. I don't know if we're supposed to pull out of here tonight or what."

The grumbling men climbed awkwardly out of the trucks, then disappeared down the dark streets. I dropped in a little later to see how the section with the 26th Armored was doing. It was wonderful to step from the nocturnal hostility past the blackout blanket into the warm camaraderie of the front.

"Come on in, Lieutenant, and grabba cuppa jolt."

The room was flickering cheerfully from a homemade lamp: a bottle of tank oil with a paper towel for a wick.

Smoky oil and coffee smells mixed. Tired, strange, sympathetic faces made us most welcome. These men from the 26th had left their blankets to set up hot drinks and a little food for our cold and bewildered men. Our hosts had crowded into one room to give us a place to catch a little sleep before morning. The hospitality was natural and gracious.

That bond of unifying friendship permeated the front. The closer the enemy, the stronger it was. We shared common dress and a common two-fold purpose in life: to live and to kill. There were no profit motives or politics to create tensions. I wonder if life on the front is not the closest humans ever come to that idealistic society philosophers dream of, where all work willingly for the good of the whole group. It was paradoxical. Men became true Christians as they lived to kill. Men gained stature as they directed all their efforts at the breaking of the Sixth Commandment.

Society up front had different criteria for good citizens. Unselfishness and sacrifice were demanded. There was no admiration for the individual who sought to better himself at the expense of others. Hypocrisy was quickly exposed. I do not mean to infer that we lived in a paradise, but I have never seen my fellowman so noble and open.

I finally found Battalion Headquarters in a school house about 0200. I was told that no one knew where Allison, the Battery Commander or Snyder, the Executive Officer, was, but that I had better keep the men inside and catch some sleep myself right there. I threw my sack onto the floor in a corner of the room and passed out.

The next morning, the Battery Commander, Major Baker, appeared and took over. He had been unable to complete the preparation of the gun positions, so the trucks were removed into a motor pool, and the guns were to be pulled out to their positions the next night. Major Baker took me upstairs to the Battalion Observation Post.

Through a hole knocked in the side of the wall I had my first look at the front.

It was a pleasing scene, similar to an open New England winter landscape in its friendly, compact feeling. The immediate small-scale countryside was one of hilly open farmland. The white sloping fields were divided by stone walls or rail fences and punctuated with scattered farmhouses. The lower cleared country was open, but misty, gray masses of bare branches blanketed the steeper slopes. Intimate, curving roads connected the small neighboring villages, which were invariably dominated by churches. Almost all the buildings were made of stone. Wood was reserved for fuel in this country. The architecture was simple and unimaginative. Still, the civilization seemed to belong to the countryside. Rugged mountain peaks lay in the distance with their evergreens contrasting against the snow.

My experiences in combat were not to carry me much farther than the territory I looked over that morning. I remember the landscape well, for I fell in love with it. It was a peasant's land, and I could understand the peasant's closeness to it, unproductive as it was.

I still have the crumpled, old yellow map of this area with me. It is Sheet 97, Italy, encompassing the Monese and the Castle D'Aiano sections. Although inaccurate topographically, it shows every individual farmhouse. A name such as Casa Florio or Casa Buio personifies each black dot representing a building on the map.

With one hand on my shoulder and the other pointing out terrain features on the ground and map, Major Baker oriented me. He seemed to be in a mellow mood that morning.

"That big hill, right in front of you about 6000 yards, yeah, that's it—that's Mount Belvedere, altitude about 3800 feet. We're at 2600 here. Not much of a mountain, is it?"

I nodded.

"Now, follow its horizon down to the left, or west, as far as you can. Got that? I wish I could show this to you from Vidiciatico." Vidiciatico was on higher ground about two miles up the road from us.

"From there," Baker continued, "you can see how the western slope of Belvedere meets the base of the northern end of Riva Ridge down there at Rocca Corneta. From there Riva runs back toward the southwest to Mount Spigliano, which lies about here." He pointed a little behind our left flank. The contour lines denoting elevation differences of about 100 feet were so close together at Riva Ridge that they made a black mass.

"Rugged country," I said. "Does Jerry hold it?"

Major Baker grinned. "Jerry holds all of Riva Ridge and then his line swings . . ."

"Sswhew. We're surrounded."

"Well, not quite. Jerry's line swings east up the western slope of Belvedere. He controls that side of the mountain completely, but on the southern slope, the one right in front of you, we have strong points holding the bottom three-fourths of the mountains. Belvedere is the southwestern end of a hill mass that runs six miles to the northeast up to Mount della Torraccia, right here. You can see how the Belvedere-della Torraccia hill mass controls Highway 64 that runs around its eastern end. We're scrapping for 64 because it's the main supply route from here to Bologna in the Po Valley, and on up to the Brenner Pass and Austria. That's why they call Belvedere the key point of the Winter Line. That country way over there to the west is too rugged for roads, so you might as well forget about it."

"Did you know that just a month ago Jerry was down here in Lizzano? There was kind of an unwritten truce around Christmas time. Colonel Briscane told me that he heard that the Jerries used to come into a tavern at our end of town up here, while the 26th boys celebrated down at the other end of town. A few of our boys got looped on

Christmas Eve and had the guts to come on up and have a little party with the Germans. When our 86th Regiment came up, we were a little aggressive and started more intensive patrolling. The 26th Armored was kind of sore at us for breaking up the truce, but at any rate, Jerry pulled way back up to their present line."

"Where do you think we'll hit them, sir?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Darned if I know, and I really don't," he said, taking his eyes off the map and looking straight at me. "But it's a cinch we're going to have to take Belvedere. We tried twice last fall and were knocked back on our fanny both times."

"How about Riva Ridge?"

He grinned. "Wait'll you have a look at it, and you'll see how about it. I've got to go down now. You might as well stay up here. There's nothing you can do at the Battery. Let me know if you see anything."

I spent the rest of the morning up there memorizing the map. I could see that our forward positions on Belvedere were under direct enemy observation on three sides. In fact, Jerry was practically behind them on Riva Ridge. From Belvedere, Jerry could look on Lizzano and Vidiciatico, and our gun positions. I practically pulled my eyes out of their sockets trying to catch my first glimpse of the enemy through my field glasses, but all I could see was the empty, sun-flooded countryside.

At 1200 I saw Captain Allison, who came in for chow at Battalion Headquarters. He called me over and said, "We're setting up the gun positions to the right of the road about halfway between here and Vidiciatico. It's a lousy exposed position, but it's the best we can find for now." Allison said he had some work that would keep him busy for the afternoon. He told me I could take his driver Pasquale with me. "He knows the lingo a little. Dig up some quarters for the men near the gun positions. Pasquale will show you the place we have picked for the officers. You might as well take your stuff up there with you."

"How do you go about making the people get out?" I asked. I didn't like the idea of pushing the civilians around.

"I don't know," Captain Allison said. "You'll have to figure that out, but we should have everything set up by tonight."

"Are you going to move the Battery in then?"

"We're supposed to, but I don't know. It all depends on how much work we can do on the positions tonight. Colonel Pearson says that General Ruffner is raising hell to get the guns in, but I'm damned if I'm going to do it when we're only half ready. We're going to be sitting ducks out there as it is, so we've got to be dug in good before we can expose the men."

"I'll check back here late this afternoon," I said.

I found Pasquale loafing up at the Battalion Motor Pool, which was hidden from enemy observation by a church. He drove me up to the house that had been selected for the officers. The house was up from the road about 50 feet and, from it, we had a beautiful view of Belvedere. And, I noted, Belvedere had a beautiful view of us.

What I remember of Italian houses are the hollow sounds and the stone and the clammy cold. There was no heat. We made our way through a hall on the basement floor to a room that had two cots set up. I threw my duffel on one of them, then took a look around. The house was dug into the hillside, so the family lived on the upper floor which had its own private entrance on the back, or upper, side. We had our own bathroom with a crude running toilet. I suppose I should have appreciated it more, but I did not relish sitting on that frozen horseshoe of a seat. On those sunny, warm winter afternoons when the temperature climbed into the high thirties, it was more comfortable to be out in the open than in the chill dampness of those gloomy houses.

"O.K., let's go down the road and see what we can dig up," I said. The nearest house was 100 yards back toward

Lizzano. Our knock was answered by a slight, elderly man in working clothes.

We had been instructed that the Italians were to be treated with respect, as our allies. I had read about the poor impression our GIs had made all over Europe and had quite seriously resolved to be an individual ambassador of good will. I told Pasquale to ask for permission to quarter the soldiers, to tell the people that we didn't want to inconvenience them and that they would be compensated for their troubles by the US Government. Pasquale spoke briefly to the man. I could only pick out certain words: "*Soldato, casa, notte.*"

"*Uno momento.*" The old man disappeared into a room off the hall. We heard a high-pitched torrent of words from what sounded like an old and irascible woman. We waited for almost five minutes, until the old fellow reappeared looking even more insignificant than before. He spoke to Pasquale, shaking his head and pointing towards Lizzano.

Pasquale translated. "He says that she will not have the American soldiers in her house. They killed her nephew last fall in Lizzano."

"Tell her that we are sorry about her nephew and let it go," I said.

The next house had no room. The next one had sick people. The next one didn't want their place dirtied up.

It was getting late. Pasquale, the square-faced, unshaven kid who had knocked around the tougher sections of Arlington, Massachusetts, crushed a cigarette with a disgusted twist of his heel. "Look, Lieutenant," he said, "let me try the next house myself. I know how to handle these people."

I was tired and disgusted. "Go ahead," I said. "We've got to come up with something."

He drove back to a two-story building close to a section of the road that went by the gun positions. I waited outside while he knocked with authority on the door. When it opened, he pushed his way in and was back in ten minutes.

"We can put half the Battery in here, and I think there's room across the street for the other half."

"O.K., try them," I said.

He sauntered over and was back in five minutes, with his helmet cocked back and the stub of a cigarette twitching in his lips. "You're all set, sir."

I was both relieved and irritated.

"What did you tell them?" I asked as we drove down toward Lizzano in the chill twilight.

Pasquale didn't take his eyes off the road. "Look, Lieutenant, we've got a place for the men. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?" The young ambassador let it go at that.

Major Stephens, the Battalion Executive, was all business when I saw him that night. "Report here at 0800. Bring your field glasses and pick up a map here from Sergeant Tillman. We're going to set up some OPs."

It was bitterly cold in my room the next morning. I dressed in my long GI underwear and regular Army shirt and trousers. Over this I slipped on a medium-weight, long-sleeved GI sweater. Then I put on my bulky smooth-woven combat pants with suspenders. The pants had two good-sized zipper pockets and two large button-down pockets extending on each leg from the middle front of the thigh down below the knees. It was a wonderful piece of combat clothing, serving as a windbreak and snow repellent, while the pockets were invaluable for K-rations, hand grenades, extra rifle clips, map cases, pencils, extra radio batteries, and such.

A snug but free moving double-insulated combat jacket slipped over the suspenders. The jacket had wool elastic sleeve cuffs and buttoned closely under the chin. I wore a GI stocking cap, a homely brown thing with a little hard bill and long enough to be pulled down over the ears. Then came my steel helmet with its rough olive drab outer surface which fit over the light plastic helmet liner containing an

inner webbing. The steel helmet had a chin strap to hold the combined apparatus down, but we usually left it unhooked, for we had heard that shell concussions could snap necks if the chin straps were secured.

I slipped on two pairs of heavy Army ski socks. The Army shoe pack with its rubber bottoms and leather uppers came halfway up to the knees. Two felt inner soles insulated each foot from snow and cold. When they were soaked with foot sweat, the felts were replaced by dry ones. The Army had suffered many casualties from trench foot the previous winter because of the old all-leather combat boot, but the new shoe pack practically eliminated this problem.

I have forgotten whether we used the ordinary GI gloves or the combination of the inner ski mitts and the outer windproof shells. The mittens had slots through which the fingers could be thrust without removing either mitten.

Next I snapped on my webbed belt which secured my canteen, first-aid packet, and rifle clips. With my lightweight .30 caliber carbine slung over one shoulder and my field glasses over the other, I was ready to go. I always carried three or four grenades in my combat pants, and this morning I picked up a K-ration cardboard packet for lunch.

The reconnaissance party led by Major Stephens consisted mostly of forward observers and battery commanders. We checked on a couple of gun positions and then took the road off to the west of Vidiciatico that bypassed the town and led toward Riva Ridge.

We climbed for a half-mile up the steep eastern slope and northern tip of a nameless minor ridge running parallel to Riva. Tight hairpin turns marked the highest point of the road between Vidiciatico and the base of Riva, and here the infantry had established strong point "Bulldog" in a typical stone house.

"Hold it up here," Major Stephens ordered just short of the turns. He pointed up the slope.

"Baker Battery will have an observation post in operation by 0800 tomorrow just left of that open spot about 400 feet above the road. Identified?" He was abrupt and tense.

I said, "Yes, sir," but what I thought was, "What the hell does he think this is, a training problem at Fort Sill?" There was something I didn't like about the whole setup, but I couldn't explain it to myself. The Major seemed to be in a hurry to leave, but I kept probing in an attempt to alleviate the confusion in my mind. "Do you want us to put in wire, sir?" I asked.

"Did you ever hear of an OP without one?"

"No, sir, only . . . O.K."

I decided to save the questions I did not know how to ask for later. Also, I was too nervous at the time to realize that Stephens was irritated because he, too, was a little unsure of himself. We headed back for Battalion Headquarters.

Memory is partial. I performed miserably in the establishment of our first OP, so I have conveniently forgotten many of the details. I do remember that the situation did not fit any of the solutions that I had learned in training. Four feet of snow forbade laying wire in concealment up from the rear of the OP. We were forced to run the wire directly from the road on the exposed northern slope. I remember my ineffective leadership, the nervous whine of my voice, the men fumbling and slow, the cold gray dawn. Finally, we were in position.

We ate a cold breakfast, and the three of us—the wire Sergeant, the radio Corporal and I—crouched down in our snow trench to observe. Nerves quieted down. 0800. 1000. 1100. It was overcast and the temperature remained well below freezing. We swept Belvedere, Rocca Corneta, Polla, and the northern end of Riva Ridge with our field glasses. The landscape had lost its charm and become for us a forbidding, empty gray.

1120. "Keep down, Colby. Do you want to expose us?" But we all started to move around more and more. We were becoming too cold and too bored to care. We ate a cold lunch, smoked, and forgot to observe. Frozen feet demanded movement. I began to realize that an exposed, outdoor OP was absurd. If we had a concealed dugout or a place for a hidden fire, it might have been bearable, but our position halfway up on a forward slope made this impossible.

1300. I tried to memorize the map but I did not have enough known reference points and was unable to match the features on the ground with those on the map. "Colby, we're up here to observe. Keep on those glasses."

"Yes, sir."

There is an extended variety of meaning a man can inject into a "Yes, sir," without overstepping the military conventions of respect.

1345. We were standing up, smoking, beating our arms across our chests. We had seen no activity. There couldn't be any enemy. I felt incapable of enduring the boredom and the cold any longer.

"Colby, you hold it here. I'm going to the tank and let those guys straighten me out on the map. We're no good up here unless we can read it."

"O.K., sir," he said quite cheerfully. I think he was happy to be rid of me temporarily. I knew that I shouldn't have been walking out on the exposed slope, but I felt that Jerry would have spotted us by now anyway. I rationalized that most of the gun positions and Lizzano were exposed to direct observation from Belvedere. If Jerry hadn't yet fired a shot, then our air superiority was keeping his artillery tied down during the day. At least, that was my thought as I stumbled through the snow down to the hairpin turns where the tank was.

I had been envious of the tanker's situation. A five-foot embankment along the outer edge of the upper hairpin turn

offered perfect concealment for the tank, which nestled comfortably beside it. The crew could wander peacefully about the road or could observe with impunity the enemy terrain over the edge of their natural bulwark, but at our OP we felt like naked ground bugs after someone has pulled away the shelter of a rotting log.

"Are you fellows from the 26th?"

"Yeah."

"I'm from the 10th. I've got an OP back up there, but I'm lost on the map. Suppose you could straighten me out?"

"Sure, sure. I thought I saw somebody wandering around up there this morning. Frozen?"

They had a little fire going, and I was soon burning my tongue on hot coffee. I imagine I was a welcome diversion for them. For two months they had languidly observed from this vantage point by day and run the tank back to the protection of Vidiciatico at night. They were eager to show me the tank, to tell a few stories, and to help me with the map. After an hour had passed, I began to feel guilty about my absence from our OP, but I was too comfortable and too well entertained to leave.

"Roll her out!" One of the observers had spotted something.

As the tank motor churned into activity, I ran over beside him. "What do you see?"

He put down his glasses and pointed. "Jerries, right over there, on Belvedere," he said, "where the road makes that curve. Wait a second, they're behind those trees now. They should be out in just a second."

I braced my elbows on the frozen dirt, adjusted my glasses, and lifted them to my eyes. The eye pieces were cold. I pressed my thumb knuckles into the outer edge of my eye sockets to keep the light out. I saw the Germans immediately. "Yeah, I've got them. Two of them. Right?"

"That's all, I think." One of the Jerries cut a ridiculous figure, so short that his white camouflage coat trailed along

the road. The other soldier towered over him. They seemed quite unconcerned as they strolled along. The tank grumbled forward a few lengths to a point where the embankment was lower and the gun barrel was able to clear it.

"That's good. Hold it." The turret revolved a little farther and the muzzle elevated somewhat. The crew seemed to be working fast and well. I watched the target, fascinated. I could hear the shell ramming home. The range was about 3000 yards.

"CRACK!" The report was much sharper than a howitzer's. As a matter of pride, I restricted myself to an imperceptible jump. "Did you pick it up?" I asked. "No, I see it. Christ, that's close!" The shell had left a black splotch on the snow a little short and about 40 yards to the right of the Germans. "Shorty," as I had unconsciously named the little one, and his companion broke into a lope, but at that range they looked remarkably unhurried and cool to me. I did not take my eyes off them, but I could hear the clank of the cartridge case being ejected, the slide and the thud of a shell being loaded, and the off-and-on purr of the turret motor.

I did not consider this quarry as human, but as target. It was as though I were a boy throwing stones at a tin can afloat in a river, or tackling a ball carrier who had broken clear and had been headed for the goal line. It was excitement and fun, with perhaps a little suppressed guilt such as one might experience while duck hunting. The second shot pushed Shorty and pal along a little faster. They disappeared behind a two-story building beside the road.

"Pour a couple into it," someone said. "There might be some more in there."

The gunner put two neat holes through the front of the building.

"Is that all that happens?" I asked.

"Listen, Lieutenant," the observer said, "you ought to see the inside of that place after a couple of rounds have gone off. They really raise hell."

We watched the house for some time, but nothing happened. What bloody action had taken place in that peaceful looking house with the two holes in front?

I was astounded at the accuracy of the high-velocity gun compared to our low-velocity howitzers.

"Did you really think you had a chance of hitting them?" I asked.

"Hell, yes," the gunner said proudly. "D'ya see that pine tree way up there by itself on the skyline of Riva?" He pointed to a spot that must have been 2000 feet above us and at least 2500 yards away. "Well, there was a Jerry up there who had a dugout on the back side of the ridge, but every morning about 0800 he came out on the forward slope to go to the bathroom. 0800, right on the dot, every morning. He used to read. We watched him for about a week, and one morning I let him have one while he was squatting."

"A direct hit," one of the tankers interrupted excitedly. "He just disappeared."

"Of course, it was a little lucky," the gunner grinned modestly, "but we can really lay 'em in with this baby." He patted the gun muzzle. I could see the gunner was pleased by my respect for the tank's accuracy. He turned to me. "Say Lieutenant, do you want to do some shooting?"

"What do you mean, with your gun?"

"We got plenty of rounds left over today."

There was nothing that I enjoyed more than directing artillery, and I had been looking forward to my first opportunity to fire shells into enemy territory.

