A "Ten-Meter War": Common Themes in Letters Home From the World War II Tenth Mountain Division January-May 1945

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A “Ten-Meter War:”
Common Themes in Letters Home From the World War II Tenth Mountain Division January-May 1945

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November 2013

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Abstract:

This thesis argues that men in the Tenth Mountain Division discussed their war in letters home from the front in Italy. In particular, they wrote about the effects of censorship, their impressions of Italy and the Italians, the experiences of combat and their anticipation of the end of the war. Importantly, soldiers revealed many details about their wartime experiences, especially while in combat.

This thesis will contribute to the ongoing discussion over the value of soldiers’ letters as historical sources, demonstrating that these soldiers at least were willing to discuss their experiences of combat in their letters home. These letters home are important sources to understand conceptually the way that soldiers thought about and wrote about the war and remained connected to the home front.
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This thesis is about telling the stories of the men involved. For that, I thank first and foremost the men of the Tenth Mountain Division for their service and for their stories. This would not have been possible without them, so I am extremely grateful to them.

A very special thank-you goes to my faculty advisor, Professor Martha Hanna, who not only helped me conceptualize the thesis but gave me feedback on the process as it went. She provided guidance to a thesis that was unclear at the beginning and the final product owes a lot to her input.

I would certainly be remiss if I didn’t thank Dennis Hagen, the archivist at the Tenth Mountain Division Resource Center, who helped me determine what collections to use and provided some sometimes much-needed comic relief from research. I am quite sure Dennis knows more about the Tenth than anybody else, so working with him was an honor and a pleasure.

I have met several veterans over the years, but nobody has been more important in my life than Hugh Evans. I first met Hugh ten years ago at the museum exhibit that sparked my interest in the Tenth Mountain Division and he has been a mentor and resource (not to mention being one of the fifteen soldiers in my thesis!) for me ever since.

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A final thank-you to my friends who have reached out and given me a pat on the back. If I listed all of you, it would make this thesis longer than it already is. Just know that you are appreciated.

Dedication:
Simply, to the men of the Tenth Mountain Division. Sempre Avanti.
Introduction

For years, historians have debated the value of soldiers’ letters as historical sources. Many scholars have argued that self-censorship limited the value of frontline correspondence to historians. According to scholars such as Martyn Lyons, letter-writers would intentionally avoid or obfuscate descriptions of combat in order to placate a domestic audience of worried family and friends. More recently, however, historians such as Martha Hanna and Sönke Neitzel have suggested that letters home can actually provide an important look into soldiers’ wartime experiences and that soldiers would reveal more than was expected.

However, this debate has ignored certain time periods. While there is much debate on World War I soldiers’ letters, World War II has been largely ignored by scholarship. This thesis will consider the letters and diaries of men in the American Tenth Mountain Division during World War II, specifically during the period from January to May of 1945 when the Division saw action as part of the Italian campaign.

Due to the sheer number of collections (approximately 700) available at the Tenth Mountain Division Resource Center at the Denver Public Library, a truly remarkable collection, I had to limit my research to fifteen soldiers. I likely read roughly 750 individual letters over the course of three weeks’ research at the Resource Center in Denver. The letters from these fifteen soldiers form the content of this thesis. For a discussion of the fifteen soldiers and brief biographies of each, see Appendix A. For a chart of military rank and abbreviations, see Appendix B.

This thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing debate by arguing that soldiers’ letters can, in fact, be useful sources for historical research. To accomplish this, I examine soldiers’ letters
(and, to a much lesser extent, journals\(^1\)) to determine the extent to which soldiers would write about their experiences as combat or other topics of their time overseas.

This thesis discusses four different themes in letters home from soldiers in the division. It also incorporates sources (where available) from other soldiers in the Second World War to describe how the sentiments of the men of the Tenth compared to those of other men fighting in the war.

Firstly, censorship limited what soldiers could write. They were cognizant of the impact that the censors had on their letters home and thus referred their families to newspapers and the press for a clearer understanding of the war they were experiencing. Although they would discuss their time in combat, they refrained from doing so until censorship was less intense. At that time, they would open up and describe combat to their families.

As the men were deployed to Italy, Italy and the Italians therefore understandably make up a significant portion of the content of their letters. As Italy was so damaged by the war, especially in the port cities, multiple men remarked on the destruction of Italy in their letters, which they rationalized as a necessity of war. They described the Italians that they encountered in the port cities as being poverty-stricken beggars and held low opinions of those civilians. However, the further north that they progressed, the more their opinion shifted. Instead, they grew to like the families who took them in and shared what they had with the soldiers.

The soldiers were very willing to discuss their experiences in combat in letters home. There appeared to be no impetus to hesitate for them in describing specific details of combat in

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\(^1\) I use the terms diary and journal interchangeably to refer to what those of the time would call a “journal.” Diaries were much more of a daybook or logbook, in which one would record details of the day or purchases made whereas journals served as a way to record memories.
Italy or the situations in which they received their wounds. Men would reveal these details either in response to their families’ urging them to discuss the war or simply as an unprompted revelation of combat experiences. They also used religion as a release from what they had seen and spoke of the relief that writing a letter home brought to them.

Finally, as soldiers, men never stopped looking ahead to the end of the war. They embraced any kind of news that seemed to signal an end to the war. While in combat, they were conscious of the chance that they would be transferred to another front after the cessation of combat in Europe. While in combat, they also plotted out their post-war life, diagramming the house they wished to build, emphasizing the importance of a future education or writing of marriage to their girl.

This thesis demonstrates that soldiers in the Tenth Mountain Division were extremely willing to discuss their combat experiences in no uncertain terms in letters home. This is important in today’s world, particularly considering the number of soldiers suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.²⁻³⁻⁴ It is important to understand motivations behind discussing war experiences for both scholarly inquiry and today’s state of affairs as it relates to veterans.

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This thesis concentrates on the months between January and May, 1945, when the division saw combat. I concentrated on this time because, as it was, there were still 750 letters during this timeframe. What’s important about this block of time is that the Tenth Mountain Division was the last division to enter the war in the European Theater. They only fought during those four months but were the spearhead of Allied forces in Italy and sustained correspondingly large amounts of casualties.

The title of this thesis is important to understanding the specific framework in which the thesis operates. The idea of a “ten-meter war” came from veteran Hugh Evans at a division reunion in which he discussed the war that he experienced. He called it a “ten-meter war,” in that he could only see the ten meters to his front and sides and only experienced that stretch of terrain. In other words, he was not aware of anything else. This was true for many soldiers.

What this thesis discusses are the common themes that resulted from so many separate “ten-meter wars.” Although these different soldiers had different experiences, these four themes of censorship, Italy and the Italians, the combat and the end of the war, in their letters are all the same. I have organized these four themes into chapters chronologically in their experiences. First, censorship, which impacted their letters even before their journey over. Second, Italy and the Italians, where they landed starting in early January. Third, the combat, which they saw

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5 Hugh Evans, discussion, February 2012.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
starting in mid-February. Finally, the end of the war, which they began to truly consider in March.

Letters home took two different and distinct forms: Airmail and V-mail letters. Airmail is the typical letter we imagine. It was mailed in a single envelope, in which soldiers could include their letter, which typically listed several pages. V-mail was a separate entity. V-mail, or Photomail, was a small form which soldiers filled in to write home. Like letters, V-mail would be “censored by their respective company officers or other designated officers before sealing.” The forms were then photographed and flown home on photographic rolls to save packing space and shipping weight. Once across the ocean, they were printed in the original small form and delivered to their addressee. Photograph 1 shows a size comparison of Airmail and V-mail, with a pencil for size. The V-mail on the right was the complete letter, while the Airmail was page one of four, typical for Airmail. Both went through stringent censorship before they ultimately reached their destination.

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8 The V stood for Victory.

Airmail and V-mail actually led to a matter of contention amongst the soldiers. No less than nine\(^\text{11}\) of the fifteen soldiers whose collections I studied kept track of whether Airmail or V-mail arrived faster, a fully understandable fascination amongst the troops. I have been told by

\(^{10}\) Weldon A. Chase, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 15 April 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library; Weldon A. Chase, V-mail letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 15 April 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library. Personal photo.

\(^{11}\) Stuart Abbott, Melville Borders, Albert Brockman, Weldon Chase, Stan Cummings, Arthur Draper, Hugh Evans, and Bernard Murphy.
veterans that V-mails arrived faster. Mail reportedly took about two weeks to make its way from the front to the home front and vice versa.

These letters contain many interesting sentiments and descriptions of different events. The content ranges from the day-to-day activity (“In the evening I went to the opera and saw Madame Butterfly”\textsuperscript{12}) to the logistical (six\textsuperscript{13} soldiers mentioned being under fire, which meant they were awarded the combat infantryman badge and received $10 a month’s pay increase) to the important, which can be found in this thesis’s four themes.

Although the content of these letters is remarkable, it is important to discuss the language that the soldiers used.\textsuperscript{14} Some letters contain slang used by the soldiers. For instance, “dogface”\textsuperscript{15} (along with its derivative “doggie”) and “G.I.” (General Issue, referring to the clothing and

\textsuperscript{12} Harris Dusenbery, letter to Evelyn Dusenbery (his wife), 16 March 1945, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{13} Stuart Abbott, Melville Borders, Albert Brockman, Thomas Dickson, Harris Dusenbery and Hugh Evans.

\textsuperscript{14} In addition, in footnotes, where possible, I have attempted to identify the party the letter is addressed to and their relation to the soldier. As an example: LaVerne O. Trepp, V-mail letter to Mr. and Mrs. C.M. Trepp (his parents), 24 April 1945, LaVerne O. Trepp Papers, TMD208, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library. This isn’t always possible: some letters don’t have a clear addressee. However, to aid the ease of reading, I have entered who the soldier was writing to.

\textsuperscript{15} Phillip Leveque explains a possible origin for the term when talking about his experience in the Army Specialized Training Program:

Perhaps I should explain the derivation of the term "dogface". He lived in "pup tents" and foxholes. We were treated like dogs in training. We had dog tags for identification. The basic story is that wounded soldiers in the Civil War had tags tied to them with string indicating the nature of their wounds. The tags were like those put on a pet dog or horse, but I can't imagine anybody living in a horse tent or being called a horserace. Correctly speaking, only Infantrymen are called dogfaces. Much of the time we were filthy, cold and wet as a duck hunting dog and we were ordered around sternly and loudly like a half-trained dog. (Phillip Leveque, “ASTP: Alchemy For A Foxhole-A Salute to the ASTP Men,” http://www.89infdivww2.org/memories/levequeastp1.htm, accessed October 27, 2013).
equipment issued to soldiers) were slang for the soldiers themselves. These terms could be used in a singular or plural form to represent a group. “Poop" referred to any kind of official word or orders. A “foxhole” was a hole in which soldiers lived, similar to a trench, except condensed to fit only a couple of men. Where possible, I have explained in footnotes the meaning of slang words in letters.

Soldiers also referred to the Germans using a multitude of terms, some of which were more pejorative than others. Soldiers used slang such as “Jerry,” “Heinie,” “Fritz,” “Huns,” “Krauts,” and the various iterations of “Tedesk”/“Tedski”/“Tedeschi” all appeared in different letters. They would also refer to them with more typically appropriate terminology, such as Germans or Nazis.

Men also referred to battlefield elements, such as mines or artillery, which obviously had a large impact on their day-to-day lives. On the front, dug in, soldiers could expect to be under artillery fire fairly commonly. Many soldiers described the artillery that they received and its disruption in their daily lives: “Had to stop last nite [sic] for a little while as we took on a L—

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16 Jerry, Heinie, Fritz, and Kraut could all be used in the singular form to refer to plural Germans.

A few examples of uses of this: “Some newspapers came up last night looks like Jerry is almost beaten.” (Albert N. Brockman, V-mail letter to Mrs. E.W. Brockman (his mother), 31 March 1945, Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.), “It’s a nice day, the sun is warm and Jerry isn’t throwing much artillery at us so I’m outside my foxhole again.” (Albert N. Brockman, letter to Mrs. E.W. Brockman (his mother), 13 March 1945, Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.), “Jerry is a tenacus [sic] fighter, which leaves a very visible imprint on the towns.” (Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 17 January 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.)

17 Italian for German. This foreign language terminology was actually picked up by the soldiers and used in their letters.

18 Unclear what Weldon Chase is trying to say here.
of a shelling.” The German 88mm gun was designed for use against aircraft. However, the Germans re-appropriated it as a field artillery piece. The 88 gun terrified soldiers in the Tenth: “An 88 shell is the worst thing I’ve run up against. It is the only sound that really churns up the fear in me… I have never felt fear like that before. After [a shell] hit a few yards off splashing mud all over me I lay there for half an hour completely out of breath.”

I have also left letters written as they were with minimal correction to the material. There are certainly grammar and spelling mistakes. I have used [sic] where the situation allows it: however, in some cases, I just believe it distracts the reader from the natural flow of the letter as the soldier would have intended it. Any spelling or grammar mistakes within the letters as cited are accurate transcriptions of the letter: one soldier in fact was French-Canadian and spelled most of his letters phonetically. And, in some cases, seeing as the original letters were written in pencil, words are unreadable. I have marked that as [unreadable] where applicable.

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19 Weldon A. Chase, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 25 March 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

20 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 22 February 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Photograph 2 Walter Prager, of the Tenth Mountain Division, 87th Regiment, Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, sits in a chair under a tree in bloom, writing a letter home from Passatore, Italy.²¹

Historiographic Context

To date, there has been little scholarly work done on letters home from American soldiers in World War II. Most of the historical literature on soldiers’ correspondence focuses on other eras and geographic areas such as the French during the First World War. Until recently, scholars

²¹ Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, 280.
like Martyn Lyons argued that soldiers’ letters are useless sources as the soldiers would not say anything meaningful in their letters. “In the First World War, and very likely in other contexts too, soldiers’ correspondence is remarkable not for its authentic personal revelations, but for its reticence and the banality of its formulaic descriptions. Its purpose was not to reveal the truth so much as to disguise it.”

Scholars have examined soldiers’ diaries and letter-writing from many different eras and areas.

Research on pre-1914 letter-writing includes Frank Emery’s 1981 article “From The Seat Of War” concentrates on Victorian English soldiers during the Anglo-Zulu War and other conflicts in the late 19th century and James McPherson’s seminal *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* from 1997 describing letter-writing in the Civil War.

Much scholarship has concentrated on letter-writing from the First World War I. Among these are Anne Powell’s 1994 article “Another Welcome Letter: Soldiers’ Letters From The Great War;” Martyn Lyons’ 2003 article “French Soldiers and Their Correspondence: Towards a History of Writing Practices in the First World War,” which deals with French correspondence during the First World War; Martha Hanna’s 2003 article “A Republic of Letters: The

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26 Martyn Lyons, “French Soldiers and Their Correspondence.”
Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I” and her 2006 book *Your Death Would Be Mine,* both on the subject of French letters home from World War I (specifically focused on the letters of the Paul and Marie Pireaud correspondence, particularly in *Your Death Would Be Mine*); and Anthony Fletcher’s 2009 article “Between the Lines” on British soldiers in World War I.

Scholarship on World War II has often focused on two different sources. Firstly, Judy Barrett Litoff and David Smith have analyzed American women’s letters in World War II (such as *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters From American Women on the Home Front* in 1991 and *We're In This War, Too: World War II Letters From American Women in Uniform* in 1994). Secondly, Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer’s *Soldaten* on German POW interviews and what they revealed and Michaela Kipp’s “The Holocaust in the Letters of German Soldiers in the Letters of German Soldiers on the Eastern Front (1939-44)” both cover what German soldiers would discuss.

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Two other works exist which have researched and compared letters across multiple conflicts; Samuel Hynes’ 1997 book *The Soldier’s Tale* discusses American soldiers throughout the 21st century and D.C. Gill’s *How We Are Changed By War*, which contains a discussion of “letters and diaries from colonial conflicts to Operation Iraqi Freedom.”

These scholarly works all examine letters from soldiers in different conflicts but differ on a few key points. According to Hanna in “A Republic of Letters” when describing this debate, “Scholars have long disagreed over the value of letters as a source for understanding World War I. Many have argued that censorship, either imposed by the state or exercised by the soldiers themselves, prompted frontline soldiers to reveal little in their letters home of what the war was really like. …Anxious to offer reassurance that all was well, unwilling to describe the horrors of war..., they wrote often but essentially dishonestly.”

