



1

- On a freezing winter night in February 1945, the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division accomplished the impossible: they scaled a 2,000-foot cliff in northern Italy to knock the seemingly invincible Germans from their impenetrable perch. THE LAST RIDGE recounts the remarkable story of the legendary 10th Mountain Division, whose extraordinary efforts turned the tide for the Allied forces in Italy, revolutionized winter mountain warfare abroad, transformed winter sports and inspired an entire generation of soldiers.

2



3



A view of
1,140 metre A.S.L.
(3,740 feet A.S.L.)
Mount Belvedere
in Italy's Northern
Apennines from the
town of
Vidiciatico, Italy
where the Tenth
Mountain Division
gathered to prepare
for attack in
February 1945.

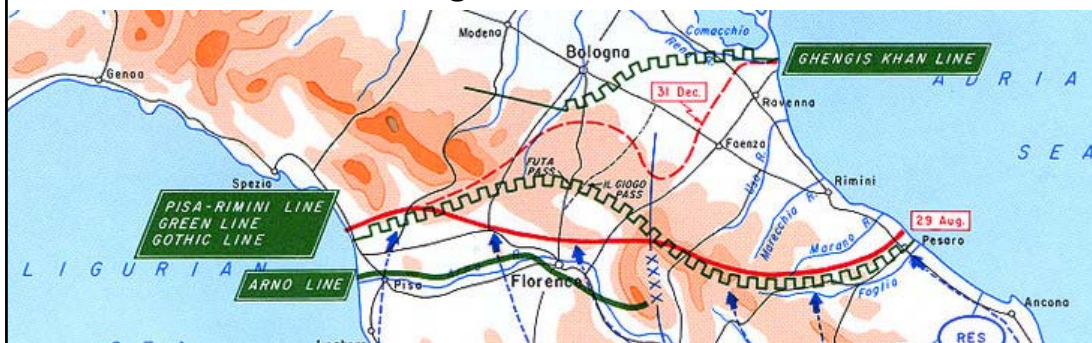
4



5

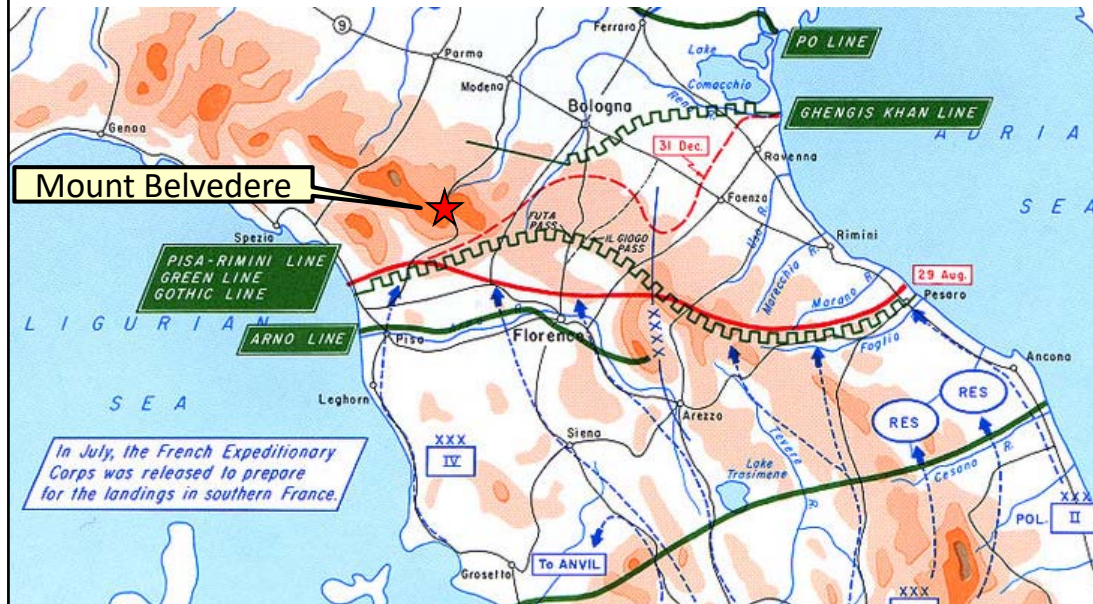
Situation – February 1945

- The European war was nearing its end, but Allied mistakes had prevented victory in Italy, France and Belgium as the Axis troops fiercely defended their homeland. Last ditch offensives in the Ardennes and the Alsace had shocked the Allies, and in Italy the enemy effectively utilized defensive terrain (and their artillery) to resist numerous Allied thrusts.
- While the Allied forces in eastern Italy had broken through the Gothic Line in September 1944, they were overstretched and blocked at the Genghis Khan Line.



6

- The Allies would not be able to advance into northern Italy without breaking through the western Gothic Line to the Po Valley. Mount Belvedere held the key to a breakthrough!
- Twice Allied divisions had failed to capture it.



7

The Terrain

- Mount Belvedere **1** is the first in a line of peaks, all over 1,000 metres ASL, that stretched northeast from the hillside village of Querciola **2** and arrayed along a three-and-a-quarter-mile ridgeline **3** to Mount della Torraccia **4**. The watershed between the valleys of the Reno and the Panaro, this terrain has been of strategic importance since ancient times and once was guarded by a castle. Now it formed part of a German bulwark called the Gothic Line (Green Line II).