"Yeah, I'd like to shoot, but what at?"

"Why don't you see what you can do with that bridge that crosses the Dardagna River below Rocca Corneta there?"

Knocking out a bridge sounded pretty important to me, although the tankers seemed casual about it. "O.K., but I'll have to use the artillery method of observation. Can you convert yards into mils?"

"You just give us the yardage corrections, and we'll take care of the rest."

"Fine," I said, "why don't you sight the gun in for direction and I'll give you a range to start off with?"

"That'll be good," he said.

I fumbled excitedly in my pocket for the celluloid ruler which automatically converted measurements on the map to ground yardage. *Take it easy, I said to myself. I've got to show these guys I can shoot. Get the right scale now.* There were two or three scales on the ruler, and I had to be sure to select the one that applied to the map. I kept talking to myself. *You can't get a decent measurement up here. Get down on the flat ground. Watch you don't get in the way of the tank.*

I took the map from the irregular surface of the embankment and lay it out on the road. I measured the distance from Bulldog to the target carefully. I felt a little awkward kneeling there on the ground and fumbling with the little white celluloid ruler on the folded crumpled map. I looked up at the gun turret and called, "Try three-five-zero-zero on range. We can correct from there."

"Three-five-zero-zero, O.K. We'll let you know before we shoot."

I strolled over to my old observation spot behind the embankment. The release from the cramped kneeling position calmed me down, and I began to feel the intent but cold awareness that comes to an artillery observer. I held my glasses in my left hand close to my left shoulder. We had been taught to observe the initial shot with the naked eye, since field glasses had too restricted a field of vision to pick up a wild shot.

"All set, Lieutenant?"

I half waved my free right hand without taking my eyes off the target area. The gun fired. *Watch it now. Only takes about two seconds. Ah, good! Like to pick up the first one.* The round had thrown up a geyser of snow beyond and just to the right of the bridge. *Couldn't be more than 400 yards off. No, play it safe and get your bracket.* I twisted in my tracks and called back, "200 right, 800 over."

Everything was under control now. The second shot was to the left and short. I was so sure of where it was going to land that I had my field glasses glued on the spot. *100 left, 400 short. This is like my first problem at Fort Sill. What a cinch.* CRACK! *Ought to be right on the line and over. Yup. Now get the next order back quickly.*

"200 over," I said. I managed to sound a little bored.

"100 short."

*I'll split this 100, then put in six rounds and adjust on that. I haven't wasted any of their shells.*

The next thing I knew I was across the road and half sliding and jumping down the snowy bank that separated the upper and lower hairpin turns. There had been a terrible explosion. I sensed the tank crew running behind me, and I had reacted physically to the noise before I fully realized that it had come from an incoming shell that had hit near our position. Muscles had taken over mind for that brief, startling moment. When I stumbled onto the lower level of the road, I stopped for a moment. I could hear the tank backing up on the road above me. I felt like a boy who has been caught bullying a younger kid.

Another incoming shell landed well down the road, and I realized that we were all adequately protected from whatever was firing on us by the steep reverse slope of Bulldog. I looked to my right and there were three Italian civilians standing under a large protruding boulder. They were grinning at me, and I sensed they must have witnessed my undignified descent. Where they came from, and what

they were doing there, I didn't know. I had to laugh at myself. "*Tedeschi bombardo*," I said foolishly.

"*Si, si.*"

"*Primo bombardo*," I admitted, pointing at myself. "*Discendo. Vite, vite.*" I pointed at my beeline precipitous tracks.

They understood my hopeless mixture of bad Latin, Italian, and French and roared their approval. Another shell went over, and I forced myself to treat it casually.

"*Cigaretto?*" I offered them around, and three earth-worn hands eagerly plucked them from the pack. I was much more concerned with saving face than with the military situation, but another shell reminded me that I ought to get back into the war. I climbed back up the same route I had descended and was somewhat gratified to find the crew under the tank, which had backed up to its former secure position behind the embankment.

Tankers have never been known for their courage. I speak not from personal experience but from the many bitter stories I have heard from the infantry: stories of infantrymen who had to walk on mined roads ahead of tanks; stories of tanks backing off, leaving the infantry as soon as the first rounds of enemy artillery came in; stories of tanks reporting control of a town, only for the arriving infantry to find the reporting tanks on the heights leading into the town, which was still packed with enemy soldiers.

I have often wondered why tankers behaved in this manner, when the same cross sections of Americans acted with great courage as infantrymen. I have concluded that a tanker suffered from claustrophobia; he lived with the fear of being trapped in a flaming tank. Perhaps the American worship of the machine had something to do with it. Just as the captain of a ship may have to sacrifice picking up survivors to avoid torpedoes, so may a tanker become more attached to his machine than to the unknown infantryman whom he is supposed to support.

It should also be allowed that tanks were at an extreme disadvantage in the muddy, narrow, winding roads of the northern Apennines. Nevertheless, at this moment I was thankful to find my new friends in a supine position, for I did not consider my own conduct under fire to have been exemplary.

I crouched down and called underneath, "Any idea of where it's coming from?"

It was a rather silly question, considering that they were not in precisely the most suitable position for observation, but it did relieve what I thought was a slightly embarrassing situation. They crawled out, a little muddy and snowy, but not in the least abashed.

"Nope. We've had it fire on us before and couldn't spot a thing. Sounds like a high-velocity weapon to us."

I ran over to the embankment and looked in the direction I assumed the fire to be coming from. I was searching the countryside aimlessly as a couple of shells went over high. *High*, I thought. Then it hit me hard. *Our OP. They are firing on our OP behind us.* A wave of guilt flooded over me. What was I doing there while my OP was under fire?

I didn't dare express my fears. I said to the tankers, "I'm going back up to our OP and see if I can spot anything from there. Thanks for the shooting."

I was down over the embankment and onto the road in a dead run, giving my Italian friends a wave of my hand as I went by. I was running out of the protection of the Bulldog defilade, but guilt outweighed any thoughts of fear. I slowed my pace somewhat, for I remembered the 400-foot climb ahead of me.

About 100 yards down the road I heard an explosion close behind me, and running sideways, I half turned to see that a round had landed on the side of the road at a spot I had just passed some seconds before, but I found that fatigue alleviates fear. As I left the road and started a stumbling, slipping, desperate climb up to the OP, I could only think of my bursting lungs and my pounding heart. About

halfway up I stopped, gasping for breath. It was a few moments before I could call.

"Colby! Sergeant Colby!" There was no answer. The Jerry gun was silent now. I started up again, sick with apprehension, and after another 100 feet or so called again with the same results. I felt for the rough canvas of my first-aid packet, which was still there.

"Colby! Droney!" I was sounding a little desperate.

I reached the OP and, to my great relief, found it deserted. There were no signs of anyone being wounded, and the telephone and radio were gone. Then I heard Colby and Droney calling from behind a shoulder of the hill. I made my way toward them. "Where are you? Are you both O.K.?"

"Over here, sir. We're O.K." I found the two of them in the shelter of a small gully with Captain Allison, who evidently had come up to check the OP in the early afternoon. I wondered if he would say anything about my leaving the position. "They were firing on you, weren't they?" I asked them.

"Firing on us!" Sergeant Colby burst out in an aggrieved tone, "They were knocking the branches off the trees! I'll say they were firing on us!"

"Well that's the end of that OP," I said to Captain Allison. "We might as well take in what wire we can and get out of here. Don't you think?"

Captain Allison agreed.

I took him aside and explained my reason for not being at the position, and to my relief, he understood. He left while we worked for the next few hours reeling in the wire.

It was 1800 before I returned to Battalion Headquarters to report to Major Stephens. He was eating with Colonel Pearson and the rest of the staff. I came in, exhilarated.

"Excuse me, Major. I suppose you heard about the OP. First OP we set up, and we're chased out." I laughed, but I expected commiseration.

"Did you spot the gun?" Major Stephens asked without looking up from his plate.

"No, sir, we didn't see a thing, and you know the men at Bulldog? They never have been able to see it."

"Well, set the OP up tomorrow morning again, and see if you have better luck."

"What did you say?"

He pushed aside his plate, looked up at me: "I-said-set-it-up-again-tomorrow-morning."

"Not where we were fired on today?"

"The same place. There's a war on. What did you expect?"

In training, Major Stephens had been a good, if not brilliant, officer. I liked and respected him. Although his present attitude was incomprehensible, I held my deep anger in check.

"They have the place zeroed in, sir. Somebody will get killed in that exposed place. Can't we at least change the location?"

The Major turned angrily back to the table and said nothing. I walked out of the room, for the first time distrustful of our leadership.

The next morning a jeep driver from Battalion Headquarters arrived with orders for me to report to Colonel Pearson immediately. I braced myself for a reprimand as I entered the overheated room.

"Good morning, sir." The Colonel was at the end of a long table with a clutter of papers in front of him and coffee in his canteen cup. I could see brown spots where he had spilled on the top report. He looked as if he had just arisen and had dressed hastily.

"Morning, Preb," he said cheerfully. "Get yourself some coffee and come over here and take a look at the map. We've got a job for you." I helped myself to a cup and then walked over beside his chair.

"You're to take two wiremen and a radioman," he said, "and report to Sally White in Vidiciatico at 2000." Sally was the code name for the 86th Infantry Regiment, and White designated their Third Battalion. "They're furnishing a weasel and driver and a guard to take you up to Rattlesnake tonight, where you will furnish artillery support for Able Company, which is there at Rattlesnake, and Baker Company, which is up here holding Coca-Cola."

Coca-Cola was the code name for Querciola, a cluster of nine houses which marked our foremost, or uppermost, position on Mount Belvedere's southern slope. Rattlesnake was a lone building about 400 yards down the road from Coca-Cola.

"There's another strong point, Lion," said Colonel Pearson, as he pointed to another single building, "about 400 yards west of Coca-Cola, and that's about all we have up in our sector of Belvedere."

"Where's Jerry now?"

"You'll relieve an observer from the 26th. He's going to spend a day orienting you. He will know the situation better than I do here, but I think Jerry has outposts about 400 yards above Coca-Cola. At night he sends patrols between our strong points, and they roam anywhere around in here." The Colonel designated the lower slopes of Belvedere with a vague three-quarter circle of his ink-stained forefinger.

"Jerry hit Rattlesnake with a combat patrol a few nights ago. They had quite a fire fight. The road you'll go up tonight, this one here, is the only one plowed clear of snow up the mountain. We control it from Vidiciatico at one end and Rattlesnake and Coca-Cola at the other end, where the plowed part stops. Lay your wire as you go. Keep an eye out. Jerry could ambush. Better keep radio contact all the way in case you get in trouble. That cover it?"

"Yes, sir. Sir, about last night, I'm . . ."

"I think you'll find Rattlesnake a little more comfortable for an observation post," he interrupted with a straight face. "That's all. Be careful."

Our guide from Able Company was waiting for us at Vidiciatico that night. He was a pinch-faced, thin kid of medium height and about nineteen-years-old. He was the most nerved-up man I had yet run across on the front.

"Yes, sir, I'm Private Patterson. Can we get going pretty soon, sir? I want to get up there before Jerry patrols get out too far. I think they're going to hit tonight. Have you got any hand grenades with you? I'll call up to Rattlesnake before we start and see if it's all quiet so far. We don't have to go, do we, if anything's happened up there, that is?"

"You better call," I said. I was starting to get jittery myself when one of the Able Company men took me aside.

"Don't mind Patterson. He's pretty broken up, Lieutenant. He and his buddy had a hole together on the perimeter guard outside of Rattlesnake the night Jerry hit, only his buddy had left to take a leak. When Jerry opened up, his buddy came sliding back into the hole, and Patterson killed him. He put six holes right into him point-blank. Pat was no damn good up there after that, so they put him on guide to give him a rest."

"And that's our guard?"

My informant shrugged.

It took us a full two hours to lay the wire from Sally White Headquarters to outside the town. We had to string the wire overhead to prevent breakage from men or vehicles. Almost all of the convenient protrusions in town, such as spikes in a side of a building, or signs, or tree branches, had as many as fifteen to twenty wires strung over and tied around them. The sky over the streets looked spider-webbed. The moon had not risen yet, and the wiremen had trouble climbing in the dark. Patterson fretted at the delay.

We finally extricated ourselves from the wire maze of Vidiciatico and were out on the country road that dipped down toward Bailey Bridge that lay at the base of the mountain. The radioman worked with the wire drum off a spindle on the back of the weasel, so he could reach for his radio quickly. We had our channel tuned but were only to use it in case of emergency. I pulled out the extra slack, for a taut wire broke if a shell landed nearby. Wiremen worked behind us, pulling the wire off to the side of the road, tying and tagging it whenever possible. We were moving smoothly at about two or three miles an hour.

"Go slow over the bridge," begged Patterson, "or Jerry will hear us coming." He was carrying his rifle out in front of him in readiness, while he glanced quickly to the sides of the road. I kept an eye on him to see that he didn't point the rifle at anyone. We crept over the bridge, but the wooden planks grumbled a dull echoing protest like far-away thunder. The full moon rose at about 2400 as we started the two-mile climb. It was a still and frosty night. Banks of snow on each side of the road sparkled and seemed incongruous with the washboard clunk of the weasel tracks, the musclebound sounds of low gear, and the poisons of the exhaust.

The hard work calmed us. Even Patterson settled down somewhat, although I couldn't persuade him to lead more than a few paces out in front of the weasel. The curving high-banked road and our isolated position put us at a serious disadvantage in case of ambush. If an attack were to come, I expected it from the upper side of the road, and I remember planning to hurl myself to the snowbank on that same side in the hope of obtaining protection from the steep bank above. Then I intended on lobbing hand grenades up the bank and at the same time working myself up or down the road out of the danger. It was a comfort to have a plan.

"Lieutenant!" Out in front, Patterson stopped, crouched down a little, and peered intently up the road. He flicked

out his right hand in a quarter gesture of halting and then brought it quickly back to his rifle. He slid around the weasel beside me. He was turned to retreat as he pointed. "Up there, up there on the road!" The driver and the radioman scuttled out of the weasel and joined us behind it.

"Take it easy," I said. "It . . . wait, there is something up there."

"Jerries! I'm getting out of here!" Patterson wheeled and ran. I involuntarily followed for a few steps, then caught myself.

"Hold it!" I sprayed my arms out sideways to check the others, who had also joined in the panic. My thought was that we couldn't just leave the weasel. It also came to me that the soldiers we saw might be American. The three men stopped and watched me tensely. I turned around. "Probably Americans," I said. "Cover me from the weasel. I'll go up and see."

I walked around the weasel and started up the road toward the five white figures who were crouching on the side of the road about 100 yards above us. I slung the carbine over my shoulder, for if it was a German patrol, they would have me covered. If it were an American patrol, I might draw fire if I looked antagonistic. I felt very alone. I saw the men turn toward me as I approached, but I couldn't judge their intentions. Strangely enough, I was still very much aware of the beauty of the night. I remember the scrunch of the dry snow underneath my feet and breathing the cold air into my lungs. I thought I was fairly relaxed. The men above were motionless. About 20 yards from them I stopped. "Americans?" I said softly, and realized how scared I was by the sound of my voice.

"Who are you?"

"You guys scared the life out of us."

That was all. Life at the extreme front was full of these little anticlimaxes. We learned from the patrol that there

was no activity that night, called Patterson back, and completed the rest of the trip without incident.

Approximately 35 infantrymen manned the Rattlesnake outpost. By day they just existed; by night, in shifts, they guarded strategic windows and doorways in addition to perimeter foxholes. Machine guns or Browning automatic rifles poked through small holes knocked through the stone sides of the building. Chicken wire replaced glass in the window frames to prevent hand grenades from being thrown in and to allow small arms to fire out. Improvised oil lamps and cigarettes were permitted only in the stuffy Headquarters room, where the window was blacked out with a blanket, and the doorway had two blankets hung from it with a space in between. Men going in and out of the room were careful to pull aside only one blanket at a time to prevent light from escaping into the hallway outside.

I groped my way through the blackness of the interior halls, with my fingers pressed against the cold stone walls and my feet shuffling throughout the litter of stone and mortar fragments on the floors and staircases. There was enough dim light in the rooms with open windows to pick my way around the sleeping forms, food cartons, five-gallon water cans, and ammunition boxes. We spoke in soft whispers.

Outside, trip wires connected to flares or hand or phosphorus grenades guarded the strategic approaches. A length of telephone wire with suspended empty C-ration cans also served as an alarm system. We learned to augment the effects of hand grenades by binding on heavy nails with friction tape and tying the grenades well up on a tree or on the rafter of a barn at a point where we surmised the Germans might pass underneath while attacking. We tied small ropes to the firing pins and ran them into the main building or to outposts where they could be pulled at the appropriate moment.

Outpost guards were a necessary evil. Field telephones with their bells removed connected all outposts with each

other and to a switchboard within the house. At odd intervals throughout the night the reports came in:

"I hear machine gun fire off to the west about a half a mile."

"I think I see something moving in from the hill above me."

I remember one ridiculous whispered conversation:

"I hear a dog barking."

"What kind of a dog?"

"I don't know. I think it's a police dog."

"A German police dog?"

"Yeah, a German police dog, coming this way. Must be with a Jerry patrol. Call the artillery guy."

So the yap of an Italian farm dog contributed to the numberless false alarms that kept us in a state of extreme tension.

At the outpost, tension mounted on tension, until one of the guards cut loose at some shadow or rustle in the dark and brought us scrambling out of our sleep for our rifles and grenades. Staccato bursts of small arms fire reverberated over the mountainside sporadically during the night. Sometimes, we heard a more voluminous and lengthy exchange of shots as two rival patrols stumbled into each other.

It was understandable for men to imagine things in the dark, and especially in the snow fog that sometimes settled down on the mountain at night, but I saw a case where fatigue and tension produced a daylight hallucination. It happened in another outpost building which was also a foremost position. In the late dawn of a clear morning, one of the infantrymen who shared a ground floor room with our artillery crew ducked behind the window and, as he released the safety on his rifle, hissed, "Look out, a Jerry!" We dove for the floor and slid over to the window.

"Where?"

I pulled the pin of my hand grenade and held the released lever down with sweating fingers.

"Right there, right in front of us. Behind that tree."

I waited a moment, then flicked my head up over the sill for a quick glance. "Don't see him. By the first tree?"

"Yeah, he was standing, and he looked out from behind it."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure, I'm sure. He was right there, I'm telling you."

We waited and looked, and nothing happened for five minutes. The tree was not thirty feet from us.

"You're seeing things," I whispered. "What would a Jerry be doing there?"

"I saw him. I saw his face. He was wearing glasses and had a thin face, and he was looking right at me."

I waited a few moments more and put the pin back in the grenade. The man was completely rational and convincing, and from what I had observed had been a quite capable soldier. Finally, about four or five of us went outside, spread out, and stalked the tree. There was no one behind it, nor were there any footprints in the snow, but the alarmist never admitted his mistake.

One afternoon, I received an agitated call from the infantry Company Commander. "Partisans report two Jerry tanks in Corona. Get artillery on them quick."

"Roger. Hold on."

I grabbed the artillery phone and alerted my Battalion Fire Direction Center that I would need a division artillery concentration. My call was treated as an emergency, for tanks in Corona, only 700 yards above us, could lay devastating direct fire into the the outpost buildings packed with our men. Meanwhile, when I centered my field glasses on the small village, I was unable to spot the potential threat. I felt panicky, and the hand that held my field glasses was shaking slightly, so I was forced to drop the telephone, put both hands on my glasses, and rest my

elbows on the remains of the window I was looking through. Nothing unusual appeared. Why couldn't I see them? Keeping the glasses on Corona, I groped for the field telephone that connected me with the Company Commander.

"Ask them whereabouts in Corona."

I had to wait while the CO relayed my question to the partisans. It seemed like a long time, so probably there were language difficulties.