Previously, historians like Martyn Lyons have argued that soldiers would not reveal details of their wartime experiences. He writes,

There were things one preferred not to write, in order to maintain the essentially consoling and comforting nature of the letter from the front. As a result, soldiers’ writing leaves us with an overwhelming sense of banality. The letters of the Savoyard soldier Delphin Quey are a good example of the emptiness and silences of soldiers’ correspondence…. He would repeat the same formulas over and over again: ‘Je suis toujours en bonne santé je pense que toute la famille soit de même,’ or to close: ‘Plus rien qui peut vous intéresser pour l’instant. Votre fils qui

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pense à vous.’”³⁷ There are no intimacies, and few expressions of feeling, even though Delphin’s elder brother Joseph had been killed in action in 1914.”³⁸

This “secret” war that Lyons describes prevailed for many years in the historiographic study of soldiers’ correspondence.³⁹ Scholarship on World War I has primarily focused on this concealment in regard to civilians; that soldiers would not in fact describe their wartime experiences in letters home. Paul Fussell described letter-writing in World War II: “One reason soldiers' and sailors' letters home are so little to be relied on by the historian of emotion and attitude is that they are composed largely to sustain the morale of the folks at home, to hint as little as possible at the real, worrisome circumstance of the writer. No one wrote: 'Dear Mother, I am scared to death.’”⁴⁰ As this thesis will show, some soldiers did, in fact, say something very much like that.

However, recent scholars like Hanna have begun to argue the opposite; that in fact soldiers would reveal details in their letters that scholars previously would not have expected to find. Hanna writes that “Scholars of the war have often maintained that a profound cognitive divide separated those who fought, and thus knew the war firsthand, from those who did not and thus remained ignorant of its horrors. At the heart of this thesis is a belief, long maintained as canonical and only recently challenged, that combatants rarely told civilians what the war was

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³⁷ Lyons provides no translations: these two sentences read “I’m still healthy and I hope (pense) that the family is the same” and “Nothing left that could interest you for now. Your son who’s thinking of you” respectively.

³⁸ Lyons, “French Soldiers and Their Correspondence,” 87.

³⁹ Ibid, 88.

really like.” Instead of keeping their war experiences from civilians, soldiers did reveal details. As Sönke Neitzel writes, “What most surprised me [in the study of interviews of German POWs] was how openly they talked about fighting, killing, and dying.” I plan to further argue this point: soldiers would speak about their combat experiences, sometimes to an extent that would surprise the reader as a civilian.

Since the deactivation of the Tenth Mountain Division on November 30, 1945, fascinated writers have been describing the exploits of the division. This movement began as early as December 8th of the same year with Richard Thruelson’s “The 10th Caught It All At Once” in the Saturday Evening Post, which described the “crack mountaineers” and their role in the defeat of the Germans in Northern Italy. This article is unique among newspaper articles of the division as it heavily quotes from the letters one soldier, Richard Ryan, I-85 sent home after the end of the war. Most newspaper articles focused more broadly on division experiences and not on the war account of a single soldier on the ground. More recent work has had a very different focus, going back to the division-level history.

Recent research into the Tenth Mountain Division has been much more focused on the division-wide experience of the war. Works such as Flint Whitlock’s and Bob Bishop’s Soldiers

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42 Neitzel and Welzer, Soldaten, vii.

43 Richard Thruelson, “The 10th Caught It All At Once,” Saturday Evening Post, December 8, 1945, 26.
On Skis (1992), Peter Shelton’s Climb to Conquer (2003), McKay Jenkins’ The Last Ridge (2004), and Charles J. Sanders’ The Boys of Winter (2005) mainly focus on the history of the division as a whole. However, The Last Ridge and, to a lesser extent, The Boys of Winter, focus on specific soldiers from the division, using interviews and personal writings as sources to show the story through the eyes of some of the soldiers. Despite this use of sources, not one of these accounts is an academic study of the Tenth and instead most of them function as books for amateur and armchair historians. While many of these works cite letters and diaries of soldiers in the division, they do not focus on what was said and not said within the letters and journals; an area that requires study.

In addition, work on censorship and its effects on the soldiers’ letters and the home front is limited. Books such as Michael Sweeney’s Secrets of Victory and George H. Roeder Jr.’s The Censored War deal with the government censorship of the wartime press. Historical research has documented this process. However, there has not been any examination of the effects of censorship on soldiers’ letters. No historical research focusing on World War II has

looked into soldiers’ awareness of the censors reading the letters, although soldiers certainly would make comments about the censor, as documented in Hanna’s *Your Death Would Be Mine*.

There is no shortage of scholarship relating to the Italian front, despite its status as the “Third Front” (behind Western Europe and the Pacific) for the Americans. Works such as Edwin Hoyt’s *Backwater War*, 50 James Holland’s *Italy’s Sorrow: A Year Of War*, 51 Douglas Orgill’s *The Gothic Line*, 52 and Ian Gooderson’s *A Hard Way To Make A War* 53 (among many other books) have studied the Allied campaign in Italy. There are plenty of secondary sources studying this era and the combat in which the Tenth participated. They have argued that, unlike British Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s description of Italy as “soft underbelly of the axis,” 54 the front was in fact a difficult one to fight on. Titles of books like *A Hard Way to Make a War* reflect this scholarly consensus that the Italian front was a brutal battle.

This thesis seeks to contribute a World War II American perspective on the extent to which details were revealed in letters home, through the letters of the Tenth Mountain Division. Scholars interested in the nature and significance of wartime correspondence have not looked closely at how American soldiers in World War II used correspondence to talk about the war: thus, this is fresh academic territory. It also seeks to discover what exactly soldiers would write


about when writing home. In addition, this paper aims to contribute to the field by relating to an ongoing debate concerning the use of soldiers’ letters as historical sources.

This thesis will, as stated before, rely on letters of the men of the Tenth Mountain Division. My process was to closely examine and analyze letters written by 15 of men from the division to determine what soldiers would discuss in their letters home and what, in particular, they were willing to say about combat. The themes that emerged from my examination of the letters were those of censorship, Italy and the Italians, combat and the end of the war. To a lesser extent, I also used the letters of the soldiers comparatively, to find out what the differences were between these historical primary sources. In other words, I sought to see what soldiers might say in a letter to their parents as opposed to a wife or girlfriend. They would also include details not pertaining to their combat experiences that they deemed pertinent to their readers in order to connect with them on a personal level. The soldiers were worried that they would return home and find that they would be unable to communicate with their loved ones once they returned home.55 As D.C. Gill writes in How We Are Changed By War, “A letter of diary ties people to their prewar sense of self and to their prewar reality. It particularly allows soldiers a tenuous purchase on a world with which they no longer have a sensory connection.”56

Unfortunately, one of the challenges I had in writing this thesis was the simple lack of relevant secondary sources to some of the material. Where possible, I have included secondary sources related to the content. However, for some subjects, there is simply no academic work

55 Some of these fears are shown and expressed in the 1946 film “The Best Years of Our Lives,” which details the story of three World War II veterans returning home and struggling to connect with their family members and friends after their combat experiences.

56 Gill, How We Are Changed By War, 113.
available. For instance, I could find no scholarly examination of the impact censorship had on soldiers’ letters.

Thus, letters had an important impact for soldiers in terms of morale. Scholarship has recognized this: "Throughout the wartime years, mail was universally recognized to be the number one morale builder in a service person's life."57 Soldiers acknowledged this in letters home: as Stan Cummings, one of the protagonists of this thesis, put it “How your letters bolster my morale.”58 Science has actually shown that “Individuals who exchange affectionate communication regularly are buffered against the effects of stress and…writing about one’s affectionate feelings for another can accelerate physiological recovery from stress.”59 And, to hear some soldiers talk, mail was essential: “Altho [sic] both your letters and mother’s letter left little to be answered they certainly contained plenty to be read. Mail call is the climax of my day. Actually mail is the only thing we soldiers in Italy need. On all other counts we are well taken care of.”60

In fact, letters were a daily staple of the soldiers’ lives. Every day, they hoped for letters from home. “I got six letters from you yesterday. They certainly help”61 and “A letter over here


58 Stan Cummings, V-mail letter to Jean Cummings, 15 April 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.


60 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 9 February 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

61 Harris Dusenbery, letter to Evelyn Dusenbery (his wife), 3 March 1945, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
is far more valuable than gold”⁶² were common sentiments among soldiers. It was the next-best thing to actually having their loved ones with them. “Mail will be absolutely the only link I have with you now darling, except for the spirit of your love I carry with me.”⁶³ Soldiers would explicitly thank their family members when they received mail: “Mom, I was so glad to get your 2 letters yesterday and 2 V-Mails today.”⁶⁴

Soldiers also worried about mail. When they went a few days without receiving a letter, their writing was often full of fretful and melancholy remarks. Other soldiers, outside the division, had similar experiences. As S/Sgt. Gray Wilcox Jr. wrote, “Why is it that the mail I write / Gets home okay, without a blight? / But all the mail that’s sent to me / Takes ten damn months to cross the sea?”⁶⁵ At a presentation I gave, one veteran in the crowd speaking on the subject also reported that he “really felt for the guys who didn’t get mail.”⁶⁶ Obviously, the importance of receiving mail had the inverse effect too.

⁶² Hugh W. Evans, letter to Mrs. E.C. Evans (his mother), 8 March 1945, Hugh W. Evans Papers, TMD4, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

⁶³ Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), January 1945 (sometime while at sea, 4 January – 13 January), Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

⁶⁴ Melville Borders, letter to Mr. and Mrs. M.W. Borders (his parents), 26 March 1945, Melville Borders Papers, TMD160, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.


This excerpt is from a book of soldier-created poetry which Stan Cummings highly praised in his letters: “For the most part the sentiments in the lines are those of us all. Whether you ‘enjoy’ it or not it is representative.” (Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 26 April 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.)

⁶⁶ Floyd Erickson, conversation with author at presentation, October 13, 2013.
Photograph 3 Casmer Omilian of the Tenth Mountain Division, 87th Regiment, Company I, reads a letter from home in the window of a rubble-strewn and artillery-shattered stone building.67

The History of the Tenth: A Remarkable Division

The Tenth Mountain Division owed its formation to Charles Minot “Minnie” Dole, one of the founders of the National Ski Patrol. The division was formed in 1941 after Dole successfully petitioned the War Department for a ski and mountain division. Dole took his inspiration from the Russo-Finnish war, in which the winter-equipped Finns were able to defeat a Soviet force superior in both numbers and materiel by using guerrilla warfare and winter equipment. Dole foresaw the need for a mountain division to defend U.S. mountains from a hypothetical Nazi invasion.

From its beginning, the division was unique. Not only was it the first mountain-trained U.S. Army division in history, but also required a special application and three letters of recommendation for admission to the unit. It was also the only division to have civilians

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67 Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, 279
involved in the recruiting process (the National Ski Patrol helped to recruit for the division). They also were one of only several units to have a specialized tab above their unit insignia which read “Mountain,” signifying them as elite troops. Other examples of this in the Army were the Airborne divisions and the Rangers.

The division was activated at Fort Lewis, WA, on November 15, 1941 but in November of the following year, it was moved to Camp Hale, high in the Colorado Rockies. At Fort Lewis, the division only contained the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment. However, it was expanded in 1943 to include the 85th and 86th Mountain Infantry Regiments. The three regiments formed the majority of the strength of the division. They were later complemented by smaller units attached to the division, including the 604th, 605th and 616th Field Artillery Battalions (Pack), 10th Medical Battalion, 126th Mountain Engineer Battalion and 10th Mountain Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop.

Each of the three Regiments (the 85th, 86th and 87th) contained three Battalions, with four companies each. Battalion 1 had Companies A, B, C and D and an associated Headquarters unit. Battalion 2 had Companies E, F, G and H, et cetera. References to men in the units consist of an abbreviation of their unit designation. Therefore, 85-C means C Company, 1st Battalion, 85th Mountain Infantry Regiment. 87-E means E Company, 2nd Battalion, 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment. 86-1HQ refers to Headquarters, 1st Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment. It is also correct to both refer to the division singularly as the 10th or the Tenth, I use them interchangeably throughout this thesis.

At Camp Hale, specially built for the division, the Tenth trained in mountain warfare, including learning to ski and climb. They also took part in “D Series,” a grueling mock warfare practice that involved playing war in a Colorado blizzard. Later, in combat, men would remark
that, as bad as combat was, it couldn’t top D Series. They also underwent infantryman training at Camp Swift, Texas.

The division was deployed to Italy, beginning in December of 1944. The Tenth Mountain saw action from January to May of 1945. The Allies invaded Sicily in July 1943 and had fought their way up the peninsula from that time until 1945 when the Tenth entered the theater. The Allies took Rome on June 4, 1944. They had fought through several German fortified lines, including the Bernhardt Line, Gustav Line, Tasimene Line and Winter Line. The Germans were waiting behind their Gothic Line when the Tenth arrived.
Figure 1 10th Mountain Division Battle Route, December 1944-May 1945

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The division first saw true combat action\textsuperscript{69} at Mount Belvedere and Riva Ridge southwest of Bologna February 18 and 19 in 1945. What follows is a map of the combat alignment of the forces in that area. I discuss that particular offensive in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{69} Excluding various patrols and scouting missions; this was a widespread, coordinated, division-wide attack.

\textsuperscript{70} G. Tedeski, \textit{Disposition of 10\textsuperscript{th} M.D. USA and German forces Before the attack at Mt Belvedere}, Hugh W. Evans Papers, TMD4, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
After the Riva Ridge-Belvedere offensive, the division fought north, past the Po River, and ended near the Austrian border at Lake Garda. They were the last division to enter the war in Europe, secured every objective to which they were assigned, and never retreated. Their contributions were essential to winning the war in Italy because they were able to break the deadlock at the Gothic Line in February, starting events in motion that culminated in the defeat of Germany.

Previous scholarship is divided on why men fought in World War II. For Lawrence Cane, a noted anti-Fascist, “Ideology remained the central motivating factor in his intense desire to serve his country in an effective way during the Second World War.”71 However, Samuel Stouffer’s comprehensive 1949 study of troops’ opinions concluded that “beyond acceptance of the war as a necessity forced upon the United States by an aggressor, there was little support of attempts to give the war meaning in terms of principles and causes involved, and little apparent desire for such formulations.”72 When he surveyed soldiers, 91% agreed with the statement “Whatever our wishes in the matter, we have to fight now if we are to survive.”73

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73 Ibid, 433.
Men in the Tenth were simply there to fulfill their obligation and fight in the war. “I’m just doing my duty as an American doggie”\textsuperscript{74} – doing my duty + not batting an eye. To knock off a Kraut is just doing the job.”\textsuperscript{75} They had no grand conceptions of fighting fascism or world evil – they were simply fighting for their families and America.

\textsuperscript{74} Dogface was slang for American troops.

\textsuperscript{75} Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 13 March 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Chapter 1: “I only hope there is nothing...to worry the censor:”\textsuperscript{76}

Censorship

Soldiers in the Tenth Mountain Division were restricted by military-mandated censorship of letters “to prevent information of military value from reaching a hostile country.”\textsuperscript{77} This meant that they simply could not speak of certain topics in their letters home. Censorship regulations had a large impact on the content of letters as the soldiers were sent to Italy. However, once the men had been in Italy for a few weeks, the prohibitions were eased somewhat and soldiers were more willing to discuss sensitive topics. As censorship limited the content of their letters, soldiers would suggest their families read the newspapers to stay most up to date on the goings-on. Although newspapers were subject to censorship themselves, it was less pronounced than what the men experienced. Twelve of the fifteen soldiers made some kind of reference to censorship in their letters.

“We are allowed to say a few more things to-day:”\textsuperscript{78} Soldiers and Censorship

Although censorship was government- and military-regulated, it was actually carried out by men in the units. One man per company, typically a lieutenant, would be responsible for

\textsuperscript{76} Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 7 January 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.


\textsuperscript{78} Weldon A. Chase, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 24 January 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
censoring the mail home from men in the company. There was a list of ten subjects that men were forbidden to discuss in letters home, including such topics as “military information of Army units – their location, strength, matériel, or equipment.”79 Although the rules were stringent, the actual censorship depended on the officer carrying out the task and how much he would allow. When something was found to violate the censorship rules, the offending word or sentence was literally cut out of the letter.

Unfortunately, I have only a few sources available on the topic of censorship, all of them government documents. Some Important Facts You Must Know and When You Are Overseas: These Facts Are Vital, which date from 1942 and 1943, respectively, are the primary documents I used. To a lesser extent, the War Department Field Manual for Photomail Operation from 1945 and the Executive Order that created the Office of Censorship are also both useful. There appears to be no scholarly analysis of censorship of soldiers’ letters home from the war and all information available to me about the censorship of letters comes from those four primary sources. From those four sources, I have assembled an approximate idea of what soldiers could and couldn’t discuss in letters home.

Censorship of mail destined for the U.S. really happened at first, while the men were being sent to Italy. Thomas Dickson wrote in a V-mail to his wife, “At this writing I’m limited by space, time, and security to the following salient points: (1) I’m in Italy….It’s not sunny! (2) I came here by boat. (3) I’ve seen the Rock of Gibralter [sic]…Just like in the Providential80 ads. (4) Saw the Isle of Capri…From a distance..But very beautiful. (5) Saw Mt Vesuvius…It didn’t

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80 Meaning Prudential.
burp for me. (6) Have seen the darndest assortment of Italians and beat-up towns and cities.”
Many men would discuss these items. They were told they could say they’d seen Gibraltar. They would then list those talking points.

