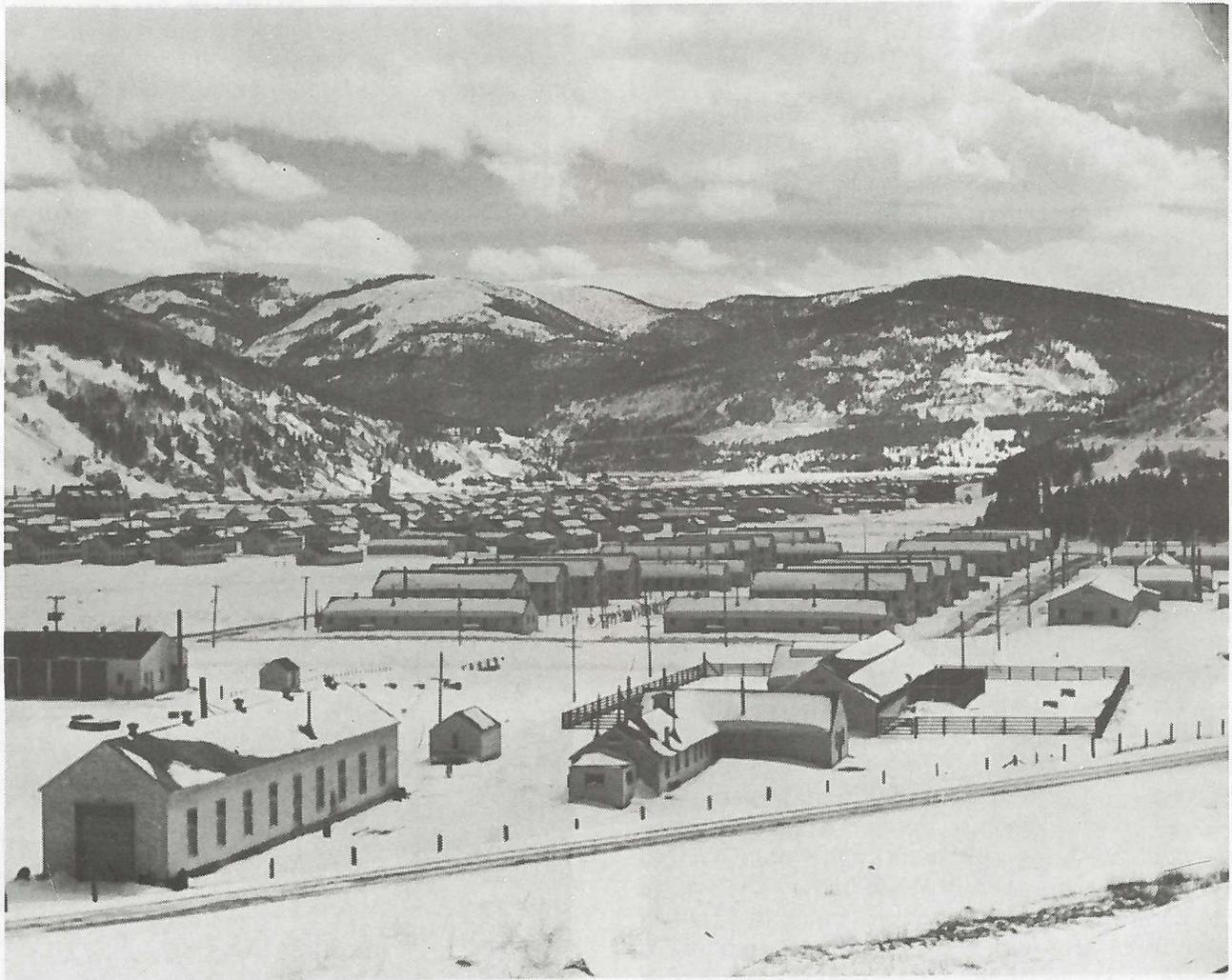


The Tenth Mountain Division

Gordy Wren

Bob Krear

Rudi Schnackenberg



CAMP HALE

By John Weber and Mark McCoy

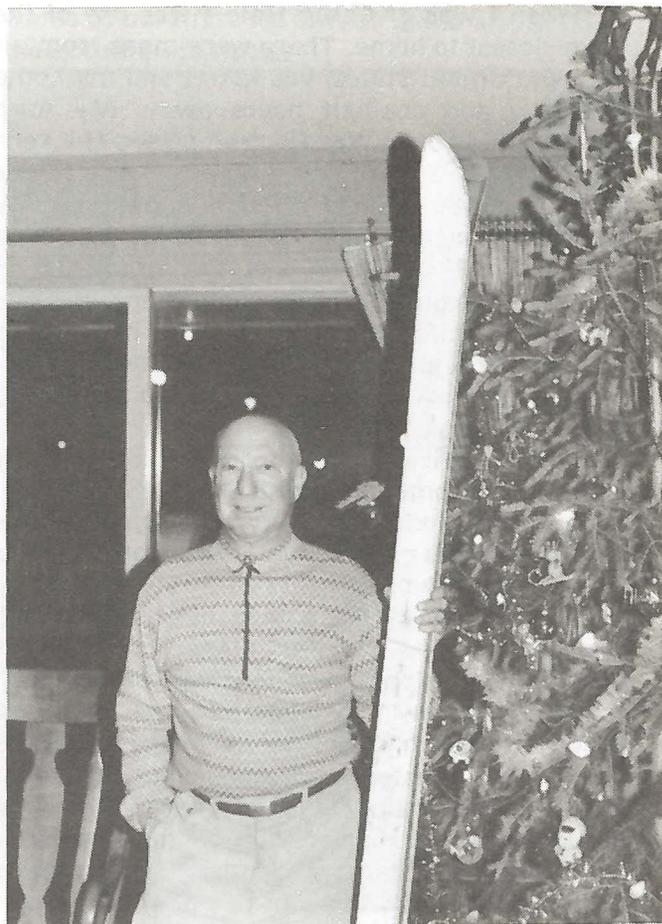
The 10th Mountain Division comprised thousands of military personnel during World War II. This special military branch was instituted for training and service in areas where the terrain and wartime pursuit was different from the usual flat-land fighting. Many young men indigenous to mountain living were employed, drafted and enlisted in this special division to further the wartime effort.

