Soldiers' Art
from the
91st Infantry Division
in Italy, 1944–1945

Clifford F. Porter

Front Cover

Moving Out

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Porter, Clifford F.

Soldiers' art from the 91st Infantry Division in Italy, 1944–1945 / Clifford F. Porter.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Art, American—20th century. 2. Soldiers as artists. 3. World War, 1939–1945—Art and the war. 4. World War, 1939–1945—Campaigns—Italy. 5. United States. Army. Infantry Division, 91st. I. Center of Military History. II. Title.

N6512.P65 2004

760'.044994054215—dc22

2004055075

CMH Pub 70–86

Soldiers' Art
from the
91st Infantry Division
in Italy, 1944–1945

by
Clifford F. Porter

with
Original Art by the 91st Division Soldiers

91ST INFANTRY DIVISION (TRAINING SUPPORT)
AND
CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY
UNITED STATES ARMY
WASHINGTON, D.C., 2004

Foreword

Nothing better captures the nature of human experience than the art chosen to depict it. Few human experiences are more dramatic than war, and this art—by soldiers in an American division in World War II—is particularly compelling. The soldiers depicted in the following pages were draftees and volunteers in the Regular Army, National Guard, and Army Reserve. They answered their nation's call and gave their all on the battlefields of Italy, with unwavering loyalty to their comrades as their finest attribute. The men of the 91st Infantry Division fought to liberate Italy from the evils of Fascism. The battle was hard and the price was high, both for the soldiers and for the countryside over which they fought. Much of the art captures the destruction, pathos, courage, and sacrifice of that difficult fighting in a far-off country. Taken together, this fortuitously preserved collection provides us a unique insight into the nature of the Italian Campaign and World War II.

Even as we write these words, the United States Army is once again engaged in difficult campaigns in distant lands. Redesignated as a training support division, the 91st has now brought its proud history and heritage to fulfilling its role in the global war on terrorism. May these endeavors be blessed with the success achieved by the predecessors depicted in this book.

RODNEY M. KOBAYASHI
Major General, USA
Commanding General, 91st Division
(Training Support)

JOHN S. BROWN
Brigadier General, USA
Chief of Military History

Preface

Throughout American history soldiers have found ways to express what is on their minds and in their hearts. This collection of artwork may be unique because the images so closely follow the battle progression of the unit. Yet, there is probably other artwork from other units—Regular Army, National Guard, or Army Reserve—hidden in file folders or footlockers waiting to be rediscovered that will reveal the experiences of other soldiers on different battlefields. Every new generation of Americans will benefit from seeing the images in this collection and other collections that have yet to reemerge.

This book would not have come to light without the assistance and dedication of many people. The staff of the Center of Military History provided the talent and knowledge to complete the project. Beth MacKenzie guided the publication process from the beginning, Glenn Schwegmann provided his editorial skills, and Henrietta Snowden designed the layout. A great deal is owed to Maj. Gens. T. K. Moffett and James P. Combs for being inspiring leaders and men of faith, guiding all of us who were mobilized with the 91st Division (Training Support) from all components. General Moffett was a constant source of encouragement while I served as his special assistant. CWO4 Robert Plank began the efforts to resuscitate the 91st Division's heritage, enabling me to research then write about it. Col. Richard Mollica supported this effort from beginning to end. Also, a note of thanks for support goes to Dr. Stephen Payne, Provost of the Defense Language Institute; Dr. James McNaughton, Command Historian of U.S. Army, Pacific; and Caroline Cantillas, archivist at the Defense Language Institute. Finally, no soldier is complete without the support of his family.

Marina, California
23 July 2004

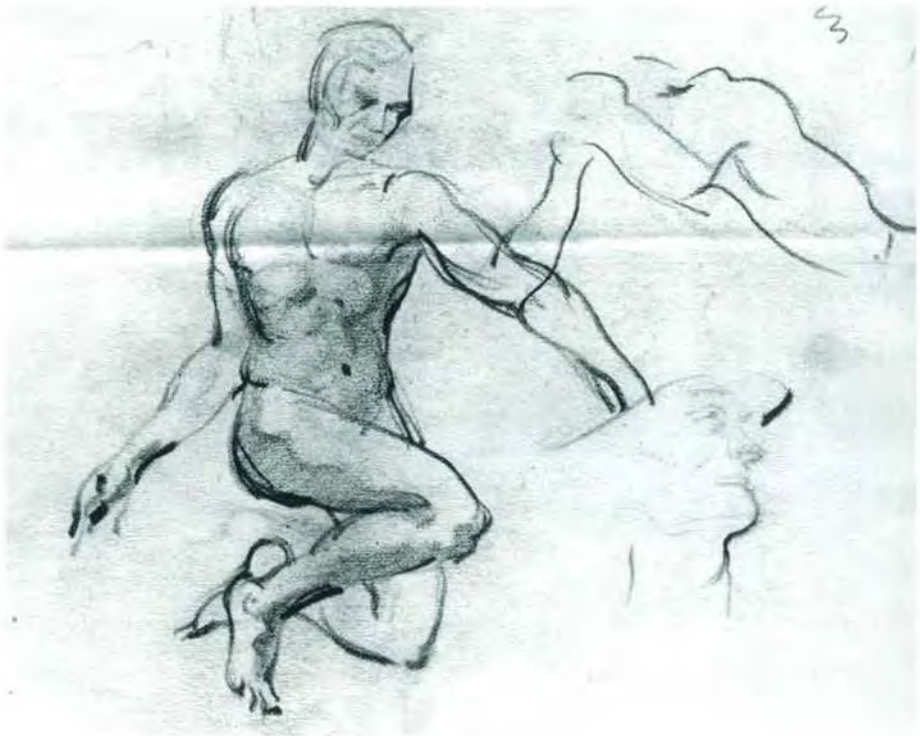
CLIFFORD F. PORTER

La Pozza command post

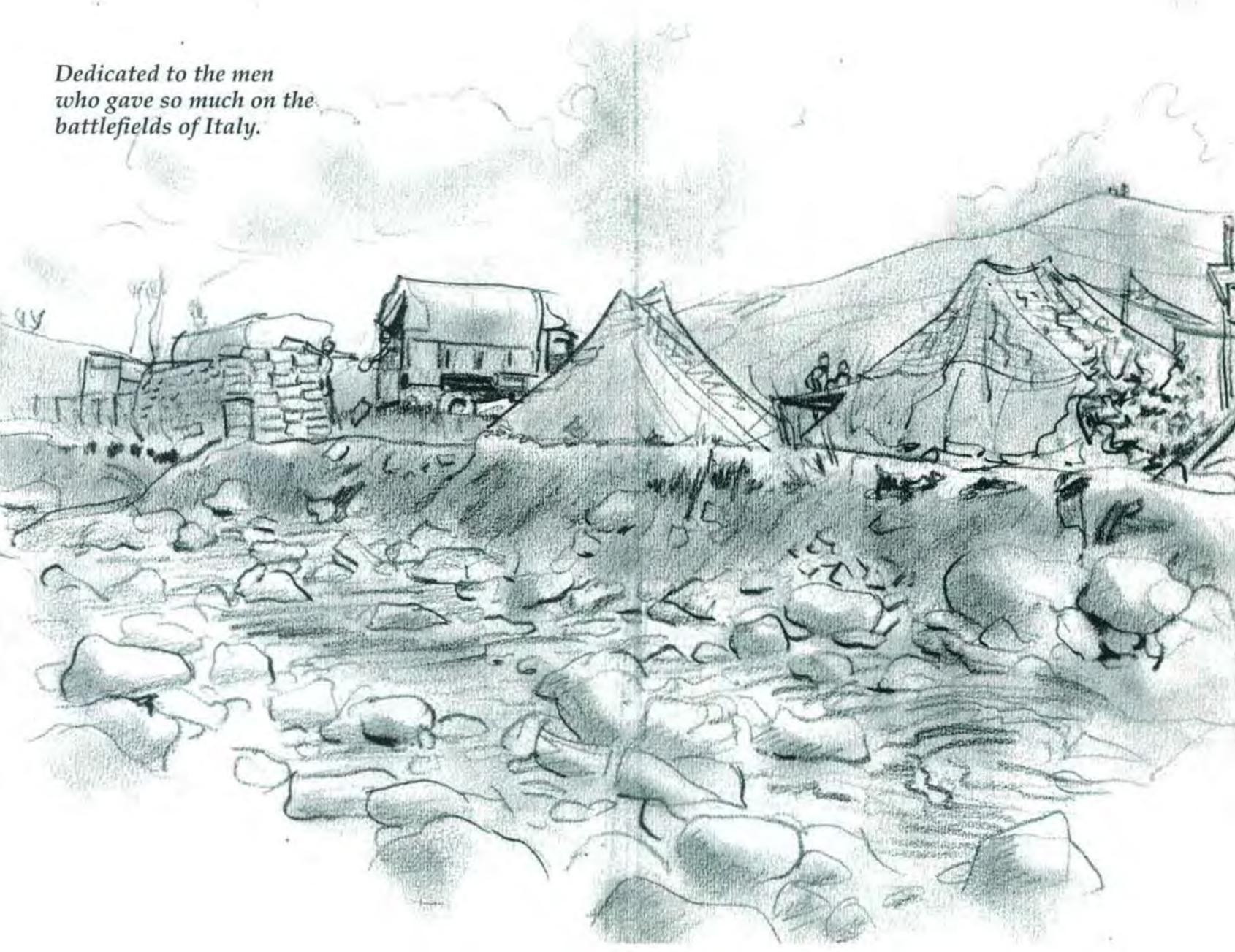
Contents

When a war poses for its picture, it leaves to the artist the selection of the attitude in which the artist may desire to draw it. And this attitude is the artist's point of view circumscribed by the boundaries of his ability and the nature of the work for which his training and practice have fitted him.

—J. Andre Smith, 1919



Dedicated to the men who gave so much on the battlefields of Italy.

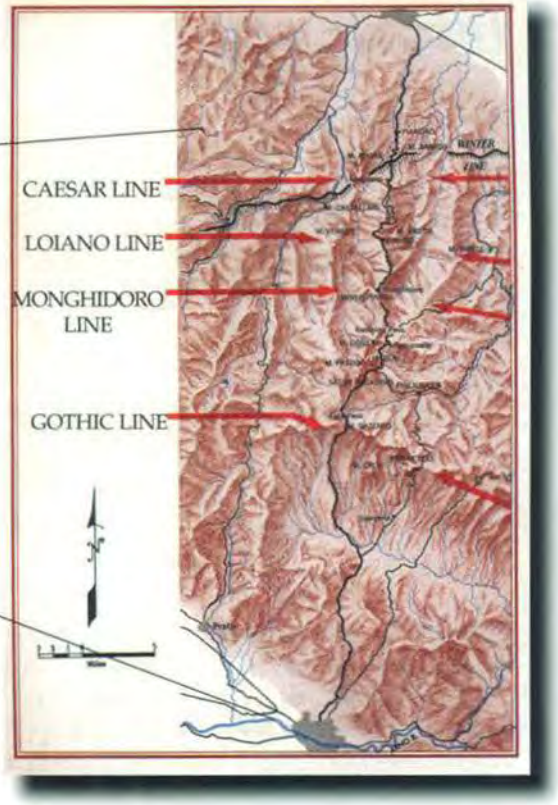


Main supply route through shattered remains of Italian mountain village

Introduction

This art collection from anonymous soldiers of the 91st Infantry Division is a window into the world of the infantrymen who fought to liberate the Italians from Fascism. Their artwork, like the watercolor (*page* 2) by an unknown artist of a northern Apennines battlefield, powerfully and accurately portrays the nature of the fighting in Italy.

The art collection was left with the Army's Reserve 91st Division, along with miscellaneous World War II artifacts and war trophies, by a veteran who did not leave his name. Some of the better sketches and watercolors were in a scrapbook displayed in the commanding general's office of the 91st Division at Fort Baker and later Camp Parks, California. Other sketches were in files unseen for perhaps decades. Except for a few, the sketches and watercolors are unsigned. The only fact for certain is that they are from the 91st Division sector during the Italian campaigns. The narrative of this book is intended to place the art in the proper context. Several of the sketches had cryptic descriptions in the scrapbook, which are incorporated into the narrative. Professional artists may find fault with some of the techniques, skill level, or detail in the art, yet these sketches represent the complex experiences of battle and capture the tragedies and extraordinary courage of the soldiers.



The 91st Infantry Division was trained at Camp White, Oregon, in 1942 and 1943, and then deployed to North Africa in 1944. After completing additional training, the 91st Division entered combat June 1944 in Anzio. The 91st fought its way from Rome to Pisa, then from Florence through the northern Apennines, and breaking out into the Po Valley in April 1945. The 91st ended the war in occupation duty along the disputed border region of Italy and Yugoslavia. The images in this collection follow the 91st Division through battlefields and fortifications known as the Gothic Line at the Futa Pass, Il Giogo Pass, Monticelli Ridge, and Monte Altuzzo; along Highway 65 through the towns of Loiano and Monghidoro; the Caesar Line along the Livergnano escarpment and Monte Adone; and final victory in the Po Valley.

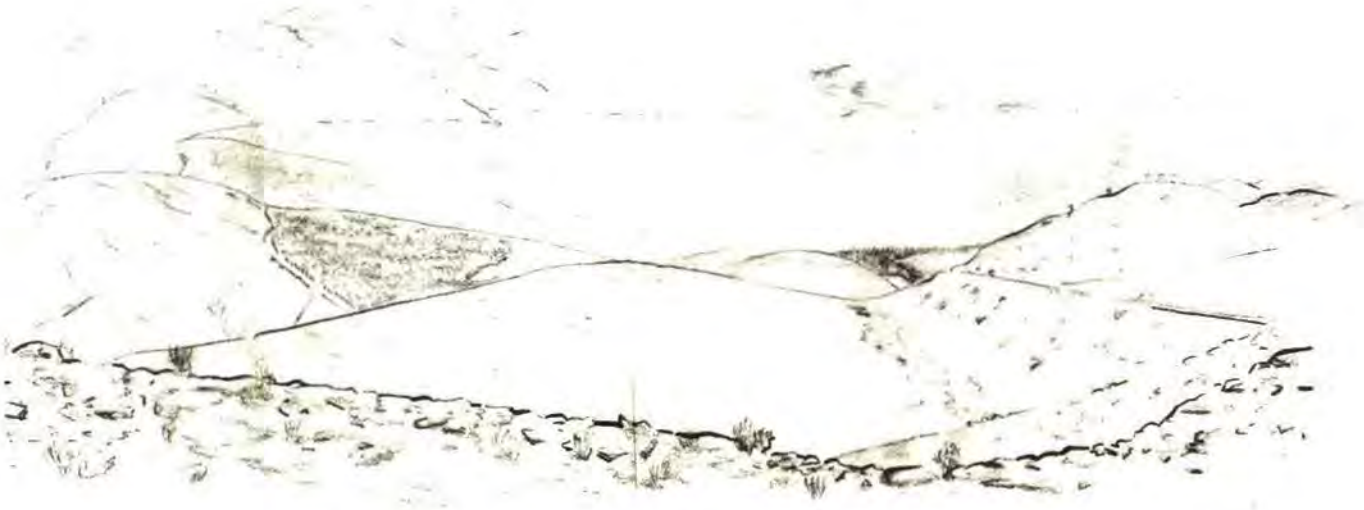
Who Were the Artists?

Overlay to Field Order 36 showing disposition of friendly units on the Winter Line on January 17, 1945

Modern computer graphics allow military planners to create sophisticated map overlays and sector sketches. During World War II the operations and planning staff, known as the G–3 at the division level staff or the S–3 in regimental and battalion staffs, relied on soldiers with artistic ability to draw overlays and sketches on onion paper. The graphic symbols used on the overlays remain essentially unchanged and are still used today.

Hill 634 Looking WSW From Turn in Road (Q265336)

1500 4 Aug. '44 Wm. E. Paulson, P.F.C. 3rd Bn. 362 INF.