“Be sure and watch the papers:” Soldiers and the Press

Due to the role of censorship, topics on which the soldiers could write home were severely curtailed and they were forced instead to tell their families to resort to the press and media for any kind of news concerning the division and its movements in Italy. When soldiers wrote home, they instead referred their families to newspapers to get a fuller understanding and conception of the fighting they faced: “Just watch the papers and you’ll get a better idea of what’s going on than if I told you myself.” Sentiments like “Be sure and watch the papers. How well I have learned to appreciate the old saying ‘Silence is Golden’!!!” were common in letters home.

Soldiers refused to talk about anything due to the censorship, as was expected under the wartime regulations. “It’s been a long time since I’ve written to you, but then, we’ve come a long way since then. You have been following the campaign here in the papers and undoubtedly have

81 Thomas A. Dickson, V-mail letter to Barbara Dickson (his wife), undated 1945, Thomas A. Dickson Papers, TMD54, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
82 Melville Borders, V-mail letter to Mr. and Mrs. M.W. Borders (his parents), 7 April 1945, Melville Borders Papers, TMD160, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
83 Melville Borders, letter to Mr. and Mrs. M.W. Borders (his parents), 13 February 1945, Melville Borders Papers, TMD160, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
84 Melville Borders, V-mail letter to Mr. and Mrs. M.W. Borders (his parents), 7 April 1945, Melville Borders Papers, TMD160, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
a pretty fair idea of where we are and where we’ve been. From the reports of correspondents you can get a pretty fair idea of the kind of chase it was.” 85 Yet, soldiers would speak more openly of the war, and their part in it, when the restrictions were lifted, or in person: “Someday I’ll be able to tell you all about it in detail.” 86 Soldiers knew that their families were able to get more details from newspaper reports than from the censored letters home. As Marty Daneman wrote on March 19, “The newspapers, as usual, can tell more about what happened than we can.” 87

Yet, the press was not a perfect source. It too was subject to the restrictions of censorship, common for any country at war. However, unlike the men, the press was permitted to tell the soldiers’ families important details about their situation. This included their whereabouts, which was something that soldiers couldn’t even reveal in letters. Censorship regulations’ rule number five, “Don’t disclose movements of ships, naval or merchant, troops, or aircraft[,]” 88 prohibited the soldiers from mentioning where they were. Letters like Harris Dusenbery’s March 9th letter showed this: “In mother’s last letter she sent a clipping saying the 10th was in action in Italy. Now you can follow us in the newspapers and will at last know in what part of Italy I’m in.” 89

Not being able to disclose “towns or locations in connection with military organizations” 90 meant

85 Harris Dusenbery, letter to Mrs. Verne Dusenbery (his mother), 2 May 1945, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
86 Ibid.
87 Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 19 March 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
89 Harris Dusenbery, letter to Evelyn Dusenbery (his wife), 9 March 1945, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
that in some circumstances families had no knowledge of their soldier’s whereabouts or well-being.

This was equally important toward the end of the war as well, when the speed of the advance meant military mail both in and out was limited. Dusenbery and Daneman both described this: “You’ve probably been reading about us in the papers and know that we are going too fast for mail service.”91 “As the papers have doubtless [sic] informed you, I’ve been busy again, + there fore [sic] unable to write.”92 The papers served as a benchmark for the pace of the division and informed families when there was no mail to be had.

Yet, the papers were not perfect sources. John Parker Compton noted several inaccuracies in letters to his brother. On January 24, Compton wrote, “Now, Jim, I suggest you read your Stars and Stripes93 more assiduously. What’s this about the Allies being in the Po Valley [The Tenth, as the Allies’ spearhead unit, would not reach the Po River Valley until April 20]94 and past the mountains? I’ll be a salt tinker if they are!!”95 Compton was obviously a stickler for accuracy missing in the press. On February 2, he again wrote his brother, “You and Dan are from

91 Harris Dusenbery, letter to Evelyn Dusenbery (his wife), 25 April 1945, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

92 Martin L. Daneman, V-mail letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 25 April 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

93 The military newspaper.


95 John Parker Compton, letter to Lt. James R. Compton (brother, fighting in the Philippines), 24 January 1945, John Parker Compton Papers, TMD42, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
slightly to horribly misinformed on Italy and what the screaming condors\textsuperscript{96} of the 10\textsuperscript{th} (that’s us) are doing. Dan says he hears we’re in the city of the Seven Hills – all wet! … I already rebuked you for saying we’re past the mountains in Italy.\textsuperscript{97} Although these letters referred to the \textit{Stars and Stripes}, men had some knowledge of the contents of U.S. domestic newspapers as their families would send newspaper clippings in letters to them. This, and information that their families wrote in letters, was the extent to which soldiers were cognizant of what the home front knew.

The soldiers, cognizant of the limitations imposed on them by censorship, would apologize for the lack of material in their letters. “There’s still a lot to write about – but I still can’t write it. Maybe if the War should wind up, in this Theatre, they’ll lift the censorship, and I will be able to tell you more of what I’ve seen and done. In the meantime, my letters are apt to be skimpy and not too interesting.”\textsuperscript{98} They also tried to make light of the censorship that seemed to

\textsuperscript{96} This is an unusual reference and not one that I’ve seen echoed in any other place. Compton is obviously making a spin-off reference to the 101\textsuperscript{st} Airborne Division, nicknamed the “Screaming Eagles” for the representation on their shoulder patches. At the time, the 101\textsuperscript{st} Airborne Division had just held off German forces in the Belgian Ardennes Forest in the Battle of the Bulge near Bastogne and were often in the news. However, I know of no reason why Compton would make such a comparison between the Tenth and the 101\textsuperscript{st} Airborne.

\textsuperscript{97} John Parker Compton, letter to Lt. James R. Compton (brother, fighting in the Philippines), 2 February 1945, John Parker Compton Papers, TMD42, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{98} Thomas A. Dickson, V-mail letter to Barbara Dickson (his wife), 9 February 1945, Thomas A. Dickson Papers, TMD54, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
be overly restricting to the only contact they had with their families: Denis Nunan wrote,
“Censorship prevents putting kisses on letters so just know they are sent anyway.”

Soldiers would in fact use the censor as an excuse for not talking about combat. When the
regulations were eased, however, they would talk freely about their combat experiences. Here,
the lack of secondary sources is apparent. Although I couldn’t find the order for or the reason
why it took place, the first time that restrictions were eased was around January 21 or 22 based
on the letters’ content. The regulations only continued to be lessened. Melville Borders
addressed this on March 12:

I can tell you more news as our censorship regulations have been lifted
considerably….I was in the town of Castel D’Aiano, and if you’ll look at the front
line I think you’ll see that it’s a salient in the line. It was a hot spot and Jerry
pounded the place day and night with artillery. It wasn’t ever safe to let nature
take its course, because as soon as you exposed yourself the shells started flying. I
was literally ‘caught with my pants down once.’ Artillery and mines or booby
traps are the only thing the Krauts have got that worries you. As for the Germans
themselves, they’ll give up when the going gets a little too rough and they’re only
too glad to do that. Snipers give you a little trouble but they’re easily taken care
of. Never the less, they’re [sic] artillery is terrific and I was praying to the good
Lord more than once. They’re mean with their mines and booby traps but if
you’re careful you’ll be okay.

Once Borders was told of the less strict censorship guidelines, he started into a nine page
description of his experiences in combat to that point. The above is a small excerpt of that.

Borders wasn’t the only one to feel that way. Stan Cummings wrote, on a similar subject,
to his wife, “Of course you want all the news. I will give you what I can. You blamed me in a

99 Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 28 February 1945, Denis
            P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

100 Melville Borders, letter to Mr. and Mrs. M.W. Borders (his parents), 12 March 1945, Melville
            Borders Papers, TMD160, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
recent letter, Darling, for not giving you particulars. Well, security regulations prevent one’s writing anything but generalities. Personally, I feel no compulsion against writing or speaking of any of my experiences. In fact I want to remember them. I want to remember that war was more excitement than even I – excitement lover that I am – could stomack [sic].”

Cummings also had a unique perspective on the proceedings of censorship as he was responsible for the censorship of the letters of his platoon. “As you know I have to censor the mail and one thing that gripes me is the way these men whine in their letters about all the hardships they are enduring. Hell, every man in my platoon is sleeping on a cot, gets three damn good meals a day, and can squeeze in a hot bath once every two days. They give the folks back home the impression they are enduring a living hell. It’s ridiculous!” Cummings believed that the soldiers gave a worse impression of the war than was actually the case, an interesting perspective considering most of the letters I read extolled the virtues of the Italian front. For example, Harris Dusenbery believed the soldiers ate “better than we did in the States.”

When censorship regulations were lifted, soldiers would discuss the war and locations. On February 26, about a week after their first combat experiences, Weldon Chase wrote home, “Well the 10th Div. hit the headlines to-day for the first time in the Stars and Stripes’ the Armies [sic] newspaper. They really announced our landing and our first actions. I’ll try to send you a copy of it or at least the article. They credited us with Mt. Belvedere, Mt. Gorgole[s]co and Mt.

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101 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 22 February 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

102 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 23 January 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

103 Harris Dusenbery, letter to Mrs. Verne Dusenbery (his mother), 12 February 1945, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Della Torracia. So we’re official in. This is the first official word so I guess it’s OK to talk now.”¹⁰⁴ Both he and other soldiers henceforth began to write home about their experiences.

Interestingly, when soldiers like Stan Cummings were wounded, they used the press (as their families did at home) to find out about the Tenth’s whereabouts. “The radio just said that they were issuing skis [sic] and winter equipment to the troops striking for the Brenner Pass so it doesn’t take any imagination to know where the old outfit is.”¹⁰⁵ As Cummings had no contact with his unit, he too was forced to rely on the press for reports on the whereabouts and situation of the division.

In conclusion, the men of the Tenth Mountain Division, like all other American military units during World War II, were under censorship which curtailed the substance of their letters home. Although they were willing to discuss their experiences in combat, they waited until censorship regulations were lifted to describe the combat they saw. Instead, they referred their families to the press and newspapers to have a meaningful understanding of what was going on with them in combat and even to find out something as simple as where they were deployed.

¹⁰⁴ Weldon A. Chase, V-mail letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 26 February 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

¹⁰⁵ Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 2 May 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Chapter 2: “We’re here...in what used to be ‘Beautiful, sunny, Italy’:”

106 Italians and the Italian Front

Deployed in Italy for the duration of their combat service, Tenth Mountain Division soldiers had a great deal to write about in regards to the Italians and the Italian front. As this was their first direct encounter with a war zone, they were especially struck by the devastation that they encountered in Italy and even rationalized it in their own combat experiences. They also had definite opinions on the Italians. When they arrived in Italy at the war-torn ports of Naples and Livorno, they had rather low opinions of the Italians in those areas, whom they perceived as being poverty-stricken beggars. However, as they proceeded further north, they changed their minds and grew to like the Italians with whom they came into contact. These Italians were welcoming, allowed the soldiers into their houses and shared what little they had with them.

What follow through the chapter are a series of photographs from men in the Tenth Mountain Division that help to illustrate the destruction of the war in Italy.

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106 Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 17 January 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

107 Units of the division had been sent to Kiska (in the Aleutian Islands, near Alaska) in 1943 to oust the Japanese garrison. They arrived only to find the Japanese forces absent, having escaped through the naval blockade. Friendly fire in the island fog cost the Tenth 11 dead. (John Imbrie and Barbara Imbrie, “Chronology of the 10th Mountain Division in World War II: 6 January 1940 — 30 November 1945,” Accessed November 14, 2012. http://10thmtndivassoc.org/chronology.pdf, 8.) So although some of the division had seen combat at Kiska, most of the Division would experience combat for the first time in Italy.

108 The fact that they landed at Naples would later be a part of a German propaganda leaflet dropped on them, referring to the Italian expression ‘Vedi Napoli, e poi muori,’ See Naples and die.
Although the above image is of Livorno, Italy, the Tenth Mountain Division’s second stop,\footnote{The Division first disembarked in Naples and then was transferred further up the coast to Livorno.} it still shows some of the devastation that men of the Tenth Mountain Division saw when they first disembarked from the boats into Italy. As Denis Nunan wrote, “The damage done to such ports as Naples and Leghorn\footnote{The Anglicized pronunciation of Livorno.} bring home the first realization of the horror or war. Ports

\footnote{\textit{A “Ten-Meter War:” Common Themes in Letters Home}.}
that have been magnificent for years on end, now lay in ruins – ruins that will never retake the ancient [sic] architectural [sic] style that made them places of beauty and seats of history.”

The Tenth Mountain Division was deployed to the Italian Front, in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. For the majority of the division, this was the first combat they saw. Although the ships transporting the division landed at Naples and Livorno between December 22 and January 18, they saw the majority of their combat action in the Apennine Mountains in the north, continuing beyond to the Po River. They were engaged in constant combat from February 18 until the end of the war, May 2.

The Tenth first disembarked at Naples; what follows are their perceptions of that particular city. Later in the war, Stan Cummings described a scene of the poverty he encountered, on March 16, after having passed through Naples. “I saw a sign on a wall written in the reign of Mussolini ‘A nation can only find its strength in war.’ It was signed by the Duce himself. Most of the wall had been toppled by allied bombs. Below the sign two boys were almost murdering each other for a stick of gum a passing truck driver had thrown them. A girl of five in a dress made from sandbags timidly held out a can for any cigarette butts she could get thrown her way. The spectacle was the strongest allied propaganda I have seen in this war.” Naples was one of the most-bombed Italian cities during the war and also saw great destruction as the Allies pushed north through what British Prime Minister Winston Churchill termed the

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112 Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 28 February 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

113 As mentioned before, members of the division had seen action at Kiska. For these soldiers, it was not their first combat: however, the majority of the division hadn’t fought at Kiska.

114 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 16 March 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
“soft underbelly of the axis,” the Italian peninsula. Naples, as a port city, saw increased bombing to try to destroy German-held infrastructure and “the Luftwaffe…concentrated in the Naples area,” especially in the lead-up to Allied Operation Husky.

Photograph 5 Patrons securing Corona, Italy -- A patrol moving through destroyed buildings.

Italy and its residents had seen several years of war by the time the Tenth Mountain Division arrived in January of 1945. The Italians had become used to and had adapted to the fighting going on around them. Both the letters and other sources like Norman Lewis’ diary Naples ’44 described the devastation and the poverty-stricken population.

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115 Winston Churchill and Richard Langworth, compiler, Churchill by Himself, 43.
117 Ibid, 75.
118 Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, TMD248.
Seeing this poverty led many soldiers to feel overprivileged. Stan Cummings wrote on January 15,

You can never comprehend the destruction war leaves in its wake until you see it then you believe it for the first time and it’s appalling! When I saw grown men fishing cigarette butts out of the filthy water around the pier I thought I was seeing total war. When they began to fight over an apple core I threw away I almost got sick to my stomach. I have an idea that many foreigners these days pray to go to America instead of heaven. Not that they believe us angels by any means but surely we have all an angel could ask for. Don’t ever accuse any nation of ‘getting the better’ of us or trying to do us out of anything. Economically we are a different world. Whenever I see a foreigner I feel like J.P. Morgan [the well-known American industrialist and banker] and I’m ashamed of it.  

The soldiers, as Americans and liberators, felt shame as they compared their own relative affluence with such widespread poverty. Although belts were tightened at home in the States with rationing, men in the Tenth Mountain Division still believed living conditions at home were far better than anything they saw in Italy.

Denis Nunan encapsulated much of this in a long, ruminating letter home on February 28 in which he spoke of things which many soldiers (including Cummings) believed:

You feel for the poor and seemingly suffering, but if one thinks back, we have the same type at home; but so many of us don’t like to admit that our own backyards are not perfect. There is a certain aire [sic] about the people that makes one wonder at times if they are for us or against us….They still lack food, clothing, heat and many things which they had in limited quantities at least. So, I’ll always wonder – are we really welcome here. True, they say yes, but I have yet to have any one throw their arms about my neck or strew flowers in my humble path! The real young kids seem to like us, but after all hasn’t there always been magic in candy?! The old people seem reconcilled [sic] to our presence, but isn’t it true that one grows tired of troubles as one ages and is willing to accept the ways of the world more readily. The young men – I question them, but why wouldn’t my

119 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 15 January 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
attitude be as theirs if strangers made passes at my women folk. And the womenfolk? They are the same as women anyplace – excited with the attention of so many new men.¹²⁰

Nunan in particular was very skeptical of the Italians at the beginning as he was introduced to the Italian culture near the coast where they landed. He believed that the Italians were too quick to try to take advantage of the soldiers and their generosity.