We, John and Mark, decided to speak with three members of the 10th Mountain division to hear their story and inform our readers about the specialties of this military division.

Gordy Wren, a local resident and ski enthusiast, told us about his initiation and involvement with the 10th Mountain division. "I was actually not a combat person. I was an instructor. I was in a lot of combat areas, but I was never in a combat troop. I was there and had some close calls, but I was not pulling the trigger. I taught a lot of the guys how to get to places where they were needed, and then I hoped it did some good."

Gordy told about his background and his quest for the Olympic team. "I made a team that was to go to Finland. This was in 1940-41, because of the war the Olympics was called off then, and we didn't get to go. I was on the Nordic team that year. I loved it, but we didn't get to go anyplace. This experience enabled me to help the training for a combat force. So when I was unable to go to the Olympics I started working in Alta for the ski school. The ski school had a contract with the government to teach paratroopers how to ski. The 503rd, 504th, 505th paratroop divisions from Hill Station were in Utah, so we started teaching skiing there. The irony of it was at that time, 1941, during the Pearl Harbor bombing I was making \$550.00 a month to teach skiing. That was a lot of dough in those days.

"I had an early draft number, while I was teaching skiing, and I didn't know it. I found out when the letter showed up, and the papers told me to come to Steamboat. So I came, and here were all these boys from Oak Creek and Milner and Hayden lined up. Since I was registered here, I had to come when they called. I had been drafted. So, by that time I was really deep as a civilian in training paratroopers. I had to get a letter from a General to help me with a deferment. Anyway I'll never forget the hall down by the sheriff's department when I got here. They had a table there and a guy by the name of Jack Stehley and Claude Leukens, the mayor of Steamboat. I handed them all these papers and I said, 'I'm applying for a deferment.' I was the first to ask for deferment in Routt County, and it threw them. They didn't know what to do. They started blubbering and stuttering and said, 'Well now, we're going to have to have a meeting. Could you come back later?' I left and they ran



Gordy with his 10th Mountain skis.

everyone else through and left me until the end and then had their meeting. They decided I had a five month deferment. So, I was the first deferment in Routt County.

"I taught skiing that winter. Then I was inducted into the service with a bunch of guys from Steamboat. We picked up a gang of guys in Oak Creek and all rode the railroad to Ft. Logan together. We stayed there a couple of days for a close order drill and a few other things. Then we were divided into four groups. They said, 'Group 1, fall out over here, group 2, fall out over here, group 3, over here, and group 4, fall out over there. Well, there were probably 600 men there, and I ended up the only guy in group 4 because I was the only one going to the ski troops in Ft. Lewis, Washington. I took my basic training at Ft. Lewis and then went to Camp Hale, Colorado, and stayed there for almost a year.

"Torger Tokle, a top ski jumper in the United States, and a friend was transferred from California to Camp Hale. I was his private instructor, which was great. The guy was a great ski jumper and knew how to go straight and make a turn at the end. I was assigned to him for two weeks to teach him how to make turns. Of course, he learned so fast it was remarkable. Then I went from Tennessee Pass to Italy and a year later Torger was sent to Italy too. It was a shock to me when he was killed there.

"When I was at Camp Hale I was one of the guys closest to home. There were mens from all over the United States, you know, and my home was two and one-half hours away. My Aunt Francis and Uncle Wes Poulson raised chickens right up on Crawford Hill. I would bring a car or two full of GI's home on a Friday night pass. My aunt and uncle would slaughter a bunch of chickens for us; that was the greatest! Of course, I was bringing guys home every weekend including Winter Carnival. We had many good ski jumpers, slalom and downhill guys in our outfit so that made ski carnival just something else. It was practically loaded with 10th Mountain Division guys. Torger Tokle was one that used to come home with me every weekend. Also Marv Elkins used to bring guys home. Steamboat was not only a place for me, but guys in the division who had cars came because it was a ski town and a place they liked. Steamboat became a very popular place for the 10th Mountain Division. I think that was important."

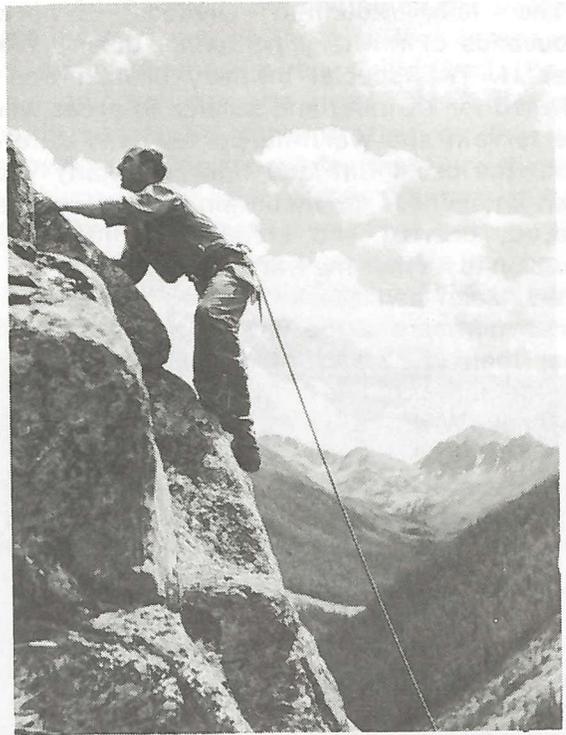
"My company was Company E, the 87th Mountain Infantry. Most were college graduates who were interested in skiing and had applied for the 10th Mountain Division. We had a lot of students and Company E had the highest I.Q. of any infantry regiment in the United States Army. So I was with a bunch of really smart guys. They were good guys, plus good skiers, mountaineers and mules skinners. I had known a lot of them through my background in ski racing. So it was kind of fun knowing some of the guys I was stationed with.

Today at Camp Hale there's not a building left, and there used to be buildings for a whole division. I think in my division alone there were 10,000 men, but I don't know how many were in the regiment. It seems strange that there's nothing left there except foundations.

