

fighting swirled undiminished until at 1536 hours came the message, "Mt. Capello taken by 1st and 2d Battalions."

During the final hours on Capello, S/Sgt. Sam McGowan of Clemson, South Carolina, won the DSC when he volunteered to lead a platoon in breaking up a German counterattack which was forming near a house on the forward slope. With fixed bayonets his platoon charged a group of 100 Germans, McGowan knocking out two machine guns on the way, killing three enemy and capturing six. Forcing one of the PWs to load an enemy gun, McGowan turned it on the Germans in a draw to the rear of the house, killing 12 and scattering the rest. Wounded in the leg, he went on with the platoon for the mop-up and refused to be evacuated until he'd organized the newly won position for all-around defense.

That was Capello, won with bayonet and blood and guts.

And then there was Mt. Battaglia, occupied almost without opposition by the 350th but held during seven days and nights of German counterattacks in an epic stand which ranks with any in Division and Fifth Army history. Battaglia—a towering, Y-shaped height some 11 miles southeast of Bologna—dominated the terrain and road net in the entire area. Translated from the Italian, its name meant "battle." To the Fifth Army command, Mt. Battaglia meant an objective of the greatest military importance. It meant the same thing to the German high command, but Marshal "Smiling Albert" Kesselring was a trifle slow in getting his troops to the spot. As a matter of record, although censors prohibited its disclosure at the time, Italian Partisan troops operating between the lines in that sector were the first to occupy Battaglia, and they held it until American forces arrived.

The 350th received its orders to take Battaglia on September 25 when the regiment just had won Mt. Acuto and Mt. Alto. The message read: "The Corps commander states it is vital to Fifth Army to secure Mt. Carnevale and Mt. Battaglia. General Kendall directs you to take them as soon as possible." Those were the orders which started a week of battle which is practically beyond description.

In mere words, you can write that on the following day the 1st Battalion captured Mt. del Puntale. With his 3d Battalion combat team, Major Vincent M. Witter of Berlin, New Hampshire, moved forward through the hills south of Vallamaggiore. On the morning of the 27th, two days after the order was received, Lt. Col. Corbett Williamson of Macon, Georgia, led his 2d Battalion to Mt. Carnevale and drove the enemy, still in the process of digging in, from this Corps objective. During that afternoon, Colonel Williamson's battalion moved to Battaglia, at that time the foremost point in the entire Fifth Army line. The im-

portant peak was taken without a struggle but that situation was to undergo a violent change. On the evening of the first night on "Battle Mountain," Colonel Fry received an official message of congratulations from the Corps commander for the prompt capture of the important objective. The Germans were planning messages of their own.

You can relate in words how dawn of the 28th found the 2d Battalion in position on the peak with G Company, commanded by Capt. Robert E. Roeder of Summit Station, Pennsylvania, as the base company; how every man with a rifle in battalion headquarters company was sent up to defend the left flank, where they remained for three days; how heavy-weapons companies equipped with light machine guns instead of their heavies were sent up to the crest of the peak with the riflemen to build up the greatest possible amount of fire power on the hill; how the rain, and mud, and cold, and fog and the fanatical and continuous enemy charges cut into the ranks of the 2d Battalion until the 1st went up to help it out; and how the men of the 1st fought and died in such numbers also that finally the entire regiment was up on the peak beating off the attacks which came with monotonous and terrifying regularity.

But what words can describe men like S/Sgt. Rocco Cotoia of New Haven, Connecticut, who saw his machine-gun section dwindle to four men, then went 1,000 yards to the rear, rounded up 19 more gunners and brought them back up on the hill to form a second platoon? Or Capt. Thomas S. Cussans of Flint, Michigan, who brought down mortar fire only 25 yards from his own troops in order to break up one counterattack?

They weren't the only heroes. There were others, like Sgt. Leo Beddow of Detroit, Michigan, blinded by a mortar burst after he single-handedly wiped out a group of Germans who had penetrated into the castle CP on the peak. And 1st Lt. Edmund D. Maher of Providence, Rhode Island, who with rifle, bazooka and bayonet knocked out a mortar crew, led a platoon in repelling an attack then dashed to the castle and bayoneted four German paratroopers as they reached the doorway. Or Pfc. Felix B. Mestas of Laveta, Colorado, who manned a position on the forward slope for three days and with his BAR mowed the enemy down like grass as they tried to get past him. On his last day in the most forward position, Mestas ordered his assistant gunner to leave, then killed 24 of them as they overran his position, giving his buddies time to re-form and beat off the attack. Mestas died doing that.