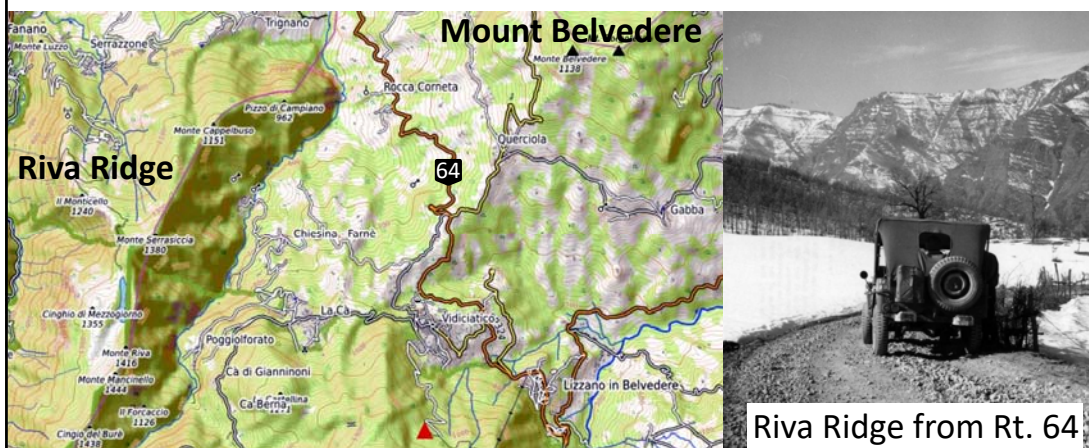
8

- The most prominent of these peaks is Mount Belvedere ❶ itself, along with Mount Gorgolesco ❷ and Mount della Torraccia ❸. The three mountains overlook Highway 64, one of the few roads then cutting through the Apennines, connecting the region around Florence to the south—which had been held by the Allies since the previous fall—to Bologna in the north, in the northern third of Italy still controlled by the Germans.
- Mount Belvedere (1140m) is the highest peak on the ridge.
- The area was held by the German 232nd Fusilier Division throughout autumn-winter 1944-45 and withstood repeated attacks by the Allies and partisans.



9

- Although Mt Belvedere remained the main objective, enemy on Riva Ridge had a clear view of approaches and summit of Mt Belvedere, allowing them to call in accurate artillery fire on any attackers. First Riva Ridge must be secured.
- To take the ridge would require troops to scale nearly vertical cliffs directly underneath the German defenders. The enemy was confident that such an attack was unlikely, but 86th IR scouts identified five routes to the top from the east side.



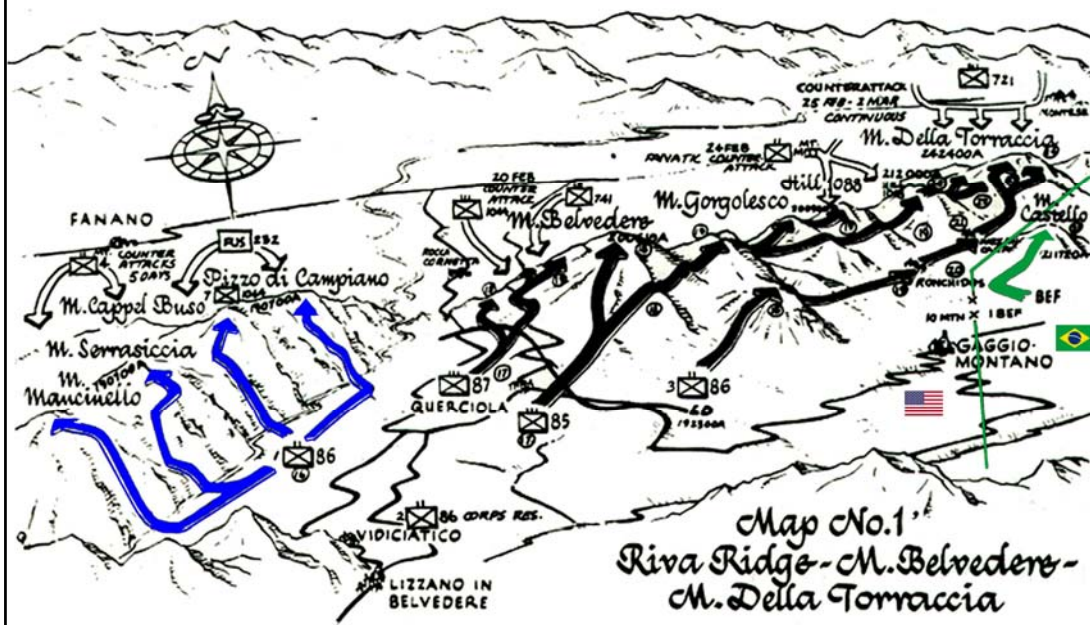
10

- The Germans remained oblivious to the reconnaissance, and MG Hays and staff drew up final plans for **Operation Encore**.
- After darkness fell on Sunday night, February 18, 1st/86th IR would climb via four routes to the summit of Riva Ridge.
- The 2nd and 3rd Battalions and the 85th and 87th—some 12,000 men in all—would depart shortly before midnight the next night, February 19, to seize Mount Belvedere and adjacent peaks.