"In the 85th, 86th and 87th regiment we had a Norwegian group, a mule skinning regiment, and one that was for artillery. Mules carried cannons, big mortars and machine guns. The mule skinners taught guys how to lead, feed and pack a mule. The saddle weighed 10 lbs., and after being cinched it could carry heavy machine guns or saddle bags with picks or shovels. I also became a mule skinning instructor while in Italy.

"We had experts in rock climbing and mountain climbing, a terrific bunch of guys from Ft. Lewis. The 10th Mountain Division was primarily a skiing division. I spent one winter in Camp Hale on Cooper Hill teaching skiing. There we had white skis and carried ruck sacks and rifles. A lot of guys thought the 10th Mountain Division was kind of thrilling. It was the place to be if you were going to be in the infantry.

I and nineteen other men from the division went to Italy a year before the rest of the



division. I was a Tech Sergeant. There were fifteen non-coms and five officers with high priority. We left Camp Hale and flew to Miami under secret orders. A guy named Ed Link was first Lieutenant in charge. We stayed in Florida one night, got inoculated, then got on a plane to Brazil. We stayed there one night, and then were put on a transport plane to Dakar. I flew over the Atlantic Ocean on Christmas Eve in 1942. We landed in Dakar, but we didn't know where we were going. We stayed there for a week, and finally, our C.O., Ed Link, said, 'Fellas we've been here long enough, and I don't know what's going to happen, but I want every man out on that field in the morning. Check out a parachute and get any ride you can. We're supposed to be in Algiers. Then I want every man to check in at the Red Cross, that's our meeting point. It was 3,000 miles across the Sahara desert from Dakar to Algiers. That next morning at 5:00 we were out there with a parachutes, ready to go. Two guys went in one direction, three guys went in another direction, and five guys and I got on a big transport plane. There were a bunch of movie actors, people like Joseph Colleo and some other people who were doing GI Tours. They had a real nice C87 transport with extra room, so we went with them. We got to see the show because we made friends with them. Three days later we twenty guys were together in Algiers."

"There was a mountain training school set up by the British Army in Algiers. They asked for a nucleus of instructors to train English troops in mountain warfare and living conditions. When we got there we found out that the school had been closed. We had been sent all the way from Camp Hale, Colorado to Miami, down to Brazil,

to Dakar, to Algiers and found out that there was no training school. We were assigned to a mountain training school that didn't exist. One of the guys with us, Lieutenant Clements, had contacts with a colonel in Algiers. The colonel found out we were skiers and said, 'There's still some snow south of the Atlas Mountains so let's have a ski tournament while we are waiting for new orders. Our CO said fine, so we went to South Algiers. We got there and found there were only three pair of skis without steel edges, and they had leather bindings and only two pairs of poles, but we were going to have a ski meet. The press was there, **Stars and Stripes** to cover this event so we had a race.'

"There were four kids who lived at the ski area who would take the skis to the top and give them to the guys who were waiting to ski. I was one of the last skiers and I took off straight. I was always pretty fast, but I realized that there was one place where I had to go around this green field to get back in to the snow field. I knew I wasn't going to make it, because I was going too fast. Then I thought to heck with it, it was green, and the water was flowing across it, so I just sat back and flew across the grass. I hit the snow and was much faster than everyone else. I got a lot of publicity in the **Stars and Stripes** saying 'Sergent Wren Wins Atlas Ski Championship'."

"Finally we got our orders to go to Sipino, Italy. The man who ran the camp, didn't even know we were coming. So to go to Naples we got in an army truck with a trailer behind. We had no ammunition and no rifles. All we had were gas masks, duffle bags and clothes. As we headed for the mountain training school, the Germans kept knocking out the roads, so we had to find other



Gordy as an M.P.

ways. We started seeing flashes of light and could hear cannons and artillery but we were green horns. Finally a big Corporal stepped out in front of our truck with a carbine and asked where we were headed. My colonel jumped out of the truck and said, 'We have a special detachment of people, and we are looking for the town of Sipino'. The corporal said, 'You'd better get back in that truck, I am out on patrol and you are behind the enemy lines'. Our driver turned that truck around so fast we couldn't believe it. We



Gordy behind his barracks.

got out of there and finally found the town of Sipino. Guards came out when we arrived and got the Colonel who was in charge of the camp. He didn't know we even existed, but we had our orders. We were assigned again to a British mountain training school.

"It was hard for the British to get along with us because in their school the lowest rank was a Captain, and we were all Sergeants or lower. There was a distinction in the British army between non-coms and officers. It took them awhile to get acquainted and accept us. Eventually they realized we knew more about skiing and mule skinning, so they accepted our techniques."

"All during my service we trained paratroopers. I helped train South Americans, South Africans, British and a private army. Everyone we trained were experts, but they had no ski or mountaineering experience. What they wanted us to do was to train them so they could go to Brenner Pass, the entry into Italy from Germany. The Germans were getting their

supplies there through the canyons. We were supposed to train the paratroopers so they could go and block off the canyons to help stop the war."

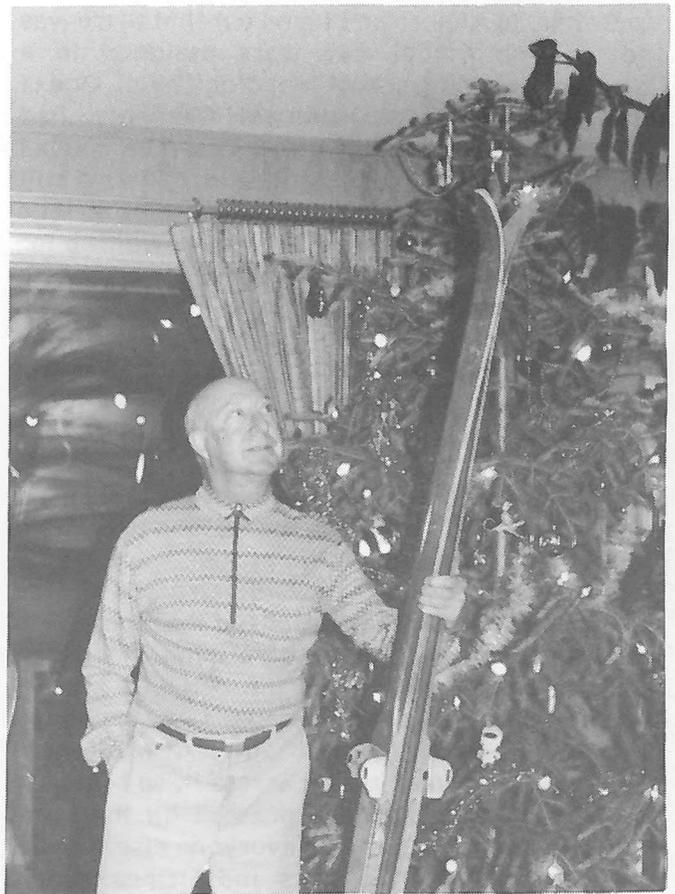
"Our second winter in Italy we were moved to another training school further north. I was stationed at a mountain resort close to the town of Turin, Mussolini's winter resort. The British troops had taken over Mussolini's home as their headquarters. Our non-coms and officers were in the Hotel Savola in this famous resort town. So we were kind of separated from the British.