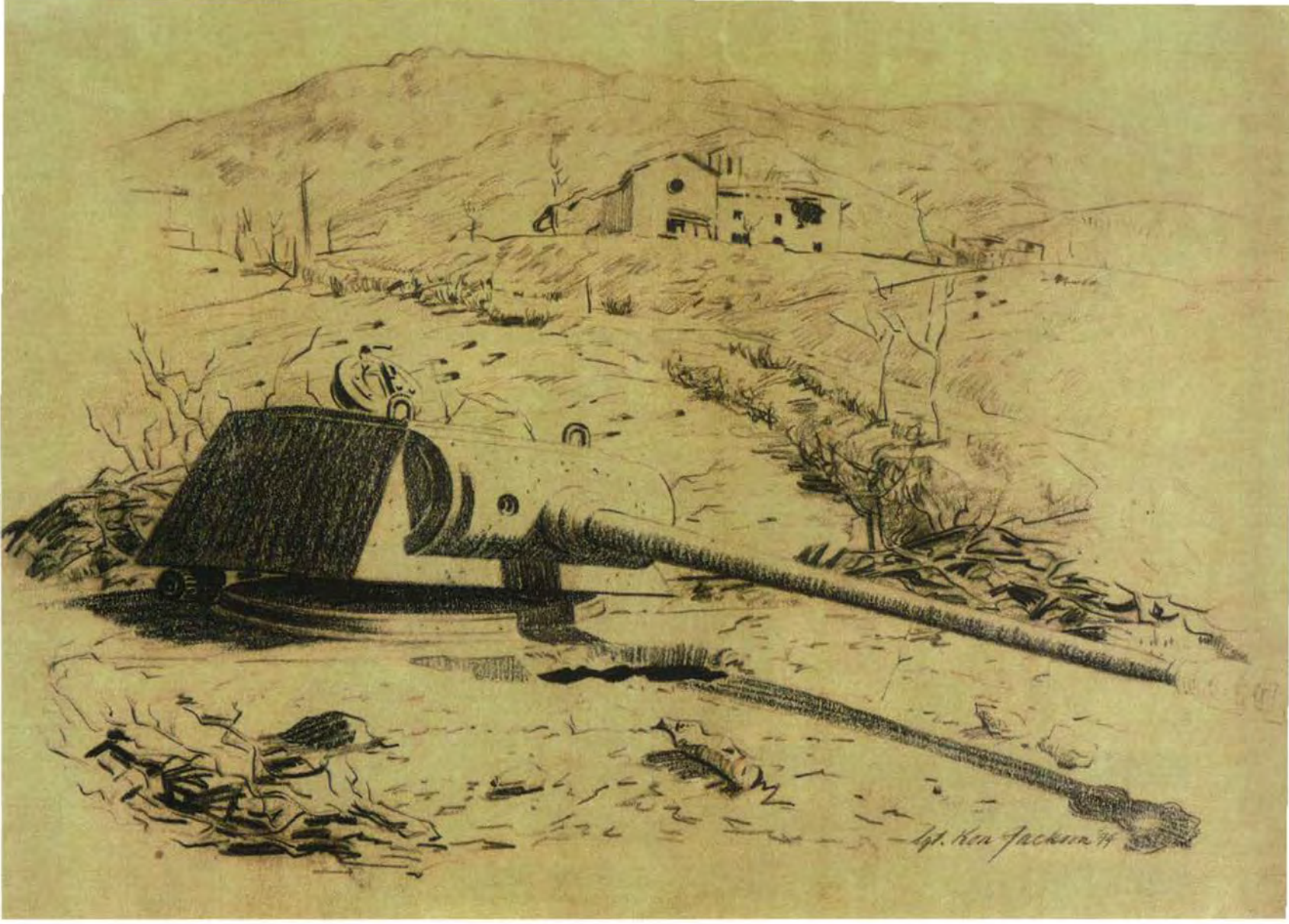
Accurate terrain images are always an essential part of battle preparations, such as this example from the 363d Infantry by Pfc. William E. Paulson. In fact, landscape drawing was a core curriculum requirement at West Point during the nineteenth century. Military leaders typically referred to these drawings of scenery during operational planning. Paulson's drawings have details of location by grid coordinate and direction of perspective, which is not typical in most artwork. They provide the commanders perspective on the terrain without having to travel to exposed parts of the front.

The artists of the 91st Division were probably drafted infantry soldiers who showed some talents and went from the foxhole to the command staff, which was very common during World War II, and included the famous cartoonist Bill Mauldin and artist Edward Reep. Paulson is a possible artist, but his name is only on these sector landscapes.

Two soldiers moving out

The artwork on the cover of two soldiers moving out was sketched several times, including one on onion paper, and probably was used as a backdrop for briefings on the 91st Division successes capturing ground and prisoners during the Italian campaigns (*page 9*). The briefing backdrop again places the artist in the division headquarters, probably in the G–3 where briefings were conducted.


91ST DIVISION
FRONT LINE POSITIONS
GROUND
SECTORS AND LOCATIONS OCCUPIED
JUNE 1944 – MAY 1945 ITALY



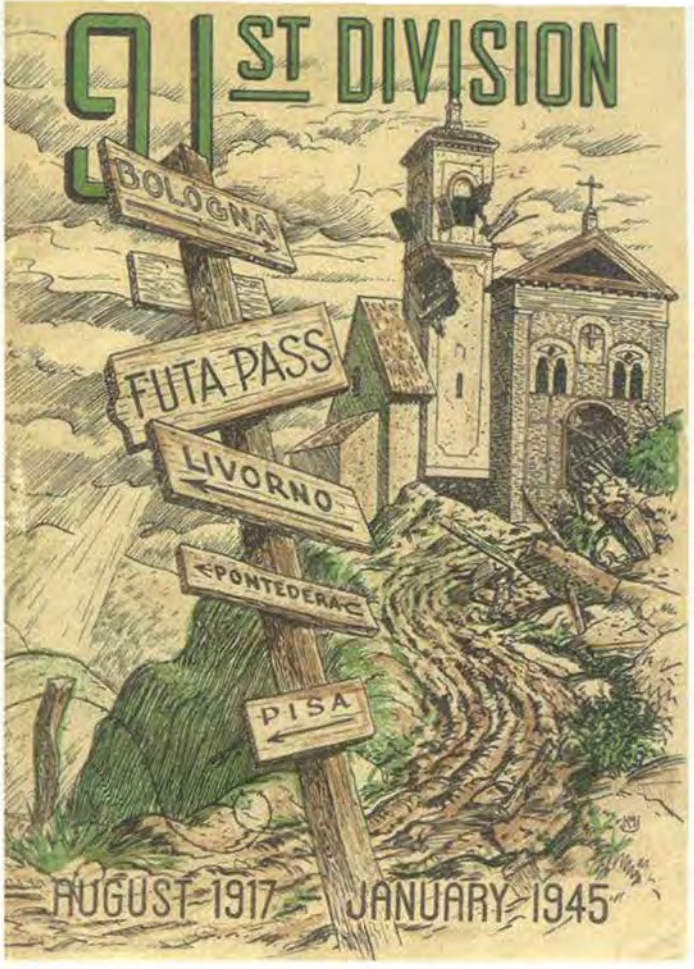
Bunker-mounted Panther tank turret overlooking the Futa Pass

Simple sketch of tank turret in the 91st Division newspaper *Powder River* dated December 24, 1944

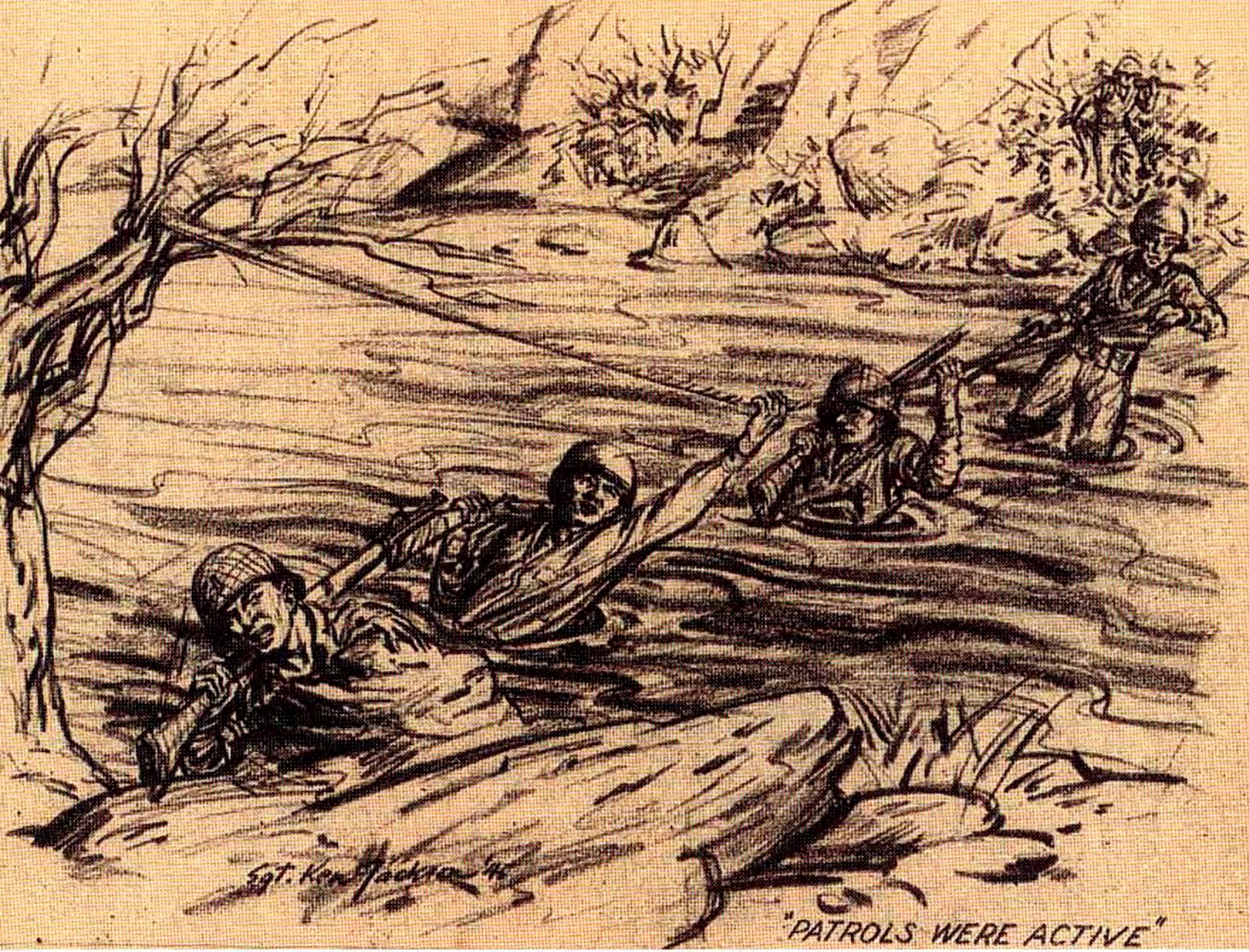
Photo of tank turret

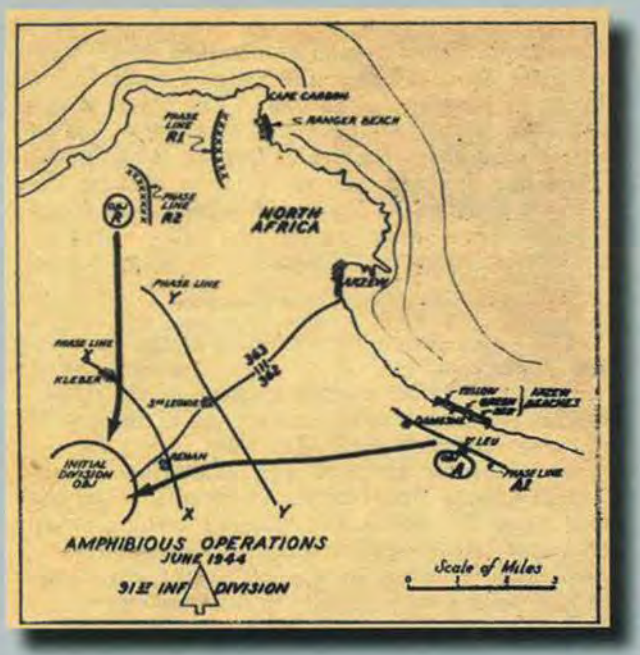
Several sketches of this German Panther turret were drawn. This extraordinary image of the turret signed by Sgt. Ken Jackson was drawn on the kind of onion paper used for map overlays (*page 10*). The small tears and yellowing of the paper indicates how poorly the drawings were stored for sixty years.

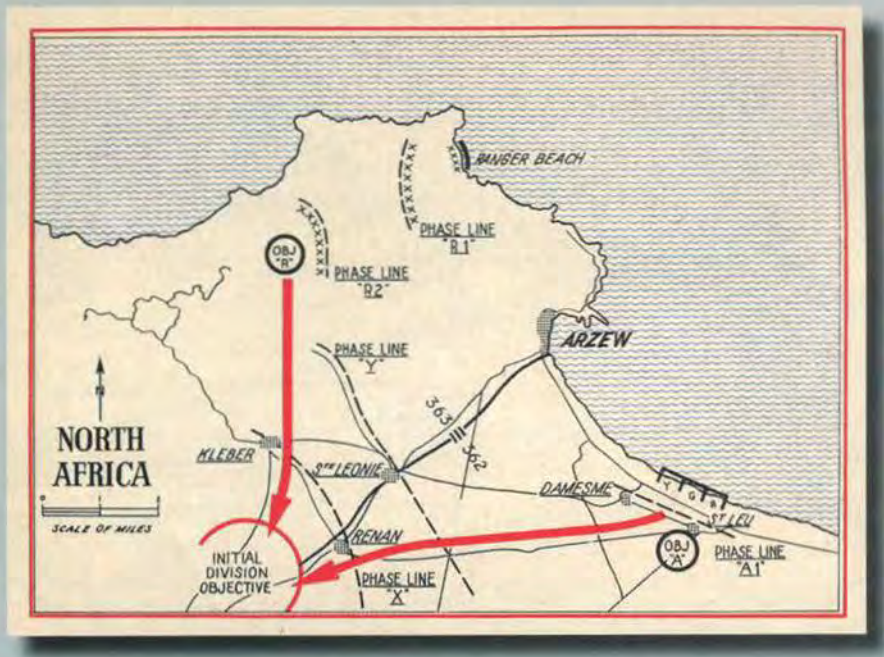
Rough drafts of the turret appeared in both the 362d Infantry and division soldiers' weekly newsletters created by the Information-Education Section of Division Headquarters (I–E Section). Jackson was frequently listed as a cartoonist on very amateurish drawings, but he did not take credit for any of the better original sketches. It is also possible that the turret was traced from a similar photo, but from a slightly different angle. If so, then his freehand work in the "foxhole" newspaper may reveal his real skill level.



The best clue to the identity of the artists is the I–E Section. Several of the sketches and maps in this collection also appeared in a pamphlet (*above right*) published by the I–E Section on the division's history up to January 1945 and printed in April 1945. Unfortunately, "Patrols Were Active" is the only other sketch signed by Jackson (*page 13*), and it appears only in the pamphlet, not in this collection. Another sketch of mules (*above left*) closely resembles draft sketches in this collection. It may have stylized initials "KJ," but it is open to interpretation.


Sgt. Ken Mackenzie
"PATROLS WERE ACTIVE"





The I–E pamphlet has a map illustration (*above left*) that resembles one (*above right*) in Maj. Robert A. Robbins' *The 91st Infantry Division in Italy*, the division's official history published after the war. Major Robbins, a G–3 staff officer, gave full credit for the illustrations to Sgt. Richard B. Reynolds.

The sketches in the official history (*page 15*), however, are signed by "McLay,"not Reynolds, and do not match the drawings in this collection. It is possible that Reynolds was a G–3 map illustrator but not an artist, and McLay was a staff artist for the Infantry Journal Press, the publisher of Robbins' official history, or another previously unmentioned division artist.

Sketch signed by McLay of Captain Conley of Company G, 363d Infantry, attacking Monticelli Ridge (Robert A. Robbins, *The 91st Infantry Division in Italy*, 1947)

THE POWDER RIVER JOURNAL

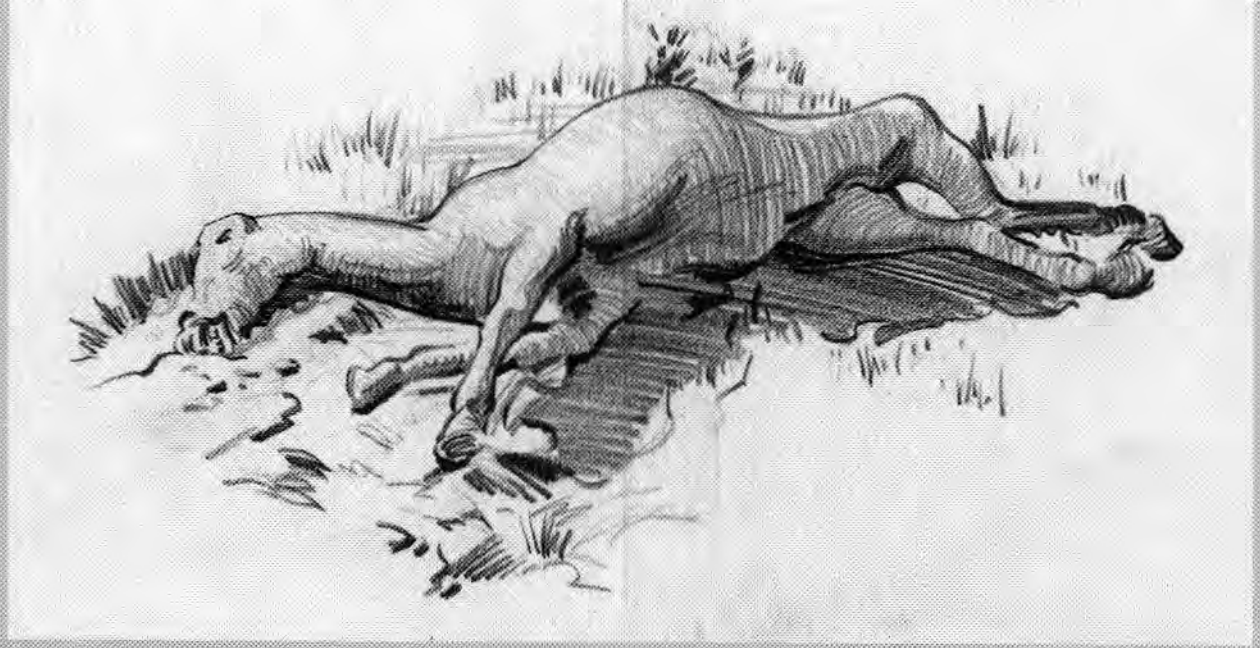
"Off the Line"

Some sketches show battlefields of the 362d Infantry, where Robert Wilkum was assigned as one of the regimental artists. He drew "Off the Line," which appeared in 1985 in the veterans' *Powder River Journal*. There are some similarities, so he may be one of the artists, but there are more differences than similarities, and his name never appears in any of the documents in the archives.