11

The Plan: The 10th Mountain Division's plan of attack was complex, with 3/86 and the 85th and 87th regiments involved in the initial assault from several sides of Belvedere and Gorgolesco and 2/86 in reserve. Once those summits were secured, 2/86, held in reserve, would push on to della Torraccia.



12



13



14



The Beginning

- In the late winter of 1940, prominent American skiers and mountaineers began to warn military authorities of the potential threat German alpine troops posed should the US become involved in “Europe’s war”.
- European armies needed to take alpine fighting seriously since many national borders ran along mountain crest. The U.S. Army had no alpine troops and had never fought on a snowy mountain.
- Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall listened to the civilians, and by late November 1941 the first ski troops began to gather at Fort Lewis in Washington State, to soon train on the slopes of nearby Mount Rainier.

15

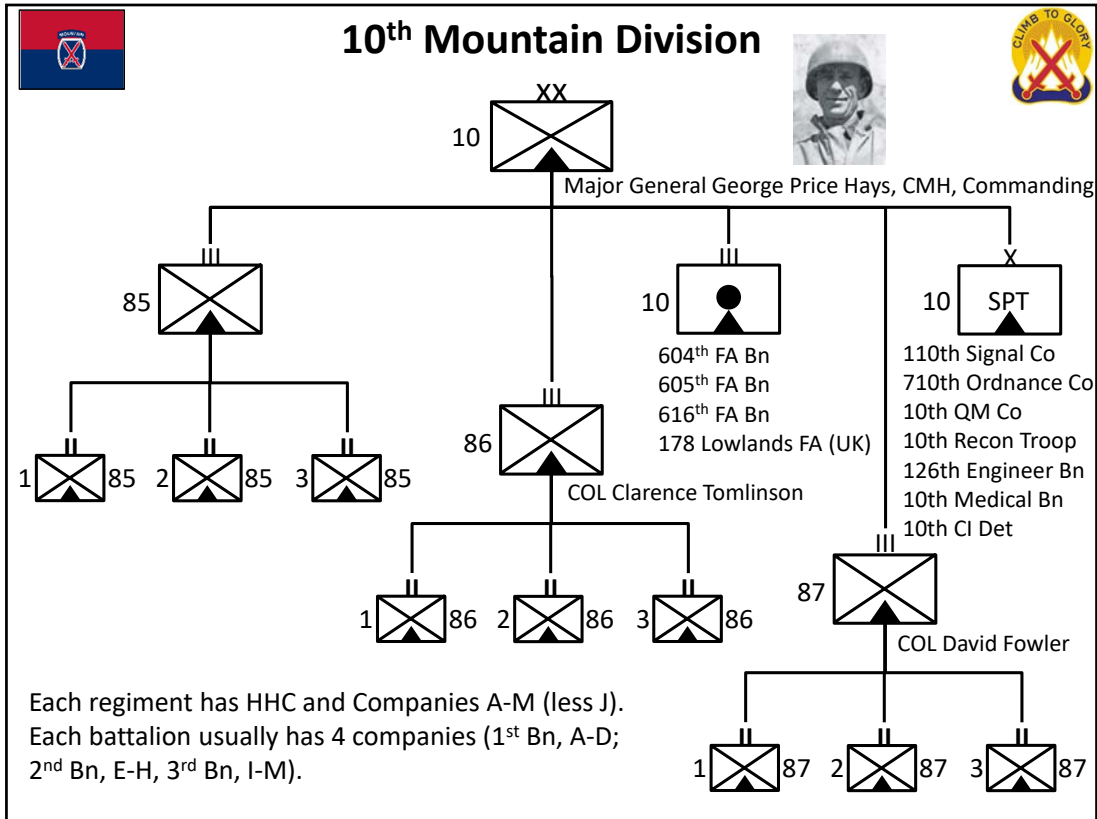
Formation and Training

- By year end 1942, the ski troops, now two regiments, had their own newly constructed training camp, Camp Hale, in the Colorado Rockies. A third regiment in July 1943 gave them divisional status as the 10th Light Division (Pack Alpine), which was renamed the 10th Mountain Division on November 6, 1944.



- The 10th Mountain Division was made up of expert skiers and mountaineers, organized into three infantry regiments (85th, 86th and 87th) each with three battalions of 12 companies. The division had three field artillery battalions with 75mm pack howitzers (instead of 4 FA battalions with 105s) and a mountain infantry antitank battalion.

16



17

MG George P. Hays

- In World War II George C. Marshall transferred Hays from command of the 2d Division's artillery in France to command the 10th Mountain Division just before its departure for Italy.
- Marshall remembered Hays from WWI, when he had ridden on horseback through a heavy enemy artillery barrage to locate targets for his artillery, receiving the Medal of Honor.
- Us 5th Army Commander LTG Lucien Truscott would later rate Hays as one of his ablest battle leaders.