The Italians’ economic conditions improved the further north soldiers went. Correspondingly, the soldiers’ attitudes of distrust or disgust towards the Italians lessened. Northern Italy had long been a more industrialized and affluent area while the south was more rural. This, combined with the devastation of war in the area around Naples, was noticeably an improvement in territory. Likewise, quite simply, in northern Italy, the people weren’t as poor as in the port cities. Gone were the dirt-poor “grown men fishing cigarette butts out of the filthy water around the pier”¹²¹ from Naples; instead, the soldiers encountered what they termed a “high type”¹²² of Italians. These good hosts were so welcoming, wrote Stan Cummings on January 21, that they were tolerant and encouraging of his road-building crew, which only created more destruction in their assigned area.

You hear all kinds of tales on the attitude of the Italian people but all that I have encountered have been friendlier than I could properly expect them to be. After all, I scar [sic] into their quiet countryside, tear down their walls and make road paving, tear up their terraces it must have taken generations to establish on such an incline and what do I get in return – the urchins grab the picks and shovels

¹²⁰ Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 28 February 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

¹²¹ Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 15 January 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

¹²² Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 21 January 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
from my men and do the work, the young girls invite the young lieutenant in for dinner (who politely refuses but finds it impossible to refuse a liter of wine – the kind you can still smell the grapes in).\textsuperscript{123}

The Italians in the north welcomed the men wholeheartedly, despite the continued suffering it may have meant for them. Interestingly, the men were engaged in serious combat in the north and not in the south where they landed. This is an interesting paradox: as life got worse for them, facing combat, it also improved in the quality of day-to-day treatment they received from the Italians.

On April 5, Nunan wrote of an Italian family he stayed with,

When we left [the home where they’d been billeted with an Italian family] they thanked us very sincerely for the food and soap we gave them and the Mother even cried. Made a guy feel that maybe if given the same chances we Americans get, the Italians would be an okay bunch – Maybe after we left they said ‘good ridence,’ [sic] but while we were there they treated us swell, and they stirred our hearts when we left, and in this kind of a life, it’s nice to have one’s heart stirred!\textsuperscript{124}

However, despite their original misgivings, as the soldiers progressed further north, they quickly grew to like the Italians they encountered. Even harder hearts like Nunan changed their minds. Towards the end of the war on May 2, Nunan wrote,

The natives\textsuperscript{125} cheered us and threw flowers at us and brought out the vino….At first one was prone to look on the natives with misgiving, as one wondered if the

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\textsuperscript{123} Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 21 January 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{124} Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 5 April 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{125} Harris Dusenbery used similar terminology. Interestingly, in a letter to his wife on February 7, he refers to the Italian locals as “natives” (Harris Dusenbery, letter to Evelyn Dusenbery (his wife), 7 February 1945, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.) but in his diary (constructed from memory and fragments of his letters home) refers to them in the same paragraph as “people” (pg. 18, Italian Diary of Harris Dusenbery Hq.Co., 1\textsuperscript{st} Bn., 86\textsuperscript{th} Mountain
same people hadn’t greeted their former leader and the once proud Kraut army in the same manner. But then one soften [sic] to the waves of the older people and the bewilderment of the kids, and remembering we have not only the task of fighting the enemy, but also that of spreading good will, we waved back and smiled and in return for vino, bread, onions, etc., we gave candy and cigarettes [sic]. It’s quite a job to fight in a hostile country and still be a diplomate [sic], but that is the American Army for you – the American Army and that wonderful guy known as a ‘doggie’ (Forget that I am one too).126

The soldiers perceived the Italians to be different from the Germans and the Japanese, the other two countries who were members of the Axis. “The divergence between…[American] approaches [in Germany and Japan] and that adopted in Italy reflected the fact that American policymakers viewed Italian fascism as something imposed upon a malleable people, whereas Nazism and militarism were seen as reflections of the true character of the German and Japanese peoples.”127 As Andrew Buchanan argues in his article “‘Good Morning Pupil!’ American Representations of Italianness and the Occupation of Italy, 1943-1945,” Americans believed during the war that the Italians were simply misled; “Italian fascism arose when the Italian people made the terrible ‘mistake’ of turning to an ‘ambitious rabble-rouser’ to solve their problems. … Italians…might be naïve and easily deceived by operatic bombast, but they were not fundamentally evil.”128

Inf. and Riva Ridge Operation; 1st Battalion Journal, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

While reconstructing his diary, Dusenbery obviously censored himself and changed the word from “natives” to “people.”

126 Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 2 May 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.


128 Ibid, 221.
However, for all the good deeds they did for soldiers, Italians remained prey to some of
the common American conceptions about them. For instance, Stan Cummings wrote on January
21 “Frankly I’ve come to think an awful lot of Italians. That they are lousy fighters is nothing
against them as far as I am concerned.”\textsuperscript{129} The soldiers characterized once they had been
welcomed into their homes the Italians as welcoming people who’d simply had a bad break in
the war, a sentiment which was actually common in the day. Ernie Pyle, noted war correspondent
of the day, was no stranger to representing that opinion.

Pyle’s widely read articles helped form precisely the image of Italianness he
attributed to the soldiers he was with, picturing Italians as backward and
malodorous but nevertheless deserving of help. He passed on the soldiers' casual
racism, explaining that one gunner’s use of the term 'gook' didn't imply contempt
because 'Muncy loved the Italians and they loved him'. 'Those people were our
enemies,' Pyle mused, but 'when we had won, they looked upon us as their
friends.'\textsuperscript{130}

The Italians were looked down upon by the Americans but they still had valuable qualities,
according to the literature of the time, including being good hosts and being extremely
welcoming to the soldiers in their homes.

\textsuperscript{129} Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 21 January 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers,
TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{130} Andrew Buchanan, “‘Good Morning Pupil!’ American Representations of Italianness and the
Occupation of Italy, 1943-1945,” 233.
The Italian Front: “As Pleasant a Front as One Can Find.”

In terms of the front they found themselves in, the men were very happy to be on the Italian Front, as opposed to fighting in Northern Europe or the Pacific. The Italian Front has often been treated in scholarship as a minor, “third front” for World War II, although it actually played a key role in deciding the outcome of the war by diverting German troops and resources that could well have been used against the Russians or Allied forces in Northern Europe. It also

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131 Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, TMD263.

132 Arthur G. Draper, letter to Lili Draper (his wife), 24 March 1945, Arthur G. Draper Papers, TMD199, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
boosted morale: “For the first time in the Second World War, soldiers of the Anglo-American alliance engaged the German Army fighting on the defensive on the ground that was, to all intents and purposes, Europe[.]”\textsuperscript{133} In addition, the Tenth Mountain Division as a unit was decisive in winning success on that front: historian Ian Gooderson writes of the 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division’s impact on the fighting, “It was the old story – skilled mountain troops could achieve much in Italy, but there were never enough of them. Had the Allies possessed them in greater numbers and the knowledge of how best to use them at the beginning of 1944, the Italian campaign would have been a very different story.”\textsuperscript{134}

Photograph 7 “Digging in” under shell-fire near Corona, Italy\textsuperscript{135} -- Men digging in next to a shell-pocked wall on a rocky hillside. Riva Ridge is visible in the background left.

\textsuperscript{133} Gooderson, \textit{A Hard Way to Make a War}, 11.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid, 293.
\textsuperscript{135} Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, TMD249.
As has been mentioned, the front they arrived in had seen much damage. Martin Daneman summed it up well on January 17 when he wrote “We’re here -, in what used to be ‘Beautiful, sunny, Italy’ – now it’s only sunny.” Italy had seen much destruction during the war, and the shock of seeing the country in ruins was only compounded by the soldiers seeing it before they had experienced combat. In other words, they were seeing destruction with fresh eyes. Weldon Chase described the scene when he arrived in January:

It is really very beautiful here in this part of the country [near Pisa, at the hunting grounds of Italian King Victor Emmanuel III] although there are only a few buildings they are pretty badly damaged. A good many of the towns and cities we passed were in terrible bad shape and condition. I guess that can be accounted to the fact that the rest of them have been bombed by both oursefls [sic] and the Germans in this sector. Most, in fact, all the structures in this country appear to be made entirely [sic] of stone and cement and when they get hit they really crumple up and fall.

Chase was correct; many parts of Italy had been bombed by both sides (as was also true in other combat zones in Europe) as the Allies advanced and the Germans retreated.

When they encountered this great widespread destruction, soldiers tried to rationalize it to themselves and to their families. They framed it in a dynamic of “kill or be killed,” a necessary destruction in order to save the lives of soldiers. Again, a letter from Denis Nunan on February 28:

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136 Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 17 January 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

137 Weldon A. Chase, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 17 January 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
When one first travels thru the country side and sees the destruction his heart misses many beats – He realizes war must touch cities, bridges, ports, etc. (but even then the works of time and history are destroyed never to be restored) but when he sees isolated hamlets, farms, villiage [sic] churches and individual homes laid waste, he can’t comprehend the reasoning of war wreckage. But then he goes into combat, and it’s then he understands why war spares nothing. The isolated hamlet – with its century old buildings, with walls of stone feet thick – make fortress for the enemy to gather strength within and strike out to kill. The villiage [sic] churches make ideal observation posts so the enemy can watch your every move and direct death against you. The littly [sic] home with it’s red-tile roof, white walls and blue door is hiding an 88 that will blast your foxhole by night. Now, instead of rebelling within at the sight of seemingly wanton destruction, we beg the artillery and air corp [sic] to lay waste to even the most innocent structure – even though it might be mellowed by centuries of laughter; the smoke of thousands of fiesta cook fires; the love of generation upon generation of family happiness. War knows no love, rare, or creed – only the desire to live. Even I have begged my air corp [sic] to lay waste to a church steeple as the 88’s were crashing too near my foxhole for comfort. So you see Mother, Daddy, et al, in my short time in combat, my heart has hardened and my soul grown bitter. I have killed, and I shall continue to do such without flinching until peace comes to the world or me. I shall destroy whatever the enemy hides behind.\footnote{138 Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 28 February 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.}

Soldiers found that they could reconcile the destruction with what they found to be the necessity of war. Although the demolition that they saw was unparalleled to what many of them had seen, they still thought of it as essential for victory and wanted the destruction to occur, no matter its toll on their surroundings. Here, Nunan creates an interesting contrast: although these beautiful towns appear to be innocent, the enemy sheltering inside could be and were deadly. Although the Italian countryside and villages are picturesque, Nunan reminds himself that he is still at war and that that damage was necessary for victory.
Thomas Dickson wrote on March 29, “I’m glad I landed here instead of all those other places I could have gone – and glad I’m in the outfit I’m in.”¹³⁹ Is some of this due to the fact that they arrived in Italy relatively late in the Italian campaign, after the very heavy fighting of 1943-44? Many soldiers in the division felt they had caught a lucky break by being sent to the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. “If I could stay here for the duration [of the war] I’d never say a word about war being hell, we eat 3 good warm meals a day + have very good quarters, I get more rest than I ever did. We get all the cigs + chocolat [sic] + gum we want.”¹⁴⁰ Although they were seeing combat, it was not a difficult front to be a part of.

In fact, this front was so ideal that soldiers such as Harris Dusenbery would write, “I believe that our sector from the soldiers point of view is by far the best of all fronts. During the winter it was the kind of front that soldiers dream about, but isn’t supposed to exist in reality [emphasis mine],”¹⁴¹ in other words, this was quite possibly literally the perfect front. It appeared from the letters that this was something that soldiers truly believed and wasn’t just something they said to make their families feel at ease.

It is perhaps ironic that, despite all the damage Italy had seen, the soldiers believed it was still the best place to be. Yet as the war progressed further north through the countryside, the devastation remained. As late as April 5, one soldier could observe: “If all the countrys [sic]
are as badly wrecked by shelling and bombeing [sic] as Italy the world must be a torn up place.

It’s hard to find a house that hasn’t been damaged in some way”\(^\text{142}\) and (April 2)

This has been one of those delightful Spring days when for no reason at all one suddenly finds himself emitting strange bleating noises. Except when they have been spaded or pock-marked with shells the hills are a soft green. The fruit trees are in blossom. Little flowers, dandelions and daisies, are in bloom. A few birds are around singing. It’s really pleasant, especially if one can let his eye skip over the signs of war: the shell craters, the hillside houses with their gaping holes and the trees that have taken a shellacking from shells and shrapnel. The tops of some trees have been blown off completely: heavy branches, partly severed, droop in a horrible fashion almost like the arm of a maimed human, gashes in the trunks are almost like human wounds. But there is one reassuring [sic] thought: one sees humans come through [sic] an aid station with hell knocked out of them: a few weeks later many return to the line just about as good as ever.\(^\text{143}\)

The soldiers saw no end of destruction in Italy, and it did not cease as they moved further north.

Interestingly, Draper’s letter here seems to discuss the trees as a metaphor for the men fighting there. The wording suggests that he isn’t actually discussing the after-effects of shelling so much as the damage done to the men. Draper served in an aid station and thus had plenty of contact with wounded soldiers as they came through.

\(^{142}\) Albert N. Brockman, letter to Mrs. E.W. Brockman (his mother), 5 April 1945, Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\(^{143}\) Arthur G. Draper, letter to Lili Draper (his wife), 2 April 1945, Arthur G. Draper Papers, TMD199, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Photograph 8 "Pauvre Italia!" Destroyed Landscape\textsuperscript{144} -- A destroyed hillside with the remnant of a building. This landscape of shattered buildings and splintered trees (possibly near Malandrone, at the location the men called Punchboard Hill)\textsuperscript{145} would have been something men in the Division encountered on a daily basis.

In conclusion, men in the Tenth Mountain Division had definite opinions about the Italians they encountered. When they first met Italians (at the port cities) they were suspicious of their motives and thought that they were mostly interested in taking advantage of them.

\textsuperscript{144} Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, TMD261.

\textsuperscript{145} Reportedly, Punchboard Hill was shelled so hard by the Germans that two shells landed per minute.
However, as the Division progressed further north, they characterized the Italians they met as being good hosts and welcome people.

They saw widespread destruction of Italy. Although they rationalized it as a necessity of war, they were still taken aback by the amount of devastation that the war had brought to the country. However, despite the damage, soldiers in the Tenth Mountain Division believed that it was better to be on the Italian front than anywhere else. They had just about everything they could ask for, between what the Army provided and what was sent to them in packages from their families.
Chapter 3: “I'll try to report...a true and grim picture of the whole fracas:”¹⁴⁶ The Combat

Although historians of soldiers’ letters from combat have frequently argued that they are effectively useless sources for historical research, the actual letters home tell a very different story. Soldiers instead would be very willing to reveal details of the combat that they experienced, sometimes to an extreme extent. They would often discuss horrific experiences and leave nothing to the reader’s imagination, generally in response to their family’s prompting or citing a desire to be open and honest with their family. I find it important to mention here, before I discuss the soldiers’ combat experiences in depth, that I have chosen to quote some letters in near-entirety. In some cases these excerpts stretch for paragraphs. I have chosen to include that much material because it is very representative of the men and, in some circumstances, is essential to understanding the way men in the Tenth Mountain Division conceptualized combat or discussed it with those with whom they corresponded.

When soldiers were first at the front, they were effectively silenced. They had no opportunities to write home. As Murphy wrote, “I hope your [sic not to[o] worried about me if I don’t write for a while, it was just because we we[re] in a place where we just couldn’t send out or receive any mail.”¹⁴⁷ However, by late February, there were a wave of letters and a wave of

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¹⁴⁶ Arthur G. Draper, letter to Lili Draper (his wife), 6 March 1945, Arthur G. Draper Papers, TMD199, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

¹⁴⁷ Bernard J Murphy, letter to Yvette Murphy (his wife), 23 February 1945, Bernard J Murphy Papers, TMD41, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
mentions of combat. It was around this time that soldiers first wrote home about combat to their families. Stan Cummings provides an example of this.

The soldiers of the Tenth Mountain Division first experience of combat came when they were stationed on the front lines on January 8. At first, they only saw minimal duty: a patrol and firefight involving members of 86-B on January 15. At this time, soldiers were able to write home with little interruption about the front. And, to hear them speak, it was not that difficult. Stuart Abbott wrote on February 6,

I have been up in the front lines, as you must well know from the gap in my mail. I have also earned my combat Infantryman’s badge by being under small arms fire. I don’t wish to sound like I know it all now because I am still about as green as a combat Infantryman can be but life in the front lines isn’t as bad as I expected. It’s not a soft touch, it can not [sic] be, but it isn’t a Hollywood hell of living in fox holes under constant fire etc etc….Anyway I got enough to eat and got enough sleep to get by and while their [sic] were bad moments they were the exception.150

Although Abbott wasn’t excited to be on the front, he was clearly struck by how different the front was as compared to his expectations. Yet, unlike what one might imagine, Abbott actually was underwhelmed by the combat, which failed to be quite the horror he expected to have to endure at the front.