There were men like T/Sgt. Beni Mazzarella of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, who saw the strongest Kraut attack of all overwhelm the castle on the crest. Without waiting for orders, he picked up a handful of grenades and charged the castle, pitching grenades like apples and killing

six and wounding more. When those ran out he used a machine gun, firing as he charged alone at the remaining Krauts who broke and ran as he came out of the fog. And 1st Lt. Walter W. Scott of Jackson, Mississippi, who potted six as he moved among his men pointing out targets and then when the attack seemed about to overrun the company took a dead man's rifle and led his men in a countercharge which stopped the Kraut attack cold. How can words do justice to the heroism of S/Sgt. Lewis R. Hamm of Olney, Texas, whom the enemy tried to get with a flamethrower, pushing it close enough to inflict severe facial burns? In agony from the seared flesh, Hamm stuck it out, killed the flamethrower operator and his assistant, took a bullet wound in the hand but managed to kill three more Krauts before he finally was evacuated.

During the seventh German counterattack—those game GIs actually kept box score—a lad named Pfc. Cleo Peek of Center, Colorado, was assistant gunner on a BAR which jammed. Peek held off the enemy with his M1, killing four, while the gunner worked frantically on the BAR. When his M1 jammed, Peek threw grenades. Those ran out. Then he resorted to the only weapon at hand, rocks, and hurled them at the enemy with such effect that they were stopped less than 25 yards from his position. And there was a soldier named Pfc. Jose D. Sandoval of Santa Fé, New Mexico, who fired his BAR until it heated and jammed. When that happened, he ran to a near-by machine gun whose crew was dead, unlocked it from its tripod and fired it from his hip, killing an unestimated number of the enemy. Can your imagination picture Sgt. Alfred E. Cassidy of Cincinnati, Ohio, who used his rifle like a mortar? Cassidy crept up on a machine gun, got it with a rifle grenade, then switched his fire to get two more. At this point, the Krauts saw and rushed him. He dashed back 50 yards, picked up a full box of grenades, returned to his old position and pumped out rifle grenades like he was operating a mortar. The Krauts couldn't take that.

In the movies they'd probably doubt the feat of S/Sgt. Raymond O. Gregory of Kings Mountain, North Carolina. His ammo and grenades gone, Gregory crawled to the crest and then savagely played "King of the Mountain" as he rolled huge boulders down the hill into confused enemy ranks. And the unselfish heroism of T/Sgt. Manuel V. Mendoza of Phoenix, Arizona, was one of the reasons why the 350th refused to be shoved off that peak. During one counterattack, Mendoza opened up with a tommy gun on 200 Jerries charging up the forward slope. Ten of them died where they fell, others lay wounded, but the rest came on. Mendoza, now using a carbine, emptied his entire ammo supply of five clips into their ranks. A flamethrower licked out at him but he killed the



Artillery dug in for high-angle fire.

operator with a pistol shot. Jumping into a machine-gun pit and pushing aside the dead gunner, Mendoza sprayed the surviving attackers until the gun jammed, then pitched hand grenades until the Krauts withdrew. Severely wounded himself by now, he nevertheless ran down the forward slope, retrieved enemy weapons lying there, captured a wounded Kraut and returned to consolidate his platoon positions.

Our wounded—and there were plenty—despite the constant enemy barrages which blasted the hill were treated by medics like Sgt. John J. Regan of Waterbury, Connecticut, and B Company, 313th Medics. Wounded himself during a barrage which fell on an infantry column moving up, Regan treated five of the doughboys and patched up two members of his litter squad. Removing them to a building, Regan made them as comfortable as possible before he started back to get help from his collecting station. It took him fifteen hours to make the hellish trip but he made it, giving directions and instructions to litter squads going up to evacuate the casualties he'd promised to bring out. Then he collapsed. And Capt. Williard Stoner of Chagrin Falls, Ohio, 2d Battalion surgeon, whose aid station was sheared to a single room by enemy shells but who kept on with his mercy task of treating the casualties which streamed in. And T/4 Joseph E. Silva, who saved countless lives as he worked