18



19

Prelude



- During World War II, the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division served in combat for only four months, but it had one of the conflict's highest casualty rates.
- The division started out as an experiment to train skiers and climbers to fight in the most difficult, mountainous terrain in Europe.
- Some of the men who joined the division were skiers already, while others had never seen a ski in their lives.
- Training at Camp Hale, near Pando, Colorado, included skiing, snowshoeing and rock climbing. They also learned cold-weather survival tactics, such as keeping warm by building snow caves.
- The men lived in the mountains for weeks, working in altitudes of up to 13,500 feet, in five to six feet of snow and in temperatures that dropped to 20 degrees below zero at night.

20



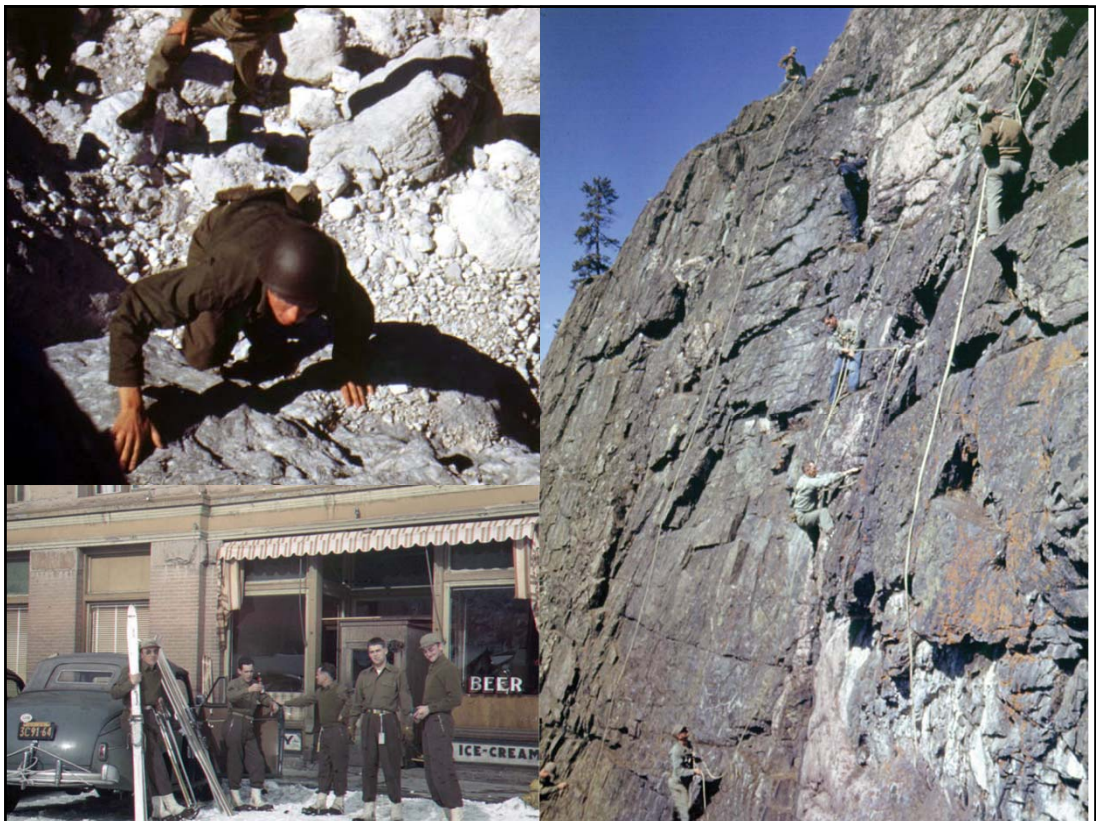
21



22



23



24

Movement to Italy



- On December 11, 1944, after almost two years of training, the 86th Regiment left Hampton Roads, VA aboard the USS Argentina (below, left) destined for the city of Naples in Italy where they landed on the 22nd of December.



- On January 4, 1945, the 85th and 87th Regiments left Hampton Roads aboard the USS West Point (shown being converted from SS America) for Naples where they landed on January 13, 1945.

25



Naples to Livorno



10th Mountain Division troops were transported through Italy to the Gothic Line, first by rail from Naples to the city of Livorno and then by truck to a staging area near the city of Pisa.



26



Arrival in Combat

15 January 1945

- The troops were transported through Italy to the Gothic Line, first by train from Naples to the city of Livorno and then by truck to a staging area near the city of Pisa. From its staging area near Livorno, the 86th Regiment entered the front line just north of the town of Bagni di Lucca and over January 8 -9, 1945 relieving Task Force 45 in the Monte Belvedere area. They were protected on the right flank by the 1st Brazilian Infantry Division (BEF).
- On January 15, 1945 the 85th and 87th regiments bivouac west of Pisa and entered the front line on January 20 in the Monte Belvedere area.