In fact, even when the soldiers had an individual encounter with war, they were struck by how little it was like the descriptions of it. Stan Cummings, on February 6, described an


149 Ibid, 14.

150 Stuart E. Abbott, letter to family, 6 February 1945, Stuart E. Abbott Papers, TMD50, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
experience in which he climbed up to an Observation Post (OP), observed the enemy and returned. He did not take fire, just observed the enemy. He discussed this in a letter home.

Some days ago I had a little excitement. Perhaps now would be as good a time as any to write you about it. This is war as I have met it. It’s inane. It’s ridiculous. It’s like nothing you ever saw in the movies. Or probably ever will see. I actually believe that here and now the infantry has almost caught up with the air corp [sic] on their style of living. … Isn’t that the damnest sort of fighting you ever heard of. Of course it won’t always be this way probably but while it lasts we are certainly enjoying it.¹⁵¹

Cummings’ experience struck him as being ridiculous because it was so unlike anything he had expected. Visiting the OP struck him as being the height of his combat experiences to that point, an exciting journey into the unknown against the enemy.

However, the Tenth would eventually win their spurs in an actual offensive attack. On the night of February 18, elements of the 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment attacked Riva Ridge in a night-time climb that totally surprised the German defenders. Riva Ridge is a steep mountain chain in the Italian Apennines that both German and American commanders had labeled unclimbable. The following night, February 19, the 85th, 87th and 3rd Battalion 86th attacked the Mt. Belvedere-Mt. Gorgolesco-Mt. della Torraccia ridge with help from the Brazilian Expeditionary Force. Nearly all of the Tenth took part in the action. This ridge, with a less extreme slope, had been attacked four times before. Each attack had succeeded in taking the summits of the Belvedere-Gorgolesco-della Torraccia ridge but had been repulsed in consequent counter-attacks, aided by artillery on the higher Riva Ridge. The assaults of February 18-19 were instrumental to the allied victory on the Italian front and formed a large part of the material in the

¹⁵¹ Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 6 February 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
soldiers’ following letters home. Ian Gooderson wrote that the attack was “to clear dominating ground astride Highway 64 leading to Bologna and a jump-off position for the spring offensive. Spearheaded by specialist rock-climbing teams,¹⁵² and in one instance roping an entire battalion up a 3,000-foot ridge, the attack secured some daunting heights[.]”¹⁵³

Figure 3 A Google Earth three-dimensional view of Riva Ridge and Mount Belvedere. This helps to show how steep Riva Ridge was as opposed to the gentler-sloped Mount Belvedere. Riva Ridge on the left was the ridge which required a night climb to surprise the German defenders.¹⁵⁴

Prior to the first offensive, soldiers looked forward to playing a part in the battle. Bernard Murphy wrote on the night of the attack on Riva Ridge, “Well Honey I got a few munites [sic] to spare while I dry out my sack + wait till all hell breaks loose, I expect that in one hour or so great things will occur up hear [sic] which may be the deciding factor of the wor [sic]. I’m playing a very small parth [sic] of it but I guess whit [sic] enough small parts you can really make out

¹⁵² In fact, the entire division had had climbing training.
¹⁵³ Gooderson, A Hard Way to Make a War, 293.
Although Murphy was in 86-E, which, as part of the second battalion, was held in reserve near Lizzano in Belvedere and was unlikely to see combat during the initial attack, he still looked forward to being a part of the action. Remember that the Tenth had been in training since 1943. Although Murphy joined the unit in July of 1944 at Camp Swift, he too was itching to see action in a war which increasingly seemed to be nearing its conclusion.

Although Cummings had been unimpressed with his original encounter with the front lines, this soon changed as he first related his experiences going up Belvedere with the 85th. In a letter to his wife Jean, he wrote,

It’s hard to say when things began. We had just loaded a weasel\textsuperscript{156} with ammo and it had gone fifty yards up the road when a mortar got it….A boy from my class at OCS\textsuperscript{157} came tramping down the road whistling. Half his jacket was blown off and blood was showing through the hasty bandage on his shoulder[].…About this time a litter squad came running down the draw pell mell. Mortar shells were landing about 50 yards behind them following them right down but luckily never catching up. We all took refuge under a stone bridge which was perfect shelter from mortars. Here we found a Lt\textsuperscript{158} I vaguely recognized[]. He kept asking me for my rifle and spoke about getting back to ‘the area’[]. It dawned on me finally that he was shocked. I pointed in the direction of the battallion [sic] aid station and said that was ‘the area’ and off he went. I didn’t have a man to spare to send with him[].\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{155}Bernard J Murphy, letter to Yvette Murphy (his wife), 18 February 1945, Bernard J Murphy Papers, TMD41, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{156}A Tenth-created truck approximation that was able to drive both on snow and land, an essential for a mountain division.

\textsuperscript{157}Officer Command School.

\textsuperscript{158}Lieutenant.

\textsuperscript{159}Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 22 February 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Cummings’ account describes the confusion he felt when he first encountered war. It was no longer an orderly or straightforward process.

In that same letter, he also described being under shelling and the terror he felt during that instance:

An 88 shell is the worst thing I’ve run up against. It is the only sound that really churns up the fear in me. The closest one came when I was lying in a tank track. I had dived for it when I heard the first one. They whistle down when they come at you and from the whistle of the second one I was sure it was going to hit me right between the shoulders. I pushed my face as far into the mud as it would go but I could still hear it coming. I was sure it was going to be a direct hit. I have never felt fear like that before. After it hit a few yards off splashing mud all over me I lay there for half an hour completely out of breath.\(^{160}\)

Of all the men surveyed in this thesis, Cummings was the most open about his war experiences in letters home. Whereas other men were willing to describe being under fire, he was one of the few to discuss the intense psychological fear he felt when in combat.

After combat, men were increasingly willing to discuss their time in battle. What follows is a long excerpt from Cummings. I think it valuable to include the quote the letter at length so as to convey the full impact of his letter.

In my last letter I was telling you the gory details of the war. Perhaps I had better finish it before I forget all about it. … Darling, don’t read this next page if you don’t care to hear of the horrors of war. You are in no condition to be shocked so perhaps I’d better order you to show it to Dad first and then let him summarize it for you in gentle language.

Well while you are asking for gory details let me give you the worst. It was my job to get every American, German, and civilian dead, put them in mattress covers, and ship them back to the rear by mule and jeep. I handled more dead in a

\(^{160}\) Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 22 February 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
few days than an undertaker does in a year! The first time I came upon a group of dead and told my GRO\textsuperscript{161} squad to go to work they laid a mattress cover by each body and just stood looking, stunned. When I came back and bawled them out they replied ‘Well look at their arms and legs. They are frozen out like that and they won’t fit in the bags!’ So I had to show them. It was impossible to move the frozen joints so I had to step on them. I thought only of the job to be done. I got a mess on my hand and wiped it on the dead man’s pants. I never let my eyes quite focus on the face or wound but through the blur I knew they were awful. I wouldn’t write to you like this, Darling, if I didn’t know you were a biologist and could take it. But war is like this. People should realize it so they will be willing to make any sacrifice to prevent it. No one, however, - not even Ernie Pyle\textsuperscript{162} can really give a good account. It is all so gigantic, hideous and unbelievable.

Some of the German dead had their fingers cut off for the rings they carried whether by our own men, civilians, or other Germans I do not know.

Again I learned first hand something I hard [sic] often heard of but never believed. I was clearing up a dark shed for an ammo dump when I came upon a pile of bones. On further examination here is what we found: the remains of 7 people, 4 adults and three children all with either a bullet hole in their skull or their skull bashed in. from shreds of clothing remaining, we could tell they were civilians. Apparently some attempt had been made to burn most of the remains. What the real story is I don’t know if anyone will ever know. We dug a hole, shoveled in the bones and made seven rude crosses out of ration crates.\textsuperscript{163}

At that point, Cummings obviously had not easily forgotten the experiences he had in combat. These are vicious, vivid memories of the horrors of war that Cummings chose to share with a wife who was eight months pregnant at the time. In this case, he references her request not to hide his experiences. Unfortunately, her correspondence has been lost and so I cannot say what

\textsuperscript{161} Graves Registration Office.

\textsuperscript{162} Noted war correspondent Pyle was mentioned in quite a few letters by soldiers who felt that he was able to somewhat fairly represent their experiences in combat.

\textsuperscript{163} Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 29 February 1945 [unlikely it was the 29th seeing as it wasn’t a leap year], Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
she wrote to him to provoke such a response. However, Cummings references another such request in a later letter, writing “I only write this at all Darling because you ask for it [.]”

Cummings was not, however, the only soldier to open up completely in a letter. Marty Daneman, until March 9, filled his letters with banalities. From his letters, there was no way to discover that he had been in combat, unless you were already aware of that fact. However, on March 9, one witnesses a complete about-face in his letter as he described combat for the first time. He really opened throughout up to his girlfriend and describes the war that he’d experienced. Again, as with Cummings’s letter, I think it valuable to quote Daneman’s letter in its near-entirety in order to display the emotion behind what he’d saying:

I’ve been keeping something from, + I think that I’d better tell you for several reasons. 1st I don’t want any secrets between us – 2nd – Some changes in my mind have taken place, + as I told Jerry [his brother, not the euphemism for Germans], I think you above all should keep abreast of them.

I think you must have read in the papers about the attack on Mt Belvedere, Mt. Della Torrachia, etc. I was in on it darling - + the story I’ll tell you about it isn’t pretty. There are still some things I can’t say – not for a while yet, but I’ll tell you what I can.

I wasn’t in the group that jumped off, with the element of surprise greatly in their favor, but in the next one. When I got there, the Krauts knew we were there, + were waiting for us. I went up with the CO to look for a new CP location at 12AM, + was caught in a counter attack. I managed to get in a dugout during part of the shelling, but when the Krauts started to assault us, I got in a shallow slit trench + started firing. I spotted one Kraut running across a gully I was covering + shot him. I’d always wondered how I’d feel shooting a man, + I found out quick enough. I felt no remorse doing it, almost pleasure. In one short period of time I learned to hate as I never thought I could. I saw enough blood + torn flesh + death to last forever. I came near to it a few times myself – shells landing all around,

164 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 30 March 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

165 I discuss this further down, see page 71 for the analysis.
machine gun bullets flying etc – but the closest shell was about 25 yds. I left my hole for a while after that to carry a stretcher. I came back to find that an 88 had landed right in it [his hole]. I lost 10 years of my life in that operation, + my watch and + something more important than either, which I can’t mention for a week yet. But I came out whole, + I’m thankful for that. It was pretty bad, but as the papers say – we did it – 4 outfits tried it before, 166 + we did it. But we paid a price.

Stan Nelson + I ran across a wounded Kraut in a dugout, + killed him. I guess hate does things to the mind. You’ll see why I feel as I do when I can say more.

Since those terrible days I can’t get back into my old frame of mind. I relive the torture in my mind too often. I can’t laugh like I did, nor sing, nor write the way I did. Please darling, don’t ask for poetry just yet. Only now do I fully realize that inadequacy of words to cover human emotion. I’ve thought a thousand times of the way I’d tell you this without worrying you, but I guess there can’t be any way. All I can say is that I’m safe now and there’s no more danger….

When it was over I shook for 3 days, jumped at every noise, + couldn’t hold a meal. And came out with a hate for war I’ll never lose, I don’t think anyone except a front line soldier, who has endured the mental agony of shelling, seen the gaping ragged shrapnel wounds in flesh; seen his buddies die before him, + smelled the sickly odor of dead men can develop the hate of war that I now have.” 167

Combat quite clearly had a visceral effect on Daneman. Here, he opened up to his future wife, citing his insistence that their relationship required such uncensored honesty. Unlike with Cummings, this was an unprompted exposure of combat memories.

Even soldiers who didn’t serve directly on the front had memories of combat. Arthur Draper was a medic in 3rd Battalion, 86th. From what I can tell, he was at an advanced operating station, the first medical line of work, meaning he and his fellow medics were just off the front and dealt with some serious wounds.

166 There had been four previous assaults on the Belvedere-della Toracchia ridge. They successfully reached the top but lost the position in the following German counter-attacks.

167 Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 9 March 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
At the moment I’m back in a so-called rest area, where as yet I have not had very much rest….It seems, though, we would spend a few days here and move on, spend a few more days there and move on. Inbetween [sic] would be a gruesome attack followed by a counter attack. We’d work like dogs for 24 or 48 hours and then subside into a sort of dazed stupor. It will take a long time to work the whole thing out into a half-way clear picture. … During the height of battle we didn’t have much time to play with the fires. There were times when I thought we’d never catch up with the patients. They came in battered and banged up in every conceivable manner. Scissors snipped clothing to hell to expose the wounds. It didn’t take long before the floor was ankle deep in debris and in that debris, alas, I lost my spectacles and my moccasins. Yes, those same damn moccasins I had so painstakingly smuggled out of Swift. They were finally lost in the pile of junk we tossed out the front door, and I had no desire to dig into that because in the mess were bits of discarded flesh, including amputated limbs. Ah well, it was so much extra weight to trot around.\textsuperscript{168}

Draper’s subject matter, like anything pertaining to combat, was certainly unpleasant to read.

This was extremely provocative material, evocative of the horrors of war that the men faced.

Soldiers’ experiences of combat, like those which I’ve quoted here, offered a look into the mental and psychological aspect of their war. “War is more of a mental strain, I believe, than physical cause the enemy is always trying his darndest to kill you no matter if you are in a foxhole or tending to the call of nature.”\textsuperscript{169} The war that the soldiers experienced involved a serious mental strain, as is typical of any conflict. Denis Nunan wrote later of the April Offensive,

Our first day was terribly bloody, and it ‘bout tore my heart out to see the trails and hillsides drenched with the blood of the best guys in the world….The small-arm fire and arty was endless, and our objectives seemed out of reach. He [sic] hills and draws would first be on our side and afford us some semblance of cover from the enemy, and then on the other hand, nature would hide the enemy from

\textsuperscript{168} Arthur G. Draper, letter to Lili Draper (his wife), 11 March 1945, Arthur G. Draper Papers, TMD199, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{169} Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 13 March 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
view or reach as he stabbed out at his with his tools of death….Night decended [sic], but it was not a signal for silence, only an increase in arty and mortar fire. The cries of the wounded and the stillness of the dead finally broke my heart.\textsuperscript{170}

As he had done earlier in the war, Nunan was trying to conceptualize the war mentally as much as anything. For him, the war served to take on an almost philosophical tinge the more that he thought about it.

Despite their initial reactions, soldiers quickly became adjusted to the habits of war and to the brutality of combat. For them, killing came hard. They didn’t like it, but it was the nature of doing duty as a soldier. Denis Nunan wrote, “In case the tax payers are wondering about their investment in me, I have now three notches in my gun stock, but you needn’t worry as I’m not a killer at heart – I’m just doing my duty as an American doggie – doing my duty + not batting an eye. To knock off a Kraut is just doing the job.”\textsuperscript{171} The men had to focus on what they believed was the task at hand. Only when they rationalized it as such could they fully do their duty.

The men got used to the nuances of life on the front. After having seen the difficulties of war, their attitudes actually hardened and they were a little less open. Cummings wrote, “When we first got here all the boys called me ‘action lover.’ They don’t now. They know that I, like everyone else, has [sic] had a stomach full.”\textsuperscript{172} Harris Dusenbery also describes the nature of this transformation. He wrote on March 18, “Back at Montecatini a letter from my wife brought news of the death of my brother-in-law, Franklyn Shields, killed in action in the Philippines. My heart

\textsuperscript{170} Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 2 May 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{171} Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 13 March 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{172} Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 16 March 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
ached for Evelyn and the family, but with death so close at hand here, I did not feel it like I would in ordinary circumstances.”\textsuperscript{173} In other words, life on the front hardened soldiers’ attitudes and left them less emotional. As Cummings admitted, “Grief is a civilian luxury.”\textsuperscript{174}

Marty Daneman too discussed this in an April 4 letter home in which he discusses this shift of opinion in an extremely pessimistic manner:

It’s strange trying to stand off from myself and try to analyze myself – before + after Belvedere. Before I came over, + for a while afterwards – I actually itched for action – glory boy that I was, but it sure changed fast. It takes only one time – one shell, to change an old opinion. The story about living thru it all if you live thru the 1st one is partially strengthened + partially disproved. After seeing what hell a piece of shrapnel can do to your buddies, you develop infinitely more caution. You don’t take the chances, you aren’t a hero anymore, unless you’re ordered to be one – or unless your [sic] so mad you lose your head. – But, by necessity, you become somewhat of a fatalist. That way it looks now to a line co rifleman is this ----: He’s lived thru it – very luckily. Perhaps it was because of the precautions taken, more probably because of luck. So he assumes the attitude that sooner or later he’s going to get hit – when + how badly are determined by luck, he will get hit. When I was under shelling, the fact that I was temporarily acting as a rifleman, made me believe it too. With men all around getting it, I didn’t wonder if I’d get it too – I just wondered when + how bad. I don’t still don’t see how or why I got out without ever a missing hair. Maybe the shell that blew my foxhole apart had my initials on it, + I fooled them by not being there. I’ll keep right on fooling them too _\textsuperscript{175}_.

