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To Fight for the Heights



Uncle Sam's mountain troops, for the most part trained on Mt. Rainier, Washington, are ready to tackle the best the Axis can send against them in high-altitude fighting

By **EDWIN MULLER**

FIVE thousand feet up on the southern slope of Mt. Rainier in Washington live several hundred young men who seem very far away from the war. On one side, their camp looks across a deep valley to the jagged peaks of the Tatoosh Range, on the other straight up Rainier to the tumbled chaos of glaciers, the great jutting bastion of Gibraltar Rock, and the remote, majestic white dome of the mountain's summit.

They spend their time ski-ing, climbing on the rocky peaks, camping in the woods. For them, none of the dust, mud and boredom of an army post—they are living a fine life. But they aren't doing it for fun. They are the Mountain Troops of the U. S. Army, and they are being trained for one of the most difficult and dangerous kinds of combat.

In this war of specialists—parachute troops, tank divisions, jungle fighters, desert troops, ski troops—no training is more exacting than that of mountain soldiers, who must learn to maneuver and fight on terrain where the ordinary soldier would be helpless.

European armies have intensively developed their mountain troops. The Ger-





Just let them come on!

man army includes at least two mountain divisions. The Italian Alpini are the best soldiers Mussolini has. The Chasseurs d'Alpins were the pride of the French army. The Swiss have the best of all mountain troops. The Russians and Japanese also use them.

A **WITH** parachute troops the importance of these specialists is all out of proportion to their numbers. Comparatively few of them are needed. Their job is to scale and occupy strategic heights that command the mountain valleys, or drive off an enemy who has seized those heights, after which masses of regular troops can operate safely in the valleys below.

Mountain troops played a decisive part in Norway, for example. Against the British, who had no troops trained to fight in such country, German mountain units installed artillery on peaks that the British had thought unclimbable, made rapid flanking marches over ridges and glaciers that seemed impassable and pounded the British from above.

Mountain troops were also the spearhead of the German attack in Greece and Jugoslavia. Here, as in Norway, their numbers were few but they turned the tide. German infantry were able to pour through the Greek passes because small German mountain units had occupied the heights.

It is likely that mountain specialists will play an increasingly important part in the war, our General Staff believes, and the men now training on Mt. Rainier are a nucleus of larger units to come. Most of them, after they have learned their jobs, will train others.

Even in summer, Mt. Rainier, where our mountain troops train, is a place for

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Motorized toboggans get the mountain troops across the terrain at an amazing rate of speed

hardy folk only. These troops are hardy folk: forest rangers, sourdoughs from Alaska, husky college men, boys who have made daring climbs in the High Sierras, men who were born in the mountains of Europe—Alpine guides and skiers. Coming from all walks of life, they are drawn together by a love of the high and lonely places above the timber line.

Every one of them is here because he wants to be. Many have been transferred from other outfits; to get in, some have accepted demotion from sergeant to private.

Most of the senior officers, Regular Army men, are not mountaineers but, through service in Alaska and elsewhere, are accustomed to extreme cold and hardship.

The regular Army ration has had to be increased for this outfit. The work requires it. The gargantuan quantity of oatmeal and wheat cakes consumed at Paradise Lodge must astonish the Quartermaster Corps in Washington.

After breakfast one platoon goes out for a session of rock-climbing on the great cliffs above the glacier. They climb with three or four men tied together by a rope. The leaders are experts. For the comparative novices, it's a test of nerve—spread-eagled on the face of a precipice, clinging to precarious holds, trying to keep from looking down to the half mile or so of sheer drop beneath them.

They practice all the techniques of the Alpine sport: "balance-climbing" up nearby vertical faces; the use of rope, spike and pulley on sheer, smooth cliffs; "stemming" up a smooth-walled "chimney" by jamming their feet against one face of it and their backs against the other, and so hitching themselves up.

But on the sport technique they must

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super-impose the military technique. They learn how to take cover from enemy fire by using jutting rock spurs on cracks in the cliff, how to carry a machine gun or mortar up steep rock and emplace it on the tip of a granite pinnacle.

They practice "roping-off"—lowering themselves from top to base of a cliff. They have to learn to come down fast—somebody might be shooting at them. These soldiers go rocketing down like express elevators. They also learn how to send down a wounded man on the rope.

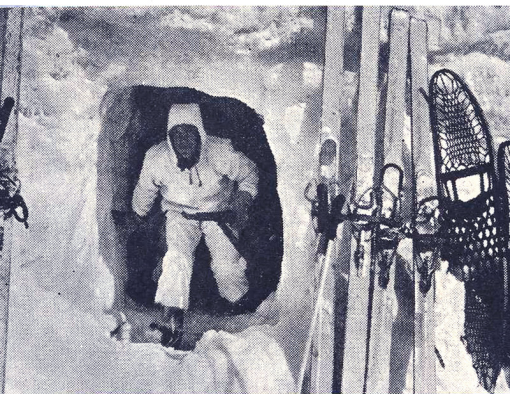
Another platoon makes an expedition to the labyrinth of crevasses on the Nisqually Glacier.