Soldier, sitting with 91st patch on sleeve

Kitchen patrol (Italian style)

Although some of the pencil sketches appear to be copies of official Army photographs, most of the sketches and all of the watercolors are obviously original. The different images also show clear differences in techniques and skill level, seemingly demonstrating that there were multiple artists. Knowing precisely who was responsible for the best artwork remains something of a mystery. Regardless of who they were, the artists of the 91st Division often developed their skills by sketching during the many hours of boredom. They practiced on any canvas they could find for their art, often using onion paper, low-quality sketch paper, and even manila folders.



Remains of horse near Futa Pass

Detailed facial sketch of a medic

The subjects the artists chose are often striking and provide us with a small window into the nature of the fighting and destruction. The artists focused on images that strike their consciousness, unlike the impartiality of a photograph. One drawing of a dead horse is strikingly peculiar. It is a distorted, tragic image and a small expression of the wider destruction of war.

The expression of the medic, on the other hand, is much more optimistic, in no small part because the willingness of the medics to come to the aid of the infantry was so important for morale. More powerfully than film, the subjectivity and humanity of the artists moves the art beyond objective recording of imagery, and gives meaning to the experiences of these soldiers as they fought and died in the battle to destroy Fascism.

The 91st Division's World War I Heritage

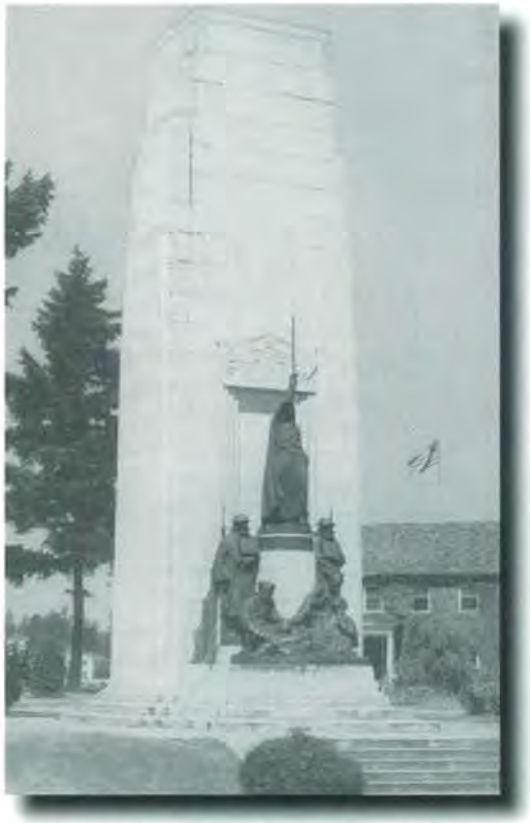
German aerial reconnaissance photo of the no-man's-land on the Western Front in late 1918. This photo was taken along the northern sector, where the 91st Division fought during World War I. The devastation of the landscape was caused by nearly five years of trench warfare.

The 91st Division was originally formed during World War I at Camp Lewis, Washington. The 91st was trained and shipped out in time to fight in the trenches in France and Belgium, earning battle streamers for campaigns in Lorraine, Meuse-Argonne, and Ypres-Lys. Although only in line for a short period—28 days—the soldiers fought hard and maintained their unit cohesion extremely well despite heavy casualties, while neighboring divisions were losing combat effectiveness. Men of the division earned a total of five Medals of Honor and numerous Distinguished Service Crosses, French Légion d'Honneur, French and Belgian Croix de Guerre, and many other awards for valor.

Shattered remains of Avocourt, France, October 1918

The above photo and etching (*page 21*) are the remains of the town of Avocourt, in the 91st Division sector, Meuse-Argonne, September 1918. The town was at a central road junction and, as such, was targeted by artillery barrages for four years. Many of the towns in the region were rebuilt after the war several miles away from their original location on less strategic terrain. The original towns were left in ruins and today appear to be ancient overgrown Roman ruins, but are really the devastation of war caused less than a century ago.

Avocourt, France, February 1919. Etching by E. Kufferath is published in *Pages of Glory and History: The 91st Division in Argonne and Flanders*, City of Paris, 1919.



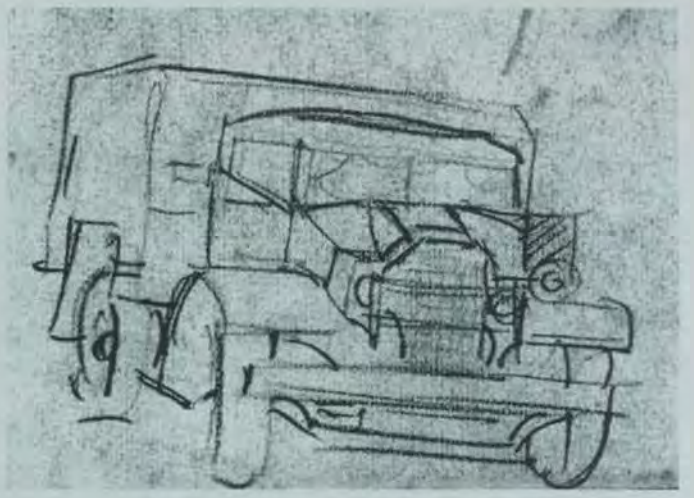
"The Right Shall Prevail." The 91st Division Monument at Fort Lewis, Washington. It was built in 1930 featuring a bronze sculpture by the renowned artist Avard Fairbanks.

After the Armistice and while awaiting the return trip home, the men of the 91st Division chose their division's motto (Powder River, Let 'er Buck!), patch (fir tree), and nickname (Wild West Division) from the symbols of the American West, in particular, Wyoming. One legend of the 91st Division was about the recruits first arriving at Camp Lewis without uniforms, one still wearing a cowboy hat and riding chaps. When the sergeants demanded to know where he was from, the recruit yelled, "Powder River, Let 'er Buck." It is still used today as a rallying cry. The fir tree was chosen as the patch because it represented all of the western states, from which most of the men were drafted. Because over 20,000 patches were needed, it also was easy to manufacture with pool table felt and Christmas tree cookie-cutters.

The Road to Combat in World War II

91st Infantry Division cadre in the shape of the fir tree patch, late 1942

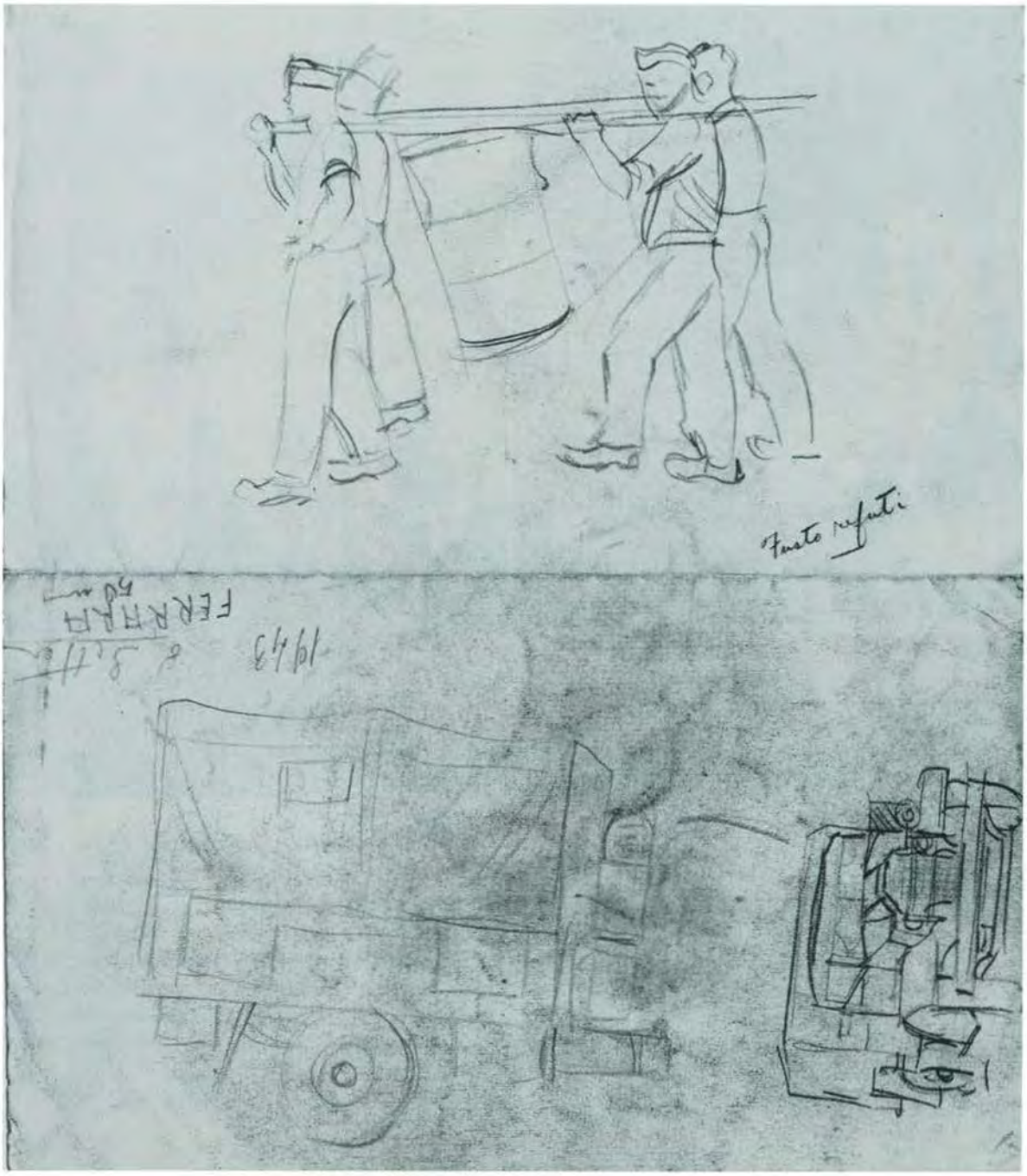
The 91st Infantry Division was activated for World War II on August 15, 1942, at Camp White, Oregon. The division started World War II with a corps of officers and sergeants from the disbanded 1st Cavalry Division. Recruits were delivered to Camp White without uniforms or equipment, much like World War I. The new division commander was a former cavalryman, Maj. Gen. Charles Gerhardt, nicknamed "loose-reigns Charlie" for his eccentricities. He revived the World War I division rallying cry of "Powder River, Let 'er Buck!" to create esprit de corps. All of his officers then were ordered to ride around without shirts because he thought all tough men should have deep tans, earning the suspicion of his sunburnt men.



Practice sketches of trucks

General Gerhard was anxious to get into combat and left the 91st to command the 29th Division, destined for D-Day and one of the highest casualty rates of American divisions in the war. The 91st Division's new commander, Maj. Gen. William G. Livesay, was more even-tempered, earning the trust of the men, and led the 91st from the beginning to the end of its campaigns in Italy.

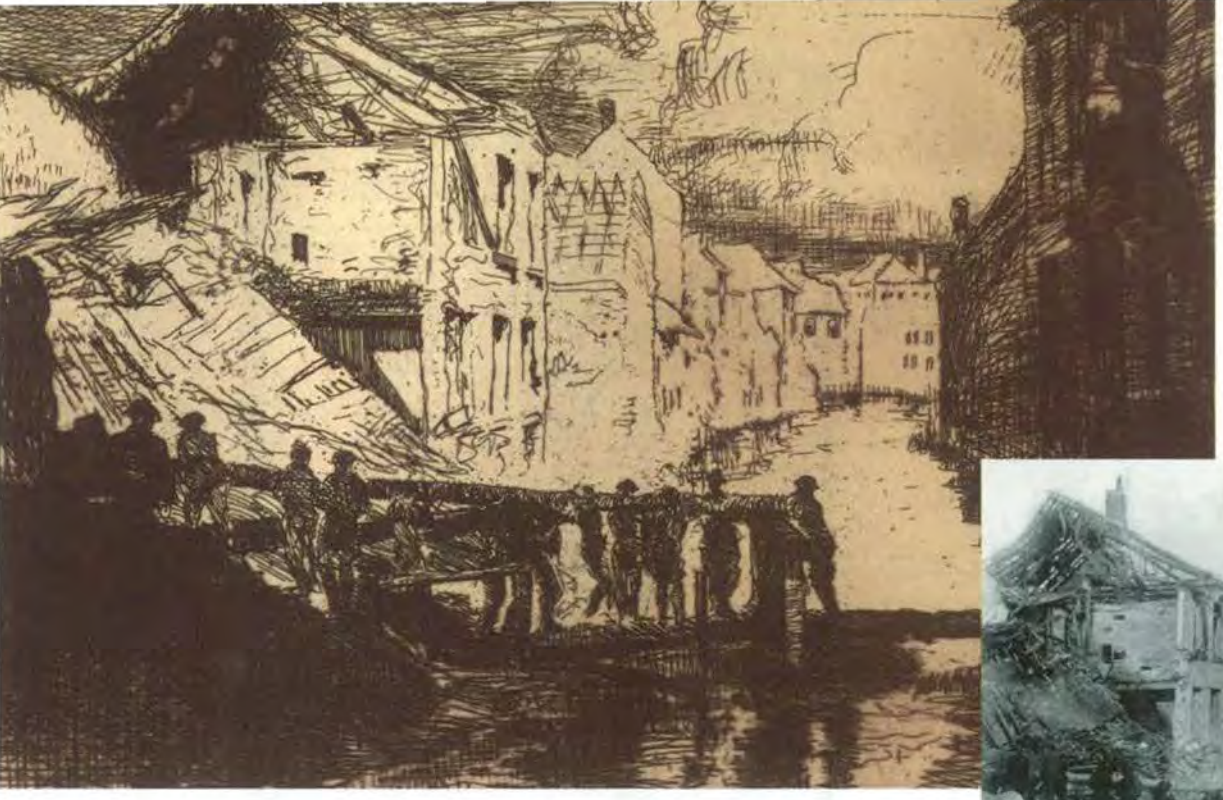
At this time a few budding artists began to doodle. The following page of practice sketches (*page 25*) shows the emerging skills of the artist and seems to have a signature. The veterans I asked believe "Ferrara" is a place, unless the artist was suggesting the army truck was a soldier's Ferrari, and what is perhaps *Frato Refuti* [*Frati Rifiuti*] could be freely translated from Italian as "Garbage Brothers." The date of 1943 (*upside down lower half, page 25*) would place the men still in the United States. The edge of the page was cut off, so there is probably more to the story than can be determined from these images.



Practice sketches of the *Frato Refuti* [*Frati Rifiuti*], "Garbage Brothers," and of trucks

Cloth Hall of Ypres

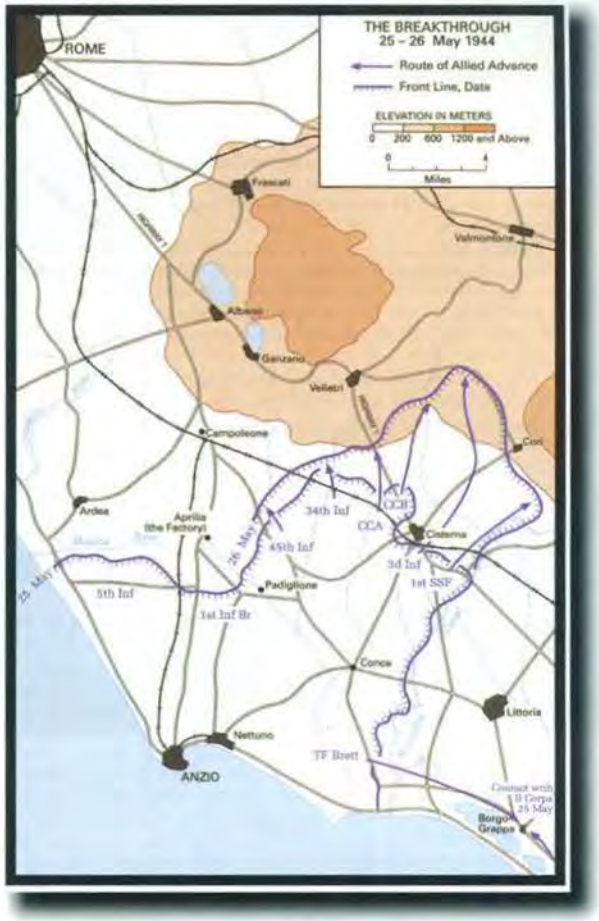
The 91st Division's first operational assignment in World War II was to train. While stationed in North Africa in May 1944 before commitment to Italy, the 91st made several public large-scale amphibious landing exercises. The division trained for a possible amphibious landing elsewhere along the coast of Italy, or at least to make the Germans believe another landing was coming. The next operational assignment, however, was combat in Italy.