I spoke to Major Baker at Fire Direction on the other phone. "Hold on, sir. We can't spot the target."

"O.K., we've got Div. Arty. all set to go."

The infantry CO was back. "One of them was right beside the third building from the right . . ."

"For Christ's sake, they don't mean those Shermans that have been up there all winter." Two crippled tanks had been left in Corona after the unsuccessful autumn attack on Belvedere.

"They couldn't. I'll ask them though."

Another long silence ensued. I started to calm down, for I realized that if a German tank was in firing position at Corona, it would have opened up on us by now.

The CO called back. "No, they say they don't mean them, but they don't sound too sure about it to me."

"Well, I'll keep looking, but I'll bet that's the story."

"Cease fire. Looks like a false alarm."

That was the story. It was inconceivable that the local partisan group which had participated in the fight for Belvedere when the tanks were lost should suddenly mistake the Shermans for the enemy.

I could only imagine a group of the paisanos in a little room somewhere on the mountainside consuming too much vino over a late lunch, suddenly catching a quick glance of the old derelict Shermans, jumping to their feet, pointing wildly, gesticulating, and rushing wildly to the phone with everybody talking at once. Although the Italians sometimes gave gallant aid to the Allies, in our sector this incident was typical of their undependability.

\*

Despite all the precautions at Rattlesnake, a German combat patrol of about twenty men once had been able to penetrate our defenses with ease.

On the perimeter guard, we had set up two machine guns to cover the open field to the north. We had set up the guns in two closely placed haystacks only 40 or 50 feet from our quarters. The Germans walked confidently across the field toward the strong point with no attempt at concealment. The machine gunners spotted them immediately, but because of their casual approach assumed them to be a returning American patrol.

Both German and American patrols wore white camouflage suits, so night identification by uniform was impossible. The Germans marched between two haystacks up to the building and opened fire through the windows. There was a wild fire fight for ten minutes, and then the Germans withdrew, dragging two of their wounded with them. Our only casualty was Patterson. The German attack was as ineffectual as it was courageous, but it did throw us into a state of jitters that was contagious.

At the strong point, we slept warmly in sleeping bags in temperatures that dropped to 20 degrees at night, and although the building was chill and damp from the open windows, we were relatively comfortable in daytime temperatures that reached the high thirties. We ate "ten-in-one" rations, which, despite complaints, were varied and edible. They included cereal, dehydrated eggs, bacon, sausages, cheese, beef and noodles, crackers, jelly, candy, good cocoa and coffee, and an overabundance of cigarettes. The food was warmed over small unit gas burners which otherwise had pots of coffee brewing over them.

Since we were well within small-arms range of the enemy, the bathroom was either the adjoining cow shed or a room within the house designated for that purpose. The Germans had previously occupied this particular building,

so the accumulated filth and rubble of garbage, discarded tin cans and human excrement in these rooms was indescribable.

There were no rules concerning personal appearance, so most of the men were unshaven. Except for dry socks, we had no change of clothes, and since we slept in them, spilled greasy food over them, and rubbed the dirt of the walls and floors into them, we were a filthy crew in spite of any attempts to sweep the floors, shave, and clean ourselves up.

We had an SOP in our Division that all infantry patrols were to be accompanied by artillery forward observers, who hated patrol work. Nevertheless, it was a good rule that raised the morale of the patrols and enhanced the infantry-artillery relationship so necessary to an effective division. Walkie-talkie radios helped maintain contact between the forward observer on patrol and our artillery crew at Rattlesnake. We relayed any fire missions back to the guns with the more powerful but bulky "602" radio, too cumbersome for patrol work.

The three patrols I accompanied were sent out primarily to obtain information, but they had the manpower and the firepower of a combat patrol. Twelve or thirteen men loaded down with BARs, tommy guns, grenades, and even bazookas were supposed to make a stealthy infiltration of enemy lines. They sounded like a small army and reminded me of young boys playing Indian.

"Keep it quiet. Pass it back."

"Keep it quiet. Pass it back."

"WHAT?"

"SHH. I SAID KEEP IT QUIET. PASS IT BACK."

Two hours out, a man dulled by fatigue blundered into the man ahead of him as the patrol came to a sudden halt. There was a metallic clash and a muffled curse. The patrol leader often lost his way, and I remember wasting half a night creeping up on one of our own outposts. One of our objectives was to ascertain the number of Germans in

Corona. We made this patrol on skis, although the snow crust was strong enough to support us without them. While we could have climbed straight up on foot, we traversed the mountain with our skis scraping and slipping on the hard crust. Unnerved by the din of our approach and by the voices of two Jerries who were digging in the frozen dirt about 100 yards above us, we crept up to a bend in the road about 150 yards from Corona itself. Timidity bred timidity as the patrol leader and his sergeant conferred in harsh whispers.

“What do you think? Shall we go in?”

“I dunno. It looks empty to me. If there were troops in there, they’d have a machine gun on this road.”

“That’s right. They would have opened up on us by now if anybody had been there. Must be empty.”

“It’s getting light. We better get the hell out of here.”

After a glorious dawn ski run down the frozen pastures of Belvedere, the patrol reported Corona deserted. When we attacked two weeks later, 200 German prisoners were taken from it.

The patrols originating out of Coca-Cola developed a habit of taking the same path out of town, so one black night Jerry ambushed the path and killed three men before they were 50 yards out. Some patrol leaders would take their men 200 yards out and sit down. While there, they would fabricate a story for Battalion Intelligence. I saw one such group returning in three hours from what should have been an arduous six-hour patrol with frozen balls of snow stuck to their bottoms and with their teeth chattering from cold.

The British, on the other hand, sent out two or three specially trained men who relished patrol work and worked well together. Shod in tennis shoes and armed only with revolvers and knives, they would accomplish more in one patrol than a dozen blundering American attempts. The Indian Ghurkas used to sneak up on two sleeping men, identify them as Germans by feeling the outline of their

helmets, silently cut off the head of one to subject his companion to a gruesome awakening.

Why was the American, a superior soldier in many respects, so poor a patroller? My belief is that the American combat god was not personnel, but firepower. The American soldier had been educated in the superiority of his weapons and led to believe that an indiscriminate shower of bullets and explosives was a guarantee of success.

"What if we do get in a jam on patrol?" the American thought. "If we bring along enough stuff, we can fight our way out of it."

The American combat infantryman was never sold convincingly on patrol work. To his mind, it was a device to obtain a Bronze Star for some ambitious higher echelon intelligence officer. "Goddamn if I'm going to stick my neck out for the f---ing brass," was the infantryman's attitude, and his front-line officers sympathized with him, for the bond between front-line men was much stronger than the bond between front-line officers and their rear-echelon superiors.

Two days at Rattlesnake convinced me that the observer from the 26th Armored had selected his observation post more for convenience and safety than for observation, with which he seldom concerned himself. Not realizing that there was a dearth of German activity—I saw only one German soldier, who was lighting a cigarette at twilight, in a week of almost continuous surveillance—and cognizant of my orders to maintain a constant vigil of enemy lines, I decided to move my position up to the church tower in Coca-Cola.

The tower was exposed and an obvious OP, but I planned to ascend the tower ladder at night and gradually build up the background of the open belfry with boards and odd materials until my silhouette would not be visible from the German lines. Since the Germans would sometimes approach within 100 yards of Coca-Cola in the darkness

and conceal themselves in a building throughout the day, I worked silently to avoid detection. I smugly remembered all my training lessons in Concealment and Camouflage, and after four nights of tense preparation, I finally completed a lookout from which I could really see something of the enemy terrain sloping gently above us.

The following night, "I" Company, of the 86th Infantry Regiment, with Captain Duke Watson commanding, moved in to replace the company then occupying Coca-Cola. In order to conceal troop movements, Watson's company had night-marched twenty-two miles over rough, unfamiliar terrain. They were dead tired. After six nights of little sleep, I was red-eyed with fatigue myself.

Duke was a strong stump of a man, a bulldozer in physique, and as open and fun-loving as an old station wagon filled with happy kids. After "I" Company had settled down to its new position, I joined Watson in a bottle of the local red wine. I was most enthusiastic about my new vantage point.

"Duke," I said, "come on up to the bell tower with me. You can really get a good view into Jerry country."

He was amenable to the idea, so we stealthily crossed the small courtyard separating the church from the building we occupied. Our footsteps sounded loud in the oppressive silence. It was a dark night, and particularly black in the bottom of the bell tower. I could only feel Duke's presence behind me. I reached back for his hand and put it on the ladder.

"*Après-vous, mon capitaine,*" I whispered, feeling a little silly.

I heard Duke chuckle as he started up the ladder. I followed, holding my head down and closing my eyes to avoid the dirt that Duke was knocking down from above. I looked forward to a few hours of quiet companionship with a man whose company I enjoyed.

Duke, who relished any form of physical exercise, lustily swung himself into the belfry, only to be met by a

tremendous blow against his steel helmet. As he staggered to one side, helmet askew, the bell of Coca-Cola proclaimed our presence over the winter countryside. I had completely forgotten to warn him of the clapper directly above the top of the ladder. As I poked my head into the belfry, I was shocked and guilt-stricken at the stupidity of my error, but in the dim light of the open tower, one look at Duke's startled posture was more than I could stand. Whether it was the wine, the fatigue, or the release from six days and nights of miserable tension, I do not know, but I broke down into helpless schoolboy giggles. Duke joined me.

Like youngsters who find it impossible to suppress laughter in church—although they fully realize the consequences—Duke and I, expecting to draw fire at any moment, collapsed in helpless, shaking heaps on the floor of the belfry and gave ourselves up to full-fledged belly laughs. We were told later our laughter was heard at Lion, a quarter mile away, and that the bell was heard at our gun position over two miles to the rear.

Duke and I finally quieted down somewhat, and as the Germans, for reasons of their own, had not fired on us, Duke observed at dawn for a while and then disappeared snuffling and chuckling down the ladder.

Two days later my relief appeared. He was a recent West Point graduate, nervous and unsure of himself. He took one look at the tower and said, "Isn't that an exposed position?"

"Sure, it's exposed, but it's the only place you can see anything from. I have been up there two days and haven't drawn a shot. It's O.K."

The following night the Germans shelled the church, and the poor West Pointer was forced to make a precipitous descent down the ladder. He never forgave me.

HQ gave me a few days of rest after the uneventful but exhausting duty at Rattlesnake and Coca-Cola. I censored

mail, wrote letters, and relieved the Executive Officer at the guns.

I then received orders to observe Riva Ridge from above Bulldog. For three days, I watched the ice cliffs and snow-covered slopes for signs of the Germans who held the ground. I saw nothing. It was a more relaxed time, and during the warm, sun tan days, I idly searched for climbing routes up the south face. Riva was a spectacular piece of topography. I concluded that a roped team could climb it, but that Riva was too formidable to be scaled in strength.

About 1700 on the third day, I received an order to report to Battalion Headquarters immediately. The Battery jeep picked me up at Bulldog, and on the ride down I noticed the stockpiles of supplies and ammunition neatly piled along the road. It was after dark when I arrived, and although I was cold and hungry, there was no time for a cup of coffee. I saw four other forward observers from our battalion with pencil and paper in hand, watching Major Baker. The atmosphere was quiet and serious. As I slipped into a chair, Colonel Pearson leaned over and said, "Here's a climb for you."

"Not Riva?"

He smiled and nodded.

I was full of questions, but Major Baker began to speak. "Last fall we lost Belvedere because of artillery fire directed from Riva Ridge. This time we are going to take Riva first, and as soon as it's secured, the attack on Belvedere and della Torraccia will begin. Now take a look at your maps. Five reinforced platoons from Sally White will climb the ridge tomorrow night and make five separate coordinated attacks at dawn. We are depending on surprise. Gorham, you'll be attached to Able Company which will hit the top of the ridge at Campiano, Matthews with Fox at Cappel Buso, Motley with Charlie Company at Serrasiccia . . ."

As I followed the order on my map, I realized that if successful, the widely distributed attacks would give us complete control of the ridge.

Major Baker continued. "Each assault force will march tonight to houses that are so close to the base of the ridge that Jerry can't see them from above. You will join your units as they pass the IP at Vidiciatico tonight." The Major gave us each a time for our contact.

"You will hide in the houses tomorrow and start climbing tomorrow night. As soon as you reach the houses tonight, lay wire back to your liaison officer at La Ca. Now listen to this." Baker, neat and purposeful, paused until he drew every eye from the maps to himself.

"The whole operation depends on concealment. No one is to leave those houses from dawn until dusk tomorrow."

He waited for the little nods of understanding that bobbed about the room.

After Baker had completed the order, we picked up fresh maps, radio and telephone codes, and hurriedly left the room, for there was just enough time to organize a radio and wire crew, bolt down a lukewarm supper, and make our rendezvous at the IP. There were no "Goodbyes" or "Good Lucks" as we left the comfort of the warm headquarters. Everyone was too busy. I did not have time to do much thinking, but I remember a feeling of relief. We all knew that a spring drive was inevitable, and if the others thought as I did, we all were willing to get the thing over with. In fact, I found myself looking forward to resolving doubts I had about my own physical courage, for on the boat coming over and during the few idle moments I had on the front, degrading memories had disturbed me.

I remembered the well-dressed little boy in the matching blue hat and coat, standing white and speechless over his small bicycle in the Public Gardens of Boston. He stared stupidly at the pack of ragged urchins around him.

"Pretty, ain't he?"

"Where didja get the nice clothes?"

"Give us a ride, pretty boy. Whatsa mattah, pretty boy, can't ya talk? Maybe this'll help." The blow on my cheek didn't hurt; it was just a force that stirred me to the only defense I knew:

"Emma! Emma!" I shrieked. My nurse, a hulk of Germanic protectiveness, lumbered to the rescue, like a mother elephant to her young.

I remembered avoiding fights during my miserable boarding school days, and the bitter mental flagellations that ensued. I remembered lying on my stomach on my bed in the empty dormitory and pounding the blue scatter rug with a desperate fist: "You Goddamned coward! You Goddamned coward!"

Battalion patrols had thoroughly scouted the terrain beneath the ridge, and except for infrequent German night patrols (a chance we would have to take), the Battalion Staff ascertained that terrain to be enemy-free. Selected mountaineers had worked every night for two weeks silently exploring the cliffs for climbing routes, which the mountaineers then memorized and improved with fixed ropes at the most difficult spots. The complete security of our assault gave us little time for preparation, and four hours after I had left the observation post, my artillery crew and I joined a column of infantry making the short march from Vidiciatico to Casa Tonnielli, our concealment for the next day at the base of Riva.

I relaxed during the march, for we were in the hands of the infantry. There were the usual inexplicable halts and long cold waits, but the march discipline was excellent, and it was remarkable how quietly 250 men (there were about 50 men to each assault force) moved to their new positions. As soon as the assault force to which we were attached reached Casa Tonnielli, it turned in for the night, but we in the artillery immediately started laying wire back to the Liaison Officer.

It was a warm night and when we were laying the wire, we broke through the snow crust, at each step sinking up to our knees. In an attempt to take the most direct route and lay the wire off the main path, I lost my way, so we wasted considerable time and effort finding the Liaison Headquarters. Sweating and tired, we finally made the contact at about 0500. We immediately turned and ran in the dawn light back to Casa Tonnielli. We were too fatigued to feel any apprehension about the events of the coming night. After a full breakfast, we crawled into our sleeping bags and slept soundly, in spite of the stirrings of the men about us.

The raving curses of Lieutenant McDonald, the infantry Platoon Leader in charge of our assault, awoke us about 1700. He was one of the mountaineers who had selected our route. He was a skinny, black-haired man with a jutting chin and long, nervous fingers. His excitability made me nervous, but the cause for his outburst at this time was justified. After all our precautions for concealment, Battalion Headquarters had sent a messenger who blithely strode through the open sunlight from one hiding place to another. I have never heard a man cursed so thoroughly and repetitiously.

As we prepared supper, we made our final plans. Lieutenant McDonald had decided on an advanced assault force of one squad in order to achieve a quiet approach and complete surprise. The remainder of the force was to follow 30 minutes behind the assault squad. I was surprised that he had designated our artillery crew to be with the main body.

"Don't you think you'll need artillery with the assault squad?" I asked. "You might run into trouble."

He looked relieved and said, "I'm awfully glad you said that. I hated to ask you, but if you don't mind . . ."

It was not the time or place for courtesy, but I appreciated his misplaced thoughtfulness. I decided to accompany the forward unit and leave my crew with the

main body, relying on the infantry radio to relay back commands to them in case we needed artillery.

We pulled out immediately after dark. Our course led us for a short distance beside the Dardagne, a small mountain stream that ran along the base of Riva. We were in the dark world of the roaring stream, pale snow, and vague black tree forms.

We crossed the river on a snowbridge a half-mile upstream and started to climb the ridge. McDonald was most observant of camouflage rules. The lower slopes were speckled with snow patches where we wore our parkas white-side out, only to reverse them to green-side as we left the snow for the bare ground. This seemed very proper and professional, but as it entailed wiggling in and out of our packs at every change, we soon gave up the practice.

We climbed from 2000 to 0600 the next day, but I am unable to remember many details. There were inevitable waits as McDonald scouted ahead. The climb was less hazardous than I expected. At times we had to use our hands, but there was only one short stretch of rope work.

Individually it was easy, but from a military point of view, it was an impressive feat to move more than a battalion of infantry under the base of an enemy-held cliff, to conceal them throughout the following day, and to send them successfully up an unfamiliar cliff in the dark of the next night. It took six-man litter teams eight hours to carry each casualty down this same terrain a few days later.

About halfway up, we stopped at a little shepherd's hut dug into a steep bit of mountain pasture. The infantry dropped off their sleeping bags to be less weighed down for combat, but I decided to hang on to mine. It had been getting colder as we climbed, and the wind was driving freezing fog clouds in unhappy confusion along the face of the cliff. Knowing that it was to be even colder on top and that courage fades as body warmth drains, I decided any

danger of the added weight was more than compensated for by the comfort of a warm sleeping bag.

During the pause in climbing, there was an irritated solidarity amongst us. The tense, contained overtones of the leaders rose above the perfunctory grumble-chorus of the men. In addition to bumps in the dark and the scrape of canvas and "Where the hell is Sgt. Gilroy?" What seemed to be in the air was: "Let's get going. Let's get on with it."

Finally, we started climbing again, but things didn't go well. McDonald was everywhere, scouting ahead, letting the line of men file by him as he whispered advice, driving hard, almost frantic. At a difficult spot, the man ahead of me disappeared into the fog, and I blundered off onto the skyline of a small ridge, only to be pulled back by the hoarse abuse of McDonald, who made it quite plain what he thought of a damn fool artilleryman who didn't know enough to keep off the skyline. I surged with resentment. If the bastard slowed down, he might keep his men together. How the hell was I to know where to go? I said nothing.

The wind picked up. It moaned in general hostility over the barren rot of the slate ridges and made personal threats around the edges of my helmet. I climbed in an endless, futile universe of blowing mist. I was thankful for little realities, the pressure of my helmet strap on my chin, the tug of packstraps on my shoulders. I sensed the nearness of the top.

The line of men drew closer together. All whispering ceased until the only sounds were the wind moan and the scrabble of feet on loose rock. Except for the white of our camouflage, it was a world without color. I reached down to feel the corrugated confidence of my hand grenade.

Suddenly, there was a shock of sounds. A helmet had blown off and was falling hundreds of feet in diminishing crashes. We might just as well have approached beating

cymbals! McDonald cursed with admirable continuity. I looked for cover in case Jerry opened up.

The Lieutenant halted the platoon and went ahead with another man to scout the top. We chilled quickly as we waited. The swirling fog changed from dark gray to lighter gray as the wind blew even stronger. Fifteen or 20 minutes went by. As I sprawled on my side, shivering, a protrusion of rock pressed uncomfortably against my elbow. I felt empty of emotion. I didn't care what happened.