The sportsman avoids crevasses but the soldier must make use of them. Shallow ones form good trenches; deeper ones are often made to serve as living quarters or a covered approach to a distant objective. Tunnels $6\frac{1}{2}$ x $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet are dug far down in the ice. In the last war troops lived for weeks in tunnels cut in Alpine glaciers.

Even in midsummer there's plenty of ski-ing on Rainier if you go high enough, and companies of mountain troops pole their way uphill in single column, their packs and rifles on their backs. Then you see 200 men come zipping down a long, steep slope—a sight more thrilling than a cavalry charge. Some of the troops had to learn their ski-ing after they joined. Most of the officers learned painfully. A major, red in the face, comes teetering down, loses his balance and collapses in an undignified tangle of skis, arms and legs. A dead-pan corporal disentangles him, sets him on his feet and instructs him crisply how to do it better next time.

In military ski-ing the thing is to get down fast—straight down rather than in the pretty curves of sports ski-ing. A wounded man is brought downhill at 40 miles an hour, lying on a toboggan with a skier directing its course.

Twenty men appear over the crest of a ridge and come charging down. At the command they all swing together to a quick stop turn—twenty exploding geysers of snow—and kneel deep in the snow, only their heads and shoulders visible. Each man crosses his skis and thrusts them into the snow; his rifle resting in the crotch. "Fire." Another command and they don their skis and



Out of the cave and into action

with a thrust of the sticks are under way again.

An expedition goes off for several days, climbing and marching during the day, camping in pup tents at night. Last winter, on testing trips, the men bivouaced in deep snow at sub-zero temperatures.

The man who mountaineers for sport can usually stay away from the cliff where rock-fall is likely, be wary of corniced ridges, avoid slopes that may avalanche. But the mountain soldier may have to venture on such places—perhaps use these terrible forces of the mountain to destroy the enemy. If the enemy lies at the foot of a steep snow slope, a mountaineer may be able to land a shell from a light mortar upon a key spot which starts an avalanche. This was actually done several times in the last war.

One means of transporting men and supplies to the summits is what is called in Europe a teleferique. It's a flimsy looking cable stretched from the valley floor to a peak high above. On it tiny cars creep up and down. The Alps are dotted with teleferiques left over from the last war.

Our mountain troops will be co-ordinated with other specialized units. With the ski troops, for example, who trained last winter in Utah. With the air force. With the parachute troops. The strategy of a mountain campaign may call for a small, mobile unit on a lofty, remote snow field. That calls for the use of "para-ski troops."

Another problem is the supply by air of mountain troops operating in high and inaccessible areas. At the head of a fifty mile long Alaskan glacier, for example, to which it would take weeks to

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No dogs, but the equipment gets up front

transport supplies on the surface. Experiments were conducted recently in the co-ordination of the ground force with supply planes. On one occasion a plane delivered by parachute 30 dozen fresh eggs to the party on the glacier below—without cracking a shell.

To a limited extent our mountain troops are mechanized. On Rainier they have several motor-driven sleds. The sleds can climb steep slopes, operate on a fairly rough surface. They make 50 miles an hour on the flat. When a motor sled passes a detachment plodding homeward through the deep snow some of the boys try to thumb a ride.

There are several hundred mules on Rainier. The mule, a skilful mountaineer, can carry a heavy load on the roughest and steepest going and finds safe footholds with a sure instinct.

Our high command has studied the campaigns in Norway and Greece and the extensive technical literature on mountain fighting in the last war.

Though few persons are aware of it, the most spectacular battles of 1914-18



Mushed into position, a 50 cal. machine gun

***Up and at them, buddy!***

were fought in the mountains. The line on which the Austrians and Italians opposed each other zig-zagged through the Alps, and on the snowy ranges of the Ortler and the Adamello they fought at an altitude of 12,000 feet. Whole regiments burrowed into glacier crevasses, dug miles of ice tunnels, mined and counter-mined each other's positions. Once the top of a peak was blown off to dislodge the enemy. One spring 4000 Austrians were killed by avalanches that swept over their winter quarters. Cold and storm on the high peaks were worse than on the winter plains of Russia.

They fought, too, in the Dolomites, that region of fantastic crags and canyons. At night men climbed walls of granite a thousand feet high to storm the enemy's position. They got field artillery up peaks that the average mountaineer would be unable to climb unencumbered.

That is the kind of warfare for which the troops at Paradise Lodge are preparing and for which they will help to train the larger units of Mountain Troops that are planned.

IN THE autumn a part of the rapidly expanding mountain troops will be moved to a new training area, among the snow-capped peaks of Colorado. There life will be even harder than on Rainier. It's a remote wilderness, a long journey from civilization. The base camp will be at 9500 feet, with mountains rising another 5000. At that altitude the winter cold is Arctic, the air so rarified that it takes a strong man to endure ordinary exertion. And these men will be trained for the extra-ordinary exertion of mountain fighting.

Where they will fight is anybody's guess. Half of the probable battlefields

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of the future are in high mountain areas. There are the mountains of Norway, the lofty Caucasus range that bars Hitler's path to the oil fields of the Middle East, the Himalayas, Greenland's icy mountains. And, nearer home, are the great peaks of Alaska.

The mountain troops think of themselves as an *offensive* force, the spearhead of a coming attack.