27

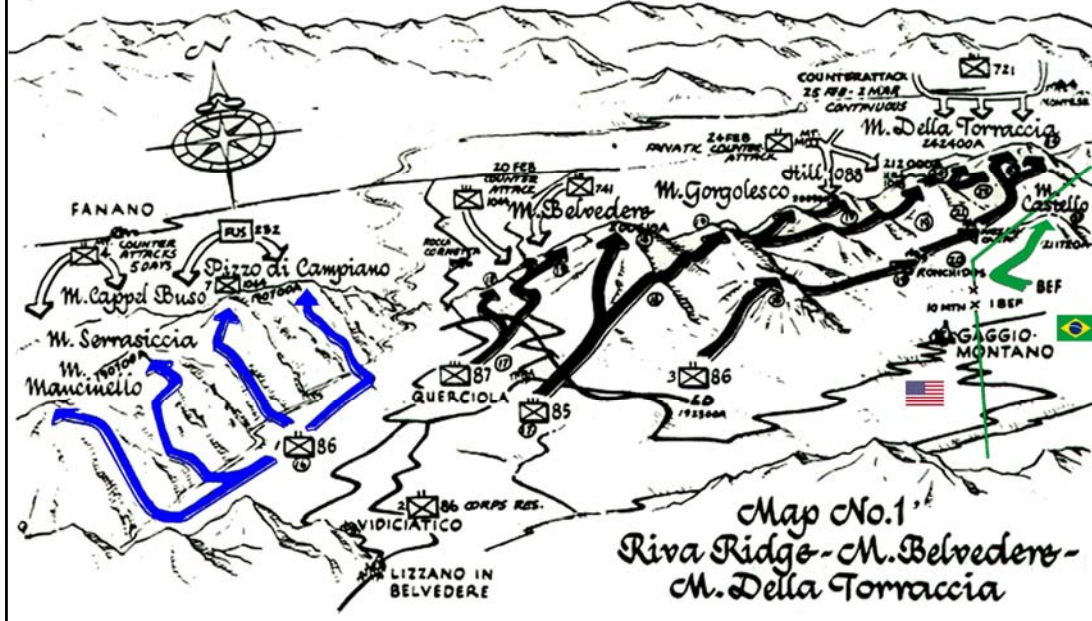
Operation Encore



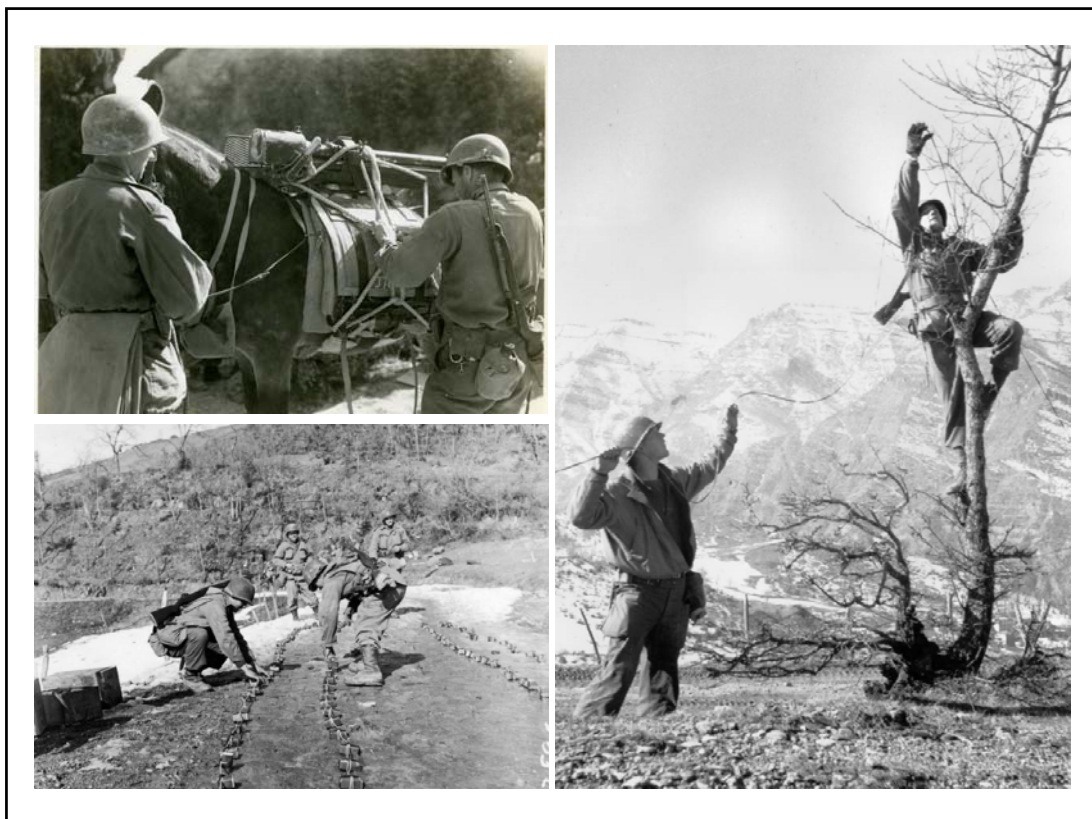
- From January 28-29 troops of the 85th and 87th Regiments relieved the 86th Regiment to rest and prepare for the Riva Ridge assault (Pizzo di Campiano, Monte Cappel Buso, Monte Serrasiccia, Monte Mancinello and Le Piagge) during the night of February 18-19.
- At 2300 on February 19, MG George P. Hayes ordered the attack. In order to achieve maximum surprise there was no artillery fire.
- The ground forces were supported by reconnaissance aircraft led by "Rover Joe" and coordinated on the ground by "Rover Pete".
- The assault of 87th Regiment developed from the departure line, near the village of Quercianella to the locality of Corona.