"We had competition meets with the University of Rome. The students there couldn't believe that the Americans could out ski them, so they came up, and we trounced them. They thought they were great, and they could not believe that ski troopers, during wartime could out ski the University of Rome. But we did!"

In Italy we had trouble getting PX supplies, so we had British supplies that were not so good. Finally, one weekend a Captain from Sun Valley came looking for a place to stay. It turned out this guy was in charge of all PX supplies in the Rome area. We gave him a place to stay in our building, because he didn't want to stay with the officers. We got to talking, and he found out I won the slalom one year in Sun Valley. He realized he knew who I was and said, 'What do you guys need?' We said, 'Wrist watches, fountain pens, and beer, beer, beer. The next weekend he came back with a trailer loaded with twenty cases of beer. We hadn't had American beer since we left home. Of course, we had to pay for the stuff, but we gave him a list every weekend, and he came with what we wanted."

"One night we went to a Sergeant's party and were trading stuff. We were in Mussolini's building and the party was for British and American Sergeants. We knew a guy had Mussolini's skis. People had hissed him off the slope for using them. He had put GI bindings on them, and that night he said, 'Gordy, how would you like to have Mussolini's skis?' I said, 'I'd love it.' He said, 'What could I do with Mussolini's skis in Picadilly Square?. I'd never take them back there, and you're a skier.' So he gave me Mussolini's skis.

I had to go through a lot of red tape to get them here. I sent them to a girl friend who at the time I thought I was going to marry, and it took me ten years to get them back. Now I still have them. I've had a lot of people try to get those skis, and some day I'm going to send them to a museum. They haven't warped at all because they are made out of hickory, and they have edges that are unbelievable. They're the most amazing pair of skis I have ever owned. They still have camber. I sent them to the United States in 1946, and now in 1980 they haven't even warped or cracked."



Gordy with Mussolini's skis.

"I got a chance to come home from the war early, but I had been in Europe a year already, so I decided to stay. If I came back here, I would have been sent to the South Pacific and I didn't want any part of that. In the meantime, the 10th Mountain Division headed for the states. When they landed in Hudson Bay, New York, the Japs had surrendered and the war had ended.

"Those guys got out of the army right then, and I had to stay in another six months. I ended up doing a lot of great things. I was assigned to a special recreation group, I became a swimming and diving instructor for British and Anglo troops. I stayed in the service six months, then I got to come home in November, 1945. It only took five days to make a civilian out of me. The Army wanted to know if I wanted to stay in as a reserve and I said 'No, thanks, I've had it!'"

When Gordy came home he kept his dream about the Olympics alive. He made the team that went to San Moritz in 1948, and placed 5th in the Special Jumping. That was the best any American has ever done in special jumping in the Olympics.

Rudi Schnackenberg



Home of the Tenth Mountain Division

Rudi Schnackenberg, a native German, moved to the U.S. in 1927. He grew up and went to school in Denver. He learned to ski at the age of 17 on Berthoud Pass. In 1942, he was drafted and became a member of the 10th Mountain Division. He served as a combat medic in B Company of the 85th Regiment and had some adventurous experiences.

"I was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1921, and I came to the U.S. in 1927. I came to Denver, and that's where I spent most of my time until I went into the army. Our family moved to the United States after World War I because Germany was in a big depression. Conditions were such that Dad, being an artist and a painter, couldn't do his work there. At that time inflation went up day by day, hour by hour, so after Dad bid a painting job, and before he could buy the paint, the cost would have gone up to the point where he practically worked for nothing. A colleague of his with whom he worked in Germany had a painting business in Denver. He wanted Dad to come over. Dad was allowed to stay beyond his six months visitors visa, because he had means of supporting himself because of his ability as an artist and painter.

"I started school in Germany, but when I came

here, the change was difficult because I had to learn a new language. My mother and three brothers had come over two years earlier, so they had learned English. While starting over again in kindergarten, my younger brother went to school with me as my interpreter.

"I learned to ski when I was 17 years old, up on Berthoud Pass. That was one of the few ski areas in Colorado then. It was a three hour drive from Denver to Berthoud Pass. We arrived on the pass in a blizzard, climbed up the hill and strapped on the 8 foot jumping skis my friends had and skied down. I didn't much care for skiing after that first experience, but later with better equipment I liked it.

"After I started ski racing, I did quite well. That was in '39, '40, '41, '42, when I made the Nationals in Alpine skiing. I also did some jumping, so I was on a Colorado Team that went to Sun Valley in 1942. Then Uncle Sam said, 'Come ski for me, for \$50.00 a month.' So I did.

"It wasn't all that easy to get into the 10th Mountain Division, actually, it was quite difficult. First I had to have three letters of recommendation. Then I had to go to basic training in Camp Robert, California. After that I was transferred in Camp Hale, which is close to Leadville, Colorado.

"In the summertime we did rock climbing, 'technical climbing.' Since there were some in the division without climbing or skiing experience, we started out teaching mountain walking, then rock climbing and more advanced climbing and rappeling. In the wintertime we would teach skiing.