Night march to new positions.

doggedly on, shifting his patients from room to room as Kraut shells burst through the walls. Trails leading down off Battaglia were under observation and fire and Kraut snipers tried to pick off aid men and litter bearers as they struggled to bring out the wounded. One litter party of fifteen wounded men was caught in a mortar barrage. Ten of the wounded got up off their stretchers and staggered to cover. Litter hauls stretched anywhere from five to fifteen miles, but the medics somehow managed to get their precious burdens through the mud and fire to rear aid stations, ambulance points and hospitals.

There were a couple of GIs named T/Sgt. Roscoe A. Webb of Columbus, Ohio, and Pfc. George O. Porter of Boston, Massachusetts, who sweated out rifle grenades, flamethrowers and even pole charges as they consistently picked off enemy attackers during one bitter brawl. Or Major Erwin B. Jones of Brighton, Alabama, who assumed command of a battalion point when Kraut artillery wounded all members of the point and cut them off from the main unit. Jones directed artillery fire on the attackers and personally killed 19 of them before relief came up.

The citation for 2d Lt. Nicholas M. Vergot of the 338th Field and Steelton, Pennsylvania, credited him with voluntarily manning his OP for two days after being wounded on Battaglia. When a heavy fog began closing in on the third day, Vergot moved to another spot about sixty yards away. During the move, he was caught in a Kraut attack and his

radio operator killed. Vergot picked up his radio, and aided in beating off the attack by directing effective artillery fire on enemy concentrations. Another wounded artilleryman, Capt. Lewis B. O'Hara of the 338th and Arlington, Virginia, remained in exposed positions for two days spotting and relaying fire missions for two battalions.

A daybreak attack on the 30th temporarily drove the Blue Devils from the castle. After sending down for more grenades, flamethrowers, blankets, ammunition and dry socks, the men of the 350th slugged their way back up again to the castle and the crest of Battle Mountain. When the last officer in his rifle company became a casualty, T/Sgt. Ralph N. Grippo of Union City, New Jersey, a platoon leader, took command of the company and led the men in defense of the peak. To stem the attack, those doughs stood up in their foxholes and fired every weapon at hand. When one weapon failed or ammo was expended, they picked up the weapons of fallen comrades and continued to fire. In the heat of the battle, Pvt. Russell P. Glass of Akron, Ohio, and Sgt. John McKenzie of Lowell, Massachusetts, took time out to replace a firing pin in their machine gun, McKenzie covering with a tommy gun while Glass performed the repair job.

As the days and nights dragged by, Battle Mountain became a symbol of resistance. Those GIs had decided they were there to stay even if it took every last man to hang on. The Krauts apparently had decided they'd take that hill, even if the whole Army were expended in the effort. On headquarters situation and battle maps, the blue arrow designating the 350th stood out like a spearhead toward the Po Valley, its tip unblunted. In every headquarters throughout Italy, that spearhead was watched closely by higher commanders who knew that the comparative handful of doughboys on that peak held the fate of the Apennines drive, and of the Fifth Army, in their collective hearts and trigger fingers. Day after day they watched that map, watched that spearhead that never moved.

On the fifth day of the defense of the hill, the enemy again came up in the dense fog behind a heavy artillery concentration. Mud clogged automatic weapons but the attacking "Green Devil" paratroopers were beaten off again by rifle fire, grenades and supporting artillery. Litter bearers worked night and day to evacuate the wounded. Despite the hazards, pack-mule trains toiled up the trails under shell fire to bring needed supplies.

The fantastic situation couldn't continue much longer. Someone had to give, one way or the other. There is no telling just which unsuccessful attack convinced the Germans, made them realize that all their efforts were in vain. The attacks began to slow up, both in numbers and in ferocity. That was good news to our doughs; better news came in the form of

orders for relief. On the night of October 2, the first of the tired, drenched, gaunt men of the 350th came down off Battle Mountain. At midnight two days later the last company was relieved by British troops. As a unit, the regiment had suffered 50 per cent casualties—reported every company commander but one killed or wounded in the defense. Colonel Fry, who had actively directed the regiment during its stand on Battaglia, was praised by the Corps Commander for his work and the same message hailed the courage and tenacity of the 350th in taking and holding the key position, citing the accomplishment as a tribute to the 88th Division. General Clark visited the CP of the 350th and personally presented the Distinguished Service Cross to Colonel Fry for his "outstanding heroism and unflinching courage" on Mt. Battaglia. General Clark told Colonel Fry he was proud to have him in his Army. The doughs of the 350th were proud of Fry also and to express this pride they tagged him with a new nickname. They called him "Fearless Fosdick."