28

- The 10th Mountain Division's attack worked largely as planned.
- Surprise was achieved on Riva Ridge, and the OPs were quickly eliminated. But the 1/86th came under fierce counterattacks for five days.
- The main attacks also achieved their objectives, but with significant losses.



29



30



31



32



33



34



35



36



37



38



39



40



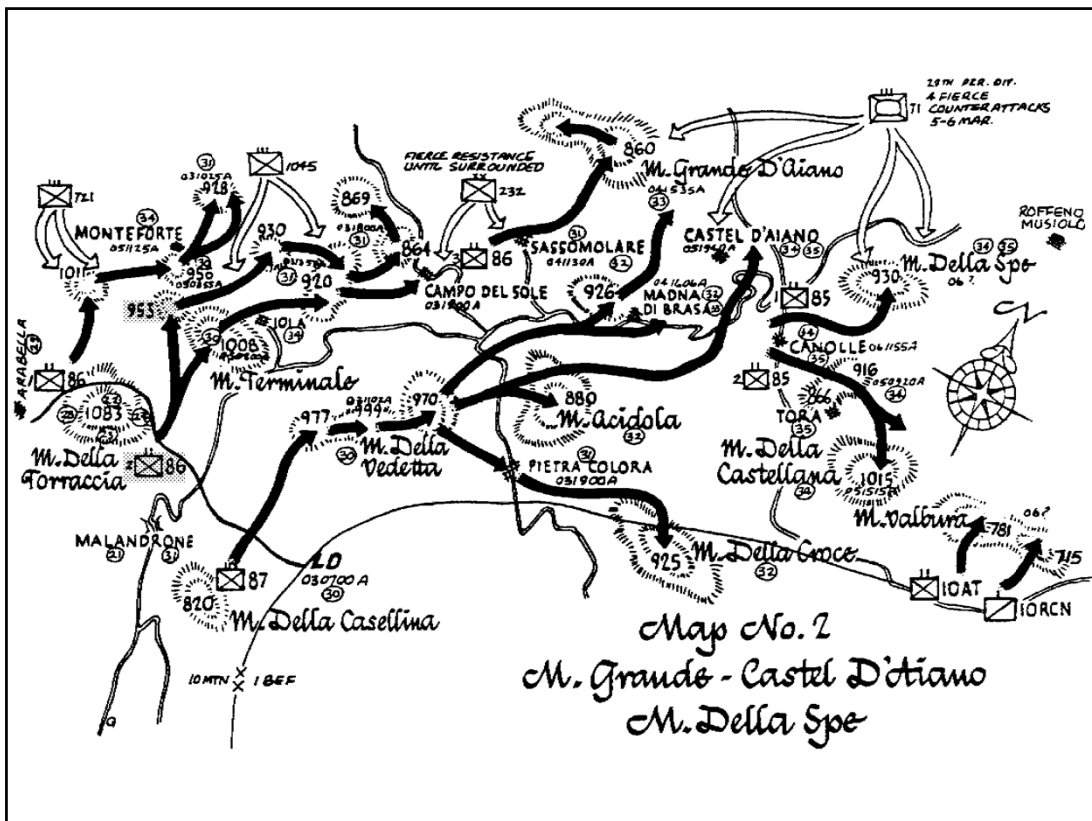
41



42



43



44

The Spring Offensive



- April 13, 1945 they launched their final attack on what remained of the Gothic Line, the last German defensive line before the Po Valley.
- During the second half of March and the first half of April troops were rotated between Camp Tizzoro in the province of Pistoia and Montecatini.
- The Spring Offensive started on April 14, 1945 and liberated the towns of Rocca Di Roffeno, Tolè on April 16th, Monte Pastore and Savigno.
- April 13, 1945 where they launched their final attack on what remained of the Gothic Line, the last German defensive line before the Po Valley. During the second half of March and the first half of April troops were rotated between Camp Tizzoro in the province of Pistoia and Montecatini.