"In 1943 I went to Mt. Ranier to teach ice climbing. That was a nice assignment. We taught a hundred men how to climb on a glacier. Then we came back to Camp Hale and on to Wisconsin to teach the 76th Division winter survival. We also were with the 76th during their maneuvers in northern Michigan.

In the summer of 1944, the 10th Mountain Division was sent to Camp Swift, Texas, for jungle training. However, my brother Karl, Paul Petzoldt, a famous climber from the Tetons in Wyoming, and I, were assigned to teach climbing and cliff evacuation to two medical units in Camp Carson, Colorado Springs. At the end of the summer, we joined the division in Texas. Their training schedule was one week in camp and two weeks in the field. Karl and I happened to arrive the second week while they were out. That week we both got poison oak infection, so we were sent into camp. While in the hospital a promotion came through for each of us. The morale of the mountaineers was pretty low since they were being trained as jungle fighters.

"Then General Hays returned from combat in Europe and took command of the division. He said he had a spot for us. That was in December, and in the first part of January we went to northern Italy. The main reason we went there was a mountain called Belvedere. This mountain blocked two highways to the north and to the Po Valley. Allied troops had been knocked off there three times. So our mission was to take that area.

"The 86th Regiment took Riva Ridge, a ridge right across from Mt. Belvedere. Every time Belvedere had been tried before, this ridge was never taken. It had always remained occupied by the Germans, this had a great deal to do with the previous Belvedere failures. This ridge had to be taken so that the 85th and 87th Regiments could secure Mt. Belvedere.

"The ridge was climbed by use of fixed ropes secured up its steep sides. The following night we went up our mountain. It wasn't easy and we lost many of our troops. In the morning I found my brother, Karl, and we worked on the many wounded together.

"Whenever we were not on the move from one ridge or mountain top to another, we would dig in, that means dig a 'fox hole', or kind of trench, so that we could get below the ground level. I still have my rucksack that went through Italy with me. I had to be welded on the frame in several places, and the bag had to be mended because of

the damage from the shrapnel that hit it. It was sitting on the side of the hole.

"Quite often people ask me if I knew a friend of theirs who was in the 10th? Usually I have to answer, 'No, he must have been one of the 15,000 men in the division that I did not get to know.' We still have reunions. Our next National get together will be at Vail in the summer of 1983.

"During World War II was the first time the army tried to have a mountain division. It was suggested by a man who has just died a few years ago, Minnie Dole. He was the one who formed the National Ski Patrol. He thought there was a real need for a well-trained mountain division, to be used in the mountainous areas of the war. This is how the Division came about. We started in combat in February, 1945 and the war was over on May 2, '45, in Italy, and May 8th, in Europe.

We didn't do much skiing during combat, but we did use our skis on some combat patrols. Our previous training was excellent, and I think an advantage was that we had proper training and experience in how to survive in the snow and the cold. I remember a time up at Camp Hale when we trained some troops that weren't used to the snow. They slept in large tents with stoves. I slept in a snow hole. Some would get up in the middle of the night and look to see if I was still alive.



Rudi telling us about the 10th.

"Once we were dug in on the reverse side of the mountain, hopefully out of direct line of enemy fire, we spent our time improving this hole in the ground which would be our individual 'homes' for the next few hours or days and maybe longer. We stood no formations as in camp. We received 'C' rations at different intervals for several days at a time. If we had enough water, we could warm the rations, have a hot drink and even wash off the dirt and blood.

"War is a terrible way to get along with your fellow man. A real special occasion was when mail (letters and packages) would get up to us from home. If the enemy was not shelling our position with artillery or mortar fire, we could sit outside our holes and write letters.

"However, when the shelling did start, it seemed that too often someone in our company would get hit. Then I would hear the cry 'Medic!' This meant that I had to get out of my hole and take care of whoever got hit. It was never easy for me to stick my head out of the hole and get going, even though I got plenty of practice at it.

"One time on Mt. Dela Spee our forward observer's hole received a direct hit. I went over the ridge to the hole, and when I got there the Germans stopped shelling. They could see my medical Red Cross insignia. I found two bodies inside, under the caved-in dirt roof. I received some help getting the two men out. When we carried them back over the ridge to the Aid Station, the shelling started again.

"While in training it was nice to be close to my brother. We had always done things together; it just seemed right to be together during our army time too. But in combat it was not good. We were constantly worried about each other. There were many times when our Company B would be on one hill and Karl's Company C on the next hill getting shelled. Karl was a company medic also, and I knew he would probably have to be out in the shelling.

"During the middle of April we were moving

out of the mountains to the Po Valley. B Company was to move along a road in the valley until we 'met resistance.' I was with the lead platoon when our two scouts, who were out in front of us were hit by machine gun fire. Everyone, including myself, jumped off the road into convenient trenches that the Germans had dug for aircraft protection. Then came the cry 'Medic,' so I got on the road and went forward. I found one of our men on the road. He had been shot through the head and was dead. Even though, I bandaged his head. Then one of our tanks drove up and stopped by us. This caused the Germans to start firing. Consequently, I received a ricochet bullet in my leg. The tank went back, and I dropped over a stone embankment to bandage my leg. I knew I had to get over to the wounded scout who was across the road lying in a field. I made my way over to him. He had been shot eight times through the chest and stomach. I fixed him up and gave him a shot of morphine for his pain. Miraculously, he lived.

"I figured the war was over for me with this leg wound. Now we had to lie there and wait until our troops could clear the resistance to come and pick us up. It was at 11:00 a.m.. The Germans began shelling the area. My leg was quite painful, so I thought I would give myself a shot of morphine. I had helped so many others to whom I had given it. I seemed doubtful that we would make it since we were lying in this alfalfa field. At 1:00 p.m. we were finally picked up and transported to the rear. Our company commander was killed that day too.

"I was the last casualty in our company. My brother said later that while I was in the hospital recuperating, it was the easiest time of the war for him, since he did not have to worry about me. Two weeks later the war in Italy was over.

Rudy Schnackenberg received the following awards: Combat Medic Badge, Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart with one Oak Leaf Cluster.



Rudi with Mark and John.