\textsuperscript{173} Italian Diary of Harris Dusenbery Hq.Co., 1st Bn., 86th Mountain Inf. and Riva Ridge Operation; 1st Battalion Journal, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library, 33.

\textsuperscript{174} Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 30 March 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{175} Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 4 April 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Daneman obviously doesn’t hold out much hope after having seen combat. He no longer wants to return to the fighting. Although he acknowledged that he once longed to enter combat, his attitude has shifted. He has become mechanical in his sentiments.

Yet, the soldiers were still emotional when discussing the losses they had seen and experienced. Although censorship regulations admonished “Don’t tell of any casualty until released by proper authority (The Adjutant General) and then only by using the full name of the casualty,” this passage from Marty Daneman describing the deaths of two buddies clearly violated that injunction:

It is now the morning of the 19th and I can tell you what hit me so hard and left be [me] so bitter after [censored] Johnny and Ned were both killed a month ago by artillary [sic] fire. An 88 hit 2 feet behind their foxhole and detonated. Johnny was literally cut to pieces from shrapnel, and the same hunks that got Johnny, got Ned. They went right on thru him and into Ned. It still seems hard to believe that they are dead -- just a corpse and a memory. Johnny was always so full of life and fun, he always had a remark to make to break the tension, and was always in there pitching. It was a terrible shock to walk from my foxhole to theirs 75 yds and see the both of them bent up in it. I’ll never forget it for as long as I live. Nor forgive for it. The hardest letter I ever had to help write was to Johnny’s mother and dad, and Neds too. It must have been harder on Neds folks. He was an only child, and such a kid. He never even had time to look around and see what life was about. He never had a girl, or went to a dance, which was amazing considering his handsomeness. What can you say to a mother or a father to compensate for the loss of a son? We could think of nothing, so we told them that. It’s a bitter experience, seeing your buddy of two years die when it could have been somebody else, but the mind heals. I hope mine does, tho [sic] it will, as I said, never forget not [nor] forgive.

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177 Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 19 March 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Daneman was obviously traumatized by the sight, so much so that he was still discussing it a month after having seen it while on Mt. Belvedere.

As the war progressed, the men were no easier at heart for it. “One never gets really use[d] to combat – no matter how many times you enter it, you still sweat it out – No doubt due to one’s great desire to live rather than one’s fears. And although spring is in the air and ‘tis warmer, one finds himself still trembling like a leaf when caught in an artillery barrage. There is less ducking however, ‘cause when you hear a shell from an 88 sing overhead, it has already passed you – you don’t hear the one that scores a direct hit on you; and the one that gets you with shrapnel sings in the distance and explodes in your ear!”

However, the more combat the soldiers saw, the more they would actually speak of the everyday, quotidian elements of being on the front. They would also discuss the things that might take place while writing a letter, often negative events. Albert Brockman mentioned such occurrences in two separate letters when he wrote, “I was writing a letter a couple of nights ago in my hole by candle light. Jerry tried to sneak through our barbed wire and I had to spend the rest of the night makeing [sic] sure he didn’t. I still have the page I did get written” and “A shell just landed a few yards away and blew dirt in on me. Don’t mind if my handwriting is a little bit jumpy.” Writing letters at the front meant that the reader was exposed to all of what might have happened during the action there.

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178 Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 13 March 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

179 Albert N. Brockman, letter to Mrs. E.W. Brockman (his mother), 23 March 1945, Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

180 Albert N. Brockman, V-mail letter to Mrs. E.W. Brockman (his mother), 30 March 1945, Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
In fact, soldiers would speak of specific and bloody details that are shocking to the reader and are quite unexpected. Stan Cummings wrote of an instance laying a minefield at night under German fire: “Suddenly there is a flash and a report and I know something has gone wrong. My platoon sergeant comes back holding his shattered hand. An antipersonnel mine with a defective firing pin went off while he was setting it. I still don’t know why [we] weren’t all killed. It was suppose [sic] to be deadly for over a hundred yards.” This is not something you would write to your family to set their minds at rest. Cummings wrote of another instance:

[O]ne night about 3 in the morning the door burst open and a kid yelled ‘Come quick Sgt – is under the stones.’ A shell had hit a house fifty yards down the street and I had been sleeping so soundly I didn’t even hear it. This time 3 floors had caved in. two men sleeping beneath had crawled out from the pile of rubble. A third – a sgt – was still underneath. We could hear his crys [sic] for help faintly at first – fainter – not at all. After two hours of feverish digging in the dark a pick uncovered a white hand. A gold wedding band gleamed in the moonlight. The battalion [sic] surgeon said he was dead. I can see why soldiers seldom repeat such stuff as this. I get a kick out of writing letters but not this. An instinct inside one keeps shouting ‘Forget it. Forget it.’ You can’t think it out. All thoughts on war lead up blind alleys. Forget it. Grief is a civilian luxury. How in hell are we going to get that tactical unit up to B Co. Will the rations get through tonight. That is all that matters.

Again, this is an instance of a horrific event that a soldier was more than willing to describe. I realize that these two examples are only from Stan Cummings, who was more open than most when discussing his combat experiences. I offer as another example this following entry from Harris Dusenbery.

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181 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 28 March 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

182 It is apparent Cummings knows the name of the sergeant but is reluctant to mention the name, which is prohibited under censorship regulations.

183 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 30 March 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Starting with the April 14 Offensive, Dusenbery’s diary, constructed mostly from scraps of letters (soldiers were ostensibly not allowed to keep a diary during the war) becomes much more descriptive of combat. One section from April 30 reads:

The only news to mar an otherwise perfect day was the report that about ten men of Baker Company [86-B] were killed during the night by aerial bombs. We heard that three bombs were dropped by a German plane and one of them was a direct hit on a squad closely bunched on a mule trail.

After getting word to move our HQ company into Nago, we wound down the mountainside and passed the spot where what was left of the bodies lay. Blood and bits of bone and flesh lay scattered over the ground. Someone had made a partial attempt to clean up the mess. In the trail there was a gunny sack of arms and legs with the grisly ends sticking out. No bodies or heads were visible. We surmised that they had simply been blown to pieces. This is the thing that gnaws at your heart yet in war we have been hardened.184

Again, in this letter, like so many of his fellow Tenth Mountain Division soldiers, Harris Dusenbery discussed the war as he had experienced it in a very real, unalloyed, and brutal sense. Dusenbery touches on event in specific, gory detail and also mentions that same emotional hardening and shutdown that others referenced.

As they experienced the horrors of combat, many soldiers turned to religion as a way to find solace for themselves despite the devastation they had witnessed and been a part of. Religion had an interesting effect on soldiers; those who entered the war with an active or robust faith185 had their religious beliefs confirmed by the combat experiences they saw; those who went in as being un-religious186 remained so. The war tended to continue soldiers’ polarization of

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185 Examples of this were Albert Brockman and Dennis Nunan.

186 Examples of this were Stan Cummings and Marty Daneman.
beliefs, establishing what they held true: in that way, it didn’t reverse any opinions. However horrendous the men’s experiences, some at least were able to cope with the stress and the imminence of mortality by taking comfort in their faith.

Some soldiers, having made it through combat, credited their religious beliefs with having brought them through it all. Albert Brockman wrote shortly after the Tenth’s first offensive, “A fellow doesn’t [sic] have much to turn to except prayer when things are going tough. I thank God for watching over me and bringing me out in good health. I carried Grandfather’s Testiment [sic] with me. I wouldn’t part with it for anything. I never knew what a help and comfort faith in God could be before.”\textsuperscript{187} Religion prompted religious soldiers to thank God that they had made it through unscathed. It comforted them to be able to discuss religion openly in their letters. Denis Nunan wrote,

However, this time when we jumped off [referring to moving into combat] your youngest felt much better than on previous occassions [sic] due to a very simple fact – he had written home – written more than just a V-mail. Written home letting you all know how much you are in his thoughts, how much he appreciates all the kindnesses you have always bestowed upon him, how glad he was to have such swell parents, and last but not least, he sent his love. True, he might not show his love as openly as other sons and brothers do but did you ever stop to think about the showing of one’s love. What greater love can one have other than one’s love for God?\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{187} Albert N. Brockman, letter to Mrs. E.W. Brockman (his mother), 26 February 1945, Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{188} Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 13 March 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Nunan’s letter shows how much certain soldiers believed that religion had an important impact in their well-being through combat. They did thank God that they had made it through safe, and, as Albert Brockman wrote his mother on May 7, at the end of the war,

The news came in about four hours ago about Germany’s surrender. There wasn’t any shouting nobody seemed very excited about the whole thing. I guess it came as sort of a anti climax [sic] after the surrender here in Italy and in Holland and Denmark. It seems funny here it is, the day everybody has waited so long for at last come. I don’t think it’s a day to get drunk on it’s a day to get down on your knees and thank God, as someone [sic] said.\(^{189}\)

Brockman became a more religious person as a result of his experiences in the war.

However, this was not the case for all the soldiers. Those who were fairly secular when first experiencing combat remained that way after the fact. Stan Cummings wrote of experiencing shelling,

I think it was at this point, that I thought of ‘no atheists in foxholes.’ What an erroneous assumption. You’re in a foxhole. The shells start screaming down. You push your face in the mud and sweat and tremble and squirm. It makes every man – even such specimens as myself – whimpering crawling cowards. I suppose that hurts a man ego. He’d rather say it made him a Christian. I doubt if anyone really prays in a foxhole. Those murmurings are nothing but desperate animal cries for help only it usually happens that God is the only one around with sufficient time on his hands to listen.\(^{190}\)

\(^{189}\) Albert N. Brockman, letter to Mrs. E.W. Brockman (his mother), 7 May 1945, Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\(^{190}\) Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 16 March 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10\(^{th}\) Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Cummings’ passage here illustrates just how fundamental his response to religion in combat was. He vehemently believed that religion had no influence in determining one’s ultimate fate on the battlefield.¹⁹¹

Writing As A Release

Even for those who didn’t turn to religion to assuage their concerns, writing served as a way to relieve soldiers’ anxiety. Science has shown that “Individuals who exchange affectionate communication regularly are buffered against the effects of stress and…can accelerate physiological recovery from stress.”¹⁹² And, although soldiers were unaware of this evidence, they did speak of having positive effects from writing home. Their minds were put at ease by writing home:

Now that I have had this opportunity to write you, I hope that I shan’t be so shaky under enemy artillery, but time alone will tell. After the first shock of combat I began writing you little notes which I carried in my pocket prayer book with

¹⁹¹ Interestingly, Cummings appeared to be more of a spiritual person than actually explicitly religious. He certainly didn’t think that religion was useful for soldiers in combat. However, he described one instance in a way that has highly religious overtones:

Two weeks ago at the front I turned a street corner and came upon a Catholic church a shell had split apart. There stood the crucified Christ. I had seen plenty that day. When I saw the statue I was sure He was really bleeding too. Below two American soldiers were cooking cow. They had leaned their Tommy guns up against His legs without realizing what they had done. For once I took time for a picture. Of course it won’t come out the way I saw it. It’s funny how things like this affect me. Music doesn’t. Nor does art usually. But some little moving scene like this will occasionally open up all the tragedy and comedy in the world to me and will stay with me for days. (Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 16 March 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.)

hopes the chaplain would mail them to you. Am enclosing them in this letter. I want you all to know I think of you constantly and only wish that I could repay you all for being so good to me. … I can go back into combat feeling much better now that I’ve written this.¹⁹³

Nunan’s letters in particular were marked by similar sentiments. He also wrote, “However, this time when we jumped off your youngest felt much better than on previous occassions [sic] due to a very simple fact – he had written home – written more than just a V-mail.”¹⁹⁴ For Nunan, as a soldier, being able to write home eased his concerns before going into combat.

**On Wounds and Death**

Although all soldiers were facing death on a real, personal and individual level in combat at the interpersonal level, the idea of death was something that the men were forced to internally consider. On a battlefield, this was a real possibility. As best I could discover, four of the men whose collections I studied were wounded during their service in Italy and three were killed in action. More generally, through the four or so months that the Tenth was in combat, they suffered a thousand dead and 3,871 wounded. Twenty-five percent of all men who served in the

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¹⁹³ Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 28 February 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

¹⁹⁴ Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 13 March 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
division were casualties, with 1,126 casualties per month during the four months.\textsuperscript{195} This was one of the highest casualty rates\textsuperscript{196} in World War II.

Obviously, given that they were in a division that suffered high combat casualties, the men were aware that there was a chance they could be WIA or KIA. This was something that they discussed in their letters abstractly. Denis Nunan wrote shortly after their first sustained action, “My one concern in combat is how you and Daddy will accept any misfortunate [sic] that might befall me. Please, you all must be brave, and if I am to go, ‘tis merely God’s will, and you must accept it as such. Accept it and hope that my going shan’t be in vain. Please be brave about it, and remember also that others have suffered greater loses [sic] than we can ever suffer. I hate to be the cause of you all to worry and grieve, but c’est la guerre!”\textsuperscript{197,198} Nunan told his family in this instance simply to accept his death if it should come. He was doing his duty and his family would be doing theirs by moving on if anything happened to him.

If they were in fact wounded, soldiers would describe what happened in detail to their families. Here, Weldon Chase describes one of the two wounds he received in the war, near Mt. Belvedere.

The Red Cross girl just went through and tells me that the War Dept. has already sent you folks a telegram telling you I have been wounded and hospitalized. I don’t know how what they told you but you know the luck of the Chases so I picked up my Purple Heart easily. We were on a little scrap on a hill side a day or

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\textsuperscript{195} John Imbrie and Barbara Imbrie, “Chronology of the 10th Mountain Division in World War II: 6 January 1940 — 30 November 1945,” 30.
\textsuperscript{196} Wounded in Action (WIA), Killed in Action (KIA), Missing in Action (MIA), and Prisoners of War (POWs) combine to form the casualty rate.
\textsuperscript{197} French translation: that’s war.
\textsuperscript{198} Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 28 February 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
\end{flushright}
so ago and it got rough where my section was and a mortar shell landed to [sic] close. It wasn’t bad at all honest there was a loud bang and I got some scrapnel [shrapnel] in my leg above my knee. There was only a few peices [sic] and they were small. I got trucked down by Jeep, truck, and ambulance, and landed in a good enough evacuation [sic] hospital here where they stuck me in this area and took this scrap metal out and bandaged me up. I feel fine now can walk on it and it’s just stiff from a few cut muscles.199

Chase’s account of how he received his wound is typical of the soldiers’ letters in that they would discuss the circumstances of how they received their wound. Chase did the same when he was wounded on Hill 913 April 15th near Castel D’Aiano. This was the simple nature of being wounded; if soldiers were, it was important to write their family of the news and “try to beat the WD200 telegram again and not worry”201 them.

In addition, soldiers were willing to talk about their wounds in letters home. Hugh Evans discussed his wound in a letter to his mother on April 20:

All that happened was that a shell went off too close….The darn thing went off in a tree about four feet above my head. I was on a hill side observing and just heard it coming at the last second. I just started up when it went off right in my face. It flipped me, put a pin prick on my forehead [sic] and made my ears ring like well [sic] it’s hard to say. I just lay on the ground after it went off and wondered how I was missed. Then I realized I had better get to a hole and took off. Once in the ‘well loved’ hole I started to look myself over for wounds – none except for the pinprick. Right then I gave a little prayer and then returned to the platoon. The medic looked me over and said the ringing in my ears would just take a little time to go away. Well it did but two days later my left ear was soar [sic] and still felt like it had water in it so I told Lt. Jones I was going down to Battalion aid to see if

199 Weldon A. Chase, V-mail letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 21 February 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

200 War Department.

201 Weldon A. Chase, V-mail letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 15 April 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
I could get it drained. The next thing I found myself starting back for hospital, and here I am.\textsuperscript{202}

Evans even provided an illustration of the incident in his following letter:

\begin{center}
\textbf{Photograph 9 Evans’ sketch of the incident.}\textsuperscript{203}
\end{center}

Chase and Evans were not alone in describing the way in which they had received their wounds. Melville Borders had arguably the most severe wound of these three with a “Penetrating wound

\textsuperscript{202} Hugh W. Evans, letter to Mrs. E.C. Evans (his mother), 20 April 1945, Hugh W. Evans Papers, TMD4, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{203} Hugh W. Evans, letter to Mrs. E.C. Evans (his mother), April 1945 (undated), Hugh W. Evans Papers, TMD4, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library. Personal photo.
of the left thigh and knee" received on April 15. He too discussed his wound in a letter home, starting with a worrying introduction.