Audenarde

Men of the 91st Division, 316th Engineers, repairing the infrastructure of Audenarde, November 1918

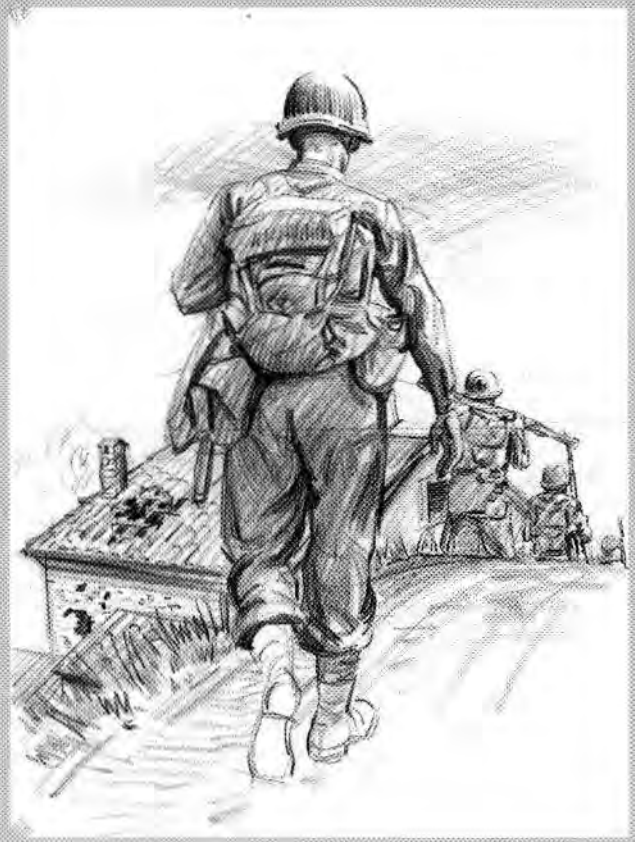
It was British Prime Minister Winston Churchill who first came up with the idea to invade Italy as an alternative to trench warfare in western Europe. These ink etchings of men of the 91st Division at the Cloth Hall of Ypres (*page 26*) and Audenarde, Belgium, in November 1918 represent the kind of devastation Churchill personally witnessed during World War I. Churchill was forever seeking a "soft underbelly" through which to strike at Nazi Germany. The etching of Audenarde was based on the photo of the 91st Division's 316th Engineers repairing the bridges of Audenarde, November 1918.



Following Churchill's strategy, the initial Allied landings in southern Italy in September 1943 achieved moderate success, but bogged down in the steep, craggy mountainous terrain. The fighting developed into artillery duels and small unit engagements, often decided by deadly close-quarter, man-to-man combat. To break this stalemate, American forces attempted to outflank the enemy lines by a second invasion further up the Italian coast at Anzio, forty miles south of Rome, in January 1944. This too bogged down, and it was not until late May that the Fifth Army, under Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark, began to break out of the Anzio beachhead and attempt to cut off the lines of retreat of the German forces.

Men and equipment of Regimental Combat Team 361 unloading at Anzio

It was in this strategic situation that the 361st Regimental Combat Team (RCT) of the 91st Division was committed to battle, made up of the 361st Infantry and supporting engineer and artillery units of the division. The 361st RCT moved into the Anzio beachhead on June 1, 1944, under operational control of the 36th Infantry Division from Texas.



Moving forward

The 361st RCT was addressed by General Clark, and then immediately moved out to the line, making its first contact with the enemy in small-unit skirmishes and mopping up enemy machine-gun positions isolated during the breakout from Anzio. The 361st also participated in the liberation of Rome, an excursion desired by Clark. The German retreat from Anzio and Rome bordered on a rout, but the leadership was experienced, rallied, and took advantage of the delay caused by Clark's Roman excursion. The German forces fought a series of delaying actions into the hills and towns north of Rome, then Pisa and Florence, establishing a new defensive line in the mountains. In these actions, the men of the 91st Division gained their first crucial experiences in combat.

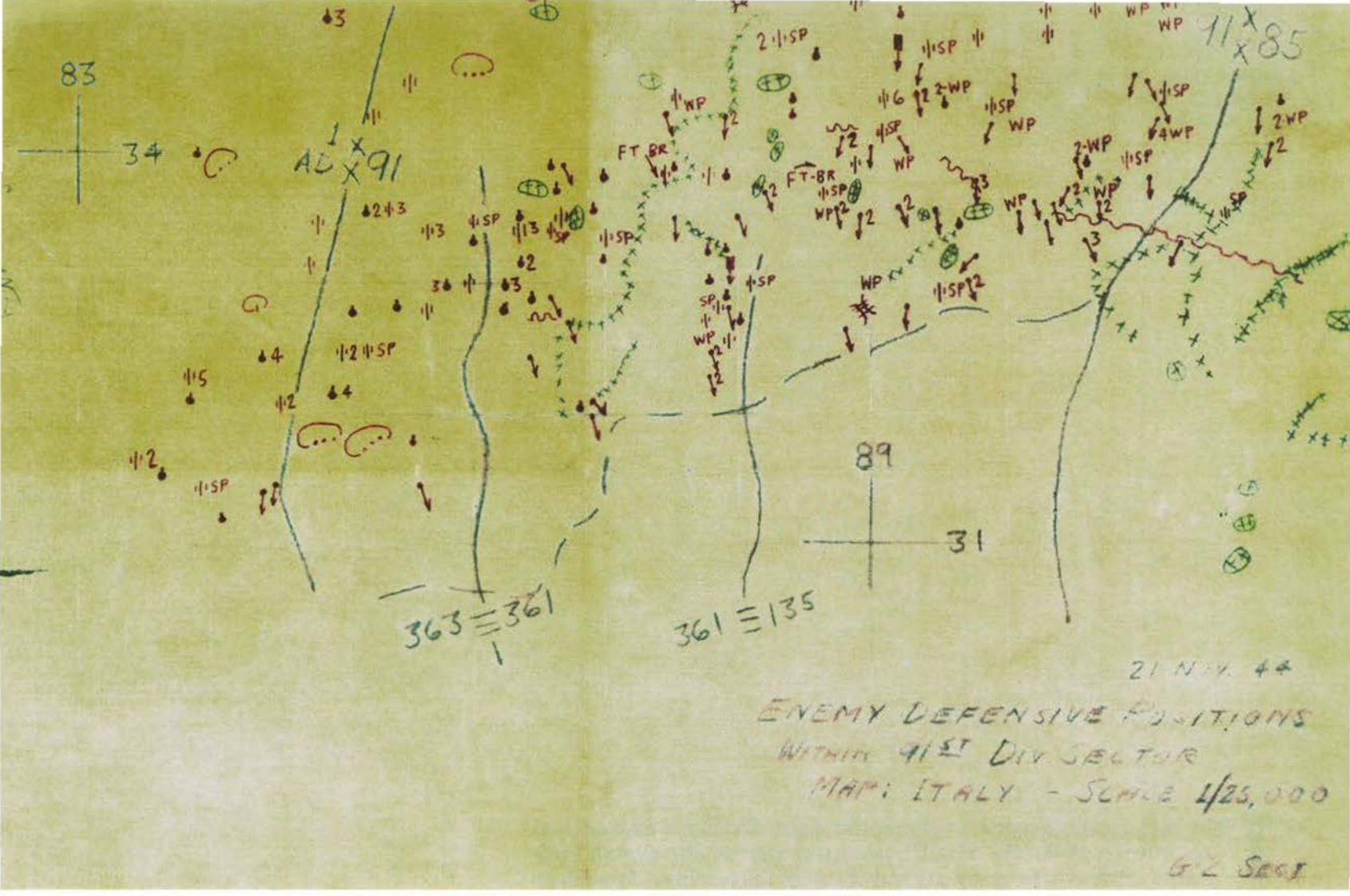
Italian family near Monghidoro after their liberation from the Germans

The Italians welcomed the Allied armies; only a few Germans offered resistance. The war had been hard on Italy, and the alliance with Nazi Germany had become onerous. The Germans had turned from allies into cruel, repressive occupiers. For the Italian people the 91st Division became liberators, as evident in the sketch of this Italian family.

In June and early July the Fifth Army chased the German armies to the base of the Apennines range along the Arno River flowing from Florence to Pisa. At this natural obstacle, the Germans reorganized and manned a previously established series of strong defensive lines in the northern Apennines known as the Gothic Line.

Monticelli (*page 32*) and its approaches. The Monticelli Ridge is at the top of the image, heavily defended by the Germans.

The first great offensive involving the entire division was launched on July 12, 1944. The 91st Division was part of the overall Fifth Army offensive designed to break through the northern Apennines into the Po Valley, and then attack southern Germany before winter. The 91st, within the II Corps sector, was assigned the area immediately north of Florence with its axis of advance on Highway 65, at the base of the deceptively serene Apennines range. The scenic Monticelli Ridge was one of the most difficult battlefields for the 91st. Highway 65 would play a central role in the fate of the men of the 91st; the number 65 still could conjure powerful emotions in veterans over half a century later.



Intelligence overlay showing enemy defensive positions on Monte Adone and north of Livergnano, dated November 21, 1944

Intelligence overlays of estimated enemy defenses in the North Apennines campaign illustrate what the men were facing. Each red arrow represents a German machine-gun, and each "SP" represents a self-propelled gun or howitzer. The graphic symbols are basically still the same used today by the U.S. Army.

For the assault on the Gothic Line, the 362d and 363d Infantry regiments were in the line, with the 361st in reserve. At the jump-off the 363d made fast progress. The 362d, however, immediately hit prepared positions protected by minefields. The German defenses were a mixture of well-prepared machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire designed to force the advancing infantry into "kill zones." Nonetheless the two regiments made progress by methodically reducing each successive enemy strong point. It was in one of these engagements that Sgt. Roy W. Harmon, Company C, 362d Infantry, stepped forward to rescue his company by an extraordinary individual act of valor. Sergeant Harmon's company was caught in a kill zone of three machine guns, each of which was concealed under a haystack. Harmon first tried to ignite the hay with tracer rounds. Failing that, he charged forward and threw an incendiary grenade onto one haystack, forcing the Germans to leave their cover, and shot them down. Harmon was hit while charging the second machine gun but still managed to kill that crew as well. He went after the third, accurately throwing the grenade, destroying their position, but was riddled by machine gun fire at the same time. For his decisive actions to save his unit, Sergeant Harmon was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Deceptively peaceful beauty of the northern Apennines range

The Gothic Line

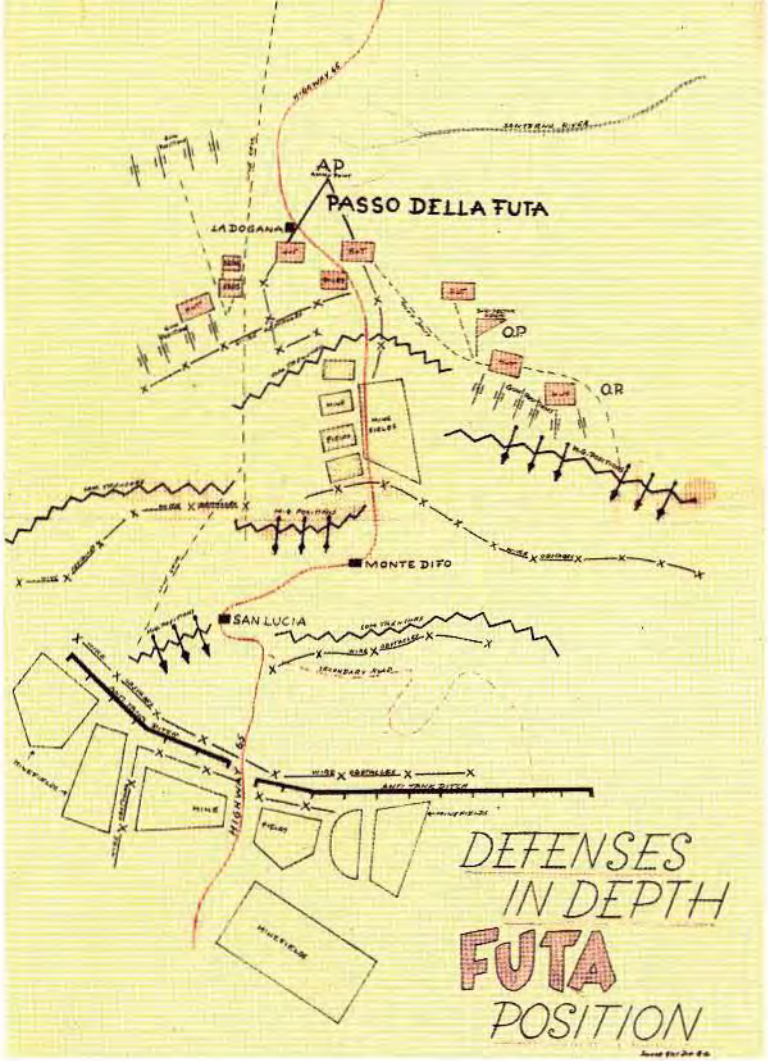
Approaches to Monticelli Ridge

Through July and into August 1944, the 91st Infantry Division fought its way up the increasingly higher foothills of the deceptively peaceful beauty of the northern Apennines (*page 36*). The German defenses in the mountains were built during the early part of 1944 with Italian forced labor and were complete with machine gun kill zones, minefields, and bunkers.

Part of the three-mile-long German antitank ditch before the Futa Pass

At the same time the Fifth Army attacked into the northern Apennines, the Eighth Army attempted to break through on the eastern side of the Italian Peninsula. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the German commander in Italy, was a brilliant tactician who was able to balance forces to delay the advances of the two allied armies. Kesselring set his defenses in the northern Apennines along a line that had been surveyed by the legendary Erwin Rommel in 1943. It was named the Gothic Line.

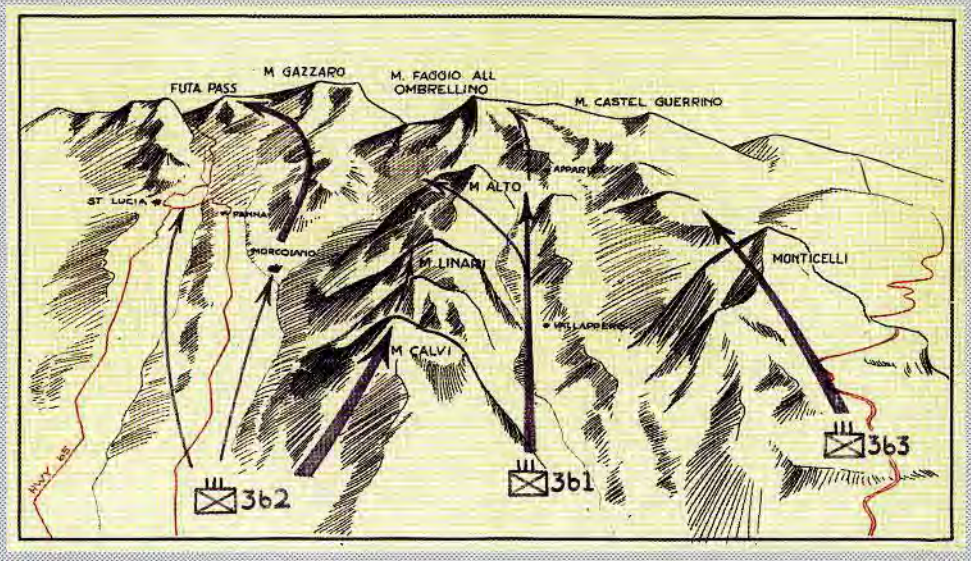
General Clark was determined to break through to the Po Valley of northern Italy and complete the conquest of Italy before the end of the year, but first he had to get through the mountains towering in front of his army. The lowest pass was the Futa Pass where the mountains rolled, rather than towered, and it was possible to use armor. Both Clark and Kesselring knew this, and Kesselring reinforced the Gothic Line with elements of SS and Parachute units and ordered a three-mile-long tank ditch dug across the valley at the base of the Futa Pass.



Sketch signed by "Hacker" of Futa Pass defenses

The antitank ditch was only one component within a very complex and carefully coordinated defensive scheme, which is evident in the graphic of the Futa Pass defenses drawn on a manila envelope (signed by "Hacker" and reproduced in the I–E pamphlet). The Futa Pass defenses were the anchor of the Gothic Line, which Kesselring intended to hold until the summer of 1945.

Early draft of terrain sketch used in I–E pamphlet



Because of the obvious strength of the Futa Pass defenses, Clark decided on a plan to make Kesselring believe the Futa Pass was indeed the Fifth Army's main effort, then make the main effort across a side road to the left through Il Giogo Pass. The assignment belonged to the 91st along with the 85th Division, also of II Corps. The early terrain sketch, drawn on a manila envelope, illustrates General Livesay's scheme of maneuver for the 362d to fix the enemy at the Futa Pass while the 361st and 363d attacked the heights above Il Giogo Pass, in particular Monticelli Ridge, in coordination with the 85th on the right of Il Giogo Pass. (The drawing may have been intended for the Robbins' history of the 91st Division because of the similar style of maps included in his book, but was never included.) This was the beginning of some of the fiercest fighting in Italy that lasted two months.

Fortifications along Highway 65. The minefields on either side of the highway were designed to canalize the American infantry into kill zones covered by small arms, machine gun, and artillery fire.