Bob Krear



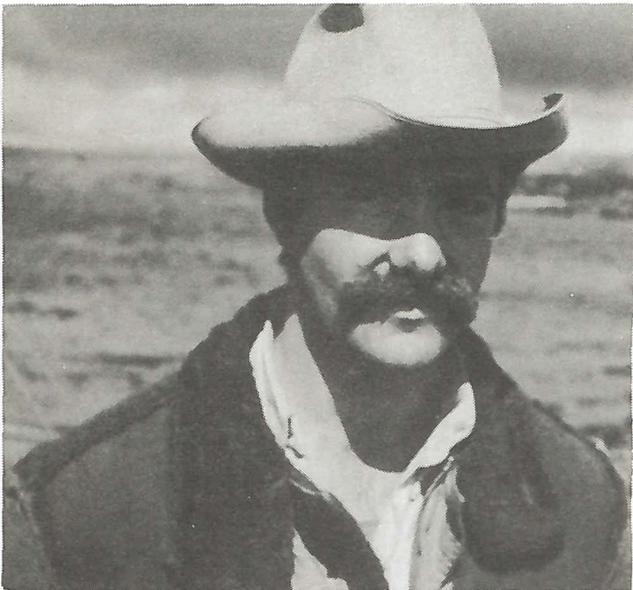
The 10th getting ready for combat.

"I was born in western Pennsylvania in 1922 and grew up in the Pennsylvania hills. It was not real snow country, but there was enough snow that I was able to learn how to ski on my own, without any instruction. There were no commercial ski slopes around, and I did not know there was such a thing as professional instruction. In the fifth grade I did not even know that there were such things as ski poles as my parents had bought me skis only!

"I had completed one year in the Forestry curriculum at Penn State when most of my freshmen class was inducted into military service to fight in World War II. While a member of the ski team I had learned of the existence of the mountain ski troop division being formed out in Colorado, and I learned also of the possibility of volunteering for that division. I did so, and was given a card by the Adjutant General's Office which I was to submit whenever I wished to be sent to the Mountain Training Center. I ended up in the Military Police Replacement Training Center at Fort Custer, Michigan. Because I had been told that the military police

basic training was some of the best that one could receive in the service. I decided to complete that before submitting my card to the Adjutant General's Office. However, one day in judo training I came down too hard on one knee and fractured a knee cartilage. Because I could not train anymore there was talk of discharging me and sending me home, but that did not thrill me in the least. I seem to have been endowed with more than my share of determination, because this was when I submitted my card to the Adjutant General's Office. Much to the surprise of the officers and non-coms in my unit at Fort Custer, I received my travel orders within a week and soon arrived at the Mountain Training Center at Camp Hale, Colorado — a cripple!

"It was almost a month before I was able to convince the doctors that I should have a knee operation (because they weren't too successful), and it was more than a month after the operation that I was finally back with my company. By this time they had completed most of their basic training (which I had missed) and were



Bob Krear in his early days in Steamboat.

beginning field maneuvers, none of which I missed. It is interesting, though, that I was eventually sent into combat without basic training! This was never any concern to me because I had started using a rifle about the same time I started skiing back in elementary school, and as a squirrel hunter I had developed a pretty good eye.

"Initially we were the 10th Light Division, as at first there were only about 10,000 men. At that time practically every man was a volunteer, and what made this division unique among infantry divisions was that a very high proportion of the men had come from the many colleges and universities across the northern tier of states. We were told that we were about 80% college men, and we were also told that our division had the highest average I.Q. of any fighting unit in the U.S. Armed Forces. There was hardly a man in the 10th who was not eligible for Officer's Candidate School. Regardless of formal education, however, the 10th was a close-knit group, characterized by intense pride and friendship. There was a wonderful rapport between officers and men, and frequently this relationship was on a first-name basis. After all, in many cases we had skied against one another in college!

"The National Ski Patrol System conceived the idea of forming a mountain division, but actually had a tough time convincing the Pentagon that there was a place for mountain ski troops in our armed forces — this at a time when our troops were bogged down in the mountains of Italy and when the Germans held the mountains in Norway! To get the quality of men that was deemed desirable a volunteer was requested to submit three letters of recommendation attesting to one's skiing proficiency, mountaineering ability, experience with mules, or just general outdoor experience. I honestly never

heard of anyone who was turned down, and I suspect that what they really wanted was young men with good, strong bodies, who loved winter! Once at Camp Hale, near Tennessee Pass and Leadville, we received all those aspects of training in which we had had no training previously. Skiers became mountaineers and mule packers; mule packers learned how to ski and became technical mountaineers; and we all learned how to survive out in the snow and bitter cold of the high Colorado Rockies. Our training in the latter respect was rigorous to the extreme, and a visiting Norwegian colonel, who hoped we would be committed to combat in Norway, told us that we would never have anything to fear from environmental conditions anywhere in Europe after the training we had received at Camp Hale.

"The 10th Mountain was very badly needed in Italy. German and Austrian mountain troops had established an east-west line across the northern Appennine Mountains north of Florence, and they had closed all highways north to the Po Valley and the Alps. The 10th was given the very formidable objective of breaking through and opening up some of these major highways so that the allied forces could get north to the Po Valley and north to the Alps and cut off the escape of all the German divisions in Italy. At least three other divisions had tried to take those mountain heights before the arrival of the 10th, but lacking mountain training they were easily thrown back by the devastating artillery barrages directed at them by the German troops, who continued to hold the strategic heights.

"We were quickly committed to the lines and after a few weeks of getting used to our new environment, many patrol actions, etc, we finally jumped off on the major attack that was to take the strategic heights in just a couple of days. We were not unexpected by the Germans. In fact, just a few days after taking up our new positions in the mountain towns below the Germans they "welcomed" us to the front with leaflets released from artillery shells that burst over us, emphasizing that we would not find the Appennines as pleasant as the Colorado Rockies had been at Camp Hale! At the same time, as we learned from German prisoners later, they warned their own troops to be especially alert, that the 10th Mountain Division had arrived, and that we were "elite troops!"