The G.I. in the next bed is writing this for me as I guess I have told you I don’t have full use of my arms yet. I will tell you what happened. During an attack I met head on with an unexpected guest mainly a Kraut[,] we both fired at the same time[,] my bullet traveled faster than his rifle grenade so I saw him fall. I killed him. ‘However you caint [sic] have your cake and eat it too.’ he got me in the leg tearing off a good size piece of flesh from my knee up to my hip[,] The blast also tore up my arms a bit. I am supprised [sic] I still have my man hood….This is a nice place and I’m getting the best of care please don’t worry about me as it sounds.

Chase, Evans and Borders all reassured their families not to worry although they did describe the series of events that led to their wounds.

However, not every soldier could remember the events leading to their injury. Stan Cummings was under fire when, as he wrote, “the hole in front of me seemed to explode. I didn’t hear it but I remember seeing the flash and I felt a crack on my head like being hit with a plank or a shovel.” From his letters, it seems likely that Cummings was concussed and certainly suffering from amnesia and loss of memory. He had to deal with the psychological ramifications of being wounded. “In a way it would be so much simpler if I could write ‘I picked up a bit of shrapnel in the chest’ or even ‘lost a hand.’ But you can’t pick your wounds in this war. Me – I’ve lost a few months of my memory. It doesn’t show – but there is a brooding uncomfortableness about it and it doesn’t seem to be healing easily. I suppose in the vernacular I

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204 Major Hugh A. Hesford, letter to Mr. M.W. Borders, 7 May 1945, Melville Borders Papers, TMD160, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

205 Melville Borders, letter to Mr. and Mrs. M.W. Borders (his parents), 21 April 1945, Melville Borders Papers, TMD160, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

206 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 20 April 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
am ‘shell shocked’.” Cummings wrote that he could only remember two things since boarding a ship in the United States: the sound of falling German shells and putting bodies in a bag as a Graves Registration Officer. For him, his wound was a struggle to remember who he was as well as what he was doing in Italy as a soldier.

**Life on the Front**

![Shrapnel Alley, Italy](image)

Photograph 10 *Shrapnel Alley, Italy* -- A trench with various items (i.e. a fuel can in the foreground, for example) left behind and littered with rocks and branches.

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207 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 22 April 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

208 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 20 April 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

209 Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, TMD256.
Soldiers would not only talk about combat but also be extremely willing to discuss the small details of life on the front. Reading their letters often takes the reader into the world that they were experiencing on the front. In a few different instances, soldiers would discuss key elements of their front-line lives, such as packages or their foxholes.

Packages from home were a large part of life on the front. They boosted morale: as LaVern Trepp wrote, “The boys liked the packages.”\textsuperscript{210} Soldiers made a specific point of asking for specific objects. Often a page of their letters home would be devoted to a list of requests. The paragraphs with requests in LaVern Trepp’s letters were circled by the family.\textsuperscript{211} Obviously members of Trepp’s family were taking note of what Trepp wanted so they could send that material to him in a package.

When soldiers received a package, an equivalent page in the following letter would be used to thank their family members for each object in turn, showing their gratitude for the home front’s care. Packages from home were a community tool. When one soldier received a package, he usually split it with his buddies. Food would often be shared around and consumed almost immediately. The morale boost from a package was therefore distributed through the recipient’s unit. And yet the packages were worth more than just the contents: “Thanks so much for

\textsuperscript{210} LaVerne O. Trepp, letter to Mr. and Mrs. C.M. Trepp (his parents), 4 January 1945, LaVerne O. Trepp Papers, TMD208, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{211} LaVerne O. Trepp, letter to Mr. and Mrs. C.M. Trepp (his parents), 4 January 1945, LaVerne O. Trepp Papers, TMD208, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
everything [in a package] including the cheese, crackers, book and film. Most of all I appreciated the love that seemed crammed into every corner.”

At the front, men spent their time in foxholes, effectively holes instead of trenches. Often these were dug hastily under shellfire or simply re-occupied and re-purposed German constructions. Soldiers seemed to take a thrill in describing their accommodations to their families. Hugh Evans described his and even provided an image:

I mentioned earlier in this letter about our foxhole, but seeing that it is such a new design I cannot just run through this letter and mention it just as a mere foxhole, instead right more I plan to describe it for you. I[t] is really beautiful mom. All the comforts of home except that they are sort of compressed into a small space. First of all in this new type hole we have a kitchen, a living room, a writing room (that is where I am now) a bedroom, and a semi bathroom of the portable type in case of need. Below you see a full blue print plan of our hole. How do you like it [sic]. You know mother its [sic] funny how quickly a human adjusts [sic] himself to his surrounding [sic]. Here we have been living in foxholes mostly under the ground for a week or so and really it isn’t have bad. I guess though that I always did like to get in the dirt and mud.

212 Stan Cummings, V-mail letter to Jean Cummings, 2 April 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

213 Hugh W. Evans, letter to Mrs. E.C. Evans (his mother), 8 March 1945, Hugh W. Evans Papers, TMD4, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Evans’ description of his foxhole was not the only one. Others also described their living arrangements, some even providing a more complete description of the scenario in which they were writing. Albert Brockman’s letter, in addition to describing his foxhole, also discusses the environment he was in on the front.

Mabey [sic] you’d like a description of my foxhole. I sleep with the platoon Sgt. We have a hole dug back under the bank with straw and blankets on the floor and a candle on a stick stuck in the wall. That’s about the only decoration. Were [sic]


Photograph 11 Hugh Evans' Sketch of Foxhole.
thinking of putting up this weeks [sic] Yank pin up girl for decoration. Outside we have a squar [sic] hole about four feet deep and about four feet squar [sic] where we have the telephone. I have my chair and myself there now. We have a cabinet riged [sic] up and have our rations and writeing [sic] paper stuffed in them. There are sandbags, and packs and all sorts of junk scattered around. Most of the fellows are cooking supper now or reading on blankets in front of there [sic] holes. Overhead there is the dull roor [sic] of the piper cubs buzzing around and the continous [sic] boom of artillery and the long sharp whistle as the shells go overhead. You get use [sic] to them after awhile [sic] and don’t even hear them.215

Brockman’s letter in particular takes the reader inside the head of a combat infantryman on the front, providing a description of his whereabouts as well as the sounds of the front. These letters, written whilst the normal action of the front continued, are important looks into the psyche and state that soldiers found themselves in.

In conclusion, the men of the Tenth Mountain Division were very open and willing to discuss their wartime experiences in letters home. They would discuss extremely sensitive details with their families, including graphic descriptions of deaths of their buddies. There appeared to be no hesitation in describing the intimacies of combat in Italy or the circumstances in which they received their wounds.

Men would reveal these details either in response to their families’ urging them to discuss the war or simply as an unprompted revelation of combat experiences. Soldiers also turned to religion as a type of consolation from the devastation that they had seen and described the release that writing a letter home brought them.

From these letters, we can see the reality of the war and combat that soldiers in the Tenth Mountain Division faced. The psychological nature of these letters coupled with the provocative

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215 Albert N. Brockman, letter to Mrs. E.W. Brockman (his mother), 9 April 1945, Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
content and descriptions of the war are remarkable, and may require further academic study to fully ascertain and understand the rationale behind why these soldiers discussed combat to the extent which they did; I could only discover so much in this limited sample of 15 soldiers’ collections.
Chapter 4: “I’m wondering what the future holds for us now:”

The End of the War

Understandably, as soldiers, men in the Tenth Mountain Division closely tracked any kind of news that they could relating to the end of the war, which became a main feature in their letters. The end of the war in Italy and the European theater served as a way to get home sooner, but for them it meant they would likely go to face the Japanese in the Pacific Theater. Their war was not truly over until both enemies were defeated. They would track news through any source available to them, which was mostly radio broadcasts when available and military media such as *Yank* and *Stars and Stripes*. Soldiers were consistently enthusiastic for the end of the war and suffered no ill will as they waited for the eventual German surrender. Interestingly, the longer the war seemed to last, soldiers gained a hatred for the Germans, which seemed to manifest itself in April letters in particular. Unfortunately, there is a major lack of secondary sources on the subject for World War II specifically, so this discussion is missing some insight as to other soldiers on other fronts’ perspectives.

Communication over war news was a staple of many letter collections. One soldier’s private journal and correspondence to his parents and wife contained no less than twenty-two separate mentions of end-of-war news from January to May. In fact, all fourteen letter collections that I studied included a reference to the end of the war or the progression of other fronts. This

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216 Albert N. Brockman, letter to Mrs. E.W. Brockman (his mother), 3 May 1945, Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

217 The Germans and the Japanese, as by 1945 the Italians had exited the war, although still were occupied by the Germans.

218 Harris Dusenbery.
was obviously something that fascinated almost all soldiers from a broad range of backgrounds; unlike some of the other themes identified in the wartime correspondence of this unit, interest in the end of the war was a fairly universal sentiment. Why was this the case?

Obviously, soldiers were interested in the end of the war because it meant they could return home, something which they discussed and eagerly looked forward to. The end of the war meant they could see their family members again or return to pre-war occupations. It also meant the cessation of fighting and the end of a war in which too many soldiers had given the ultimate sacrifice. These are all typical of soldiers and will be important to understanding the actual content of soldiers’ letters.

Soldiers consistently discussed the war news in their letters, despite the fact that that news would likely be far outdated by the time it reached their addressees. Post was too slow and the war too fast moving during the period I examine (from January-May) to allow any kind of consistency in letters and current news. They wrote about war news because it was a remaining link that they had with their family members, something they could discuss with each other and both could understand. Like their families at home, they shared a common desire of wanting an end to the war and wanting to be reunited. This was something that was true for other soldiers in the war as well. Lawrence Cane was a soldier fighting in Northern Europe, who, "Throughout his letters…expressed enthusiastic support for the Russian war effort."\(^{219}\)

In addition, end of war news served as a definitive morale booster for soldiers. Dusenbery wrote, “News from the Russian front has been extremely good for the last few weeks and it was

important in keeping our morale high at the front. That prediction you made [Dusenbery’s father predicted that the war would be over by April 1] that Germany would be out of the war by April may be good. I certainly hope so. We are all willing to do our share of the fighting, but the less we have to do the better.”

Although they were taking part in the fighting, they absolutely would have rather been back at home.

Excitement for the end of the war was so great that soldiers would often prematurely celebrate any kind of news that seemed to signal the end of the war. Harris Dusenbery’s letter of February 7 is an example. At that time, the Allied Twelfth Army had nearly passed through Luxemburg. In his letter, Dusenbery made a list of requests of his wife, Evelyn, nothing out of the ordinary for a letter. However, one of his requests was for “one quart of the best whiskey (Scotch) you can buy to celebrate victory-in-Europe.” The letter was written approximately three months before the surrender, so at the time, surrender must have seemed near enough to make such a request, despite the long months of war that actually lay ahead of him.

An early end to the war had other benefits as well, more pragmatic ones for soldiers who were on the front facing combat. Hugh Evans wrote in February, “Isn’t it wonderful the way Russia’s moving now. I certainly don’t think we’ll have to go through another winter’s fighting with Germany. That makes things much more pleasant for all of us because all we have to look forward to now is a pleasant warm summer, and we don’t have to worry about the winter that

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220 Harris Dusenbery, letter to Mrs. Verne Dusenbery (his mother), 5 February 1945, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.


222 Harris Dusenbery, letter to Evelyn Dusenbery (his wife), 7 February 1945, Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
follows.” They223 The soldiers’ future was often brightened by the prospect of a shortened war simply due to logistics on the front.

And, no matter how well the war appeared to be progressing, soldiers were never satisfied. As Bernard Murphy wrote, “Gee Honey You say the news is good on all Fronts, but there still not good enough to suit me.” They always hoped for an end, and although each new piece of news was welcomed, it was still not the final surrender. Arthur Draper echoed this, later, in May, when he wrote, “How much longer it will take I would not want to hazard a guess. … More and more I’m looking forward to the day when the peace terms are signed and we all come marching home. By golly, I’ve seen a lot of countryside where the people cheered us as we passed because to them the war was over. That was a thrill you couldn’t help but share even though to us it was slightly hollow.” Soldiers hoped for the end of the war from before they arrived in Italy until when they were fighting the Germans, even up until the actual surrender.

In fact, the wait for victory led many soldiers by April to detest the Germans. Thomas Dickson’s outburst helps describe this, in part.

Feel slightly impatient about the war. Since the breakthr [sic] on the Rhine, this has become a war of attrition. If the German people want it that way – OK, we are in position A to make it hurt. But I’d hate to see any of these guys hurt down here for the reason that the group of people called Germans don’t have the collective guts to override their leaders. That they still believe any adherence to Nazism to be right or even profitable is nonsense. They had nerve enough to start a big war – nerve enough to want England invaded. And were willing to gamble on being able

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223 Hugh W. Evans, V-mail letter to Mrs. E.C. Evans (his mother), 15 February 1945, Hugh W. Evans Papers, TMD4, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

224 Bernard J Murphy, letter to Yvette Murphy (his wife), 12 March 1945, Bernard J Murphy Papers, TMD41, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

225 Arthur G. Draper, letter to Lili Draper (his wife), 1 May 1945, Arthur G. Draper Papers, TMD199, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
to knock Russia out, and either neutralize us, or, with Japan’s help – defeat us. Their chances weren’t too long at that – based as they were on a belief [sic] in their own superiority. Nor did they miss by very much. Now they’re in a bad spot – but continue to kill any of us they can. The result has been to eliminate any feeling we soldiers might have had of them as people to be re-educated. And the more of them who die from any cause, from now on, the better.226

Many soldiers shared such emotions. These opinions seemed to stem, once again, from a desire to see the end of the war. Many soldiers favored a total annihilation of the Germans, a thought which Stan Cummings summed up on the day the cease-fire was announced: “[I]f someone made out a case for wiping out the entire German nation I don’t think I could plead much of a defense for them. Unlike an individual you can’t put a nation in a padded cell and forget about it yet that is what certainly needs to be done. [emphasis added]”227 According to what they wrote, soldiers’ unique perspective as being a part of the war on the front lines contributed to their opinion on the end of the war and their desire to see the surrender. Hugh Evans wrote in April,

“Mother you have alot [sic] different idea about how long the war is going to take when you are sitting in a fox hole and realize how far you have to go before it can end. You look at it in steps and sweat, and not in how many miles the ninth228 advanced today. These observers and guessers about the proximity of the end of the war don’t seem to realize that men have to move over every inch of the ground that’s taken. That those men have to fight on top of that for it and besides that they have to get fed and sleep a little [sic] too and all that takes time. The war wont [sic] end suddenly mother, but slowly and surely as a cattapiller [sic] inches along a log we will crush the German nation. And boy mother we better really crush her. At times I would like to see her surrender but that’s only because I’m

226 Thomas A. Dickson, letter to Barbara Dickson (his wife), 12 April 1945, Thomas A. Dickson Papers, TMD54, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

227 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 2 May 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

228 Referring to the Ninth Army, fighting in the Rhineland.
lazy or like the others don’t like this frightening [sic] business much. Yet I stop and think and realize there is only one answer, kill her!”

Startling expositions of anti-German feeling were all too common amongst soldiers, as shown in these letters. Despite the fact that these soldiers were on the Italian front, a less important theater of operations, these soldiers had no resentment. Instead, they were simply happy to be able to contribute to the war effort. They knew that they were unlikely to reach Germany or any areas of interest to the home front, but they were doing their part in the war effort. Interestingly, despite what might seem to make sense, the anti-German sentiment among soldiers didn’t result from knowledge of the Holocaust and what the Germans were doing to the Jews. In fact, there was only one mention of the Holocaust in the anti-German letters. The horrors of the Holocaust would have been somewhat-common knowledge among the soldiers at this point in the war and it is intriguing that they did not refer to this.

This anti-German sentiment was true too of other soldiers on other fronts. Again from Lawrence Cane:

During the hard, slogging fighting of the summer of 1944 Cane's revulsion for the Nazis only intensified. In a June 24 letter he angrily remarked: 'One word is engraved in my heart when we go after those bastards, 'REVENGE.' For Spain and my maimed and dead comrades,\textsuperscript{230} for my people, the Jews, for the destruction, the devastation, the suffering of all the peoples of the world. It's a terrible thing to say, perhaps, but I am full of hate and my soul cries with the Russians, 'DEATH TO THE GERMANS. DEATH TO THE NAZI DESPOILERS.'\textsuperscript{231}

\textsuperscript{229} Hugh W. Evans, letter to Mrs. E.C. Evans (his mother), April 1945 (undated), Hugh W. Evans Papers, TMD4, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{230} Prior to fighting in World War II, Cane fought with anti-Fascist forces in the Spanish Civil War.