McDonald reappeared with the miraculous news that there was no enemy on top! We quickly walked up the last 100 feet. For ten hours we had climbed toward an invisible foe, only to find a bit of land where the ground was level, where the wind blew a little stronger, and the cold a little colder. Fog cut the visibility to a few feet. The Germans had failed to maintain a continuous guard, and we had reached the top between shifts. So this was Teutonic thoroughness!

I spent five days on Riva, but I can't remember them in sequence. It was all a blur of fatigue, but I do remember a pattern of personal blunders erased by climactic success. Sometime during the first or second day, the clouds broke to let us see the enemy side or what we called the forward side of the ridge. It was steeped in snow and sloped gently in graceful ski slopes to a broad valley 2500 feet below. Immediately in front of us was a horseshoe bowl about 400 feet across. Two minor ridges sloping down away from us formed the handles of the shoe. In comparison, our side, or the reverse slope, was almost perpendicular rock and nearly blown clear of snow. In some places there were harsh ice cliffs; in others, little trees clung to the steep rock ridge.

The top of the ridge was barren of vegetation except for a few shrub branches that had clawed their way through the snow, as though for air. The ridge summit was only a few feet across at its widest and was corniced and knife-edged in places. It was a clean cold place, and it was exhilarating

to be above the enemy after a month of looking up at their heights.

On the first or second day, I spotted the enemy. There were about 40 of them lined up behind a hedge close to a village about a half-mile below us. They were looking us over, and we just looked back. To this day, I don't know why I didn't put artillery on them. Of a sudden, I was convinced that these German troops were Italian farmers. I was not alone in my buck fever, for although we were within machine-gun range, not a bullet was fired by our troops.

When the Germans started to move to our left, paralleling the top of the ridge, I finally snapped out of my spell and requested artillery. By this time, the enemy was moving rapidly across our front, well separated and almost hidden in a small gully. My first opportunity to fire on enemy personnel was a complete fiasco. On the first round, one of the shots fell behind us, and the others scattered ineffectually over the snowy landscape, as if some child had cast a handful of gravel in anger. One of the infantrymen summed it up with tactless brevity: "Piss-poor artillery."

It hurt, but he was right.

We later heard that this particular group of Germans pulled out a Red Cross flag and walked up without benefit of cover to within 50 yards of Company "A" 's position to the left of us. At this point they dropped their flag, pulled out concealed weapons, and began firing. The attack was as foolhardy as it was treacherous, and they were soon either killed or captured, but the attempted trickery put us all in an ugly mood.

Since I had underestimated the amount of wire needed for our telephone communication, the wire crew had to return to the base of the cliff for reels. When the wire finally reached the top it wouldn't work, so the exhausted men had to undergo the interminable job of locating the break

somewhere back down the cliff. The radio was not working satisfactorily.

Nothing is more demoralizing to the artilleryman than to be cut off from his guns. Without them he becomes a useless observer, a little man with a toy carbine to be protected by stronger infantrymen who have heavier weapons and more know-how. The cut-off artilleryman feels lonesome and hopeless: a homesick boy at camp not allowed to call home. Then the wire or the radio comes and the artilleryman is transformed into a vital part of a combat team, a swaggering war lord, respected and depended upon, the fury of a division's artillery at his command.

On the odd chance that the enemy could monitor our radio conversations or infiltrate behind us and tie into our telephone wire, all conversations over radio or phone were in code. It was security carried to absurd lengths. The people who devised the system had no conception of the handicaps that code transmission and translation put on a forward observer crew already dumb with fatigue, cold, and either under fire or tense with the expectation of it. It used to take us a half-hour to send the simplest of messages.

I speak with bias, but I am convinced that the forward observer was the key man in the infantry-artillery combination. Everything should have been done to make his job as easy as possible. To add to our difficulty we were required to make position reports every hour—in code of course. Evidently, HQ folks with their stoves and cots didn't think sleep essential for those on the line.

About 2200, after a cold meal of K-rations, I collapsed into my sleeping bag close to the Platoon Command Post on the reverse slope. I fell into a black sleep, only to be blasted from it by the cat-fight fury of a small-arms fire fight that seemed to come from the black and cold next to me.

I recognized the BRRRrrp of Jerry burp guns. *Keep cool, keep cool* was my one thought. I forced myself to lace up my shoelaces deliberately. For some reason, in that

first 30 seconds of cold shock, with that first expectation of dusky death forms coming out of the black at me, I was overwhelmingly concerned with whether I should lace up my mountain boots all the way or just lace the top eye. I compromised. I laced up every third eye carefully. I had the clear sense that I couldn't perform well or even die well without the tight security of laces on my feet.

I stumbled up to the command post as the firing died down. I asked what happened. Even to me, my voice sounded little and shaken.

"Don't know," someone said. "McDonald has a patrol out there. I'm afraid they're gone."

There was nothing to do. In the fog there was no one to fire at, and we were afraid of hitting whatever might be left of the patrol if we fired blindly. So we waited for dawn. No one returned from the patrol.

I think the fog never cleared the next day, which we passed in fear, uncertainty, and sorrow. One of the good things about war is how quickly friendships are formed under the stress of danger and mutual dependence. I remember forming deep attachments with infantrymen though we didn't even know each other's names; our lives had been stripped of sham—we did not need to pretend to be something we were not. Friendships were formed without lengthy conversation. An infantryman would say, "Come on Lieutenant, you look bushed. We got some coffee hot here. Sit down." And in the way he handed a cup to you, accepting you completely, you knew that you had another friend, one that you probably might never see again, but that made no difference. We didn't worry whether our wives were going to get along, whether we both could afford the same things, or whether we would feel comfortable meeting each other's friends. We were friends.

The only bright spot of that lonely second isolated day was the establishment of communications and the appearance

of the Infantry Captain with a few reinforcements. That night we sent out another patrol, and they reported loud, confident German voices off to our right: "They were singing—the crazy bastards were singing."

The fog burned off quickly the next morning, and we found ourselves in a bad situation. About 50 yards to our right on the crest of the ridge lay the six bodies of Lieutenant McDonald's patrol, strewn about in the confusion and panic in which they must have died. One of them lay a long way beyond the others, and I pitied him for his last, desperate, foot-slipping, equipment-laden, clumsy run for life. All alone in the early morning fog, he had probably run the wrong way.

Beyond the bodies, up where the ridge ran to a little snowy knoll, were the Germans. They were about 200 yards away. They kept well under cover, but now and then a tanned face rose to observe or snipe at us. From their position they could fire directly on the ridge we had used to climb the mountain, our only supply route.

With a dwindling amount of ammo and food, our position on the main ridge was not secure, and it soon became obvious that we would have to drive them off if we were to hold the position. We received orders to do so. Meanwhile, we pecked away at them and they at us with rifles. No one saw any point in exposing himself, and I think we suffered only one or two casualties. One of them was the Captain who was nicked on the tip of his ear. A burly, brave man with red hair, he cut some figure with a bloodstained bandage wrapped around his head. It was a still and sunny day, and our morale improved, even soared to be finally at grips with Jerry, real people in white camouflage suits, instead of invisible shots in the fog.

Rifle fire did not bother me. It was artillery I feared. I remembered the great jagged pieces of shell fragments lying on the ground at Fort Sill, and I imagined how a human body could be torn asunder by them. A rifle bullet seemed

clean and tiny. I had no more fear of a rifle bullet than I had of a bee sting. One of the Jerries who must have been an atrocious shot, fired at us all morning, and I remember from the cover of the ridge positively enjoying it. Every time a bullet whined harmlessly overhead, I ducked and half grinned, half grimaced.

I distinctly remember one of the Germans being lowered over a rock on the reverse side of the ridge in full sight of us. It was a wild, useless stunt, and three or four of us opened up on him—the first good shot we had at a Jerry. It was such an easy mark that we all missed in our wild eagerness, but his wild scramble to safety was comic. We roared with laughter—the way you laugh when a football player takes a long skid in the mud. It was part of our mental preparation to not only kill, but to enjoy killing.

Around 1200, a few of our infantrymen had managed to work themselves along the narrow top of the ridge to a point about 50 yards below the Jerries. Although this position looked hazardous, the convex nature of the slope protected them somewhat from enemy fire. In order to shoot at them, the Jerries had to expose themselves to those of us who were farther back along the ridge. Lying white and small on their stomachs with their heads thrust back to look up the hill toward the enemy, our advanced men looked like some little pack of wild things harrying a gigantic adversary. An Indian kid was in the lead. His skin looked dark against the snow.

It was an ideal winter day, with white cumulus clouds drifting close over the top of our ridge. It was hot out of the wind, cool and invigorating in it. The ridge was a dazzling white, a place removed spiritually and physically from the dark shades of the valley below us.

That day there seemed still romance left in war, with the deep blue of the sky, the white of snow and camouflage suits, the startling red of blood on the snow and the deep tans of hardened young men absorbed in battle. Our little conflict was so isolated from the usual confusion of battle

that it was more like a private duel of snow gods than the usual terrestrial muck of manmade battles.

About 1400, the firing increased. At the same time, after three days of poor communication, both my radio and telephone came in to give me full control of our artillery. I moved my phone up close to the Infantry Commander, the Captain, and without discussing it, we began to operate as a team. He was worried.

"We are going to take a lot of casualties. A direct attack. It's the only way."

I could not see the ground behind the enemy knoll, but I tried to rake it thoroughly, starting about 300 yards behind the knoll and moving the fire up toward it and us. Everything was working smoothly.

"Able Battery on the way."

In about 15 seconds, the four shells from Able's guns cracked satisfactorily someplace behind the knoll.

"Baker on the way."

"Charlie on the way."

"Dog on the way."

All the Battalion shells whooshed and cracked in spasmodic continuity. I moved the fire 50 yards toward us, calling for four rounds from each gun or a total of 80 rounds on any one spot. After the last round was fired, I closed the fire 50 more yards and repeated the process. For the first time I was the war lord. I experienced the joy of destruction which lies concealed or half-concealed in most men.

I knew that prior to this moment I had been inept and useless, my mind paralyzed by the difficulties of communications and cold and fatigue. For three or four days, I had tottered about in a daze, leaving things in the snow, stumbling into holes, and displaying a lack of leadership. Now everything was all right. I began to enjoy myself as the fracas became a glorious, absorbing game. I believe that we were under considerable small-arms fire at

this time, but I do not remember the actual fire as much as I recall people telling me to be more careful.

Eventually, I moved the fire right up to the knoll where we could see Jerry. The little hilltop cracked and snapped as the 20 guns of the Battalion fired 12 rounds apiece for effect. Seemingly without command, the platoon of infantry started their final dash for the enemy. A round fell next to one of the foremost men. I knew it must have killed him, but my mind said *Forget it*. I kept on firing. The Jerries had disappeared from sight. The little Indian and a few others ran up onto the spewing knoll.

"Cease fire. Cease fire." Another round or two came in. "For Christ's sake, cease fire."

"What's up?" asked Baker on the other side of the phone.

"They've hit the top. Wait a second—more Jerries—three rounds for effect—no, hold it—cease fire—cease fire—they're prisoners, Jerry prisoners. We've got 'em!"

I saw Germans rise out of their holes and thought at first it was a counterattack, but in a moment I realized that about ten of them had their arms and hands raised, palms across the back of the neck, elbows out in the World War II gesture of surrender. Herding them like an alert sheep dog was my spry little Indian friend. He told me later there was not a German in sight when he ran onto the knoll. They were all deep in their holes, cowering from the artillery. Our men just stood over the Jerries and ordered them out. We took the knoll without a single casualty in a direct attack with no cover. By some sort of miracle we had coordinated the infantry-artillery team with textbook success in our first combat attempt. The infantry forgot our preliminary failures and treated us with new respect.

After the prisoners started back, there were a few spasmodic shots beyond the knoll. With the hope of getting up there in time to place more fire on the retreating enemy, I prepared to move my OP. Lou Brand, one of the other

forward observers in the 605th, appeared on the scene. I asked him to cover the present post while my wireman, Corporal Gardocki, and I ran the wire off a little hand reel up to the new position. I phoned Fire Direction.

"Jim, I'm moving up to the knoll. Lou can take it from here."

"Take it easy. There's no hurry."

"It's O.K. It's pretty quiet."

"Well, watch yourself."

My failure to do just that nearly cost Gardocki and me our lives.

After Gardocki had tied in the wire, we started off on a slow trot up the ridge, Gardocki holding the reel while I pulled off the slack. Our carbines were slung across our backs. It had occurred to me to lay the wire just over the top of the ridge on the reverse slope where it would be away from the foot traffic and where we would have a little more protection, but that would have taken much longer. I was in a hurry. We laid the wire right on the skyline. Gardocki was a good man, and we made fast time. I wondered how many dead Jerries we would find.

Just short of the knoll we heard the faraway BURP-BURRP of a Jerry machine pistol. We flopped on our stomachs, more out of habit than from a feeling of necessity. Another burst. It sounded much closer. It was nice to take a little break. Just in front of me there was a bare little bush or the top of a small tree sticking two feet above the snow. On the third burst, twigs six inches in front of my face fell to the snow. I looked over to Gardocki and found him looking at me with a bewildered expression.

"My God," I said, "they're firing at us!" It all seemed so unfair. This was an infantry affair. We were just artillery, spectators really. Another burst and more twigs—closer this time.

"The hole. Get in the hole."

We scrambled for a hole which must have been dug previously by one of our infantrymen. Another burst

flattened us out on the bottom. The snow sides seemed to give us scant protection. We were face-to-face.

"Sorry I got you in this, Gardocki."

Gardocki managed a sickly grin.

"Tie in the phone. Fire Mission!"

Gardocki slid the strap of the field telephones over his head, cut the wire off the reel and prepared to connect the phone, his usual efficiency unimpaired. The burp gun had not fired again, so I stuck my head up for a quick glance.

To this day I do not know for certain where the firing came from, but in that one glance I guessed that it probably originated in a little triangular group of evergreens about 100 yards down the forward slope, the only cover in the horseshoe bowl. Our attack had bypassed his thin, possible position.

Gardocki got the phone in. "Here."

I grabbed the phone from him.

"Fire Mission."

"Fire Mission," Jim repeated.

"Concentration 202—" this was the last concentration we had fired on the knoll. "Concentration 202 is 200 right, 200 short, one round, enemy burp gun firing at Forward Observer." I remember being a little pleased with myself for the studied objectivity of the report.

"Are you O.K., Preb?"

"Yeah. Now listen, Jim, every time I look up he pops at me. Be sure to tell me how long it will take before you give me On-the-way."

"Just sit tight. We'll take care of you."

Wonderful, wonderful Jim. How I loved that little tyrant now. He called back. "About eleven seconds."

"Eleven seconds—you'll give me On-the-way?"

"Sure I will. Just hold on."

I stuck my head out again, only to draw another burst. I was beginning to feel better. The toggle switch in my hand was reassuringly substantive—one flick and I could talk to Jim.

Minutes, not seconds, seemed to pass.

“On-the-way.”

“On-the-way,” I repeated. The old firing thrill was intensified this time. I started counting. *One and two and three and four and—counting too fast—five and six and seven and eight—look up now? No, wait. And nine and—Now. Head up.* I heard the shu-shu-shu of the shell behind me, over me and somewhere near the crack of the explosion. I lowered my head as Jerry let go with another burst.

“Lost. 200 left. Repeat range.”

“200 Left. Repeat range.”

*Lost. Damnit lost—somewhere off to the left, I thought. Pull it out here and in front of me and then creep it back toward the trees.*

“On-the-way.”

Jerry fired again, but this time I picked up the shell burst, that wonderful shower of white and the circular black blotch left behind on the snow. Got it, by God, I’ve got it, I said to myself.

“100 right. 50 short.”

*No big range jumps—just creep it in and keep track of things—all under control now.* This was one of my supreme moments in combat, a wonderful exciting game with high stakes. I remembered that a burp gun pulls up as it fires—inaccurate. Jerry would never get me if I were quick enough. I began to feel sure that he was in the pine trees.

“On-the-way.”

*There—good—getting down in there—a little to the right and still short, I counselled myself.*

“50 right. 50 short.”

Jerry fired again, but he seemed wild. I had him licked. I had a wild idea.

“Say, Jim?”

“Yes.”

"Listen to this." I put my head up for a second, ducked, and then held the phone at the rim of the hole. Jerry obligingly gave another burst.

"Jesus Christ," said Jim.

The next round was just short of the trees.

"25 short. Fire six rounds for effect."

I think I miscalculated, for most of the fire for effect landed still short of the trees, but whether Jerry was killed, scared out, or never was in the pines at all, the job was done. The burp gun was silent. I stood up in the hole for a full moment, and then told Jim, "Cease fire. Mission accomplished."

We waited a while before we went on to the top, where I fired a few blind rounds into the tangle of ravines and slopes below us. We saw a considerable number of retreating Germans, but they were moving so fast and scattered over so wide an area it was difficult to bring effective fire on them. With a small shell allotment, Jim was sparing of ammo.

Leaving Gardocki at the knoll, I explored out to our infantry perimeter about 200 yards away. I was disappointed with the number of Jerry dead, for the snow was liberally covered with our shell bursts. Rationalizing that Jerry must have dragged off some of his wounded with him, I looked futilely for blood stains.

A shell cracked about 100 feet behind me. All my aggression and morbid curiosity disappeared as I hit the ground. *Not a shelling, please—I'm not dug in—not a shelling out here in the open.*

An infantryman close to the burst was laughing. He had been scratched on the finger by one of the fragments, the only casualty. I waited for the heavy shelling to come, probably with a counterattack behind it. I didn't want to fight any more that day. But, that was all, just that *one* shell. It was another unanswered question. I was sure Jerry had us zeroed in with the first shell right in the middle of

us. Why didn't he follow it up with more? It would have been a slaughter. Was it a blind, lucky shot? Perhaps a Jerry observer had been forced to move because of fire from Charlie or Dog Companies farther up along the ridge. We never knew.

I walked slowly up to the top of the knoll. I felt letdown and tired. Some of our infantry had surrounded a Jerry sitting in the snow. He had his hands covering his testicles where he had been wounded. He was sitting up straight, and he didn't look too badly off except for an air of resignation on his face, pale showing through the tan. His head was held back a little to look up at his captors who were in an ugly, blood-red mood. He spoke good English with dignity and without emotion.

I listened stupidly to the conversation close by and, yet, removed from the whole thing. I knew something was wrong. I remember him saying, "This war, it is a terrible thing."

"You F---er, now you sit there and tell us it's a terrible thing," one of our men said.

"A terrible thing. I am shot here." He moved his hands a little. He didn't seem to be in pain.

"Right in the balls. Well, you won't need 'em'

I don't clearly remember the rest. He, quiet and removed. They, bullying, mob-like. I moved away, dull with fatigue. When I came back about fifteen minutes later, the men were still there, but the prisoner was gone.

"Where's the Jerry?"

"The sonofabitch tried to cut our wire with his heel. We tossed the bastard over."

"Over the cliff?" I couldn't believe it.

The man was boasting, proud. "Right over." He pointed. "Right over there. The dirty bastard. He had nothing to live for. The bastard tried to cut our wire with his heel."

"Where's the break?" I asked. "Where did he cut it?"

"We caught him in time. He was asking for it."

I turned away.

We were just as tough and cruel as the enemy. I saw a man chip the teeth out of a dead Jerry to get the gold. An officer in my battalion claimed he slit the throat of a prisoner because he refused to give away the artillery position of his comrades.

Men from other combat divisions told comparable stories. As in the case of Riva, extremes of savagery usually occur during or immediately after the first experience of troops in close combat, where the frustrations of training and the fears of battle are released at once. The more experienced infantrymen at Riva were less emotional and even displayed an elemental sense of justice.