German timber-fortified bunker destroyed by artillery fire.

Attacking up the mountain ridges was hard and torturous. The easy and covered approaches were through the draws that led to the top. It was a logical approach to both the Americans and the Germans, which is where the Germans preplanned artillery concentrations. For the infiltrating infantry, the Germans planned ambushes and fire from bunkers and fighting positions reinforced with timber.

Artillery spotter adjusting fire onto enemy positions

Tank firing over ruins of San Lucia

Under an initial artillery barrage and a bombing preparation by about four hundred medium bombers, the regiments attacked up the steep slopes on September 10, 1944. The attack of the 362d could not be a mere feint; it had to keep pressure on Kesselring's forces and fix them at the Futa Pass.

The approach to the Futa Pass, up Highway 65, was first blocked by the town of San Lucia. Initial probing attacks were repulsed, so the 362d brought up tank support, called down division artillery, and pummeled the town until the German defenders died in the rubble or fled.

Surrender of Jerry (German)
pillbox near San Lucia

Many Germans refused to surrender and fought to the death. Other Germans were more willing to surrender, but only after vicious fighting. With San Lucia seized, the 362d continued its slow progress up to the Futa Pass through the extensive German defenses. The 362d attack prevented Kesselring from shifting his forces to reinforce his defense of Monticelli Ridge or Monte Altuzzo.

German soldier

Infantryman practicing the deadly art of stalking

Remains of San Lucia near Futa Pass

The 363d struggled up the steep ridges of Monticelli in intense yard-by-yard fighting. The infantry tried to probe and infiltrate through the enemy positions in small groups. It took every hour of every day to advance. Each new ridge, draw, or spur held new defensive positions and was dominated by enemy machine gun emplacements or artillery observers at the highest points. Men would spend hours crawling forward to throw grenades into a bunker or foxhole, while the Germans tried to coax the American infantry into kill zones. Casualties were heavy in the shattered remains of the small farming communities.

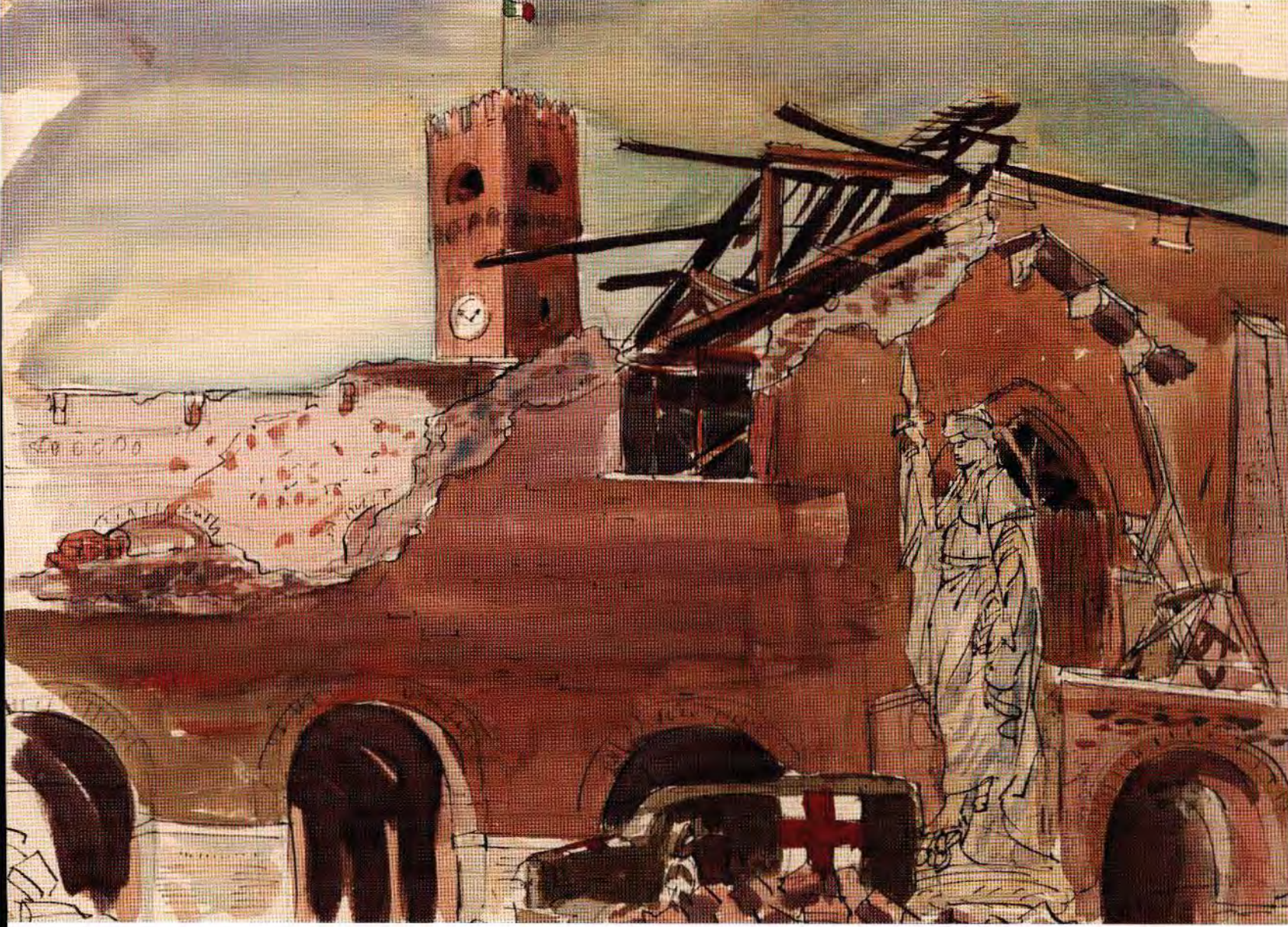
Sgt. Oscar Johnson after award ceremony for the Medal of Honor on June 25, 1945

By September 15 elements of Company B, 363d Infantry, succeeded in seizing the western edge of the German positions on top of the Monticelli Ridge. The German forces quickly counterattacked, and artillery and mortar fire came down heavily on Company B, preventing reinforcement. Pfc. Oscar G. Johnson Jr. (later Sgt.) personally held the left flank of Company B's position as the rest of his squad was killed or wounded. Over the course of two days, Company B held its position as the rest of the 363d Infantry fought through the German pillboxes to bring reinforcements. Johnson stood in his position for two days and fought off a dozen attacks. At dawn on September 17 elements of Company K, 363d Infantry, also infiltrated to the top of the ridge and directed the division artillery fire into the German rear positions behind the ridge and in the Il Giogo Pass itself, effectively piercing the Gothic Line and outflanking the Futa Pass. When Kesselring's defenses became untenable, he conducted a fighting retreat while taking heavy casualties from the American infantry and artillery. The German defenses crumbled, and the 362d seized the Futa Pass a few days later. Sergeant Johnson was awarded the Medal of Honor for his decisive actions in breaking the Gothic Line. He continued his service after the war, retiring from the Michigan Army National Guard as a CWO4; he passed away in 1999. The current headquarters of the 91st Division (Training Support) was dedicated to Oscar Johnson's memory in July 2000.

Simple and powerful ink drawing of a medic

In these conditions, combat is often close quarter and dependent on the entire support structure of the division, such as engineers, logistics, artillery, medics, and support services. Medical support was crucial to morale and cannot be overstated. The men needed to know where the medics were and that the wounded would be promptly treated and evacuated. This ink drawing only hints at the powerful emotions the medics dealt with everyday caring for battle casualties.

The structures least damaged served as hospitals. The watercolor (*page 49*) is probably from the Po Valley region around Pianoro, south of Bologna, where the division had its command post during part of the campaign. It could also be from Gorizia at the end of hostilities, where the division was in occupation duty, although the destruction suggests south of Bologna toward Livergnano where fighting was particularly intense. The Romanesque statue in front suggests that the makeshift hospital was a converted public building, whereas the alcoves and architecture suggest a church. Either way it was still standing and large enough to accommodate the wounded.



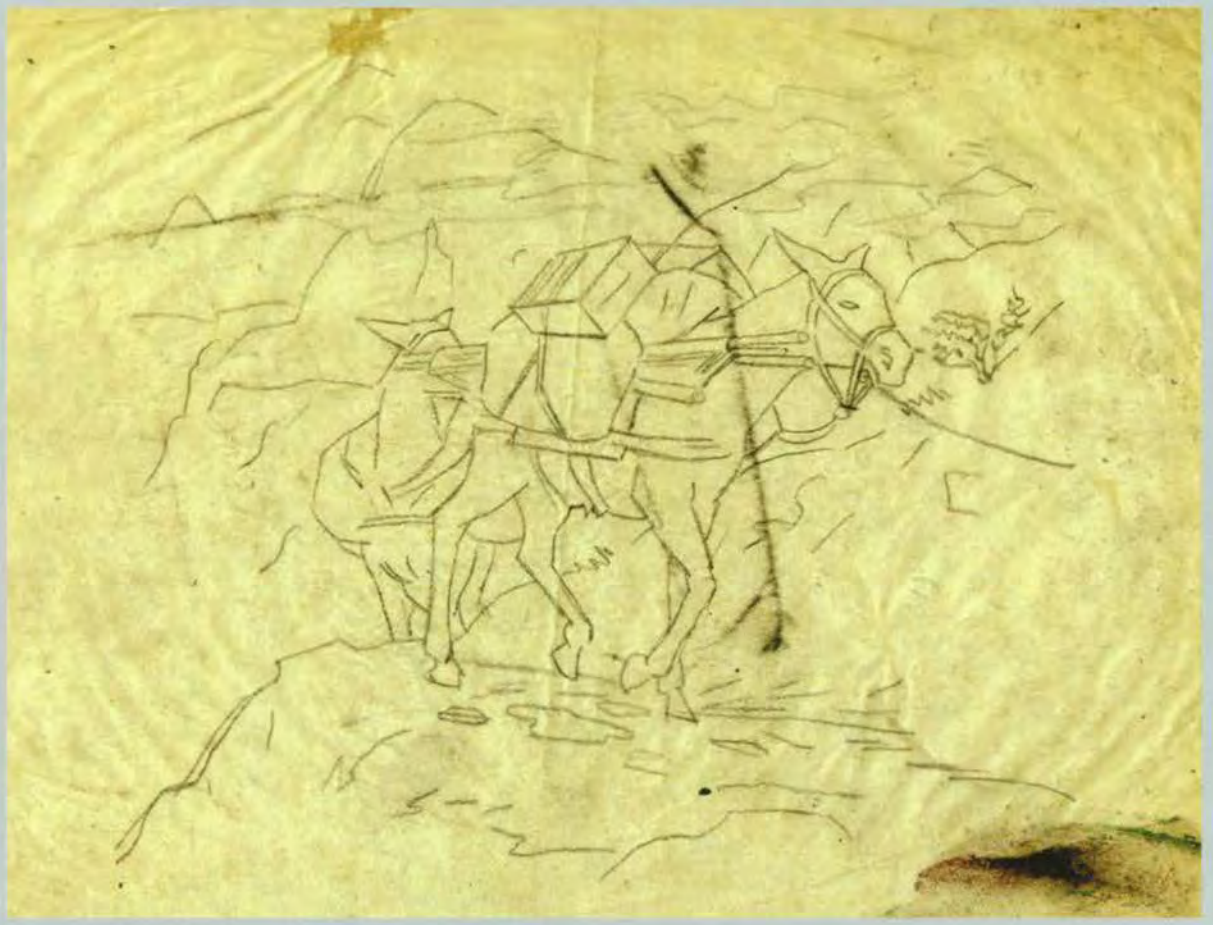
Heavily damaged structure used as a hospital

The 316th Engineers working on road fill in San Lucia

Detecting and clearing mines

The division's 316th Engineer Combat Battalion built or rebuilt, often under fire, bridges across the rivers, streams, and gorges. The engineers built a total of 23 bypasses, 19 culverts, and 99 ½ miles of roads under enemy harassing fire to aid the resupply and casualty evacuation and to bring up the artillery.

The engineers were also responsible for de-mining operations using both mine detectors and "the old-fashioned way." The sketch of the soldier clearing mines by hand appears to have been sketched from a photograph.



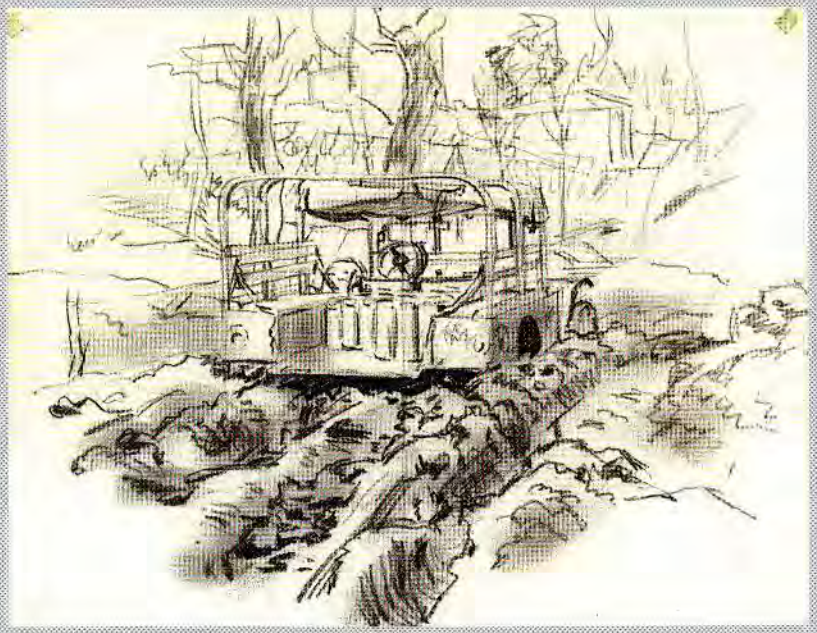
Despite the efforts of the engineers, the steep terrain required heavy reliance on both mule and men to carry heavy loads over narrow mountain trails. The Italian (*left*) may have been one of the many Italian *Alpino* soldiers in the employment of the 91st after the fall of the Italian Fascist regime. The sketch on onion paper (*above*) is likely an early draft of the sketch published in the January 1945 *I–E* booklet (*page 12*).

Italian service camp
along the Idice River

Motor pool on the Zena River

Slogging through the mud to support the front is an unsung but truly critical component of the division's warfighting capability. Support for the front could simply be delivering hot meals to soldiers. The value of a hot meal can hardly be overstated in the winter conditions of the northern Apennines. More immediately significant was getting ammunition, men, and artillery support when the fighting became intense.

Ordnance replaces a motor

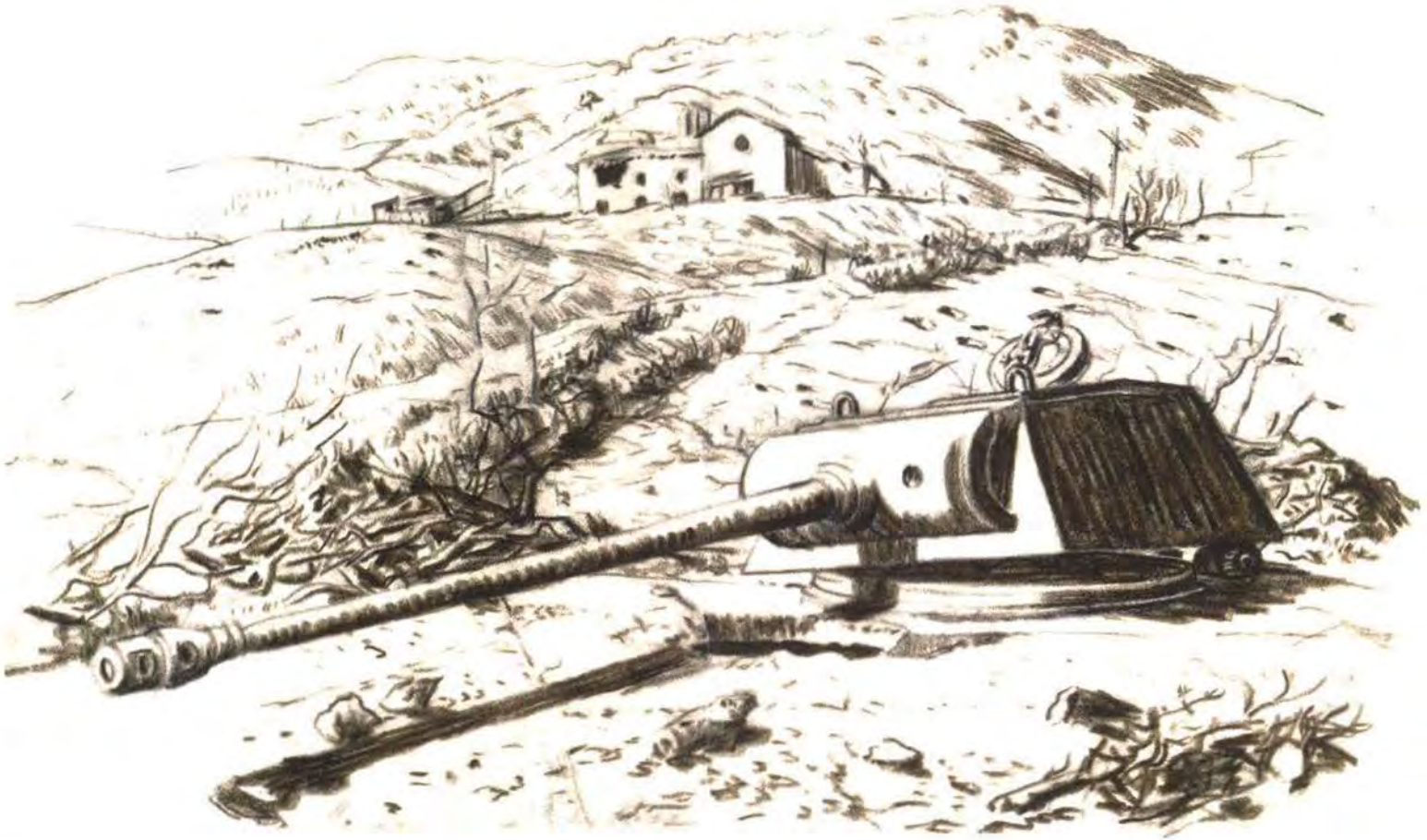


Bogged-down vehicle

Support from ordnance also was an essential part of keeping the division functioning. Despite the conditions, mechanics set up in bombed-out buildings and persevered through the worst mud rivers. Their efforts kept the men and guns moving forward.