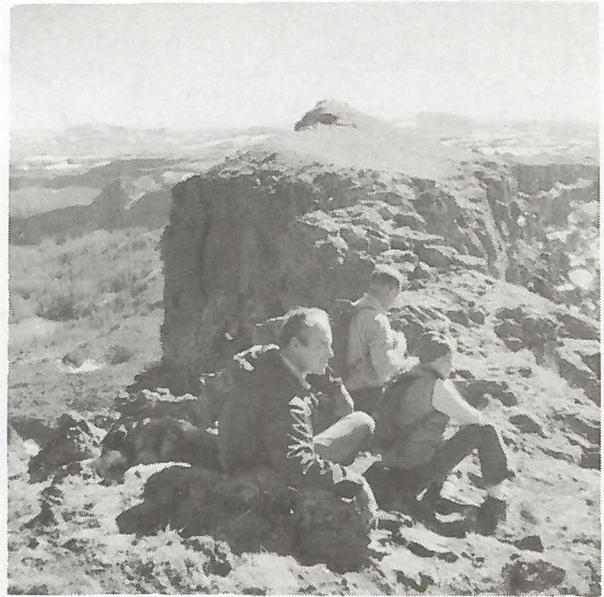
"After taking these strategic heights and chasing the Germans down the northern slopes of the Appennines to the Po Valley, we had opened up the major highways that permitted the American Fifth Army to pour through, and to follow the 10th as we spearheaded the attack northward across the Po Valley. We were the first to cross the Po River, and the first to reach the foothills of the Alps. Together with the

and then executed a few days later.

"As soon as the armistice was signed, the 10th was sent through the German lines and up to the top of the Brenner and Resia Passes, with the objective of preventing any German troops in Italy from slipping into Austria where they were still fighting American troops. I was at Paso di Resia, at the juncture of the Swiss, Austrian, and Italian borders, and it was magnificent high alpine country. We were back in our favorite element and, best of all, there was no fighting. It was an incredible experience, though, to be able to walk down to the Austrian border and talk with German troops there who were still officially fighting American troops in Austria, but yet who honored the armistice that had been signed in Italy! We got the impression that they were terribly tired of fighting too, and hoped that it would end soon, and that perhaps they envied the Germans in Italy.

"The 10th relaxed happily on the top of the Paso di Resai for about two weeks (it seemed as though there were no Germans in Italy who were anxious to get back into combat in Austria!), and then unfortunately we were pulled out and sent east over into the Julian Alps on the border of Yugoslavia because the communist guerilla leader Tito was trying to acquire some Italian land in the same manner that the Soviets were acquiring Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Hungary. Fortunately it was not necessary to fight these veteran and tough guerilla forces; they did not want to take on the U.S. Army, and moved back across their border. This was also a beautiful area, and we continued to relax by climbing for pleasure, skiing, ski jumping and glacier training on the Groglockner in Austria.

"Because the 10th Mountain Division was one of the most recent divisions to be committed in

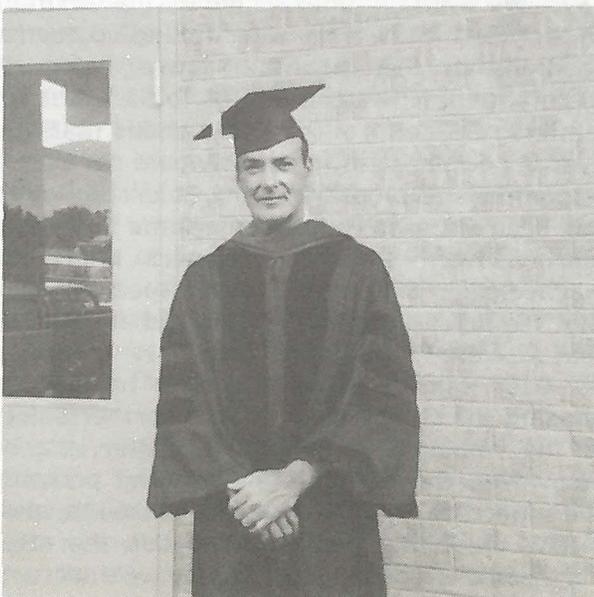


Bob Krear at Devil's Causeway.

Italy we were the most logical candidates for the indefinite period of peacetime occupations after the war, and we were determined to enjoy this to the utmost and to turn the opportunity to our respective advantages. Along with others I signed up for some courses at the University of Florence, but we were all looking forward to polishing up our mountaineering skills in the spectacular Dolomite Alps. But, somebody must have told the Pentagon because they immediately figured out something else for us — that "something else" being committing us to combat in the invasion of Japan! One can well imagine what a sobering situation this was for us, because we knew the Japanese fighting man was a dedicated fanatic compared to the German, and that the fighting ahead would be much fiercer than what we had encountered in Italy. But the luck of the 10th, at least for those who had survived the Italian campaign, had not run out.

"The orders from stateside, we were told, were that the 10th should proceed directly from Italy to the Pacific Theater, but our divisional commander, General Hays, managed to get us sent back to the States first for a 30-day furlough, and for some retraining. Before our troop ships reached New York and Newport News, the atomic bombs were dropped on the Japanese cities, and the war was over! Had the bombs been dropped before we left Italy we would have spent at least another year there as occupation troops, and it is interesting to speculate how the change in timing of subsequent events would have changed all of our lives. We would have loved the effervescent Italian people and the mountains, but many of us who were veterans of Camp Hale were now eager to resume our educations and meet the other major challenges of life.

"The 30-day furlough at our homes was



Bob Krear outside "Three Wire Winter" room.

divisions that were hot on our heels we cut off the retreat of all the remaining German Divisions in Italy, and the war in the Italian Theater ended a couple of days later when the Germans in Italy signed an armistice, **without** Hitler's approval.

"A great deal of damage had been done to the 10th Mountain Division before it entered combat. While we were still at Camp Hale, near Leadville, one mountain-trained regiment was detached from the division and sent to the South Pacific theatre, and arrived, we were told, with barracks bags full of mountain clothing! Another unit, the 99th Battalion, was detached and sent off to the Ardennes in France. I have mentioned that, at Camp Swift, Texas, an additional 10,000 men were added to the division to bring it up to the full strength of a flatland division. These were not mountain-trained men. In combat, when we needed replacements, they were not mountain-trained. This gave us serious troubles in combat, but in spite of this "sabotage" by the Pentagon we were still able to take the combat objectives that required mountaineering and skiing skills by pulling the best men out of several companies and combining them into a single unit, for any special assignment.