After we dug in, the rest of the day passed uneventfully. Our artillery crew busied itself with communications while the medics took care of the dead and wounded. The medics referred to the dead by last names, identifying the dead in the manner they might identify a stick or stone: a dead soldier's name now merely a point of reference. The corpses were but things: frozen logs, dead rabbits on a highway. There was sorrow (when we had time) for the personality now gone, but no sorrow for the bodies, which in their dead, frozen, huddled forms appeared much smaller than in life.

The medics were overloaded. To get the bodies to the base of Riva two men went below and with arms upstretched to their full length, they grasped the handles of the stretcher as four other soldiers lowered it. As soon as the stretcher was steady in its new position, two rear men clambered down to take over the burden. The six soldiers kept alternating positions to transfer one wounded or one dead to the base of the cliff. In steep or slippery places the uppermost pair of soldiers attached a rope to the end of the

stretcher, took a turn around a tree or rock, then lowered the stretcher to a more secure position.

The wounded took some terrible jolts, but not one was dropped, despite the understandable exhaustion of the litter crew after eight straight hours of this work. Quartermaster personnel were pressed into emergency service.

Evacuation was slow. Some severe casualties waited up to three days on Riva before being removed. Quietly they lay in sleeping bags and, miraculously, they lived and lived and lived.

Somewhere out along the ridge beyond our position lay a wounded Jerry. For one night and two days we heard him groan, not the painful groan of a conscious man but that of a man far gone in shock or delirium. The sound was changing to a death rattle when I left Riva, but it was another day and night before our medics got to him. Despite his wound and the unfriendly weather, this Jerry survived.

On the night of the German ambush our radioman, Lidke, disappeared. We didn't know if he had deserted or had been captured. Two days later, he reappeared. He was suffering an injured back. He had rolled in his sleep, bounced 100 feet down the cliff. He landed upside down, snagged in the branches of a tree, still in his sleeping bag. His fall had taken him away from the main supply route, so his cries for help went unheard for two days.

On the next night when my relief came up, it was the West Point soldier again. He had not trained with us in the Rockies, where we had learned to cope with the psychological fears that rugged mountains can create in a man. I had to put him, whimpering, into his sleeping bag for the night.

Once I had tucked in my relief, my men and I wanted to get off Riva and back to the 605th. We started down soon after dark. Gardocki, Lidke, and I stumbled down the dark ridge, exhausted. We staggered from rock to rock, from rock to tree to rock, half asleep.

When we reached the base of Riva, my mind cleared, and we figured out the shortcut to the road above La Ca. A few hundred steps and we were in a weasel, clunk-clunking back to Vidiciatico. I fell asleep.

*A jolt—A kind voice—“Here you are, Lieutenant”—Cold air—“Thanks”—Pack—Carbine—House—Mess Sergeant—Coffee—Cigarette—Bed.* I stepped into the lighted room. *Lighted at this time of night? Everybody up—green packs neat along the whitewashed wall.*

“What’s up?”

“We’re moving out.”

I came close to tears, so bitter was my disappointment. I crawled in the cab of a two-and-a-half ton truck. The hum of the road soon lulled me into an uncomfortable sleep.

We were stopped.

“Who’s in there?”

“Lieutenant Motley, sir. He’s beat.”

Captain Allison sent me back to our former Casa where I threw my sack on the floor, then slept through the next day and night.

I’ll never forget the morning I awoke, simply because nothing happened: *nothing*. Separated from my outfit, I was in no hurry to get back. After the Italian family gave me some breakfast, I sat in the second-story window of the house and watched the farmyard below. The front was quiet that day and the spring sun warmed my insides. A few chickens pecked where the snow had melted. Wet earth smells rose to the window. I drank a bottle of red wine slowly. It was all I could ask for: a full stomach, warmth, quiet, peace.

I noticed the Italians seemed much happier, then I realized the war was over for them now that the mountains above their farm had been cleared of Germans. This spring, the natives would take up their old lives again. They cared nothing for Mussolini or politics or war. They wanted to work their soil again. But I had to follow the war, valley

after valley, ridge after ridge. Who were the conquerors now? Later that day, I returned to my outfit.

Our new position was about ten miles to the east, near Gaggio Montano. Unlike the Lizzano towns, Gaggio Montano did not nestle in with the countryside but dominated the region with its fortress-like stone church rising well above the highest ground.

After Riva Ridge and Belvedere had been secured, the Division fought northeastward against increasing resistance, along the Belvedere ridge out toward Mount della Torraccia, the high ground that insured domination of Highway 64 below it. But the Jerries clung stubbornly to the summit, so the job at hand was to drive them off. The next day I took another forward observer party up to assist a Second Battalion Company in the attack. This time I found it harder to go into the lines. I had satisfied my curiosity about combat and about my conduct therein. Now I began to feel the conflict between the great forward movement of our Battery, our Division, our Army, and the growing tug of fear that pulled me back.

Our jeep and trailer took us up along a winding dirt road filled with the loud complaint of military traffic. By late afternoon, we had risen to the pines, then into a strange new place with no snow, no alpine vistas, and no privacy. We were part of an army, part of a groaning, confused, irritable mass of men with MPs, Battalion-aid stations, strung wire, and squirming, muddy roads.

About three-quarters of the way up we unloaded our gear, strapped on the radio, and proceeded on foot up to a rendezvous with the Liaison Officer. There was the usual confusion of finding the place, but we found it. A hot supper, and we were part of a mule train climbing in the early night, climbing in the old familiar smells of fresh manure and leather, in the old familiar sounds of hooves and creaking harnesses, and the half-meant savagery of mule-skinners' voices. Except for Italian mules and Italian

drivers, it was like old times in the Colorado Rockies. Before 2400, we stopped and settled down for the night.

The elation of Riva had changed to a somber determination. The troops about us talked of mines and casualties. "A" Company had almost been wiped out in a night of shelling of its bivouac area. Its commander had made the terrible mistake of camping his men under trees that triggered off the incoming shells into deadly airbursts. From my sleeping bag I could see a white mattress cover over one of our dead. The patch of white dominated the moonlit scene, and it affected me more than the uncovered corpses on Riva. The plain white mattress cover had transformed a dead body into an ageless symbol of death and fear of the unknown. If only there had been others, but this corpse was very much alone. I woke up often to stare at it, wishing someone would take it away.

The next day my wireman shot himself. I have forgotten his name, but he was an awfully nice kid, kind of the baby of our detail section. He loved weapons. Continually, he cleaned his carbine or sharpened his knife. He had spent hours sighting in that carbine.

We had stopped for a break, and he was stretched out on the bank of the road just below me. Suddenly the carbine cracked, and he slumped over. He had been caressing the trigger with his thumb while the safety was off. Too much thumb pressure and the kid had a neat hole entering his armpit and exiting the top of his shoulder—a stiff arm for life and no purple heart to show for his trouble. The bullet missed me by a foot. The kid was in considerable pain as we lifted him into the jeep, but he was more concerned with the humiliation of his mistake.

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant. I'm terribly sorry," was all he could say in a low voice that was crying in pain and laughing at himself at the same time. Moments later he was gone down the jeep trail. Somebody said what we all were

thinking: "Well, at least he's out of it now." We shouldered our packs and continued up the hill.

The Captain of the company to which we were attached was a big-boned man with thick, black hair. He would have been handsome except for a hint of fleshiness on the coarse features of his face. He had a self-reassuring boom to his voice, in keeping with his parade-ground appearance. He led us up to the reverse slope of a wooded ridge, where we dug in for the night. Our line of attack on the next day led us over the ridge, down into a miniature bowl already filled with our troops, up over the lip of the bowl into Jerryland, and finally out about 300 yards along a finger ridge that ran to the north. It proved to be a difficult journey.

That night I laid wire to the lip of the bowl in order to save that much effort the next day. It was a black night, difficult to work in, especially when the infantry about us was jittery about the forthcoming attack. At about 0200, we returned to our bivouac, where I happened upon one of the infantry lieutenants urinating in my foxhole.

"Hey, that's my foxhole."

"Oh, no, I thought it was the slit trench."

"I know it's a poor hole, but it's home to me."

"Hell, I'm sorry. Let me dig you another."

The ground was in shale, and it would have taken two hours to dig another hole. The man was terribly embarrassed, and it was some time before I could persuade him to just throw in a little dirt and let it go at that. It seemed strange to be exchanging social niceties with this fellow five hours before the attack. He acted as if he might have spilled food on my dinner jacket and was insistent about getting it cleaned and paying the bill. The foxhole repaired, we snatched four hours of sleep before the attack at 0700.

We were in reserve. Our plan of attack was to follow one of the attacking companies until they took the top of della Torraccia; then we were supposed to slip past their left flank and take the long finger ridge I mentioned before.

First, Division Artillery opened up with a concentrated half-hour barrage, an impressive business with the intermingled sounds of our guns firing, the shells passing overhead, and their explosions beyond us. This was a time of optimism. We were out of our holes making our final preparations or observing the effects of the artillery on the ridges ahead.

Watching a ridge disappear under puffs of shell smoke sometimes gave you the wild hope that nothing would survive, that this time there would be no opposition. Then the concentration lifted, and there was a moment of quiet. A single thin snap of a rifle rang, followed, perhaps, by a burst of a burp gun. Two machine guns began their controlled stutters, other rifles came in, and the mortars began to cough. The noise rose to a crescendo over which were superimposed the malevolent personal smashes of enemy shells exploding close to your own position: you knew you were in for it again.

This time we were in trouble immediately. The first ridge line, the one between us and the bowl, was under heavy enemy machine-gun fire. Ten minutes after the attack began, I was lying with the Captain about five feet from the ridge line crest, where brown earth spurts marked the course of the bullets. This was the spot where we had walked back and forth with impunity the previous day. This was *our* ground. Why did we have to risk our lives to cross it today?

It was essential to push the attack in spite of the enemy action, and the Captain rose to the occasion by throwing sticks and stones at the backsides of crouching men, hesitant to cross the line of spitting dirt.

“Go on you bastards. Go on!” he screamed. On all fours, he scrambled about for a clod of earth or a stone which he heaved awkwardly from his knees, like a school girl, at some hesitant rump.

“What are you waiting for? Go on!”

The men looked back at him blankly, ignored him, and waited. I noticed that he, too, kept well below the crest of the ridge. Finally, one of his lieutenants came up without a word, ran up over the ridge and down out of sight. The men rose by twos and threes and followed.

Leaving the two wiremen behind, I took my radioman and scrambled over the ridge. The Captain stayed behind.

It was much worse than I expected on the other side. In addition to the machine-gun fire, mortar shells began to hit around us. All I remember about the next half-hour—or was it two hours?—was the fury of noise and the “feel” of bullets flying and hitting close by. We ran a quarter of the way down the bowl where we flopped among the infantry. We lay there with the sensation that each bullet and shell was personally directed at us. It seemed impossible that our luck would hold out. The fire was so concentrated that we dared not raise up enough to dig even a shallow hole. We lay with our faces turned to one side, helmets pressed into the earth and were afraid.

When the mortar or artillery fire—whatever it was—lifted somewhat, an infantryman rose up and made a fast run down towards the bottom of the bowl. I saw the earth spurts trail along behind him, pick him up, and pass on to leave him sprawled on his stomach. He was dead.

Thinking we held the right side of the bowl, I concentrated my observations over the left lip on enemy terrain about 400 yards to our left front. I saw nothing. I couldn’t see. I couldn’t think because of the terrible, cracking din. I felt futile and desperate.

I ordered a fire mission on the ground out to the left. I had to do something.

“Able, on the way!”

The shells swooshed over, and I looked at the enemy ground. No bursts there, but I heard a cracking of shells in the bottom of the bowl. I started to give an order, hesitated because of its terrible import.

"Baker, on the way."

I still have a clear and present picture of a man—our man—in the bowl, blown out of his hole, spinning in a horizontal position, then flopping neatly back in the same hole. *This can't be*, was my panicked thought. *Must be enemy fire. Did I read the map wrong? Is it enemy artillery?* I asked myself these questions at the time, but I never later tried to confirm the answers. Then: *What good am I lying here killing the men I'm supposed to support?*

By now, some of the infantry successfully had made the run under fire into the bottom of the bowl. I watched as another soldier started down and made it.

My head was full. *Now, now*, I thought and scrambled to my feet. *Head down—run—carbine—field glasses—up and over the dead one ahead—up and over—canteen—cool—curious.* Suddenly, I knew I would make it.

I experienced the same thrill that comes after a downhill ski race: the eye-shining, heart-pounding joy of risk. Puffing, I flopped on the ground and looked back from my relatively safe position. What I saw next, I can still see: another man tearing down the hill. I see bullets spurt out ahead and sweep back toward him. I start rooting for him: *Only one thing to do. Ah, good man!* He dives into the stream of bullets—flattening himself to present the least possible target—the way you should dive into incoming surf.

I remember getting on my knees and cheering, for I could tell by the way the soldier landed he was not wounded. At the time, I was sure I had willed my fellow into his life-saving leap.

I climbed well up into the bowl where the lip offered more protection. There I ran across Gordy Allen, another forward observer, lying in a hole with his right foot covered with a bloody bandage. Gordy looked well by casualty standards, and though in some shock, still full of hate and fight. I remember crouching down and kind of grinning at him as

he poured out an uninterrupted, high-pitched monologue of advice, orders, and a description of what had happened to him. It was good for him to talk, so I stayed with him for five full minutes, then pushed on.

When I climbed up over the lip of the bowl, it seemed as if the fighting had let up. I walked past a man who was sitting on a little bank of earth, laughing and encouraging us as he held up his hand, the blood dripping from where three fingers had been blown off. "Look, no hands!" he said.

Further on, I saw a man staggering back to the rear until he ran into a barbed-wire fence. There, bellied on the middle strand, one arm over the top strand, he pushed futilely with his feet at the ground behind him. He kept pushing himself against the wire. I could not move to help the desperate white face. I watched him the way I would watch a wounded bug. Finally somebody said: "Help that man." Someone pulled him off the wire.

I walked on. Two men came running toward me. One was young and pale and foolish looking. He ran up to me.

"Lieutenant, Lieutenant, how can we get out of here?"

I must have been in a daze, for it took me a long time to answer. My inability to answer must have testified to him that there was nothing wrong, nothing at all. He stood there, panting and wild-eyed, then pointing down at his thick rubber-soled shoe packs with two pair of ski socks and one pair of felt inner liners inside, said with down-cast eyes: "I broke my toe."

Was I supposed to be outraged? All I could say was, "Well, go over there and lie in the sunshine until the medic sees you."

Both young men obeyed meekly, and I continued.

After this series of dream-like sequences there is a blank spot in my memory. I think I cowered from artillery and mortar fire for some time until the Captain and my forward observation crew caught up with me.

Meanwhile, the attacking platoon had worked its way out toward the left ridge. Up to this point, I had contributed nothing to the attack.

The Captain and I were crouched under the comparative safety of a four-foot embankment. One platoon was cleaning out the left ridge. We could hear the men as they worked from hole to hole, screaming like children in high-pitched tones: "Come out of there, come out of there, or I'll fire. Come out of there you sonofabitch! Come out." Then two shots.

Screams and shots. It was the closest I ever came to hand-to-hand combat. I was afraid, and at the same time I had a wild urge to rush out and get into it. The Captain picked up the walkie-talkie to call the Platoon Leader. There was no reply. The Captain, still huddled against the armor of the embankment, called again. "Red Able! Red Able!" I heard the Captain curse under his breath. Then Red Able came in. The clatter of small-arms fire rang through the radio.

The Captain bellowed, "Goddamnit, Lieutenant, when I call you, you answer. You answer me when I call or I'll know the reason why. What the hell are you doing out there? Do you hear me, Lieutenant? You answer me when I call!"

This went on. I imagined the Lieutenant lying out in the open, his radio cuddled up at his ear, keeping an eye out for his men and himself, listening to this fool's tirade. Yet discipline restricted him to "Yes, sir. Yes, sir." I was to find out later that he already had a bullet in his leg.

The German shelling had blown out the wire we had laid in the night, but with the artillery radio I went up to the newly won platoon position, despite the protests of the Captain, who seemed to want me back with him where I could see nothing.

By the time I reached the Lieutenant, the ridge was in our hands, but our men were under considerable small-arms

fire from the right ridge and from our front. By now, the Lieutenant had been hit again, and shell fragments had ignited colored smoke grenades around his belt. He tossed them away when they began to send up green and orange smoke. We held our breath and wondered if the hand grenades on his belt would go off.

The Lieutenant's leg started to stiffen, and I finally persuaded him to report back to the medics. He was a good man. In combat you could spot a good man or a poor one immediately, just by the way he talked or moved.

The men out on the point of the ridge seemed to be in trouble. The time had come when I could be of some use, for my position was a natural observation post. I moved into a hole on the right with one of the infantryman. It made a difference to have a man beside you under such circumstances. Almost immediately I spotted a lone German on the right ridge across the gully from us. Evidently he was moving back toward his own lines, which had buckled under the pressure of our attack. I nudged the infantryman.

"Jerry, see him?" I pointed. "Over there, over in those trees!"

The infantryman shifted his body around and stared. "Can't see him."

"Take the tree on the right and come in three . . . there, there he goes! See him! See him! Oh, hell, set your range at 300 and give me that rifle!"

I had never fired the new gas-operated M1, but I knew my carbine was useless at this range. While the infantryman fiddled with his sights, I pulled my eyeglasses out of their case, fumbled unsuccessfully for a cleaning handkerchief and settled for a piece of undershirt which I pulled out. What an effete way to wage war, was the thought that rose: glass polishing before killing. Without the glasses, though, I was unable to see the front sight of the rifle through the rear sight, a handicap of some consequence.

My companion handed the Girand over, and I remember its bulky heaviness compared to my stick of a carbine. I lay in a prone position, but the downward slope of the ridge made it uncomfortable to raise the weapon for the necessary elevation, so I rolled myself into a sitting position, consciously remembering training procedure, elbows pressed into knees (always a wobbly performance), cheekbone pressed hard against stock, and heels digging for firm purchase in the slippery turf. The Jerry moved quickly from one tree to another, and I fired wildly, almost without aim. I knew I had missed by yards.

The German stopped behind the next tree, obviously aware he was under fire. Trying desperately to settle down my breathing, I fired close to the edge of the tree in the hope that he would be making his break in that direction at that particular moment. It was poor strategy, as he waited until after I had fired before moving. The next time I waited and fired as he ran, but missed again. Two more trees and two more shots, and he was over the brow of the ridge, safe from what was undoubtedly small risk.

It was nothing but a game of skill to me, a challenge to my marksmanship. That he was a well-collected antagonist only added to my enjoyment. Was this the killer instinct? Certainly it was not a matter of self-defense, for the Jerry had not even seen me. However, I knew the odds were with him. If it had been a sure kill, I might have felt differently. I admired his coolness.

Handing back the borrowed weapon, I moved on up to the foremost tip of the ridge where a lone rifleman lay behind a pile of dirt and stones. In his exposed position, he was under mortar and small-arms fire. I remember how out of place my formal introduction of myself seemed to be, though I made the introduction anyway.

Here was the ideal observation post, looking down into Jerry territory on three sides. After establishing a voice relay back to my radioman, I had a great afternoon firing

at a considerable number of actual or possible Jerry positions.

I had learned that to be effective, a forward observer has to fabricate occasionally. For example, if I reported accurately that I saw three Jerries disappear behind the top of a hill, Jim might sarcastically suggest I use my carbine on such a minor target. If, however, I visualized and reported the three Jerries joining their squad and digging in on the reverse slope, I was able to receive a fair portion of our limited artillery. I had no compunctions concerning these misrepresentations. As a forward observer, I soon lost my identity as an artilleryman and became an infantryman at heart, thoroughly sympathetic to their needs.

Later in the afternoon, I found some raw potatoes dug into the earth in front of me. During a lull in the fighting, I was eating one of these delicacies when there was a slapping noise and the left side of my face stung with pain. I clapped my hand to my face and turned to my companion, half expecting him to fade into a foggy vision before my dying eyes. However, he remained clearly in focus.