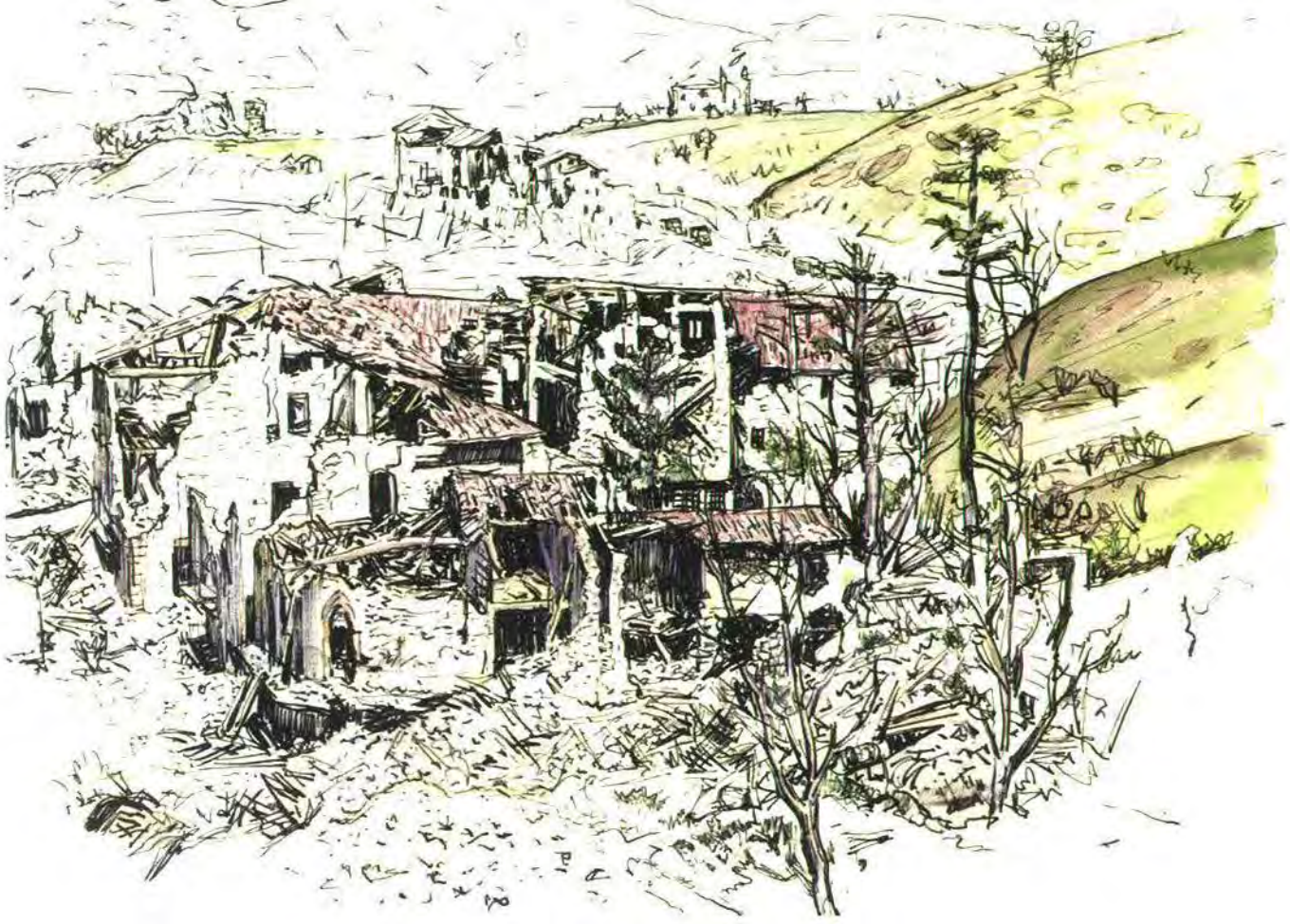
Close-up in Monghidoro, with scars from the intensity of the battle

The largest guns, the artillery, were vital to systematically reducing the enemy positions. Heavily fortified positions required concentrated, high-angle fire with 155-mm. artillery to penetrate the concrete bunkers and blast the Germans out of buildings.



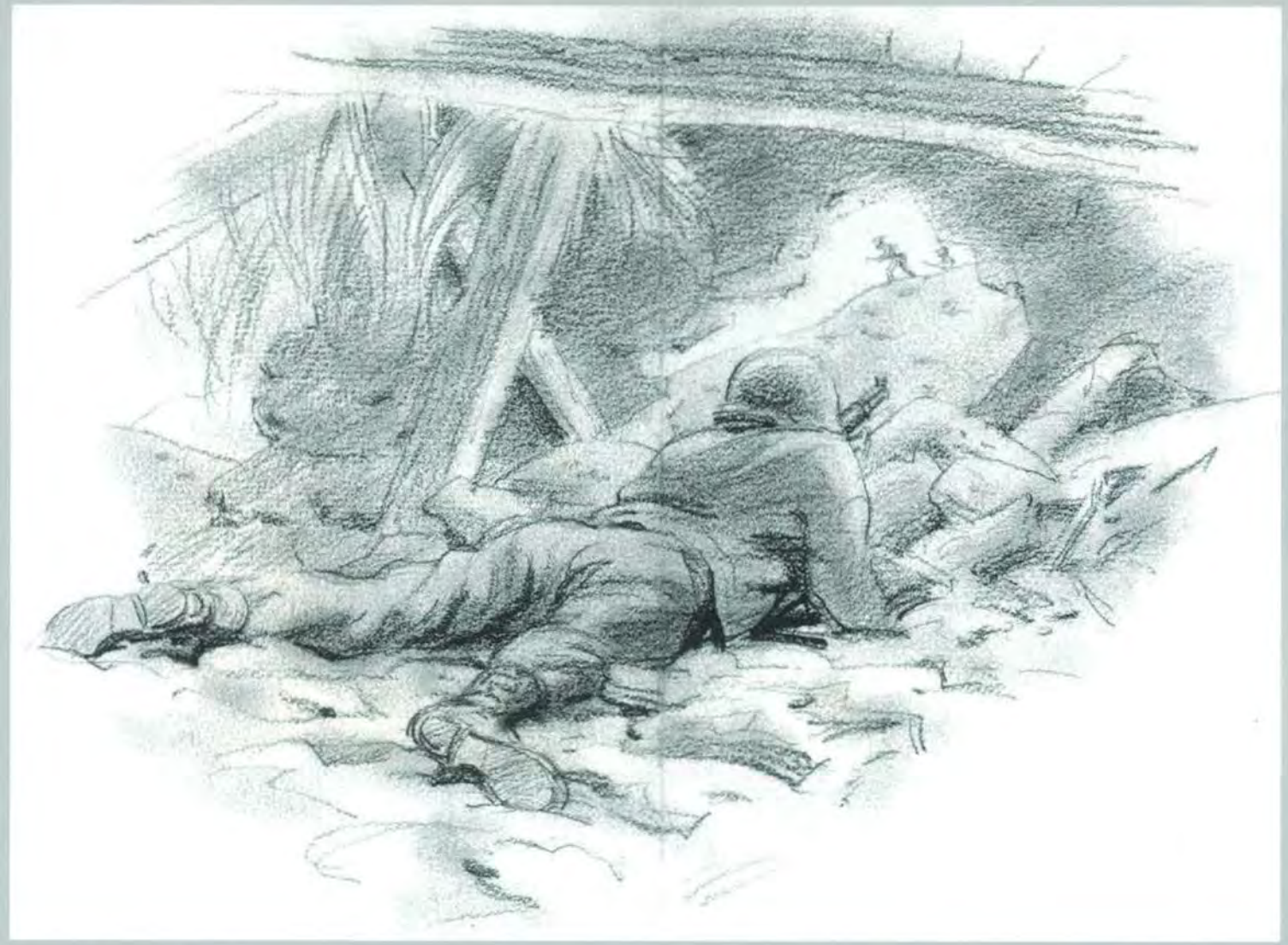
75-mm. German Panther tank turret mounted on a concrete bunker overlooking the Gothic Line

The 75-mm. cannon of the German Panther tank, one of the anchors of the German defenses at Futa Pass, was sketched several times. The tank turret above was likely blasted off of its mounting ring by high-angle artillery fire. Note the hole just in front of the body of the turret. The scrapbook had this cannon labeled as an "88," one of the Germans' most feared weapons for its accuracy, range, and power to kill men and tanks. Although the Panther did not have an 88-mm. cannon, the 75-mm. was just as deadly.



Watercolor of devastated mountain community

In the end, it was still the infantry's job to personally close with and kill the enemy. Although the Gothic Line was breached, the 91st Division still had thirty miles of mountainous terrain to fight through to reach the Po Valley. The German forces fell back again to create a hasty defensive line at Monghidoro. The 91st reorganized and resupplied its forces, allowing the men to sleep briefly. Liberation came at a heavy price for this mountain village (*above*), possibly Pianoro or Loiano.



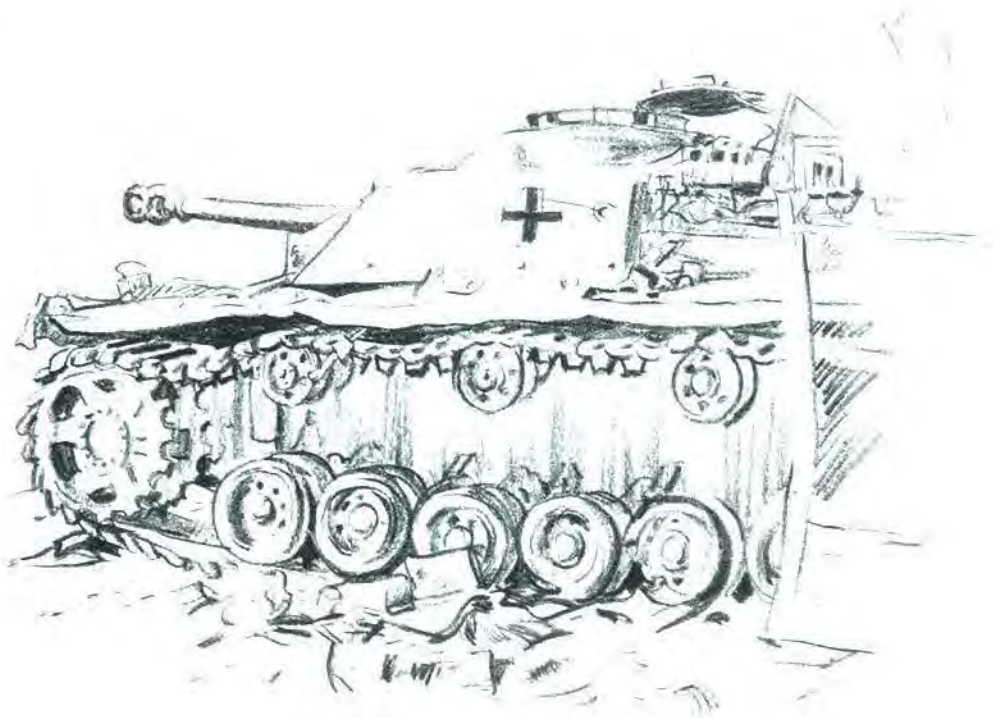
Engaging retreating Germans

Remains of Monghidoro

The offensive was resumed up Highway 65, fighting through and seizing the ruins of Monghidoro on October 2. The division made steady but slow progress, less than a mile a day, up and down the steep valleys, ravines, ridges, and hilltops. The artillery continued to provide the edge in firepower as they fought ahead. The same patterns of battle were repeated. Small units located successive enemy strong points and eliminated them by artillery, close combat, or individual acts of valor.

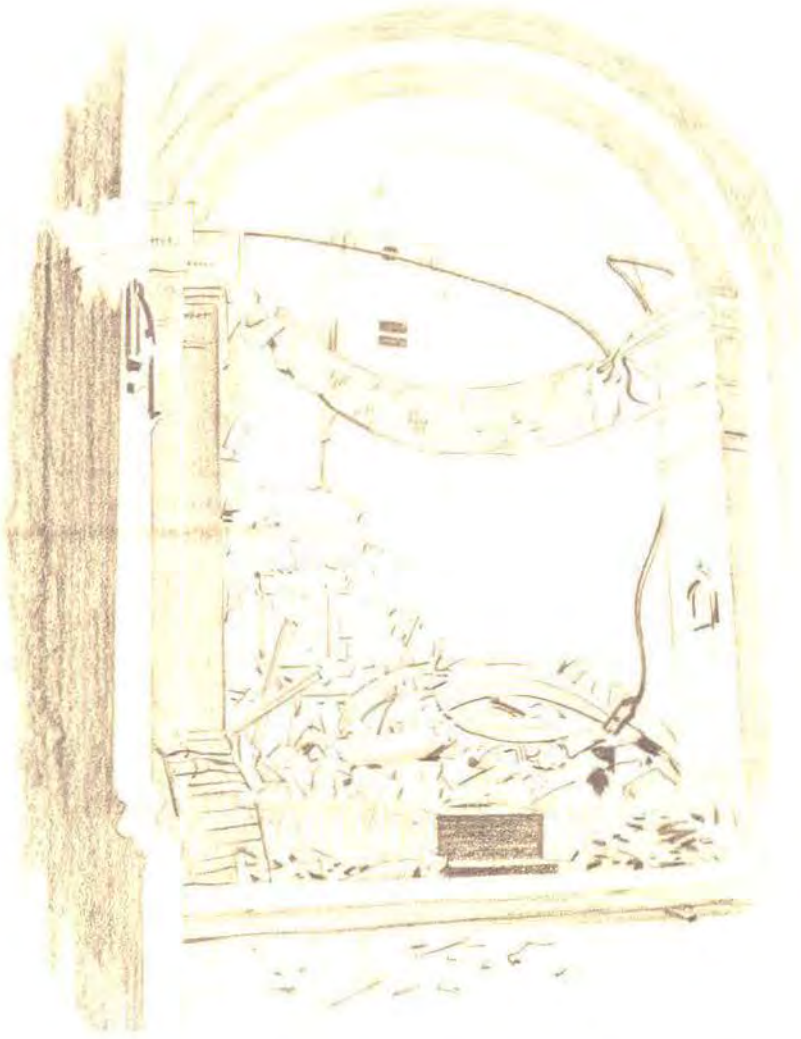
The Führer of Nazi Germany, Adolph Hitler, was not ready to give up on his Fascist ally, even though most Italians had, and he committed two SS combat divisions to the defense of northern Italy. Kesselring considered abandoning the northern Apennines and preparing better defenses along the Alps, but Hitler refused to give up any ground.

Knocked-out German tank



The next critical objective was the town of Loiano astride Highway 65, which was heavily fortified and blocking the advance toward the Po Valley. In heavy fog and rain the 362d attacked at 6 A.M. on October 5, 1944, with a 1,000-round artillery preparation. A few German soldiers chose to surrender, but most continued to fight even after the buildings began to collapse on top of their positions and their armor support was destroyed, like the one above sketched in Loiano. This sketch was identified in the scrapbook as a Mark IV tank, one of the most common German tanks, but is likely a self-propelled gun, type STUG III G.

In the afternoon, the 916th Field Artillery Battalion fired in fifteen minutes 205 rounds of 155-mm. artillery on the town. Close-support artillery and house-to-house fighting cleared Loiano, decimating the town.



Ruins of the church of San Giacomo e Santa Margherita in Loiano

This sketch of the church of San Giacomo e Santa Margherita in Loiano—the more refined of two such sketches—is perhaps the most haunting in its contrasts. The church was not directly targeted by American artillery, even though the steeple was used as a German artillery observation post.

CHURCH BELLS STILL RING IN LOIANO

Hope, Courage, Faith ...peace

By TSG [illegible] JOE [illegible], 363 Staff Writer

Back to the town they had helped liberate they came. There they rested after many days of battle.

And there in the Church of San [illegible] e Santa Margherita, in Loiano, men of Company E worshipped their God.

These men, fighters, are infantrymen. Members of the 363rd Infantry, they had helped crash the Gothic Line. In tense struggles they had helped wrest mountains, valleys and ravines, hill and towns, from a fierce, resistant German.

