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The American Soldier, 1918

The 332d Infantry Regiment, 83d Division, together with attached medical and supply units, was sent to the Italian front in July 1918 in response to urgent requests from the Italian government. Its principal missions were to raise Italian morale and to confuse and disrupt the enemy by creating the impression that a large American force had reached the front and was preparing to participate actively in the fighting in that area.

Trained in the rigors of mountain warfare at its first station near Lake Garda, the regiment proceeded to Treviso and its next assignment with the Italian 31st Division, behind the Piave River. There, for the purpose of deceiving the enemy, the 332d Infantry staged a series of marches in which each battalion, attired in various uniforms, left the city during daylight and in full view of the Italians and Austrians but later returned inconspicuously by an alternate route at night.

During the Italian Vittorio Veneto offensive, on 29 October, the 332d Infantry formed the advance guard of the British XIV Corps of the Italian Tenth Army as it pursued the Austrians from the Piave to the Tagliamento River. Four days and several marches later, the 332d reestablished contact with the enemy rear guard battalion, engaged them in combat, and overran their position on 4 November 1918. At 3:00 P.M. on that day, the armistice between Italy and Austria-Hungary became effective. Shortly afterward, the American troops were assigned in smaller units for occupation duty. In March 1919, the regiment reassembled in Genoa, prior to embarking for the United States.

Shown in the painting are U.S. Army and Italian Bersaglieri troops as they train in preparation for combat with the Austrians. The soldiers of the 332d Infantry Regiment are armed with the M1903 Springfield rifle and M1905 bayonet and are attired in the standard US Army uniform and equipment of the period. The Bersaglieri are wearing the standard 1909 grey green uniform with steel grey helmets and cockerel feathers and carrying a pistol and a M1891 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano rifle and bayonet at the ready.