“Am I hit? Is it bad?”

“You’re O.K. You better stay down.”

We determined that a sniper’s bullet had hit the rock near me and the particles had blasted my face. I had been aware of this sniper all afternoon, but I was still careless enough to expose myself.

By the end of the afternoon, we dominated the area from a superior position, but the Battalion Commander decided to draw back 200 yards because holding the nose of the ridge might be untenable during the night. The gullies on either side of the ridge were unoccupied. Events proved the Commander’s caution to be justified.

We now had platoons out on each ridge. I decided to draw back for the night to the junction of the ridges, about 400 yards to the rear, at the same spot I had left the Captain

that morning. He was still there, a veritable homebody. He was well dug in.

It was now late in the afternoon, and the air was chilling fast. With no enemy activity, I had a blessed two hours to dig a hole in the embankment, prepare some hot coffee, and warm up two cans of C-rations.

The infantry helped me rig a system of communications to the two platoons. As I slipped into my sleeping bag, boots and all, and ate the warm food, I experienced a real sense of coziness. To be well dug in with warm food inside and a sleeping bag around you was the ultimate in well-being. Twice during my meal, activity was reported in either gully. Using my infantry observers, I indirectly fired a few rounds into the suspected areas. In fact, I conducted two missions at once while I ate.

I congratulated myself for picking a spot that was not only comfortable and safe, but which also enabled me to cover all the approaches to our position with artillery concentrations. Wire and radio to the Fire Direction Center were in. I was well set up.

At the same moment I was sipping my last cup of coffee, the Jerry artillery began. I remember thinking, "Thank you for letting me eat." I threw my empty cans down the hill and flattened myself down in my hole.

It was a heavy concentration of artillery and mortar fire, with perhaps six to eight rounds a minute falling for more than two hours. In a short time, my sense of security vanished. All wire communication was severed, and our 600 artillery radio characteristically went out of commission.

I found too, to my horror, that in my weariness I had dug in close to one lonely stubble of a tree on the embankment above me. One tick from the nose of a shell would set off an air burst spraying fragments directly into my foxhole. It was particularly uncomfortable when time after time I felt the ground shake as flat trajectory shells bounced off the embankment and ricocheted out to explode out over the valley below. Once again I was a cringing

lonely animal. I remember thinking, "O.K. God, if you are going to come into my life, now is the time to do it." God did not accept my belligerent challenge.

Sergeant Droney and another man were in holes above the embankment. Although I hated to do it, I had to send Droney back along the artillery wire to locate the break. In a remarkably short time, he had found and spliced the severed ends, and for a moment I had a three-sided conversation with Fire Direction Center and Droney. Then I heard the Jerry shells swish low over me and explode out where Droney was. The line went dead. It was another heavy barrage, and I knew Sergeant Droney's chance of survival out in the open was poor, so again guilt was added to my misery.

It was obvious from the intensity of the artillery preparation that Jerry was determined to retake della Toraccia, and I was not surprised by the immediate outbreak of small-arms fire on the left ridge as soon as the artillery lifted.

A fire fight is a beautiful thing to see at night. Yellow flashes from the rifles are intermixed with the long, lazy red streams of machine-gun incendiaries. Globs of yellow arching out from their centers in all directions marked the detonation and flying fragments of mortar shells. The fighting intensified on the left ridge. As I expected, a messenger came back from the left platoon. "Tell the artillery guy to come up quick."

I had already made my plans, and I refused to go forward, as I was determined to remain in this apex spot back of both platoons until I was sure that the attack was not a feint to be followed by a major push up the right gully or down the right ridge. Moreover, at this time I had no means of communication. After what seemed like hours, but was probably only fifteen or thirty minutes, another messenger came back.

"Tell the Goddamned artillery to come up!" and above the small-arms fire I could hear them bellowing up on the

left, "Artillery, artillery!" in angry, scared voices. It was my hardest combat decision, but I chose to stay where I was. I felt I had to sacrifice the immediate need of the left platoon for the overall safety of the company. I had not forgotten the reported activity in the right gully earlier in the night.

I crawled over to the Captain's hole as he had a 300 radio. As I remember, he could not establish contact with either of his platoons, but he could reach the Infantry Battalion Headquarters. After a while, I decided the main attack was on the left, and I persuaded the Captain that his 300 was useless to him without contact to his outlying platoons. It could be better used, I argued, at the platoon position for artillery support. Moments later, I started out on the run for the beleaguered platoon with both a borrowed radio and operator. It was a relief to be in action again.

I was always a poor pathfinder, and in a short time I began to feel I was off my course. The firing had ceased for the moment, so there were no sounds to guide me along the short distance to the platoon. Nevertheless, we ran on for two or three minutes and finally stopped for breath. As soon as our heavy breathing lessened, I heard the Jerries nagging away at each other, not 50 yards downhill and to the left of us. In another 30 seconds, we would have barged right into them.

We had drifted downhill off the top of the ridge to the left. The Germans, whom I could now see, were obviously trying to outflank us from that side. They must have been badly disorganized, or they would not have been making the racket that saved our lives and eventually cost most of them theirs.

The radioman and I slipped behind some trees, and I think we would have done some nocturnal ballet number justice as we tiptoed up the ridge, keeping always in the shadow of the trees. As soon as we were safe, we ran on until we saw the platoon position.

"Over here. Over here, Lieutenant!" Eager hands helped us into foxholes deep enough to stand in.

"Jerries on your left!" I gasped.

"Set up the radio."

The radioman did a superb job that night. In addition to being completely unfamiliar with artillery radio procedures, he had to contend with a relay of communication from us, to Infantry Battalion Headquarters, to the Artillery Liaison Officer, and finally to the Fire Direction Center. It was not SOP, but it worked.

It seems morally wrong to designate that night as the night of "The Great Shoot," but that is how I thought of it at the time, and that is the way I will have to write of it now. Within minutes of our arrival, we had devastating, thundering, yellow-orange globs of destruction falling on the Jerries to the left and to the front and down into the gully on the right. We could hear them screaming.

It was defensive artillery at its best, for we were placing fire within 50 yards of our own position. Jerry was caught out in the open and slaughtered. In addition to the hundreds of rounds I fired close by, Jim placed fire on all possible routes of withdrawal. The infantry loved it. Although we were later criticized by Corps for an extravagant use of ammo, we literally wiped out the battalion of German infantry that had assaulted our platoons. Our casualties were few.

In two hours, the Germans were disorganized and beaten, but some were still within hearing. For a while it was quiet. I took advantage of the lull to bellow: "*Kommen Sie hier!*" almost the total sum of my Teutonic vocabulary. I remembered a German-speaking rifleman, whom I called over to my hole. "Tell them," I said, "if they don't surrender we will put artillery on them again." My interpreter shouted out into the dark, and to our amazement, there was an answering call.

"They're coming in, lots of them."

Tension built up along the line.

"Here they come!"

"Watch 'em now"

"How many?"

"Forty, 50 maybe."

"Halt. Halt!"

Two shots.

"What happened?"

"One took off. He's not going anyplace now."

I thought now that others wouldn't come in, but they did. Some of the prisoners were shuffled up the line to our position. In their overcoats, the Germans loomed large and forbidding. Scared, and suspicious of trickery, we had them sit together on the ground behind us with one man on guard.

As if to punish the deserters, the German artillery opened up again with a vengeance. There was a prisoner close to my hole, and at first I made him stay out in the open. "Let the bastard get a taste of his own artillery," I thought, but as the shells started to hit among us, I motioned him into my hole. Because I had visions of a knife in my back, I frisked him first. Grinning, the German shook his head at my suspicions and took up his place in one side of the hole.

We stood together in the dark, enduring. In spite of myself, I felt a sense of companionship, an equality of misery with this enemy—no, this man. I offered him a cigarette.

Suspecting that the German artillery was being personally directed by a forward observer, I plastered the area around us again. In time, the German artillery ceased.

The crash of shells was replaced by the moans of a wounded Jerry. At first it didn't bother me, but after a while it became disturbing. Perhaps it was guilt concerning the wounded Jerry we left in the cold up on Riva; perhaps it was the companionship of the German beside me; or perhaps I had vented my fear and hate on the enemy already that night, but suddenly I became irrationally determined

to do something for this fellow who sounded as if he were in bad shape.

"Medic!" I called. "Send the medic up here."

The medic arrived.

"We can't leave the man out there like that. Will you go and get him?" I didn't order. I just asked.

"No, sir, I'm not going out there."

"We've got to get him. Look, we'll tell them we're coming, and I'll go with you, O.K.?"

"Well, O.K."

Our interpreter shouted that two of us were coming, unarmed, to pick up the wounded. There was no answer from the Germans.

"Tell them again," I said. Still no answer.

"Let's go."

I decided it was safer to leave my carbine behind, but I kept my fingers wrapped around a hand grenade. The medic and I worked toward the moaning man. At intervals I would stop and shout, "Don't fire, Jerry. Here we come. Don't fire, Jerry."

My complete faith that the Germans would not fire on us must have been reflected in my voice, and I think served to calm them as well as to inform them of our exact whereabouts.

We reached the wounded Jerry and kneeled beside him. I could see Germans in the trees close by. I pretended not to notice them as the medic and I worked on the wounded one, a young baby-faced fellow with a lot of strength in his wails.

"Comeradi, comeradi!" he bawled.

I remember being half-disgusted with the baby-faced soldier and half-amused with our foolishness when we found what seemed to be a superficial flesh wound on the side of his thigh. While the medic patched him up, one of the shadows came out from the trees and walked over to us. He spoke English with a slight accent.

"I am Captain . . . , " he said, "We want to surrender."

"Fine, " I said, "you can come in with us. How many?"

"Sixteen men."

"You've got more than that out there. Order them all to surrender."

"I can't do that."

"If you don't, we'll kill them all with artillery."

"I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"It is the code."

"Is it the code to have the rest of your men killed?"

"I can't order my men to surrender. It is their choice."

*The code!* I could have been talking to a medieval knight.

"All right. Bring out your men and we'll take them in."

The medic and a German soldier slung the arms of the still babbling Jerry over their shoulders, and we all started back for our lines. As usual, I strayed off course, and we approached our positions from a different direction. Fearing that the prisoners would draw fire again, I had to go through the self-location process again.

"It's the artillery. We're bringing in prisoners. Don't fire!"

"O.K., Lieutenant. Over here. Come on in."

Back in my foxhole, I wrestled with myself. Because the German Captain had told me, I now knew there were more Germans in the trees. Was it ethical to use this knowledge gained during what could be called a truce? Was this code business starting to get me? I compromised by throwing a few rounds in the general direction of the trees. I figured the few remaining Jerries would be pulling back and evacuating their wounded. At any rate, after a few rounds, I stopped the artillery. I had had my fill for one night.

At dawn, all firing stopped, and sometime in the morning the radioman and I returned to our original positions. There we found Sergeant Droney, very much alive, a happy sight.

I don't remember anything of note happening until the next afternoon. A call came up from Infantry Intelligence reporting Germans in Casa Tonnielli and ordering artillery fire on it. The building in question lay downhill and to the left of the ridge tip. Immediately, I knew exactly what it entailed. "Tell them I can't. I can't observe without exposing myself."

The wireman relayed the response: "Tell him to do it anyway."

"Give me the phone."

The voice on the other end was authoritative. "We've got to get artillery on that spot, Lieutenant."

"But machine guns have been reported in there, sir. I'd have to go in front of our line to even see the place." I was tired and jittery. I had stretched my luck far enough.

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant. That's an order."

"I'm not going until I call artillery on this, sir. I'll call back."

"All right."

I tried to call Colonel Pearson and then Jim, but they were not available. The Artillery Intelligence Officer was the only staff officer on hand.

"I'm afraid you'll have to go. There's nothing I can do."

I hung up, red in the face. The fat bastard was sitting back there with his maps. I considered still refusing, but I didn't dare risk the consequences.

An infantry lieutenant offered to go with me and we laid wire without incident to a hole that gave us partial observation of the building about 150 yards distant. I set up the phone, still angered, but feeling a little foolish since we had not been fired on.

I started to send back firing orders. About this time, a German mortar coughed. My attitude changed. I might be able to see the mortars from the tip of the ridge. "What the hell," I thought, "I have come this far."

I turned to the infantryman. "Look, I'm going to crawl

up to the ridge point and spot those mortars. You relay the orders from here."

"You don't have to go up there."

But I was on my way. It was a childish gesture of rage. I'd show them. It was a lonely crawl on top of the bare ridge out to the same hole where the sniper had fired on me the previous afternoon. Other mortars opened up.

When I reached the familiar pile of dirt and stones, I thrust my head over the top and looked into the faces of a dozen Jerries standing up in their holes 50 yards below. They must have been forewarned, as they immediately opened up. Burp guns, rifles, and perhaps grenades—I don't know—let go at me. I dropped behind the earth pile, miserable, but still capable of some decision.

I worked it through. *Throw the grenade? No.* The fire was so concentrated, I feared my arm would be hit as I heaved the grenade over my little bulwark. *Artillery? No.* They would be on top of me before I fired the first round. I visualized some of them charging up the slope while others kept up a steady supporting fire. *Run? No.* If I stood to run, I would expose myself. *One thing to do. Crawl back and hope to God they do not advance up the ridge and catch me out in the open.*

I crawled with the bullets keeping me close to the earth. First on my belly, then on my knees, and finally I was back far enough to risk a low crouching run back to the Lieutenant.

He was standing up, waving me back toward our lines, but the reprieve from danger restored my anger, and I slid into the hole, grabbed the phone, and put battalion fire just over the nose of the ridge, again with unknown results, but it was deeply satisfying to hear the shells cracking away down there.

Without completing our mission, the Lieutenant and I retreated to our lines. To most of the infantry, our former reluctance to go forward was now justified, but in retrospect I realize that I more or less consciously provoked

the enemy just to prove my point. As any good combat man can vouch, that type of impulsive behavior eventually has serious or fatal consequences. It was not a matter of courage, just foolishness. A man was more effective in the long haul if he took risks only when they were unavoidable.

We were relieved late that afternoon by my West Point friend, in his usual state of jitters. A jeep took us back to our new battery positions. I made it a point to immediately visit all our batteries, pleading with the gunners to carefully level the bubbles on their gunsights before firing. During the night fight we had received a number of short rounds around our foxholes, something that devastates infantry morale. The gunners swore that they always doublechecked the levels, but the guns became inaccurate when red-hot.

One crew asked me, "What was it like up there? Was it pretty rough?"

I was on a tired jag, light and airy, relieved of all responsibility. Partly in truth and partly to reassure them, I replied breezily, "No, it wasn't bad at all. Didn't bother me much."

At this moment, I heard the incoming whine of a shell, and tired nerves hurtled me headfirst into a muddy hole around the gun position. When I looked up, face black and carbine plugged with muck, I saw the crew still standing, some of them grinning and some sporting a shocked, disappointed look. My shell turned out to be the whine of a jeep's tires as it drove by. There was not much to say.

I bivouacked with a peasant family in an old stone farmhouse for the next two weeks. The head of the family, a man of 45 or 50, had lived in Oklahoma for a number of years. With him now was his wife, her astoundingly ugly sister, and, I believe, his mother-in-law.

They were the classic peasant types with all their faults and virtues: narrow, simple, hard-working, uncomplaining, and, above all, generous. I had given them two or three

little things that cost me nothing: a pack of cigarettes, a few candy bars, some rations. In return, literally everything these people had was mine. Sometimes after eating supper with the Battery, I would drop by to spend an evening with them. They insisted on double-loading me with food and wine, and were deeply hurt when I tried to refuse.

One afternoon I stumbled off the mountain, caked with dirt and dead-tired from five days on the line. They took me in like a baby, helped me off with my clothes, and placed me unwashed in one of their two treasured beds. I can still feel the coarse comfort of those blankets. Twenty hours later, I awoke to be served chicken and eggs in bed.

The house had no heat except for the fireplace in which the family cooked their meals in black pots. The only furniture I remember, aside from the two beds, was a rough wooden table and chairs. Their life was drab and limited. They worked around the farm as much as conditions permitted during the day, and at night they gathered around the fireplace where they talked for a while. From the tenor of the conversation I could tell they spoke only of oft-repeated little things. Sometimes they were silent, and then the only sound was the hissing of the steam in one of the kettles or a log crackling in the fire.

One night, one of the women fell asleep. She started to snore softly. After a while, she woke up to resume the conversation in flat, emotionless, yet friendly tones. It was an intolerable life, and yet at the time, I found it deeply satisfying. Circumstances gave me true friendship with these good people. The only sour note in this otherwise idyllic rural scene was a wild, irrational fear that the ugly sister-in-law wanted to sleep with me. Her tender looks almost drove me from the bed to the hayloft in the adjoining cowshed.

My association with the Italians led to what I proudly called the Motley Intelligence Service. When things were quiet, the local inhabitants wandered back and forth between the

lines. My Italian friends' house seemed to be a gathering place for many who had come from the north. One day I idly asked one of them if he had seen any *Tedeschi* gun positions.

"Sure, sure," he had come by two of them.

Could he point to the place on the map?

"Yes," he thought so.

I produced the map and everyone gathered around it.

"Oh, here is Montese." He came down out of Montese by this path. He traced his course with a work-torn finger. One of the women with him said something. "No, no," he said, "that was over there. We came this way. Remember those two buildings?" The man and the woman argued for a while, and I could only follow part of the conversation. Finally, they agreed on a position.

I did not place much value on their information, but decided to report what I knew to Baker, half expecting some sarcastic remark. To my surprise, he noted the positions carefully on the map. Two days later he called me.

"We got a double-check on that artillery location. See what else you can dig up." At the expense of always being overloaded with food and wine—gastronomic sacrifices in the name of love for my country—I reported five or six more German positions to HQ.

Most of the time off the line I wrote letters. It was tough to observe all the censorship rules. I wrote I was enjoying myself, which was almost true except for the thought that tomorrow or the day after that I'd have to go up to the front again. It became harder and harder to summon the nerve for combat.

We were attached next to "L" Company, which was going to be in reserve on a limited offensive planned to penetrate some five miles of Jerry territory to a point where the 10th could establish a more suitable staging point for the final spring offensive.

We joined "L" Company, a short distance to the south of the bowl. It was familiar territory, and I felt as if I were rerunning an old nightmare. Our objective was Mount Ione, directly to our front. At dark, we received the welcome news that the attack had been postponed for 24 hours—one more day of grace. However, I felt a driving urge to do something in the interval.

I couldn't sit still, so I moved forward to a strongly held house out on the edge of another little ridge with an excellent view of Mount Ione. Two German corpses lay on the ridge, 50 yards from the house. During a counterattack, the Germans had committed the tactical error of setting up their machine gun in full view of our men holding the house. The Americans watched the machine gunners for a while, then shot them.

During the first night I requested troops dug in outside of the house to alert me to anything unusual. Infantrymen are always hearing something, so I not only had a sleepless night, but I nearly lost my life. It was another black night. The fourth or fifth time I was routed out of sleep to go outside and check on noises—all harmless—I put on my billed stocking cap, but neglected to don my steel helmet. On my way back, a GI suddenly burst out of concealment and rushed at me, gun at hip readiness.

"Put 'em up you sonofabitch," he hissed. "Put 'em up!"

I had just sense enough to raise my hands and say, "Artillery."

"Oh, Jesus," he said, "sweet Jesus. I nearly shot you." He lowered his rifle and let me have it: "What in hell are you running around in a hat like that for? You look like a Jerry. You ought to know better than that."

I took it, because I had it coming. The German mountain troop hat was a billed affair which easily could mislead a trigger-happy infantryman at night. I returned to the house, chastised.

\*

Another 24-hour reprieve. The next day we received reports of Germans in a house about 300 yards to our left front, well-protected by an embankment. My attempts to demolish the house with artillery were unsuccessful, but the last round gave us a close-in reference to adjust from. Fire Direction Center designated it as concentration number 202. I gave the concentration number and its physical location to Lieutenant Green, a likeable, intelligent fellow in charge of the strong point.