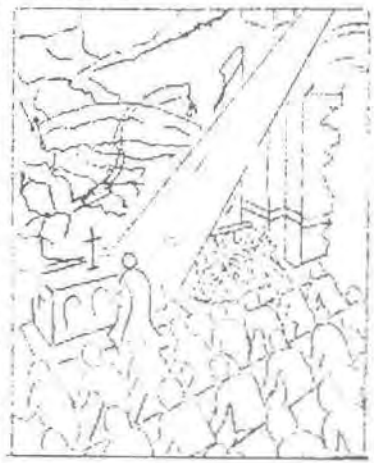
Monticelli, Monti Freddi, Monghidoro, Loiano...the list grows.

War had left Loiano in its wake of destruction, and in Loiano they could rest, reclean their equipment and supplies, and not unlike other men, go to church.

The church, torn though it was, accepted both Catholic and Protestant.

Catholics knelt as Chaplain Joseph A. Le[illegible] recited Mass. Pvt. Vernon Koehn assisted. Then the Protestants placed their services in the choir room of the church's ancient portico, and listened to the words of Chap' in Tim W. Holbrook. Chaplain Holbrook was assisted by Cpl. Gerry De Haan.

Inside the church, hymn books were passed around. Outside, the wheels of war moved on. Rations were distributed from a tent just outside the church. Two Military Police guided traffic at a nearby [illegible] junction. Across the narrow street, two soldiers paused, talked. One put his foot on a rusted iron girder, protruding from a pile of rubble. A jeep, carrying a colonel, rushed by, but stopped when two ambulances appeared from the other direction, hurrying to the rear. Air brakes wheezed on a big truck pulling a howitzer, as it slowed in a traffic battlejam.



"Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away." The men in the church knelt as the chaplain uttered the epistle. There was no full-throated organ, no chanting alter boys. No vestments. The Word was there.

The soldiers had chosen a place of worship that was rich in history. It had been struck before by wars, bears [illegible] the old. The sanctuary, done, [illegible] had all been hit by air bombs or artillery shells. The work of destruction [illegible] been helped by heavy Italian rains. Germans had sought protection in the church, using its courtyard as a vehicle park, its shadows for cover for the tanks.

(Cont. pg. 5)

(Courtesy of 91st Infantry Division Association)

Monument to the Allied and Italian soldiers who fought for liberation dedicated at Loiano in 1994.

Fittingly for combat soldiers, the men used the church of San Giacomo e Santa Margherita for prayer and services in its devastated condition. The article (*page 64*) is from the division's weekly, dated November 19, 1944.

Many Germans, and especially SS officers, hated Catholics and, in general, Christianity, calling it a weak religion. During one battle before liberation, Father Felice Contavalli discovered an insight into the enemy. One SS officer ordered the Italian priest executed and used the civilians, including children, as forced labor—many were simply never seen again. The SS officer disappeared, presumably in battle, before the execution order was carried out, and Father Contavalli tended to the sick and wounded civilians and Germans soldiers. Later, a German regular army officer came to the priest and prayed to see his daughters again and asked for forgiveness; another officer looked at the priest and simply began crying.[1]

The church was rebuilt after the war and the people of Loiano dedicated a monument to the 91st Infantry Division on the fiftieth anniversary of their liberation. The dedication reads in English and Italian, "To the veterans of the 91st Infantry Division, United States of America, and to the people of Loiano who shared a common bond during that terrible autumn of 1944."

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[1]Roy Livengood, *Powder River!: A History of the 91st Infantry Division in WWII* (Paducah, Ky.: Turner Publishing, 1994), pp. 178–79.

Command post

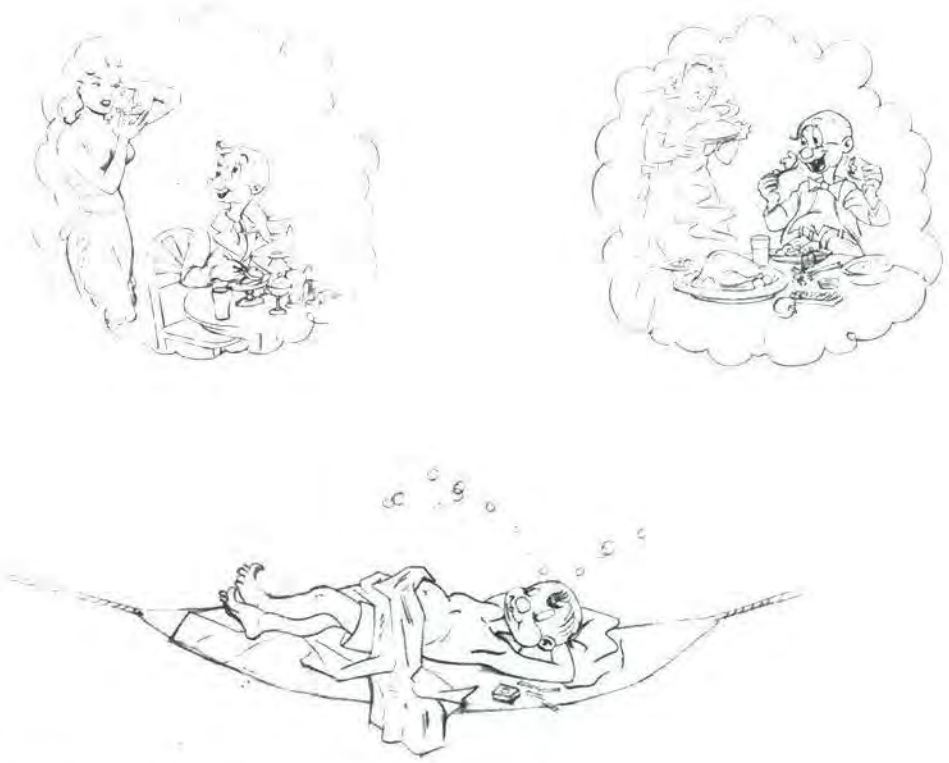
Winterized huts near command post

Loiano became the division's command post for the next major objective—Livergnano—and the hoped-for breakout into the Po Valley. Weather turned colder in the incessant rain and fog, causing mud and slush, and the men winterized their quarters as best as they could.

Great McGoo of 362 imagining himself a sultan

Autograph sketch of visiting VIP

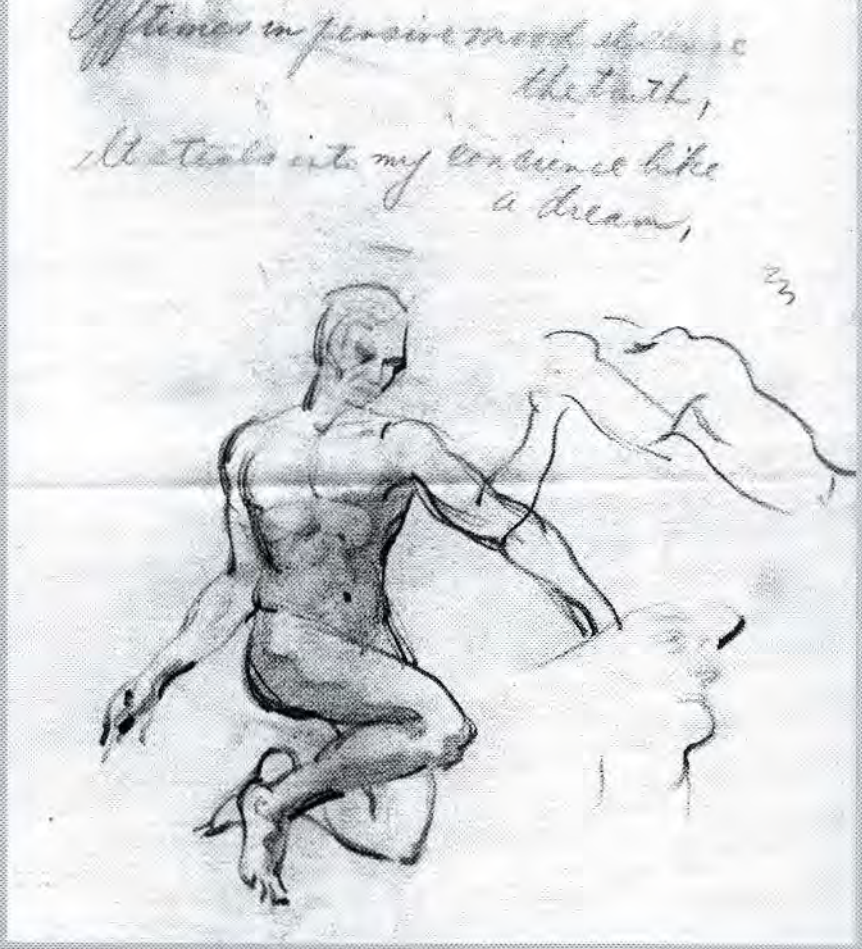
Soldiers thousands of miles from home can be forgiven if they imagine a better life, perhaps as a sultan. Although September and October 1944 were periods of constant activity and battle, soldiers spent long periods of boredom, punctuated by occasional visits by VIPs and celebrities, or short periods of intense combat.



Great McGoo of 362 dreaming of a better life

Most of the time was spent dreaming of better things, primarily women and food, which were obvious and favorite motifs. The imagery above was three different sketches on onion paper, which appear to go together. Although the imagery might be somewhat offensive, what else should soldiers think about when Germans were trying to kill them?

Reputedly, one of the artists helped design the Mr. Magoo cartoon character after the war. The evidence is intriguing from the 362d Infantry's regimental weekly newspaper. Both Sergeant Jackson and Cpl. Bill Campbell signed the "Great McGoo of 362," but Jackson's sketches are much better quality and closely resemble those above; Jackson may very well have been the primary artist and improved as the war went on. However, neither Campbell nor Jackson's name appears in any of the animation credits for the Magoo cartoons.



"Offtimes [*sic*] in pensive mood I sense the truth.
It steals into my conscience like a dream."

Despite efforts to escape the images of destruction, the reality of war forced its way deep into men's consciousness, such as in the above single sketch page that included both philosophic poetry and sketches in the style of Michelangelo. The soldier's face in the lower right has a seemingly pained expression.

It is not particularly stunning poetry in itself, with imperfect word usage, but is very powerful when understood in the context of war. This anonymous soldier-artist-poet was not writing for an audience. Rather, he was anonymously expressing what was in his heart and soul. In war, a man's soul is most brutally treated. The next battle at Livergnano tested men to the limits of their physical and mental endurance.

Section of the three-mile-long Livergnano escarpment

Livergnano and the Winter Line

Observation post in hayloft on Hill 603

The Livergnano escarpment guarded the approaches to the town of Livergnano and further progress north up Highway 65 and ultimately the Po Valley. On October 9 lead elements of the 361st Infantry approached the Livergnano escarpment. The men came to refer to this geological formation as the "Escarpment"; the town was nicknamed "Liver and Onions." The escarpment, the last obstacle before the Po Valley, is a three-mile-long cliff as high as 1,800 feet overwatched by Monte Adone. Both geologic formations were the foundations of the German defenses the Germans called the Caesar Line. The Allies and Germans would trade artillery fire over this terrain for seven months.

Two soldiers resting at the base of the Livergnano escarpment, viewing the town and Monte Adone in the distance

Ruins of Whistle and Wham Street

There were two ways through—climb the cliff or fight through the town. The town was built into the sides of the rock and had the only road through the escarpment. The above photo is of two soldiers sheltered against the escarpment, with the town in the center receiving enemy harassing artillery rounds and Monte Adone in the distance, from which German observers called down artillery fire. Company K, 361st Infantry, was sent to reconnoiter in force and seize the town. The men moved forward into streets they would later rename "Purple Heart Corner" and "Whistle and Wham Street."

Caves of Livergnano

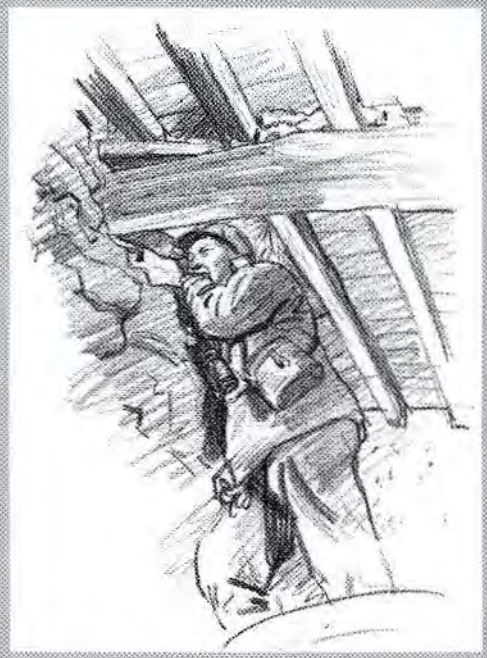
In the wreckage of houses built into the sides of the cliffs, Company K stealthily entered the town, but was cut off within an hour. The Germans held the town in battalion strength with armor support. Company K fought for 24 hours. Company B, 361st Infantry, tried to reinforce the foothold, but the Germans had set an effective trap. Ten men from Company K escaped; the rest of the company were killed, wounded, or captured.

Evacuating wounded from the Livergnano escarpment

The entire division was committed to the line as the battle intensified in street and mountain fighting. The 362d and 363d tried to outflank the escarpment by climbing over it, but casualties were very heavy. Evacuating wounded from the escarpment was difficult and painful, and inspired one of the more moving sketches, perhaps done in the style of Michelangelo's *Pietà*.

The 755th Tank Destroyer Battalion on January 15, 1945

The division brought up a tank destroyer company and began to blast the Germans out of the caves and buildings, defeating further counterattacks. The engineers again played a vital role by rebuilding the roads, under German artillery fire, to bring up the armor and artillery. The division artillery delivered each day over three hundred tons of high explosive. With increasing fire support and progress up and over the escarpment, the German forces abandoned Livergnano on October 13, but kept control of Monte Adone, just to the north.



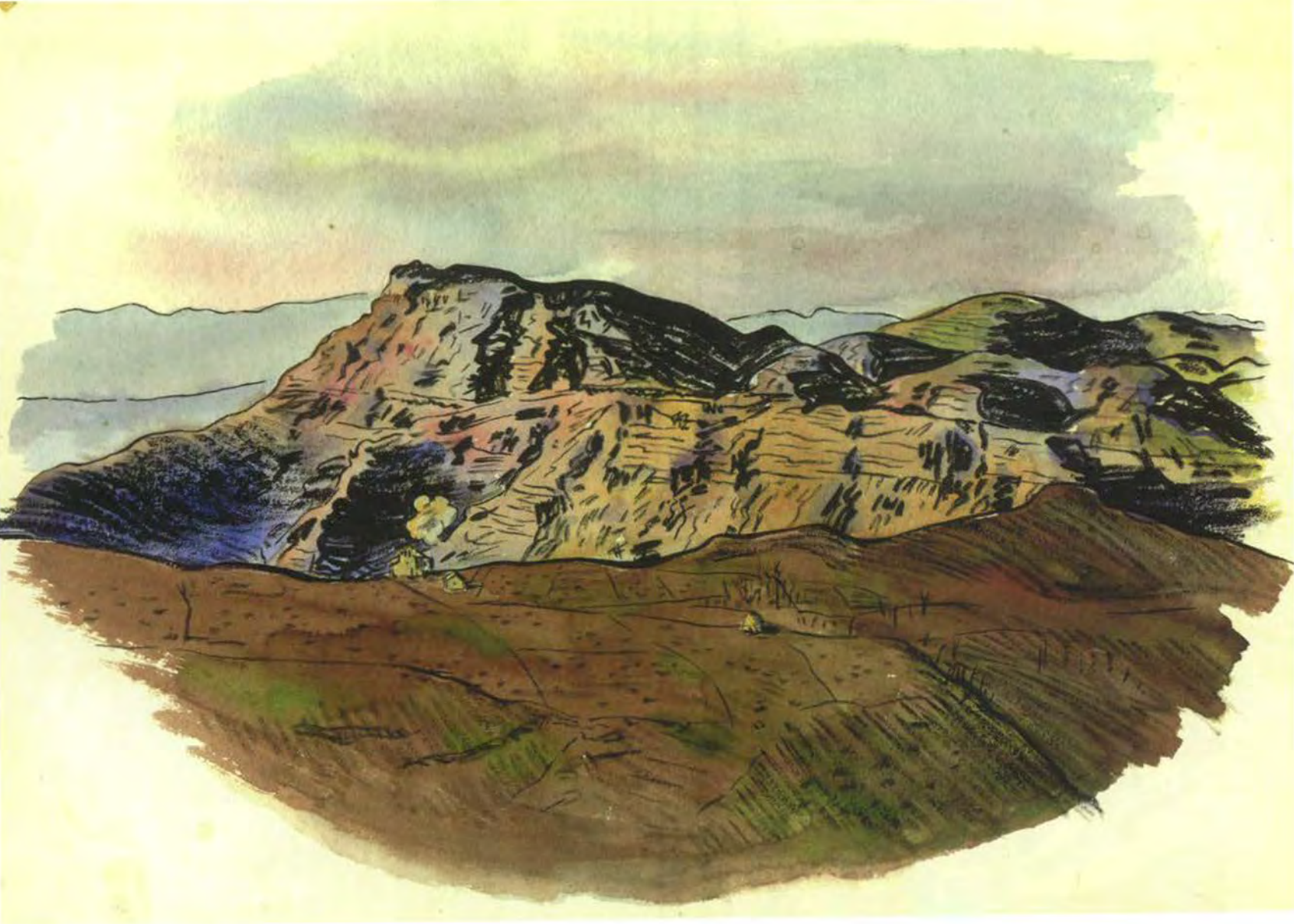
Observation post above Livergnano

Soldier showing the exhaustion of war

Monte Adone dominated the landscape with its fatal beauty in the sunset: fatal because German observers on the mountain directed artillery fire into Livergnano. Anyone pausing to admire the mountain was dangerously susceptible to shrapnel.