Scores of medal award recommendations were started through channels for the gallant men of the 350th, who, exposed on three sides, denied air and ground observation, under terrific artillery and mortar barrages and hampered by bad weather which made supply nearly impossible, stood off all attacks to hold Battaglia. From Battle Mountain the 350th took its regimental nickname. And for its stand there, the 2d Battalion was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation.

Every man who fought on that peak was a hero in every sense of the word. But there was one man whose "magnificent courage and intrepid leadership" so outshone all the rest that he was awarded the Medal of Honor. That man, an officer, gentleman and leader—in the finest meaning of those words—during his career with the 88th, was Capt. Robert E. Roeder, G Company, 350th, and Summit Station, Pennsylvania, who took the first unit up on the height and never came down. Roeder was CO of G Company, the base company in the defense. He was all over the hill, checking his men, pointing out targets, outlining new strategy, never sleeping or resting. In one of the enemy attacks in the bleak dawn and fog, Roeder was wounded by fragments and knocked unconscious by a shell burst. He was removed to his CP where he came to. Refusing medical treatment, he dragged himself to the doorway of the building. Here he braced himself against a wall, picked up a dead soldier's rifle and began firing at the still approaching enemy, meantime shouting orders and encouragement to his men. He fought on until a mortar shell burst a few feet away. That was the end. There are a hundred or more stories all attesting to his courage but the citation recommendation summed them up neatly with this tribute: "Of all the men present on this field of valor, it

was solely through Captain Roeder's leadership that his men held Mt. Battaglia."

By now the entire front was a nightmare of mud and fog. Days were hardly distinguishable from nights. Companies were low on personnel and replacements were slow in coming up. Not only were they slow in coming up, but they were hard to get. Rear-echelon units in the theater weeded out their able-bodied clerks and typists, gave them rifles and sent them up to the front. Inexperienced and untrained, many of these replacements were killed in their first few hours of action. Many died without even knowing what company or regiment they had been assigned to. It was rough, but it was necessary. Front-line units needed men and they had to be found some place. Old and young, they were sent up. Replacement depots were squeezed dry and still the calls came for more men. Several thousand were flown in from France, others from England, to bolster Fifth Army and 88th ranks. The GIs continued to give all they had but the Po Valley still lay many miles, and mountains, away.

Switching its direction of attack from northeast to north, the 88th threatened Highway 9, the vital German road from Rimini to Bologna, and the Germans reacted to this threat by throwing in no less than nine divisions against the Blue Devils at various times in a vain effort to halt the slow, but steady, advance. Among the enemy units committed were two of his best—the 1st Parachute Division and the 90th Light Division. And Italian Fascist troops also discovered, the hard way, that they couldn't stop the Blue Devils. Continuous and driving rains swelled streams to river size and the 313th Engineers doubled their tremendous efforts to keep open the lines of supply. In several places they strung high lines over washouts and flash floods by means of which supplies and ammo were sent to forward troops. Moving into Castel del Rio, the Division CP itself took a pounding from German artillery which resulted in the death of four enlisted men and wounds to one officer and six men. Among the dead was Sgt. John T. Lowenthal of Lafayette, Indiana, a soldier of German extraction who had enlisted to fight the Nazis for the liberty and freedom he had found in America. A PW interrogator, he was killed by a direct hit as he questioned four new prisoners.

Struggling along toward its key objective of Mt. Grande, the 349th dug the Krauts out of the tiny village of Belvedere. When the fight was over they were paid the supreme tribute by a captured Nazi officer who said that "in nine years of service I have fought in Poland, Russia and Italy—never have I seen such spirit. I would be the proudest man in the world if I could command a unit such as the one which took Belvedere."

Some of the men who won that tribute for the 349th were GIs like