The next night was marked by the desertion of two Russian soldiers from the Germans over to our strong point. They had been captured somewhere near Austria, marched almost continuously to the Italian front, and forced into combat. They were grinning, pleased with their own fortitude and happy to be safely in our hands. Evidently, there were others who were ready to give up. On our front, German morale was eroding.

Later that night, I made my way back to the rest of the forward observer crew. Everything was in readiness for the morning attack. I went to sleep immediately, only to be awakened by a phone call from the strong point. It was the Sergeant next in command to Green.

"For God's sake, Lieutenant, don't fire 202 again. We just called for it and two shells hit our building."

"Anybody hurt?"

The Sergeant's voice was full of anger and grief. "Lieutenant Green and another man were killed. The shell came right through the roof into their room."

There was nothing to say. Should I have stayed up at the strong point and fired the concentration myself? I asked myself. It wouldn't have made any difference, I answered. A short is a short, no matter who calls for it.

I contacted Fire Direction Center, but they had already heard the news from other sources.

\*

We awoke to hoarfrost to find the infantry already moving out. After a mad scramble with numbed fingers fumbling with cold wet canvas and metal, we joined our company without benefit of breakfast or hot coffee, a nasty way to begin a day of battle. Our artillery thundered for 20 minutes. Again we attacked at dawn over the skyline, and we had even reached the strong point where Green had been killed. My wire reel snarled. Hermanson, the wireman, had to kneel and untangle me in the midst of the mortar and artillery fire. I lay alongside and exchanged grin-and-bear-it smiles with the new infantry Captain, a good man this time. He was killed the next day.

I remember how one fragment whistled down toward us. This one is going to be close, I thought, and a moment later it harmlessly hit my helmet with a sharp clunk. After a half-hour of such misery, we moved forward again toward the strong point. As we arrived, the Captain learned that in the confusion a whole platoon was still there in their holes. He stood up.

"You shouldn't be here. Your buddies are up there." He pointed at Mount Ione. "They need you."

That body of men came out of their holes as one with a unified roar of rage at being left behind. They took off toward Mount Ione at a dead run. It was a magnificent sight, and typical of the 10th's esprit.

Our company, which was in reserve, moved forward slowly. I remember one man, glissading down a snow patch, using his rifle butt for balance. I spoke a few words of condolence about Lieutenant Green to the Sergeant as we passed the strong point, and then we hurried down the mountain to a stone wall, the boundary of a small orchard.

In a few moments, we caught a frightful barrage of mortar fire. The noise was terrible, sharp shocks of face-slapping sounds. We were taking heavy casualties and cries for the medic began to fill the air. The company couldn't move. I ordered the radioman and wireman to take

up positions behind the partial protection of a small house and dashed forward a short distance to an observation point behind another stone wall. I had a walkie-talkie in my hand, with which I unsuccessfully tried to communicate with the forward platoons. I searched Mount Ione with my glasses for activity, but I couldn't see a thing.

"Why not?" I wondered. I knew there were men on it. I wanted to drop behind the wall and cower on the ground, but I kept observing uselessly over the top. The mountainside was cracking in the fury around us. A violent explosion just on the other side of the stone wall blew the walkie-talkie out of my hand. My hand stung but was intact. This near miss seemed to relieve my nightmarish paralysis. The blast tore off the spare batteries which had been strapped by friction tape to the radio. I picked up the radio and the batteries from the ground and scrambled back to my men. The infantry was still pinned down.

"Set up the 602 and dig in," I said. I planned to observe and possibly direct fire from the vantage point of the stone wall. The men were gray with fear, but they responded wonderfully. The radio was set up and contact established with the Fire Direction Center.

I made a crouching run for the stone wall again. A shell exploded far away it seemed, but a stunning blow on my right shoulder bowled me over. The pain came immediately.

"They got me!" I shouted. Given another chance, I'm sure I could have done better than *that*. I was on my side, helpless, with the pain in control. I was scared.

"Sergeant, take a look at him." I could tell by the tone of the Captain's voice that he hated to give up his sergeant.

I was too weak to sit up or to use my good left hand. I lay on the ground and kicked in pain while the shrapnel fragments burned themselves out. I wondered if I was bleeding. The Sergeant arrived, a small, lithe man with a good strong Germanic face.

He cut away the shoulder portion of the shirt, exposing the wound.

"Not too bad, is it?" My voice was high and quavering, like a hurt small boy's.

"It doesn't look too bad."

My world narrowed to my pain and this benefactor. Nothing else mattered. The Sergeant opened my first-aid packet and emptied the sulfa powder into the wound. The powder felt cool sprinkling against my skin. I think the Sergeant also gave me some sulfa tablets to take with water.

When some strength returned, I ventured a look at the wound, a hole in the side of my shoulder the diameter of a 50-cent piece, rather neat, not bloody, with the meat of my shoulder showing like raw hamburger. I didn't notice the bulge under my collarbone where one of the fragments had penetrated some three inches through the shoulder joint. This fragment would have killed me had it struck my neck, head, or even side. The Sergeant wrapped a bandage around the wound and left me to the ministrations of Hermanson, the radioman. I became a useless monologue of orders and suggestions. Hermanson listened vacantly.

Meanwhile, the terrible pain subsided some. Hermanson and the crew left me as a medic appeared. The medic checked the wound and administered morphine. Suddenly, the pain flew, and I entertained the idea of catching up with the fight, but the medic, warning of copious bleeding, persuaded me to start for the rear. I forgot my carbine, helmet, and field glasses.

I could hear that the shelling had ceased. I began to feel deliciously happy, out of combat with a perfect excuse: a clean round hole in my shoulder. I felt myself grin with relief. It was one of the happiest moments in my life. As I headed back for the house, feeling, I thought, quite strong, Hank Bollman, my replacement, came hurrying by, grim-faced. I yelled encouragement. He glanced at me and hurried on toward the fighting. I remember walking slowly and carefully. I traversed the mild slope back and forth like

a ski climber. My right hand was tucked in between the two buttons of my shirt for support. I was relaxed, absorbed in my little journey, which seemed to go on and on. As I carefully worked my way up a small incline, an infantry officer appeared at the top.

"You O.K.? I'll give you a hand."

"I'm O.K. You go on."

"You just hold up." He bounded down the embankment to my side.

"Where's your helmet? You should have a helmet."

"I don't need it."

I was out of the war. I didn't need a helmet any more. I was still grinning foolishly.

"Well, come on then." Despite my protests, he put my left arm around his shoulder and half carried me back to the strong point, where I began to feel weak again.

I was put in a room with some other wounded. It was dark and cold in the room. We tried to comfort each other. The man next to me with an abdominal wound complained of feeling funny inside, but he insisted that a man in shock take his blanket. We spoke in low tones, joked a little, and waited for help. I think I received another morphine shot.

Eventually, I asked to be helped to the outside, where I was propped against the building. I basked in the glow of sunshine and morphine. It was a golden day, and I was in good hands. I fell into a light sleep.

"That you, Preb?" I recognized the voice before I opened my eyes.

"Colonel Pearson! What are you doing up here?" He was bending over me.

"Heard you were hurt. How are you feeling?"

"Fine, sir. I really feel all right."

"I can send you back with a litter team if you want."

"The medics will get me out. I'm O.K. Thanks."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, sir. How's it going?"

"Good, I think. Well, I'll get on." He scrambled down the hill, looking a little harried. The Colonel had no business up on this mountain, hours away from his command and his communications, but this was the type of leadership that endeared him to us.

After the Colonel left, I ate, with relish, some rations, dozed again, and awoke about 1400. The March sun was already beginning to lose its heat, and the prospect of another night on this chilled mountainside was not appealing. Medical evacuation was obviously bogged down, for no one had been moved. I was determined to get myself off the mountain before dark. I remembered from the map that Highway 64 was down the mountain to the south, the obvious evacuation route providing that the Germans no longer held the terrain. We could have gone back the long way to our rear, but I decided to take a chance on a shelling or capture in order to save time and effort.

I explained to all the walking wounded, including a number of Germans, what I wanted to do, giving them the choice of accompanying me or waiting where they were. They all decided to go along. What a crew we made! It reminded me of "The Spirit of '76" superimposed on a painting of Napoleon's Retreat from Moscow.

There were perhaps 30 of us, some with bandaged heads, some hobbling on makeshift canes, some half carried by their comrades, some on litters. We were a wretched-looking lot, torn and dirty. A half-hour of travel with frequent rests brought us to a point where we could look down 1000 feet to Highway 64. It was a grand sight. Half of the highway was jammed with our tanks, self-propelled guns, tank destroyers, and jeeps headed north, while the other half was filled with Jerry prisoners filing to the rear. We had broken through the della Toraccia massif, the hinge point of the Gothic Line. The German prisoners gazed down, seemingly without emotion.

I remember an old peasant woman who came out of her solitary hut and offered water to the German prisoners. She had only venomous looks for the rest of us.

We picked our way down the mountain. For once I chose a good route, and as dusk approached, we reached the highway. We left the quiet of our afternoon walk for the vast but friendly grumble of a moving army. The badly wounded were led to a nearby aid station, while the MPs took the prisoners off our hands.

A jeep came by on the highway, stopped, and backed up. It was the Commanding Officer of the 602nd Field Artillery Battalion. "That you, Motley? Been hit, eh? Hop in. Give him a hand, Corporal. I'll take you to the Battalion Aid Station."

What luck. I was helped in the jeep, accepted a cigarette, and in a moment the jeep was whining down the highway. Relieved of my last responsibility, I began to let down. I remember a wonderful wave from one of our wiremen, working along the side of the highway. I chilled quickly in the cold air and began to feel a little tired. We switched on our blackout lights as we passed dark groups of marching German prisoners. Twenty minutes later, the CO dropped me at our aid station. Immediately, there were friendly faces, helping arms.

"No, I can walk," I said. Grinning, I walked into the aid building, into warmth and protection. It was too much.

"How do you feel?"

"I'm fine," I said, and started to faint.

I slumped into waiting arms which laid me on a table. After downing a mixture of coffee and whiskey, I quickly revived. Our Battalion Medical Officer stripped me to the waist and probed at the wound as I sat on the edge of the table. I watched him poke his instrument deep into the opening. There was no sensation. I felt nothing, but I wanted him to stop. Unable to locate anything, the Medical Officer bandaged the arm again, shot me with morphine,

then loaded me into a waiting ambulance. The doors slammed shut. I was alone with three wounded Jerries.

It was night now: blurry, sleepy, night. A German above was bleeding badly, his blood splashing on my face. I didn't particularly care. There was the whir of gears and tire whine and my own private dark world. The ambulance stopped: "No, no. Put him over here. He's not a Jerry."

I felt warm and comfortable. I must have slept. They unloaded me with the litter temporarily at an angle. I was not worried. Under bright lights, a doctor I knew examined me.

"They've probed already, Doc. Just bandage me up again. I feel fine."

The doctor looked hurt, but ceased his curious pokings.

Then: *Darkness—More jolts—Motors—Stop again—Check-up.* Everybody seemed to be working quietly, efficiently. I heard no sounds of suffering from any of the wounded. We all sensed we were in competent hands.

Then: *Bright lights again.* I came fully awake. *An operating table—X-rays.*

"What time is it?"

"About 1030."

Here was a doctor, a stranger whom I instinctively trusted. I sat on the operating table, stripped to the waist, bright and chatty now.

"Can I see the X-rays, Doc?"

He showed me the small white specks, seven of them scattered throughout my shoulder.

"We'll probably leave these. They're too far in the bone, but I can get these two and this one over here, and this one from the back. We'll clean out all the clothing and dirt that was drilled into you. He studied the X-ray for a few moments, glancing often at my shoulder."

"All set?"

"Do a good job, Doc."

Somebody inserted a needle into my wrist. *One, two, three, four, five. . . .*

\*

I awoke the next morning to bright sunshine at a field hospital where I spent about ten days. We were sheltered by a big tent. The medics rolled up the lower flaps in the daytime to let in the warm valley air, and rolled them down at night. I have forgotten whether we were in cots or in hospital beds. There were 50 of us to a tent.

A body cast from my shoulder to my waist held my right arm parallel to the ground. The wound was left open inside the cast, for ten days, to encourage drainage. I was able to walk around comfortably two days after the operation.

We were still keyed up from combat. There was much talk, detailed accounts of the individual combat experiences, high-pitched laughter, sympathetic listeners, and great humor. As combat veterans, we knew the odds dictated we were to be either killed or wounded. Therefore, we were grateful for our wounds. At first, there was literally no petty complaining, no griping. There was always somebody much worse off than yourself. I remember a man, missing an arm, writing a letter for a fellow with both arms gone. There were marvelous stories of self-sacrifice like that of Murphy, a Boston Irishman.

At the staging area, Murphy had lost his hand when some fool had accidentally released the lever of a hand grenade and frozen with it in his hand. It was set to go off in five seconds in a crowded second-story room. Murphy grabbed the grenade, intent upon heaving it out of the room until he noticed more GIs in the street below. He thrust his hand below the outside sill, ducked, and held on. He was the only casualty.

The infantrymen were not particularly loyal to either their country, their army, or their outfit, but they were dedicated to each other. The Combat Infantry Badge had more meaning to the infantrymen than all the Silver and Bronze Stars that higher echelon officers so liberally bestowed upon each other.

\*

At the hospital, we did not remain in such an exalted state of mind. As our thankfulness for life itself wore off, as we were moved farther back from the line, we lost our gratitude. We started to gripe about the nursing, the food, the point system, whatnot. I also noticed that the hospital personnel's sense of dedication varied inversely with their distance from the front line. Without the rumble of artillery in their ears, the hospital staffs tended to think less of the wounded and more of the next night's date, their ranks, their week's leaves at Salerno, their next liquor rations.

Sometime in the next ten days, I travelled by ambulance back to a base hospital at Leghorn. My body cast was split, the open wound closed, and the physical therapy begun for the stiff shoulder.

I shared a room with Harold Hawkins from my outfit, Len, an officer from the 86th Regiment, and another fellow I forgot.

I remember the warm spring sun, the occasional explosion as German mines were set off, sometimes accidentally by some unfortunate Italian. I remember the cement German bunkers, the mined beaches, the Italians picking at the garbage can, the thin wiry look of Italian men, popular arias floating in through the window on warm evenings. I remember some pain in the physical therapy room, as I worked on my shoulder. I remember boredom, but I remember best some of our lighter moments.

Len had been hit by a generous amount of small mortar fragments, none of which penetrated into a bone or a vital organ. Since stitch pulling broke the tedium of the room, we all gathered around Len's bed to give him sympathy and advice when his time came.

"Look at that big one. That will hurt!"

"Can I help pull one, Doc?"

"Only a few hundred to go, Len."

With our good assistance, the job was finally done. Len had 26 separate scars on his back.

"Let me see it?" he asked, still on his stomach. We arranged two mirrors, enabling him to see his lacerated back.

"My God," he said, "looks like a railroad map of China."

Len and Harold collaborated on what I still think was an inhuman joke. As mail had failed to come in for a week, I had grown sullen and self-pitying, quite impossible to live with.

"If I don't get a letter tonight," I muttered one evening as I left the room to attend the hospital movie. I returned to find a letter from Major Stephens on my bed.

Dear Preb,

Just wanted to let you know how much we miss you up here. The infantry CO's have been begging for you, and they are still talking about the great job on Riva Ridge. You are a fine combat officer, Preb, and I have found it an inspiration to serve with you. I am sure you will be successful in any of your future undertakings.  
Best of luck.

Major Stephens

*Well, what do you know about that, I said to myself. I laid the letter down. My eyes filled with tears. Isn't that a nice thing to do. I picked up the letter and reread it. So the infantry wanted me? Isn't that great? Maybe Len and Harold would like to hear the letter. I glanced up. No, they're busy reading their letters. I reread my letter for the third time. All the risk, all the fatigue, it was all worth while now. Len and Harold put down their letters.*

"Say," I said, "I just got the nicest letter from Major Stephens."

"You did?" Harold interrupted quickly. "So did I. Listen to this." He raised his letter.

"Dear Harold," he began. "Just wanted to let you know how much we miss you up here." *Something was wrong. This sounded familiar.* "The infantry CO's have been begging . . ." Why, Stephens wrote the same letter to Harold. He wouldn't do that. Len flopped over in his bed, croaking. Hawkins was unable to go on.

"You bastards, you dirty bastards."

"Well, you said you wanted a letter, didn't you?"

I was the fool, but I must admit their perverted sense of humor snapped me out of the doldrums.

Len had a wild theory that the Red Cross librarian, a woman about forty, had been or wanted to be, the mistress of Ezra Pound. Len's pointed references to the famous poet seemed to affect the librarian greatly.

We had a good time with one of the chaplains, who, weighed down with too much human misery, had given himself up to despondency, with a deleterious effect on the morale of those he visited. We launched a room campaign to cheer him up, utilizing two weapons, his love of food and his forthcoming trip to Jerusalem. When we spotted him shuffling unhappily past our door, one of us would say loudly, "I hear we are going to have steak tonight."

"Is that so—New York or filet mignon?"

The retreating footsteps stopped, reversed themselves, and in a moment the chaplain appeared at the doorway, head a little higher, eyes a little brighter.

"Hi, fellows. Did you say something about steak?"

"Come on in, Chaplain. Say you never told us how you are going to get to Jerusalem. Going to fly?"

Twenty minutes later, he would leave us with almost a smile on his face, as we hoped enthusiastically that there would be steak for dinner.

Frequently, we were visited by a remarkable man from the 10th, who used to travel about the hospital by overhead rail. Wounded in one leg, he learned to bounce on his bed with the other until he was able to grab the pipes that ran

under the ceilings. Then, hand over hand, he hauled himself, ape-like, out of his room, down the corridor, to other rooms where he dropped onto somebody's bed for a sociable chat. Amazed at first, the nurses and doctors soon learned to appreciate the morale-raising effect of their peripatetic patient.

At college I had joined the Fly Club, a group limited to about forty students. Within that group there were subgroups, including a bridge foursome who apparently devoted all their leisure time to the game. I saw them daily for the six months prior to my Army stint. One aimless, wandering afternoon on the Leghorn beach, I was attracted to a German bunker which had been turned into a beach club bar by a medical group. A familiar figure was sunbathing on the sand.

"Gordy McGrath?"

Gordy, despite nearsightedness, chinlessness, and just plain ugliness, had always maintained his St. Paul aloofness. He blinked at me nearsightedly. I helped him a little.

"Preb—Preb Motley."

Gordy considered this a moment, then brightened.

"Oh, the Fly," and then, disappointment registering, "you didn't play bridge, did you?"

While I was convalescing, the Fifth Army launched the final spring offensive that was destined to break through the Gothic Line, debouch into the Po Valley, cut Kesserling's army into segments, and carry on up into the Brenner Pass. The 10th Division was originally slated as the pivot point for a vast left-wheeling movement of the whole army. However, still relatively fresh, the 10th displayed an offensive zest that placed it on the vanguard of the whole army, sometimes 30 miles ahead of other units. Led by the famed Colonel Darby, formerly of the Rangers, a task force of the 10th's men dashed miles ahead to cut off the German escape route to Germany at the foot of the Brenner, an

accomplishment which cost Darby his life the day before hostilities ceased on the Italian front.

The 10th took many casualties. Some 33 percent of the Division were eventually wounded or killed. Our leadership was criticized by older battle-weary outfits for the recklessness with which the 10th infantry was employed. Certainly those dashing gallant runs up enemy-held terrain were costly, but our cautious critics failed to comprehend that our foremost units forced the German artillery and mortar units to withdraw, thus saving many troops in the rear. Did the critics understand that it was the sustained, reckless offensive of the 10th which eventually cut in behind the line of communications of German divisions in the Po, neutralizing them as effective combat units, thus sparing other American outfits many casualties?