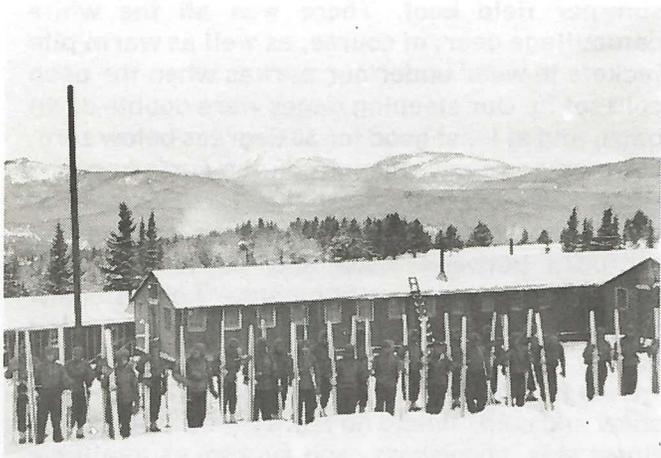
"As mountain ski troops we were, as one might imagine, superbly equipped. I doubt if any other infantry unit in the U.S. Armed Services had better or warmer clothing than we. We had several types of footgear — mountain boots, shoe-pacs, felt boots as well as the regular

summer field boot. There was all the white camouflage gear, of course, as well as warm pile jackets to wear under our parkas when the deep cold set in. Our sleeping bages were double down bags, and at least good for 50 degrees below zero. I remember sleeping right on the surface of the snow, without a tent, at 40 below zero! We spent a good part of the winter living out of doors at altitudes between 9,000 and 14,000 feet, and becoming adept at building snow houses, snow caves, at constructing mattresses out of fir and spruce boughs — with the end result being that we came to feel at home and comfortable in the snow and cold; it held no fears for us. We had the finest skis, snowshoes, and rucksacks available at that time, and with the constant climbing in that high altitude with heavy packs, in summer and winter, we were in superb physical condition. Actually the 10th had been ready for combat for more than a year before we were finally committed; we were definitely over-trained.

"When the war ended in Italy, the 10th Mountain was at the head end of beautiful Lake Garda, at the towns of Riva and Torbole in the foothills of the Alps. There had been some last bitter fighting as we had pushed north up the two roads that flanked the lake, and we also had had the distinction of having chased Mussolini and his mistress out of one of the beautiful lakeside villas. Unfortunately for them, they had been captured by Italian partisans soon afterwards,



The Tenth Mountain Division at Cooper Hill



The 10th at attention.

wonderful, and then we all assembled again at the foot of the Colorado Rockies at Camp Carson, near Colorado Springs. Camp Hale was gone, we were told, torn down soon after we had pulled out for Texas. We were also told that this was a mistake, that it was another camp that had been marked for destruction, and not the mountain training center. However, it did not surprise any of us that the Pentagon was capable of making such mistakes, at least as far as the 10th was concerned.

"The location of Camp Carson was also very nice, and we enjoyed it in the little time we had left in the army. The 10th Mountain Infantry Division was deactivated there at Camp Carson, and for some of us it was a very sad occasion because we loved the outfit and hoped that it would become a permanent part of the United States Army. The War Department had never appreciated the value of the 10th, not at least until after our spectacular contribution in Italy, and even then they lacked the vision to anticipate the contribution that an arctic and alpine trained division could make in future wars. Certainly the 10th could have contributed much in the Korean War. Ironically, it was the German alpine division who had first classified us as "elite troops" and not our own high command, but in our modest way we did not need anybody to tell us that we were something special. The 10th Mountain never did any bragging; it never needed to. Our actions spoke for us. The successful achievement of our formidable objectives high in the northern Appennines ended the winter stalemate and revitalized the American Fifth and British Eighth Armies who, now seeing the "light at the end of the tunnel," poured through the gap we created, but they were never able to catch us, because we were first to the Alps! It was the British high command, I believe, who described the exploits of

the inexperienced 10th Mountain Division as "amazing," and "the cat's whiskers!" All of the accolades we received were testimony to the very high calibre of the men and officers of the 10th Mountain Division, probably the most intelligent aggregation of infantrymen ever gathered together in the history of the United States Armed Services.

"Some of the men of the 10th were lucky enough to remain at Camp Carson until they were discharged, but others of us went elsewhere to await this important date. It was a sad parting because we all had an awful lot in common and had made very close friendships that have endured to the day of this writing, 36 years later!

"My life, subsequent to my military training, has been very enriched by the 10th Mountain Division experience, even to the point of channeling me into my life career. Within a few months after my military discharge I was back at the Pennsylvania State University, where I received a degree in Forestry in 1949. I immediately went west and earned masters degree in wildlife ecology at the University of Wyoming, and perhaps the major reason I chose that university was that former friends from the 10th Mountain Division were studying there, that and the fact that it was mountain country! A few years later I received my doctoral degree in Biology from the University of Colorado, where I was an Associate at the Arctic and Alpine Institute. I conducted my research for this degree in the alpine regions of the Indian Peaks Wilderness Area, in both summer and winter, and it is interesting that the oversnow vehicle that I had to use in winter to get me up into the alpine snows was an old Army Weasel that had been developed by the 10th Mountain Division 20-some years earlier! I am now a veteran of four arctic and subarctic expeditions, as my major research interest lay in these regions. If it were not for the 10th Mountain Division I am sure my life might have been quite different.

"I do not know how well known it is that most of the ski resorts that mushroomed all over the United States after World War II were started by veterans of the 10th Mountain, especially in Colorado! In that respect the State of Colorado, and the nation, owes a lot to the illustrious men of the 10th. They left behind a legacy that will be of never-ending benefit to the people of this nation. Formerly:

S/Sgt.
3rd Platoon Guide
Co. "L 86th Mountain Infantry
10th Mountain Infantry Division

A special thanks to Carla and Rossi Jones for pictures of Bob Krear and Gordy Wren for his 10th Mountain Division pictures.