General Clark wanted to seize Monte Adone and break out into the Po Valley, a short ten miles away. The 91st continued its assault beyond Livergnano, making some progress up Highway 65, but its flanks were exposed to artillery, machine guns, and tank fire from the German-controlled mountaintops.

Although Clark wanted to continue, the men of the entire Fifth Army, including the 91st Division, were exhausted. Aside from the physical exhaustion of the troops, the Fifth Army only had enough strategic reserves of men and material for fifteen days, effectively meaning the men could not be resupplied or reinforced if the offensive was pressed, leaving the line vulnerable to counterattack.



Monte Adone at sunset

Shoveling snow

Rough sketch of soldiers working and on patrol in winter camouflage

Winter patrol near Monterumici on January 20, 1945

On October 26 flash floods severely hindered resupply and support efforts. Clark had few options, so he ordered the Fifth Army and the 91st Division to dig in and consolidate into defensive positions; this was the beginning of a winter stalemate. Elements of the 91st were pulled from the line at the end of October. For the next five months the division rotated in and out of the line, patrolling in the snow and trying to keep warm.

Mountain base for patrols

Unloading supplies

While on the Winter Line, the 91st Division staged raids and patrols from mountain bases on reverse slopes, sheltered from enemy artillery. When not conducting reconnaissance and security, the men were fighting off boredom and taking care of the logistics and service requirements of the division. The poor sanitary conditions in the bases made the men highly susceptible to disease. Most of the men caught some infectious condition or bacteria, with dysentery being one of the most serious and frequent.

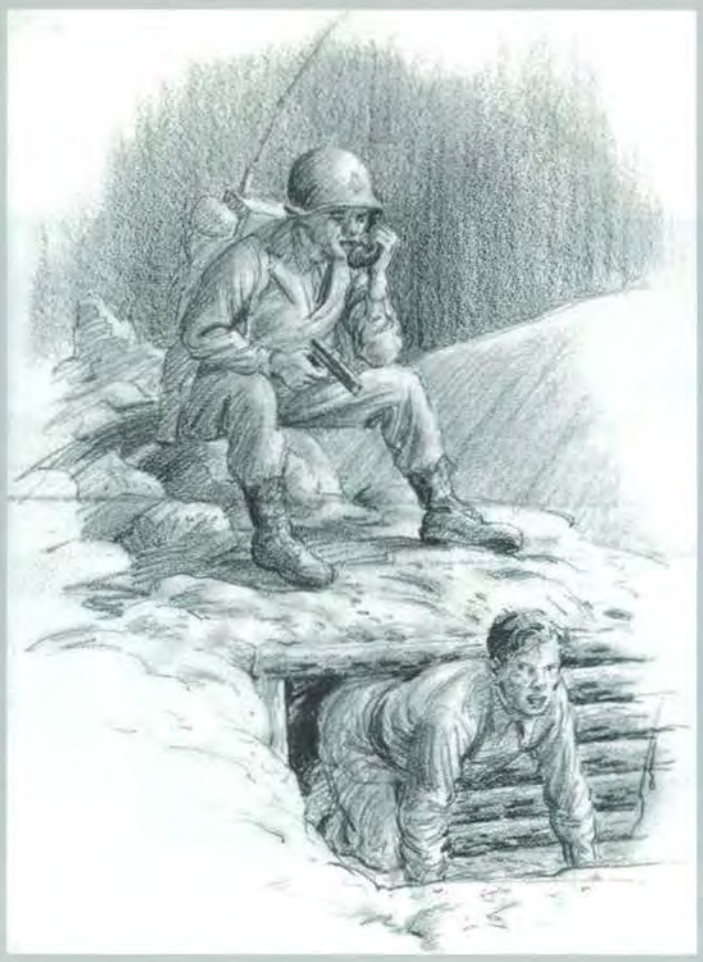
Lieutenant Palesky in action during raid

One that did not get away

Counterintelligence interrogates Carbiniere

Raids exposed the men to hazards, but were nonetheless essential to keep pressure on the enemy forces and gather intelligence, usually by capturing prisoners. Several sketches depict one raid from Company K, 361st Infantry, to capture prisoners for interrogation. The Hollywood image of the combat scenes (*page 80*) and the well-dressed officer throwing hand-grenades (*above left*), however, suggests that the artist was not present at this particular engagement.

"Three prisoners, Colonel!
We're coming back now."



A more accurate portrayal of a raid is the sketch *(above)* of the actual raid's aftermath with three Germans emerging to surrender. The dramatic scene *(page 83)* is great for the home front or press, but is more suitable for Hollywood. The contrast between these two images suggests two different artists with different frontline experiences.

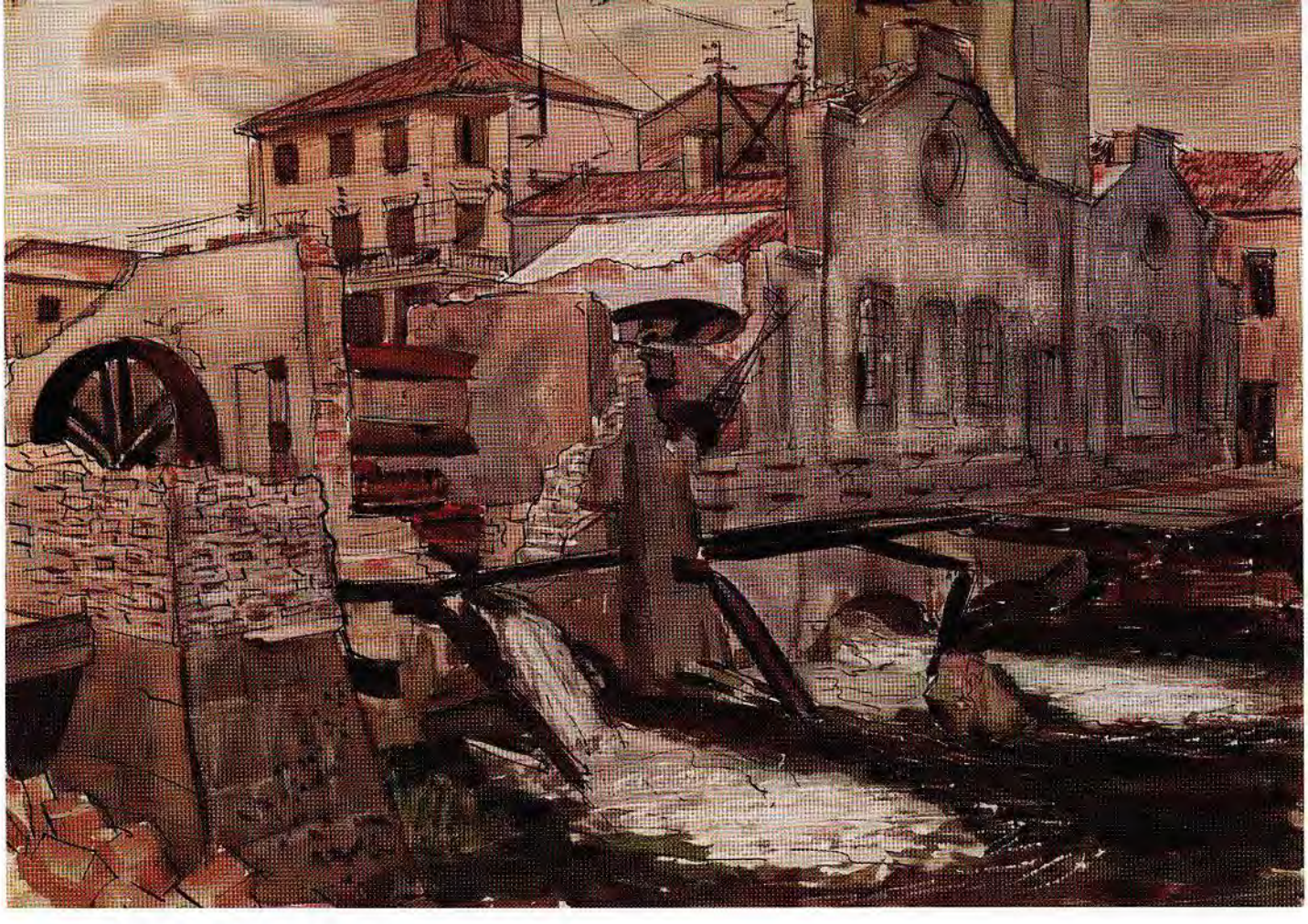
Incident during raid

Directing fire at Monte Adone. The .50 caliber "M2" machine gun often required a spotter with binoculars or radio to aid the gunner. This is likely a partial copy of a photograph (*above*) but depicts the .30 caliber machine gun.

After months on the Winter Line the 91st Division was part of the offensive designed to finally breakout into the Po Valley and make a dash for the Alps and the southern border of the Nazi Reich. The attack began on April 12, 1945. Monte Adone was taken in three days of intense combat, repeating the intensity of earlier battles for Monticelli and Livergnano.

Abandoned enemy ammunition (*above right*)
Burial detail burying enemy dead (*above left*)

With Monte Adone seized and open country to the front of them, the Fifth Army was able to break out. The Germans broke into a headlong rout for the Alps and German territory fifty miles to the north. The 91st adapted quickly to the conditions of maneuver warfare and mechanized five battalions of infantry by placing a squad each on tanks from two attached tank destroyer battalions and thirty trucks from II Corps. The pursuit was so fast that the 91st soldiers captured the Germans' preplanned defensive positions before they could occupy them. Although the 91st suffered minimal casualties, the Germans were devastated as they abandoned their equipment and ammunition in the rout and swam the Po River and other canals trying to escape. To the victor, however, goes the task of burying the enemy dead.



Damaged waterway in the Po Valley. The attractive scenery of the Po Valley was decimated by artillery duels and demolition of canals by the Germans in the hope of slowing the Allied offensive.

The watercolor of the heavily damaged canal system is probably near Bologna, Pianoro, or Casalecchio along Highway 65. Pianoro, north of Monte Adone in the last foothills leading into the Po Valley, was occupied by the Division Headquarters during the breakout. All of the watercolors in this collection depict terrain that matches the Po Valley or Yugoslav partisans, whom the 91st did not meet until May 1945 north of Venice, indicating that the watercolors were done during the spring or early summer 1945 at the end of the fighting.

Peace and Occupation: Tito's Partisans

Headquarters of the Yugoslav Partisan Division in Trieste after the German surrender

German forces surrendered in Italy on May 2, 1945, and the men were ready to celebrate as liberators. Unfortunately, the division was immediately sent into the role as peacekeepers in territory claimed by several different factions and partly occupied by the potentially hostile forces of Tito's Yugoslav partisans. Adding to the confusion were several ethnic groups—Croats, Slovenes, Italians, and Austrian-Germans. Returning to the area after having been expelled or having fled the fighting, these groups often claimed the same territory and were willing to fight for it.

Yugoslav soldier

The 91st Division occupied the area north of Trieste in an uneasy truce with Tito's partisans. The men had to respond to occasional alerts, such as one night when the partisans started firing weapons in the air. The entire division was put on alert, but returned to barracks when it was learned the partisans were celebrating Tito's birthday.

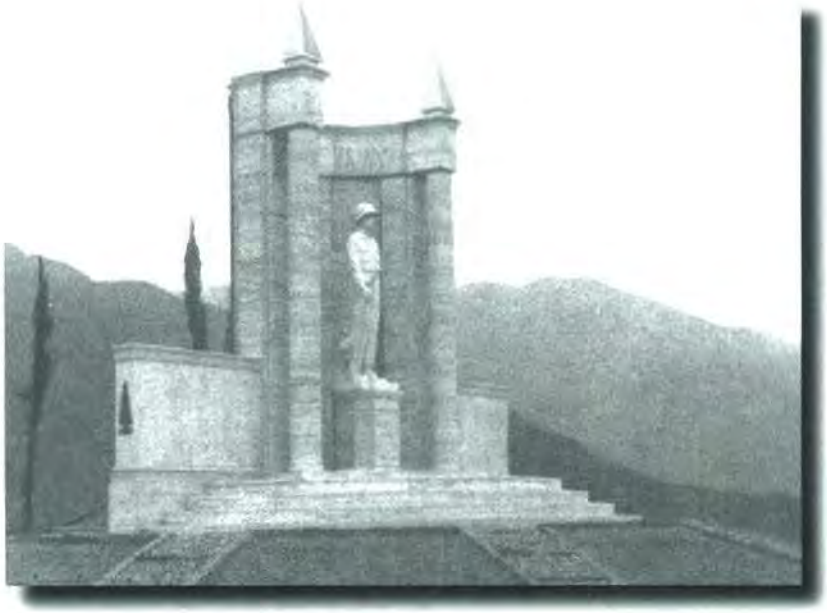
Yugoslav officer

Yugoslav partisans were another favorite motif of the watercolors (*pages 88–90*), which suggest that the artist developed his skills late in the war when not fighting or working at Headquarters or was a replacement to the division late in the war. One of the sketches (*above*) has the name "*Rizba*" in the top right, which may be this partisan's nickname.

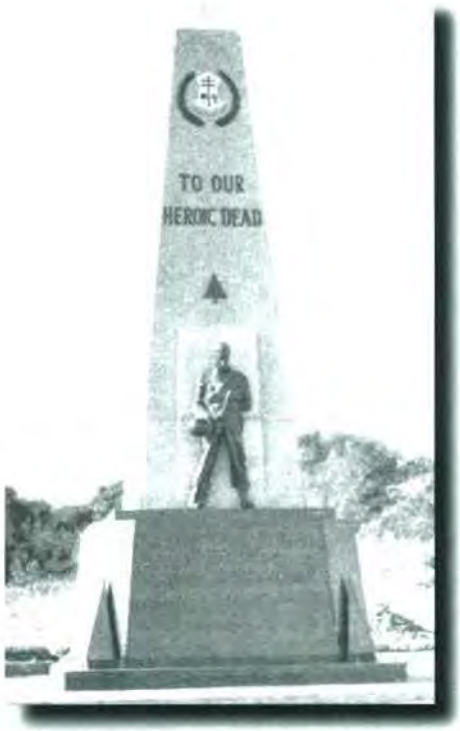
Yugoslav soldiers relaxing

Yugoslav medic

The politicians eventually solved the border disputes in July, and Tito's partisans became quite friendly, allowing the soldiers to relax, fraternize, and travel to Venice or Rome for rest and relaxation. But relaxation was tempered by events in the Asiatic-Pacific Theaters of Operations. The 91st Division's battle record gave it the dubious honor of being one of two divisions in Italy, earmarked for further service in the Pacific.



The 363d Infantry monument at Il Giogo Pass



The 361st Infantry monument at Livergnano

Before the 91st Division left Italy, the men of the 363d Infantry built a monument to those who fell on the Gothic Line in the Il Giogo Pass. The men of the 361st Infantry likewise built a monument to their "Heroic Dead" at Livergnano.

On August 1, 1945, the division prepared to return to the United States, and going to the Pacific theater was still possible. The dropping of the atomic bomb resolved the destination issue, and the division was demobilized completely by December 1, 1945.

Total casualties for the division in World War II were 1,400 killed and 7,344 wounded. The men earned three campaign streamers: Rome-Arno, North Apennines, and Po Valley. For valor the men had earned collectively 2 Medals of Honor, 33 Distinguished Service Crosses, over 450 Silver Stars, and 3 Presidential Unit Citations. It was an extraordinary achievement of a division of citizen soldiers and its small cadre of regular army sergeants.

It is but justice to assign great merit to the temper of those citizens, whose estates were more immediately the scene of warfare. Their services were rendered without constraint, and the derangement of their affairs submitted to without dissatisfaction. It was a triumph of patriotism over personal considerations. And our present enjoyments of peace and freedom reward the sacrifice.

—George Washington, December 1, 1789

WWI Victory Medal

WWII Victory Medal

War on Terrorism Service Medal

Epilogue

Mobilization ceremony of the 91st Division (Training Support)

Brig. Gen. T. K. Moffett explaining training planning for armored battalions

On January 27, 2003, the 91st Division was mobilized again for global conflict in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. The division is no longer an infantry division; it is a tricomponent (Regular Army, Army Reserve, and National Guard) training support division with the mission to aid the mobilization of reserve component units and provide military support to civilian authorities in emergencies.

Many of the fundamental lessons learned from the 91st Division's World War II combat experiences apply just as much today. All branches and skills of the Army play a critical role in the overall success of operations. Equally important are the individual skills required to survive on the modern battlefield, as witnessed by the experiences of "support troops" during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

The experiences of the soldiers in this collection of anonymous art, along with the soldiers serving today, are powerful reminders to future generations that freedom is not free. The price is paid by soldiers and their families.

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