I speak as if the 10th single-handedly cleaned up the Italian campaign, which is not true, but we certainly contributed our share, and we were the offensive sparkplug during that final drive. Thank God we happened to play a dramatic but brief role in the war. Had we faced the endless miseries of North Africa, Sicily, and the first year of the Italian campaign, we, too, would have lost some of our spirit. Every man and every unit has its breaking point.

As the final offensive progressed, the casualties poured back into the hospital. Some of us were torn between guilt that we were not with our outfits and thankfulness that we were out of combat. Len, who had narrowly escaped death when he was wounded, had an opportunity to join an MP battalion in the vicinity. As an intellectual, he saw war as madness, and yet, after a soul struggle, he decided to rejoin his company. After a few days of combat, he collected another wound and a Silver Star on the banks of the Po. He was soon back with us. Evidently, while directing mortar fire, Len had felt a prick on his back. He pulled up his shirt and asked his companion, "Am I wounded?"

"Yes, there's a little . . ."

"Good," Len interrupted. He climbed out of his hole and marched to the rear.

To make room for the new casualties, many of us were shipped south to Naples. I remember one unreal night on the fantail of the well-lighted hospital ship, with the balmy sea air, the reassuring deep throb of the ship's engines, the long white wake behind us. We talked with a perky, red-haired nurse.

Naples was bad. The poverty depressed me, and I lacked the background or the interest to see the city in its historical perspective. I drank too much and felt lonely and moody. Some days I climbed the hills in back of the city in the early summer heat.

I remember little villages where black market GI supplies were sold openly in the streets. I remember shepherd boys roaring with laughter as they held back a struggling, amorous he-goat from fulfilling his natural inclination. I remember being infuriated by a beggar-boy with his bomb-blown, bare stump of a leg. I remember a harsh, squabbling, amoral people. Pity soon turned to intolerance, even hate. These were not my peasant friends, just animals: sly cruel foxes. It seemed as if the Neapolitans were striving for nothing except existence itself, which they clung to with harsh resiliency. This, of all cities, was where the country boy was taken.

I do remember too, though, one pleasant interlude, playing soccer with a group of street urchins. The kids accepted me quite openly, but some onlooking Britishers were obviously shocked at such undignified behavior from an American officer.

Via Roma was a mass of shouting, surging Italians on VE day. The Americans accepted the event casually. There was still Japan ahead. At best, we might get a little time at home. I remember the little Major from the 10th, the guy who was sent back for incompetence, tossing coins

from the balcony of the Officers' Club into the street-clogging rabble below. He was drunk and giggling, a mad emperor favoring his people with a Roman holiday. It was a pathetic, ugly scene.

Although my shoulder was not completely healed, I persuaded the Medical Officer to release me for light duty with my outfit, now that the fighting was over. I heard the 10th was at Lake Garda, and I wanted to see the Alps, to share in the victory celebration and the champagne drinking.

The hospital sent us to a staging area where we waited for orders and transportation back to our unit. From these areas, there was always the odd chance that you might be transferred to some other unit, so I made plans to go AWOL, a practice winked at in these particular circumstances. By furnishing my own transportation back to my unit, I planned on a few extra days of sight-seeing in the Alps.

After morning check, I immediately made my way to an airfield outside of Naples, and by 1400, I was in the bucket seat of an American transport plane, with the smells, heat, and amorality of Naples behind me, and the clean cool air of the Alps up ahead. It was an exciting flight at low altitude through the great brown passes of the Apennines. Like so many others, I could only wonder at the stupidity of conducting an offensive through ideal defensive terrain and at the miracle of our eventual accomplishment.

From the air, Italy looked old and worn, but also as indestructible as its peasant people. Late in the afternoon, the plane landed at an airport south of Pisa, and I hitch-hiked to the base of the tower itself, where I accepted the hospitality of an MP battalion. What better place of refuge for an AWOL?

Over a steak dinner, the CO boasted how well he kept his outfit fed during the combat days by commandeering the best foods off the Quartermaster convoys as they

headed north. Here was a practical leader who took care of his own, but I thought of the combat men off the line for a day or two, eating spam instead of steak. There was always that taint of corruption in the rear areas, where the "operator," a deputy-sheriff kind of guy, amassed and spent small fortunes. Oh, the bitterness of such connivers who found themselves in the hard, honest world of combat.

I have forgotten many details of the next day. I do remember passing tantalizingly close to della Torraccia, but not being able to recognize the countryside, which was now surprisingly green. I remember the warm breeze in an open jeep, a perfect early summer day, wrecked tanks and villages, and winding mountain roads. I arrived in Bologna about noon, where I caught a ride north in a truck filled with members of the Jewish Brigade. I was immediately impressed with these men: wiry, lean, and purposeful. Most of them had strong English accents. They had made an excellent combat record.

The afternoon drive across the Po was hot. Every form of German transportation had been destroyed or neutralized. Buses, trucks, motorcycles, combat vehicles: all smashed. I did see a few usable railroad cars, but they were cut off from the main track. Our Air Force had been effective.

Our troops had been given the hero treatment by the local populace on their hectic dash across the Po Valley, but by the time I arrived, enthusiasm had dimmed, and instead of wine, women and food, I had to be content with a few friendly "Ciaos." It was enough. Destruction of the houses and villages was spotty. The people seemed more prosperous than my mountain friends, and the farms tended to be bigger.

I looked at the valley from a soldier's point of view. That convoy must have caught it from the air. I saw the place where the 10th might have crossed the Po river. I saw where Len might have been wounded.

The misty white of the Alps was a welcome relief. I spent that night in Verona, the walled city. I remember soft air and songs from the darkness of the town square surrounded by white buildings. It was a calm yet lonely place. I drank quite a bit, and hoped that a girl would miraculously remove my loneliness, but such things just don't happen. Miracle girls have to be sought after, and I was not an accomplished seeker.

I felt wrong about riding safely across the Po and into this town, a destination that had previously been fought for: the sleepless nights, the cringing in foxholes, the gear-laden runs. When you won a house or a bit of a mountain, you shared the victory with your infantry friends. You counted your dead and the enemy dead, told your story, and listened to others, as you prepared for the next advance. But to walk about all alone in a town so far north, not knowing how the town was taken or who took it—something was missing. My trip was turning sour.

Two airmen in a jeep gave me a lift the next morning. We travelled along the east shore of Lake Garda, where the road had been cut out of steep mountainside cliffs that dipped sharply into the lake. There were many tunnels, some of which had been strongly defended by German artillery from the lake's opposite shore. Driving northward to seal off the Brenner, the 10th had attempted an amphibious operation across the lake in ducks. One of the ducks was overloaded and foundered in a rising wind. Half my detail section went down with it.

I left the airmen at noon, because of the hate the civilians displayed toward them. It was easy to see why. Every bridge up the pass had been bombed, but here, certainly, the "pinpoint" accuracy of our daylight bombers was myth. The damage to the villages within a half-mile radius of the bridges was complete. In fact, there were craters and blasted houses up to a mile away. There were pilots who indiscriminately strafed children, women, farmers in the field, dogs, livestock, anything that moved. Some even

boasted of such rampages, while others kept silent and were deeply ashamed.

A captain in a jeep at the head of a convoy gave me my final ride to the top of the Brenner. Of all things, he was another Harvard man. I passed a pleasant time with him as we rose through the hairpin turns of the pass into the cool mountain air. I was disappointed with the topography, a monotonous great valley with slate gray cliffs on its sides. I saw the cables thousands of feet above us where the Jerries had hoisted 88s to the rim of the cliffs where they fired horizontally and even down at our low-level bombers. No wonder our bombardiers were inaccurate! I saw now why the Brenner was considered one of the toughest bombing runs.

The top of the pass was lovely, a typical alpine scene with scattered white villages nestled in the greenery of the valley and the lower mountain slopes. The vast natural purity of the snow peaks above dominated the man-nature intimacy of the valley below. I rode as far as the Austrian border, but dared not go down into Innsbruck where my AWOL status may have led to trouble.

Here in northern Italy, the towns were clean and the people were blonde and handsome, even Aryan in appearance. "Here are the true mountain folk," we said. Unfortunately, the northern Italians showed a marked dislike for us, their sympathies obviously with the captured German forces. Many of these Italian women had married or lived with Germans and Austrians.

I was amazed at the quantity and quality of the German prisoners. They were obviously fresh and well-fed, many of them were superior mountain or Jaeger troops. Like the MP battalion, I suppose they had confiscated food and supplies designated for the wretched combat troops to the south. I remember an uncomfortable moment when I encountered an unguarded encampment of Germans on a

lonely stretch of road. They were still armed and I was not. I attempted a casual air as I walked briskly out of sight.

Despite the beauty of the place, I became bored. There was nothing to do but look at a rural countryside. There were no facilities for skiing or mountain climbing. I attended a drinking party of some infantry officers, but I felt very much out of place.

I did hear one good story concerning the unfortunate infantryman who had been attending to the call of nature in a third-story john in a large Italian house. The plumbing system was one which utilized the force of gravity supplemented by water sloshed into the toilet by hand. This soldier absent-mindedly picked up a five-gallon GI container, poured the contents down the hole, and then resumed his seat with the intention of completing some reading matter. His literary pursuits were violently interrupted as he tossed his lighted cigarette into the void below. Every toilet in the house erupted when the gasoline fumes exploded. Our hero suffered serious burns on those portions of his anatomy which had served as an firebreak.

There were many such accidents in the post-combat days. Men accustomed to living violently seemed to find it difficult to forsake violence. GIs of the 88th Division stole a train. Sergeant Colby, the chief of my detail section, broke his back in a drunken jeep accident which killed our supply sergeant. I believe that some of us, myself included, hated combat, but were also now discontented with the prospect of lives free of risk and thrill.

The next day I travelled down the pass to the southern end of Lake Garda, where I found the 10th. The reunion was a disappointment. There was champagne, but everyone was sated, and I felt ridiculous drinking alone. It was hot and humid, and the mosquitoes were out. There were multitudinous directives from Division HQ about the necessity for military discipline and training. The men were particularly resentful of routine drill. We all felt stale and

flat. We were a long way from the clean other-world of Riva Ridge.

To my delight, and to the disgust of practically everyone else, we were ordered into the Venetian Giulia territory on the Yugoslav-Austro-Italian border. Evidently Tito had designs on Trieste and the surrounding territory—designs which the Allies had to counter. We soldiers were politically naive, and I remember being puzzled by the predominance of red stars painted on the buildings of Udine and the villages to the northwest. All I understood was that we were going to see new mountain country, which proved to be spectacular. Great monoliths of rock towered over white specks of villages 3000 feet below. This was the country where the Austrians and Italians fought the mountain battles preceding Caporetto in World War I. Here was Hemingway's setting for *A Farewell to Arms*.

The Division camped in and around a border village, also occupied by Tito's partisans. Our artillery batteries faced in their direction, and as an army unit we acted tough, but as individuals we liked our potential enemies. I remember attending a movie in the village where I sat next to a stocky, young partisan girl. I remember her boots, her ruddy cheeks, and her pleasant assurance. She carried a rifle; I carried a carbine. We nodded and smiled. It seemed incomprehensible that I could be fighting this cheerful creature.

I heard that the company I had fought with during the della Torraccia counterattack was bivouacked on the other side of town, so one night I visited them. They were cordial and polite, but the old camaraderie was gone. I was artillery; they were infantry. I was an officer; they were enlisted men. I even visited the Captain who was in a tent by himself up the hill. He had come through combat unscathed, but his men knew why he was unmarked and he was hated thoroughly for it. I felt sorry for him. We had a couple of drinks which tasted bad.

It was cold and wet in the mountains, and the men hated it. We took training marches, cleaned equipment, and groused. On a rotating basis we were allowed to visit Venice or Klagenfurt. I was disappointed with the latter, a grubby railroad town, set in a flat valley surrounded by mild green hills. It was hot the day I visited. We wandered about the town.

There were pictures of Dachau exhibited in the city square. I watched the Austrians as they viewed the horrors. It seemed to me they were visibly shocked and ashamed. I watched a British guard-changing ceremony, a marvel of precision. Next, I ignominiously purchased a Luger pistol from an acquisitive little Cockney, who had probably never seen combat. I spent the latter half of the afternoon drinking in a British Officers' Club, and I slept on the long ride back to our bivouac.

The next morning I was supposed to give the Battery mountain climbing instruction. It was a damp raw day, and I had a fair-sized hangover. There was little equipment or qualified help, and I was ill-prepared. After demonstrating some basic rope work, I took the Battery up an old stream bed behind our camp. As we climbed, the banks grew higher and steeper. Large boulders cluttered the bottom of the stream bed. We ascended the steep right bank to a 45-degree grass slope topped by a small rock face some 20 feet high.

I started working on the face with one group and sent the remainder of the men to another rock face in the charge of an enlisted man who had a little experience. I demonstrated a few holds and then let the men climb. They seemed to do well. I followed one of them up an innocent-looking portion of the face with my head just below his feet. As he reached the top, I saw his right foot slip back a little on some loose gravel.

“Look out Lieutenant, I’m falling!”

I thought that he'd do what I'd do in his place. I thought he'd turn, then push out over me. But the man skidded down onto my shoulders and knocked me off my small foothold. I snapped around, faced out, and prepared to land on my feet and roll forward into a shock-absorbing somersault. I congratulated myself in midair. Everything seemed fine, but I had forgotten that the man above me was riding me down. I hit the ground, and he hit me. I felt my right ankle crack, but I was still able to roll forward. I reached for the short grass and missed. I was up in the air, bouncing down the slope like a sack of potatoes. The wind started to whistle in my ears. My thoughts were cold and sharp: *Duck your head under. Take it on your back.* I bounced up high again. *Good, keep the legs and arms in—Like in a ski fall. Going to hit again—Can't stop—Head down—Over to your back—Up again.*

The last bounce threw me well up in the air. As my head came forward once more, I looked out ahead of me, and felt I would die or be horribly injured. There was one tree, a small evergreen, on the lip of the bank. I was sure I was going to miss it. I was going to miss the tree, clear the bank, then plunge into the bouldered stream bed.

Right about then, I remembered some story about circus acrobats relaxing as they fell, so I let myself go completely. I did not feel, but I heard the crash that seemed premature. I woke up a moment later to find myself on the downhill side of the tree, clinging to it desperately. I felt blood trickling down my face from what would prove to be a superficial scalp wound.

“Lieutenant? You O.K.?”

It was the man who had fallen with me.

I was still dazed from hitting the tree. “Are you O.K.?” I asked.

“I’m O.K. How about you?” Then: “I think I’ve broken my leg.” His voice rose in alarm.

“Somebody come here,” I shouted. “His leg is broken.”

But for me, his leg, broken or otherwise, was unimportant. I was alive. I was absorbed in *that*.

Soon I was propped up on the downhill side of the tree. While we waited for the medics, I looked up the slope and estimated that I must have covered some 100 feet in the three high bounces. I calculated I was doing about 40 miles per hour when I hit the tree.

To keep my nerves under control, I gave a little lecture concerning the errors that had caused the accident. Nobody listened, but they stood there uneasily. After 20 minutes or so, the Medical Officer arrived. I remember the sweat rolling from his face. He incorrectly diagnosed my injuries, but gave me the blessed morphine. It took the men nearly an hour to wrestle me and the stretcher down the slope to camp. I clung to the sides of the stretcher and remembered the litter cases coming off Riva.

While we waited for the ambulance, I pecked at a little lunch. Colonel Pearson came over, looked uncomfortable, and said "Goodbye." Though it was left unsaid, we both knew I would go to the States this time. Soon I was loaded into an ambulance. It was a long ride, a jolting ride, and the morphine wore off. I started to cry, and I was furious. I had approached calmly the last mental moment preceding death in the morning, and here I was crying in the afternoon.

I was unloaded just before sunset in some flat, hot place. I waited for a long time, probably while the doctor finished his dinner. When he arrived and started to question me, I began to blubber like a baby. He looked at me with disgust and injected a shot with an immediate calming effect. I realized that my ability to hold onto myself was far inferior to the time when I was wounded in battle, but there seemed nothing I could do. You can only take so much of a physical beating, then the nerves go. Your behavior becomes seemingly reprehensible under conditions of stress. The medical folks rediagnosed my injuries: my ankle was not

broken, but dislocated. My leg, however, was broken and the fibula had to be straightened.

There is not much more to say.

I remember fighting my nerves at the hospital. I remember a GI with half of his face shot away. He was able to talk only with great difficulty. All the patients, including myself, avoided him. I was ashamed of both them and me.

A month later, I was loaded onto a hospital ship and headed home. We had a cheery crossing. There were about eight of us to a cabin. The nurses were attractive. Those of us who were confined had a great time burlesquing the daily calisthenics faithfully broadcast over the PA system. The portholes were open and the sea air poured into the cabin, a far cry from the crowding and the stench of the transport over.

In the New York harbor, Lady Liberty raised her torch. WELCOME HOME! WELL DONE! was written in white stone on the Brooklyn shore. An excursion boat came out to meet us, complete with a jazz band and some thick-thighed, hard-faced brunettes who lifted their skirts and jitterbugged on an upper deck.

No time was wasted in transferring us to hospitals close to our homes. Within twenty-four hours, I was on a train for Fort Devens, Massachusetts. The dreary night landscape of the New Jersey tidal flats looked lovely. It was July 2, 1945—exactly six months from the time of embarkation.

General Hays had spoken to the Division before we went overseas. "You will have bad times, but you will have good times, too," he had said.

He was right. □

## Selected Glossary

<b>Division</b>	The smallest formation (12,000-20,000 soldiers) that comprises a balanced team of all the arms and services needed for the independent conduct of operations. Divisions may be specially trained to perform specialized roles, such as airborne and alpine divisions.
<b>Regiment</b>	A military organizational unit consisting of three battalions.
<b>Battalion</b>	A tactical military organization (500-1000 soldiers) usually composed of three rifle companies, a heavy-weapons company and a headquarters company, often including reinforcements such as attached artillery and tanks.
<b>Company</b>	The smallest body of troops that functions as a complete administrative unit. A rifle company during World War II generally consisted of 6 officers and 187 men.
<b>Battery</b>	Smallest division of artillery used for tactical purposes.
<b>BAR</b>	Browning Automatic Rifle—.30 caliber standard automatic weapon for the U.S. rifle squads (1920-60).
<b>C-Rations</b>	A day's supply of food for the combat soldier who could be resupplied daily (six 12-ounce cans, three of which contained combinations of meat and vegetables, biscuits, soluble coffee, cocoa, lemon powder and cigarettes).
<b>CO</b>	Commanding Officer.
<b>Div Arty</b>	Division Artillery.

<b>Ducks</b>	A 2.5 ton, 6-wheel-drive truck equipped with a propeller and a watertight hull for ferrying or amphibious landings.
<b>GI</b>	Government Issue—also applied to the American foot soldier.
<b>IP</b>	Initial Point.
<b>Jaeger</b>	German mobile, light infantry troops specialized as mountain or forest riflemen.
<b>K-Rations</b>	Derived from the American Indian's concentrated venison, or pemmican, it also included biscuits, coffee, cigarettes, chewing gum, and candy.
<b>LCI</b>	Landing, Craft, Infantry—flat-bottomed boat used to transport infantry troops from sea to shore.
<b>POE</b>	Point of Embarkation—departure point.
<b>SOP</b>	Standard Operating Procedure—the proper method of doing things as prescribed by the U.S. Army.
<b>Weasel</b>	A small, tracked vehicle for transporting personnel and cargo across snow and ice or sand.
<b>Note:</b>	To avoid confusion between a.m. and p.m., the military operates on a twenty-four hour clock. Hence, 1 p.m. is 1300 (pronounced thirteen hundred hours) and 12 a.m. is 2400 (twenty-four hundred hours).