45



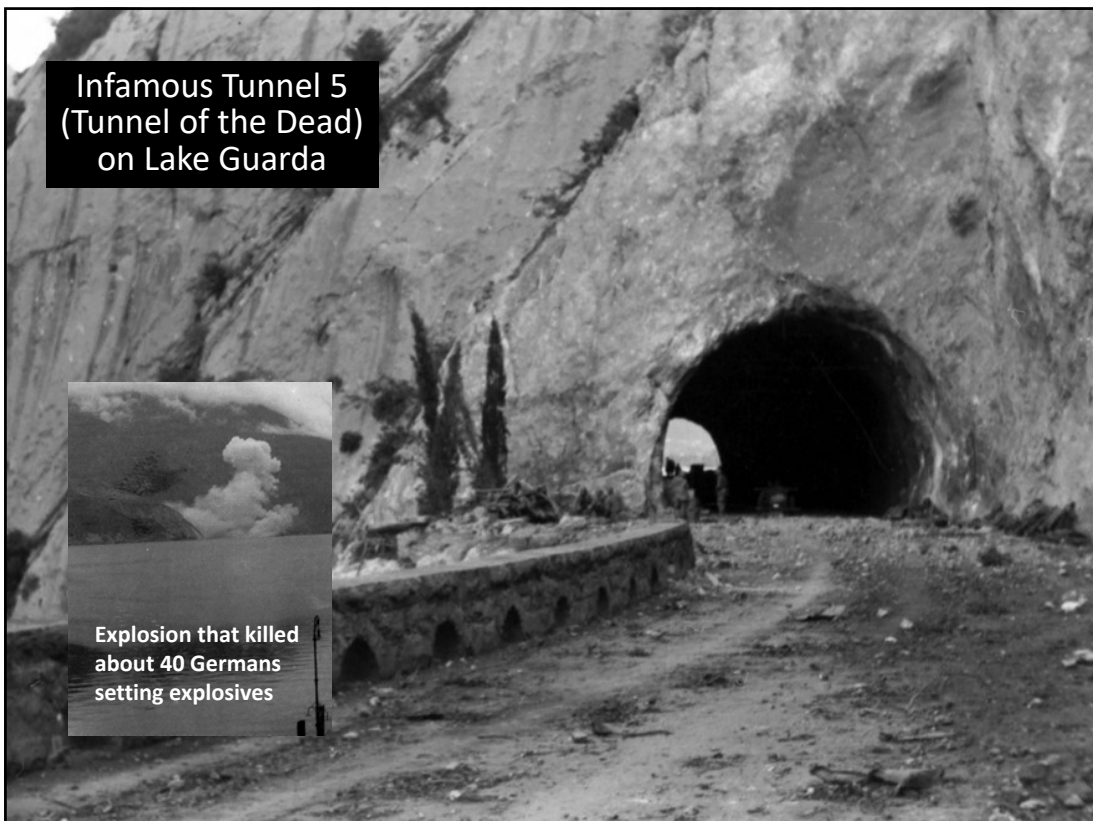
The Spring Offensive

- The 10th crossed the Via Emilia, a large and long northern roadway between Modena and Bologna in the vicinity of the small town of Ponte Samoggia following through the towns of Nonantola, Bomporto and on to Bastiglia, which was reached on April 21.
- Over the days of April 23 and 24 the three regiments of the 10th Mountain Division crossed the Po River near Governolo (left).

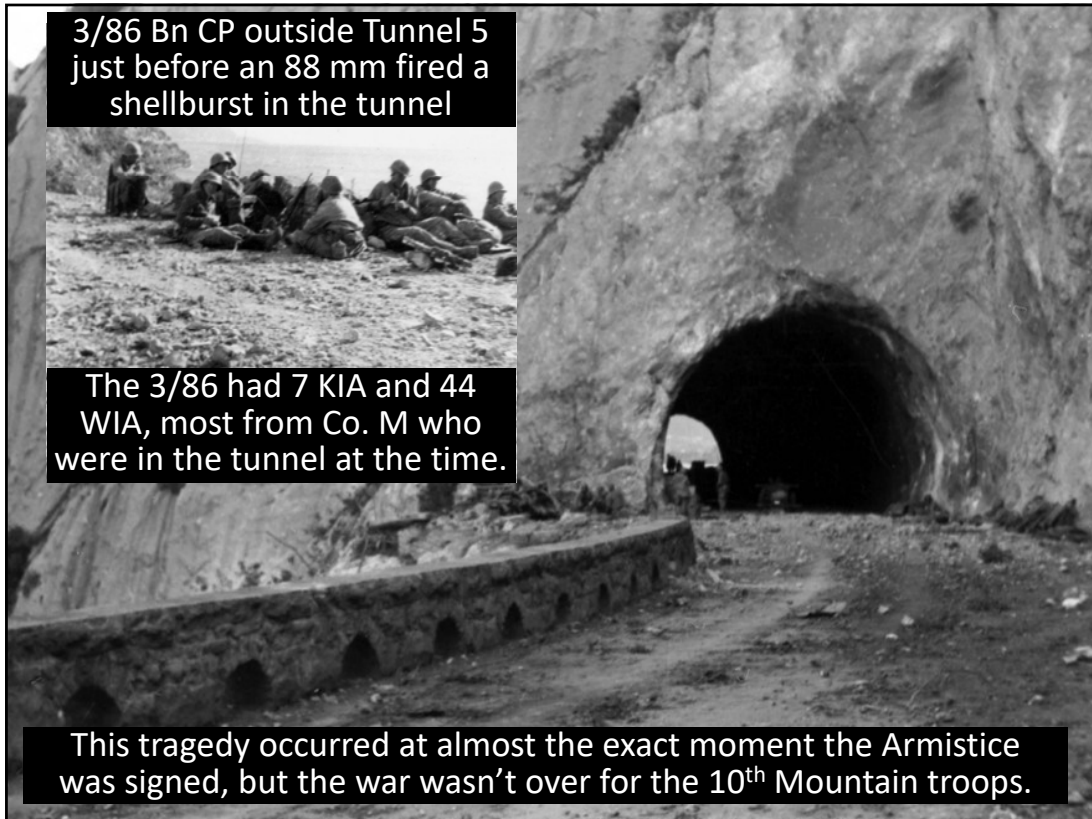
46



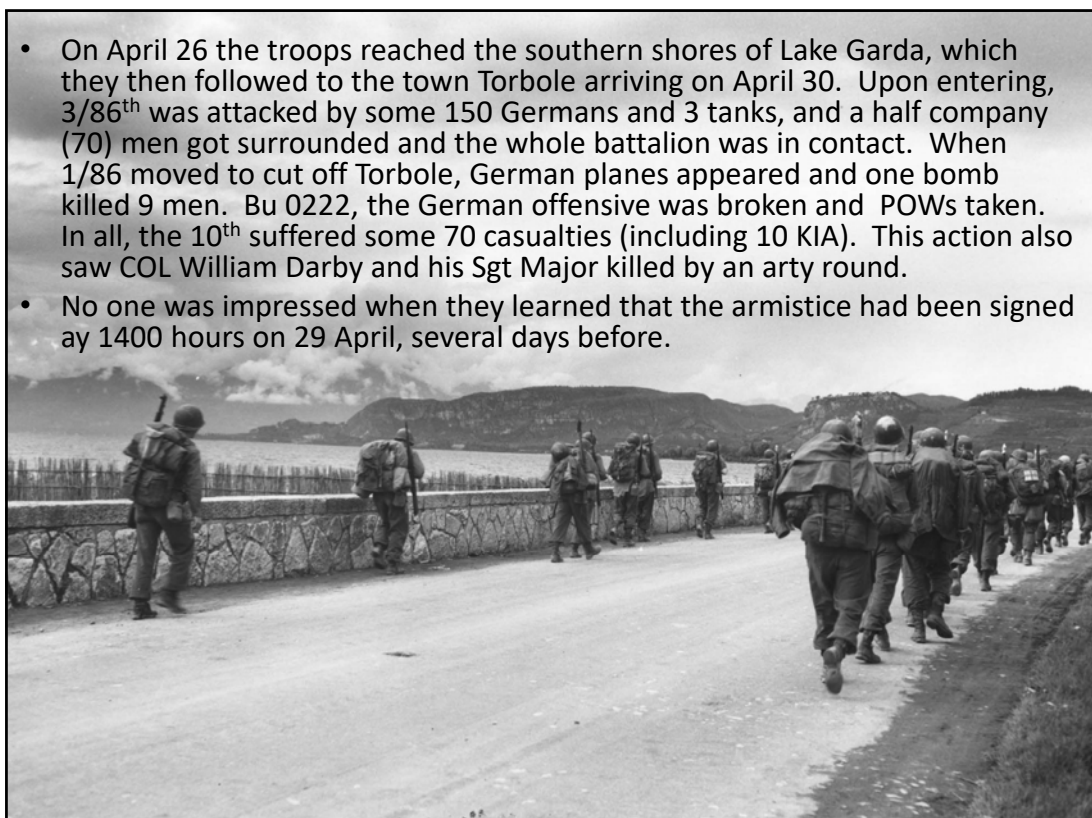
47




48




49





50



Casualties in 114 days of combat




- **Total battle casualties:** 5,220
- **Killed in action:** 1,000
- **Wounded in action:** 4,154
- **Missing in action:** 38
- **Prisoners of war:** 28





Source: Army Battle Casualties and Nonbattle Deaths, Final Report (Statistical and Accounting Branch, Office of the Adjutant General, 1 June 1953)

51



10th Mountain Division Decorations



Decoration	Recipients	33,000*
Medal of Honor	John D. Magrath	0.003%
Distinguished Service Cross	3	0.01%
Distinguished Service Medal	1	0.003%
Silver Star Medal	449	1.3%
Legion of Merit	7	0.02%
Soldier's Medal	15	0.05%
Bronze Star Medal	7,729	23.4%

*Includes total database for Nov 41–Nov 45, not just those in combat in 1945; fewer than half would likely have served as Infantry in combat (say 12,000±).

52

Task Force 45

- IV Corps Field Order No. 6 dtd 26 July 44 designated the 45 AAA Brigade as Task Force 45. It consisted of American and British antiaircraft gunners acting as infantry to relieve the 34th and 91st Infantry Divisions on a 12-25 mile front.
- It also included troops from the 1st (Brazilian) Infantry Division, 23rd (Italian) Engineer Regiment, 5th (Italian) Mule Pack Company, Italian partisans, the 370th RCT (Colored) of the 92nd Infantry Division, and other American elements.
- 45th AAA Bde Cmdr BG Paul W. Rutledge commanded TF 45. Unit strength varied from 3,000 to 8,000.
- An experienced infantry officer advised each company (ex-battery), battalion, group and brigade headquarters.
- Each AAA battalion, with a minimum change of personnel, adapted from a four battery structure to the infantry design of three rifle companies and one heavy-weapons company.

53

Division Moderno Armando, Italian Partisans

- Partisans made no fewer than three attacks with Task Force 45 on German defences on Monte Belvedere: on 29 October, 24-25 November and 12 December. Matteotti brigade CO Toni Giuriolo was killed in the December assault, which briefly captured but could not hold the height.

It must be said that throughout the entire Belvedere operation, the Partisans fought side by side with our troops and showed exactly the same courage and determination in the conduct of their mission. The operation concluded with strong mutual respect and admiration between these Italian volunteers and our American troops.

54



55