\textsuperscript{231} Cane, \textit{Fighting Fascism in Europe}, xxv-xxvi.
When the end of the war actually arrived, it often came as an opportunity for soldiers to philosophize. On April 30, Marty Daneman wrote to his sweetheart Lois,

> Rumors of peace have been flying around here thick + fast – we don’t know what to believe any more. Only one thing seems sure – it’s a matter of days, or perhaps only hours til this mess is over. I don’t know what the reaction on myself will be. Maybe I’ll yell my head off, + maybe I’ll just sit + wonder why so many men had to die + be wounded, + why so many wives, sisters + sweethearts had to pay with broken hearts. I’ll never understand how man can destroy himself by such horrible means. Even more than I hate the Krauts + Japs, I hate war. I cannot consider our enemies as men – they may, as individuals, once have been human, but as a mass they have done nought but bring misery + chaos to the world. I can see only one solution to it all, - we must remain strong, + crush any attempt at disturbing peace before it gains any momentum. I said it before, + I say it again – it must never happen again.²³²

Many soldiers felt similarly, that the horrors of such a war needed to be stopped before it ever repeated.²³³

Finally, although the end of the war caused jubilation in the ranks, soldiers remained fully pragmatic about the war – they remained on the front, and danger seemed to still be present. On the day the armistice was announced, Albert Brockman was writing a letter home when the news broke. “The news just came that the Germs have surrendered in Northern Italy. The place is going made. Jeep are fireing [sic] machine guns rifles and everything else. I hope it’s true. It will take a month to get ammunition up to us again.”²³⁴ Despite the joy they must have felt, some

²³² Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 30 April 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

²³³ This is a type of sentiment that had occurred before. For instance, immediately after its conclusion, World War I was referred to as the “Great War” or the “War to End All Wars.” Neville Chamberlain’s policy of appeasing the Nazis occurred partly to prevent such an awful bloodshed as had occurred in the trenches of Europe.

²³⁴ Albert N. Brockman, letter to Mrs. E.W. Brockman (his mother), 2 May 1945, Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
soldiers restrained themselves as it would not have been the first false rumor; Stan Cummings described the situation by writing “I have had so many wonderful hopes blasted, however, that I count on nothing now until it is a certainty.”\textsuperscript{235} Soldiers also reflected on the mortality that they perceived close to the end of the war.

Had to stop last nite [sic] for a little while as we took on a L—of a shelling. As I layed [sic] here in my foxhole last nite [sic] during the middle of one of the beatings I couldn’t help but think of all the foolish people that have relaxed because they think this war is nearly over. There were fellows last nite [sic] that will never think that the 25 of March was the end of the war. If the war stopped to morrow [sic] the shells won’t fall any lighter or with less terror to night. Enough of this talk but it, the thought, comes to all of us when we run by a machine gun or through an impact area that any thing [sic] would be easier and people at home complain because they can’t have intertainment [sic] after mid night and gas to roam around and clothes and food. If you want to see someone that really wants a new white sheet you want to see a non man [sic] laying in a snow field in OD\textsuperscript{236} while a sniper or machine gun throws snow along him.\textsuperscript{237, 238}

The men certainly reflected on the end of the war, but never mentally stopped fighting in the war.

\textit{“Everyone over here is sweating out the Japs:”}\textsuperscript{239} Another Front

\textsuperscript{235} Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 3 May 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{236} Olive Drab, a term for the Army uniform.

\textsuperscript{237} What Chase is saying here is that a soldier dressed in army green lying in a field of snow would have more need for a white sheet for camouflage, an interesting inversion of the normal government message to people behind the rationale of rations. Here, the soldier himself is pointing out his need for material from the home front for the war effort.

\textsuperscript{238} Weldon A. Chase, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 25 March 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{239} Melville Borders, letter to Mr. and Mrs. M.W. Borders (his parents), 29 March 1945, Melville Borders Papers, TMD160, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Although soldiers looked forward to the end of the war in Italy, it meant one thing to them – another war front. The end of the war in Europe meant the beginning of their war against Japan in the Pacific Theater. Many soldiers discussed this and urged their families not to worry, that they would return home as soon as they could, despite the impending fight against the second enemy. Soldiers were very aware of the fact that “there is still work ahead; whether it be up north or in the Pacific sector we do not know – all we know is that the big job is not over.”

Arthur Draper summed this up when he wrote, “I believe our mission may not be over even when a formal surrender has been announced. Of course, we may find ourselves moving homeward by way of China and Japan. Or again we may find ourselves stuck in Europe as occupational troops who go around mopping up fanatical nests until a reasonable semblance of law and order is restored. In short, it may yet be quite some time before I hit up-state New York.”

In terms of demographics, there was no different between married soldiers and single soldiers when writing about the war in the Pacific. Soldiers in the Tenth Mountain Division believed that they were likely to face combat in the Pacific Theater.

Every one, on the radio and in the press at any rate, seems to be optimistic about the end of the war in Europe. I certainly hope all the optimism is warranted. But no one says anything about the war in the East ending at the same time. My hunch is the CBI theater will continue to operate somewhat longer. And now that we are youthful combat veterans I have a hunch we may continue our world travels. You never can tell, but I just mention it so that you won’t be killing the fatted calf

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240 Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 2 May 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

241 Arthur G. Draper, letter to parents, 15 April 1945, Arthur G. Draper Papers, TMD199, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

242 Referring to the China, Burma, India Theater of Operations.
too early. As someone is apt to remark, it’s a long, hard road to the end of the duration plus six months. 243 Ah, phooey. 244

Although they felt pessimistic, as demonstrated in Arthur Draper’s above letter, the men still tried to put a bright spin on the situation. Hugh Evans wrote, “You can only expect me home after the war is over both in Europe and Japan which is still quite aways [sic] off. Not too long I hope though. It could all be over within the next year or year and a half. At least mother I’ll get a trip around the world.” 245 They tried to encourage their families and tell them not to worry, for they believed that they would eventually be sent to their “work ahead; whether it be up north or in the Pacific sector.” 246

In fact, the soldiers were fully correct in their predictions that the US military high command expected to redeploy the 10th Mountain Division to the Pacific Theater. The Tenth Mountain Division received orders to return home and were sent “back to the U.S. for further training in preparation for the invasion of Japan. Plans called for the division to attack Kyushu on November 2, 1945.” 247 In the eventual attack plans, the Tenth Mountain Division was strategically assigned to attack the high cliffs on the Japanese beaches. However, the division

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243 Referring to the length of service – some soldiers were drafted and required to stay in the Army for the duration of the war plus six months upon completion.

244 Arthur G. Draper, letter to Lili Draper (his wife), 30 March 1945, Arthur G. Draper Papers, TMD199, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

245 Hugh W. Evans, letter to Mrs. E.C. Evans (his mother), 13 April 1945, Hugh W. Evans Papers, TMD4, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

246 Denis P. Nunan, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Rickard (his parents), 2 May 1945, Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

returned home between four and eight days before the surrender was announced. Although they were likely to have been sent to the Pacific Theater, their concerns didn’t come to pass.

And, although the soldiers had wanted to return home, they weren’t shirking their duties. “[A]ll we know is that the big job is not over. We are proud to have taken part on this operation that brought victory after so many months of trials and tribulations – we are proud to have played such an important part on the 5th Army’s drive to victory – spearheading the break out of the Appennines [sic], across the valley and the famous Fiume Poe to the Alps.”248 They remained faithful to the Army and their cause despite their continued combat, although they never stopped awaiting the end of the war, which they continued to dream about.

\[\text{“Someday soon…you will…be in my arms…and then I shall start living again:”}^\text{249}\text{ Returning Home After the War}\]

Soldiers eagerly looked forward to the end of the war, as has been demonstrated above, and had definite plans for after the war. This often consisted of visions for their future, whether education, housing or marriage. Mostly though, the soldiers just seemed eager to get away from the combat they had seen for months.

\[\text{---}\]

248 Ibid.

249 Stan Cummings, V-mail letter to Jean Cummings, 15 April 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
In June 1944, Congress passed the G.I. Bill of Rights, which helped to finance soldiers’ post-war educations and provide for veterans after the war. According to noted historian David Kennedy in his seminal World War II work *Freedom From Fear*, “The bill aimed to regulate the flow of returning veterans into the job market by offering them vocational training and higher education, as well as housing and medical benefits while in school and low-interest rates thereafter for buying homes and starting businesses.” The G.I. Bill came about after a failure to provide for veterans after World War I, who suffered from massive unemployment during the Great Depression. In other words, “ensuring that history did not repeat itself [was] the primary objective both of the U.S. Army and of Great War veterans.”

Some of the soldiers wrote home about taking advantage of the legislation of the G.I. Bill. Melville Borders wrote to his father,

> I expect to go to school, after I get home again, under the G.I. Bill of Rights but I know that law school will cost money and I’m not covered by the Bill of Rights for that. Even if I don’t go to law school the money will come in very handy I’m sure for some other educational purposes. I have a lot of reasons for going back to school. One of them is that since I’ve been in the army I realize how important it is. Another one is that I have a lot of personal pride and the ambition (more than ever) to raise myself up higher than I was before I came into the army.

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253 In fact, the G.I. Bill ended up being massively successful. Kennedy described the typical post-war life for veterans after their G.I. Bill-financed education as being “flush beyond their parents’ dreams, or their own Depression-era dreams either, for that matter” (Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 858).

254 Melville Borders, letter to Mr. and Mrs. M.W. Borders (his parents), 15 April 1945, Melville Borders Papers, TMD160, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.
Although money was no problem for his family - Borders had attended one year of university prior to the war and (according to the 1940 census), his father was a “Private Practice Lawyer” and the family owned a home worth $30,000\textsuperscript{255, 256} - he still dreamed of getting an education. For some of these soldiers, an education meant being able to climb the social ladder. In a post-war world in which veterans flooded back into the job market, education would be important indeed in finding employment, and the G.I. Bill helped them take advantage of that.

Several soldiers wrote often of their plans for building a post-war house. They concentrated on describing it in great detail to those reading the letter and tried to make it as real as possible for themselves. In some cases, soldiers provided diagrams of how they imagined it. As Weldon Chase wrote, “I think this is a good time to really plan my house I guess I will have to work on that. It will take up the time.”\textsuperscript{257} At the time, Chase was unmarried and was writing to his parents.\textsuperscript{258} For instance, Weldon Chase drew several figures in his letter of March 3.


\textsuperscript{256} The Borders family also employed a “Private Family Servant” and lived next door to a Bank President.” (Ibid).

\textsuperscript{257} Weldon A. Chase, V-mail letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 27 February 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{258} Few details on Chase were present in his file at the Resource Center.
Photograph 12 Chase's diagram of the barn he wished to build.\textsuperscript{259}

\textsuperscript{259} Weldon A. Chase, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 3 March 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library. Personal photo.
Photograph 13 Part of a letter in which Chase described the house in great detail. Present here is his rendering of how he envisioned part of the house.260

Thinking about after the war helped soldiers to escape their reality they faced. As Arthur Draper wrote, “After the war, when we build our little cabin, there are two things I want one is a bthroom [sic] with an inexhaustible supply of hot water and the other is the nearest one can come to perfect sunlight illumination. For all I care plumbing and illumination can all be in the same

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260 Weldon A. Chase, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Chase (his parents), 3 March 1945, Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library. Personal photo.
room. Ever since we hit Italy both things have been abominable.”

Planning a post-war house and all the logistics that went along with it helped soldiers to concentrate on their golden dream; making it home after the war and returning to their sweethearts. This too may have been a way reflect on American material life, in contrast to what must have seemed like substandard conditions in Europe (where indoor plumbing would still have been something of a luxury, for example).

A reunion with their loved ones was something most soldiers eagerly anticipated, the case with all soldiers and their families. Phrases such as “Someday darling, we’ll make a ceremony of burning our pens, + never have to write to each other again” or “I want to hold and kiss you so much that my life is miserable altho [sic] I can assure you it is quite perfect on all other counts.

Someday this war will end. Someday that boat will sail. Someday I’ll see you there waiting. Someday you’ll be in my arms again. The future beyond that point has no meaning to me. That is all I really want” were commonplace amongst the letters. For some, it meant simply being with their wife or sweetheart.

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261 Arthur G. Draper, letter to Lili Draper (his wife), 13 February 1945, Arthur G. Draper Papers, TMD199, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

262 For instance, as Bernard J. Murphy wrote, “After this is over whit I expect I’ll may be able to get a jeep or a small weapon carrier pretty cheap + I know where I can get all the stones I need to build.” (Bernard J Murphy, letter to Yvette Murphy (his wife), 25 January 1945, Bernard J Murphy Papers, TMD41, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.) The “how” of building a house after the war often encompassed pages of letters.

263 Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 26 January 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

264 Stan Cummings, letter to Jean Cummings, 9 February 1945, Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

265 These themes were common to other conflicts, as Martha Hanna’s close examination of one couple’s letter collection in Your Death Would Be Mine shows.
For other soldiers, returning home meant “no delay” before marriage. They attributed this to their combat experiences and what they had learned under fire. As Martin Daneman wrote, “I want to have the wedding as soon as possible dearest – I’ve found life is too short, + too uncertain to waste waiting. Our love has been proved a thousand times, + it can’t be said that we’re too young anymore. I want to be with you every moment of my life dearest, + never have to wait[.]” The bonds that soldiers had with their sweethearts constituted a major theme in their letters. As another soldier in the Mediterranean Front wrote in his poem “Assurance,” “How could I ever feel alone / When I know you wait for me.” This was also reflected in the songs popular at the time, with titles such as “Till Then” and “You’d Be So Nice To Come Home To” showing this desire.

For soldiers, returning home meant getting to see their girls again, and for some, that was one of the great promises of the end of the war.

In conclusion, soldiers tracked any news they could of the war’s end and wrote about it often in their letters, as it was a common point of reference that they shared with their families and friends. They hoped for the end as soon as possible. Any kind of news that seemed to be a conclusive statement as to the war’s impending close was fully welcomed although the soldiers’ perception of the end of the war included pragmatism when the end came, in hoping that the

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266 Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 8 April 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

267 Martin L. Daneman, letter to Lois Zora Miller (his future wife), 10 April 1945, Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.


news was finally true and that the news wasn’t another red herring as they had seen so many times before. The lack of satisfaction when the end of the war failed to come led to intense, visceral distaste for the German nation. These men had no patience for or sympathy with the German people. In contrast, for example, they had generally positive perceptions of the Italian citizens they encountered.

When the end of the war did arrive, soldiers were highly conscious of the fact that the end in Europe meant they were likely to be transferred to the Pacific Theater. They reassured their families but were cognizant that they were not likely to arrive home for some time yet. They were worried about having to go and fight the Japanese, although they thought of it in a positive light.

In fact, soldiers eagerly looked forward to the post-war environment when the war was completed. They saw opportunities in education, which would help further their social status; housing, so they could settle down and create a life for themselves; and marriage, when they could finally marry the girl that they had dreamed about during their time overseas in combat. They carefully considered all alternatives while in combat and plotted them out and described them in letters home.
Conclusion

In summary, this thesis has demonstrated that, despite these numerous separate combat experiences (or “ten-meter wars”), there were many commonalities between or similar points in the content of different soldiers’ letters. In most of these cases, these sentiments were similar to those of other soldiers in the war.

Censorship had a major impact on the content of letters home. Soldiers knew that what they could reveal in letters was severely curtailed by this military ordinance. Instead, they told their families to rely on the newspapers to find out more details about the combat that they were going through and even their location (mentioning it was forbidden under censorship measures). After censorship restrictions were relaxed, men would be willing to discuss their time at the front.

The more the men experienced the Italian front, the more they described it in their letters. As this was the first time most of them had been in a war zone or somewhere that the ravages of war had touched, they were understandably struck by the damage that they saw in Italy. Their descriptions of this are therefore colored by expressions of surprise at the destruction. In some cases, the men even wrote of the desolation as an unfortunate side-effect of war. In other words, so much demolition was necessary to win the war.

The men also wrote of the Italian citizens they encountered. At first, in the port cities, they held unfavorable opinions of the civilians, believing they were trying to take advantage of the soldiers’ generosity. However, as they progressed further north, this relationship reversed.

Hugh Evans, discussion, February 2012.
The Italians instead were willing to share what they had with soldiers and welcomed them into their homes. This shifting dynamic between the soldiers and civilians changed the perception of Italians in the letters.

Likewise, the men’s discussion of combat shifted. Although they originally thought it far less difficult than what they had believed going into the war, this perception transformed quickly. After having experienced combat, they were extremely willing to discuss the time they had spent in combat, in all its specific and brutal details. Furthermore, soldiers were willing and open to write of the deaths of their buddies or the way in which they received their wounds. Men would discuss these instances either in response to their families’ urging them to speak of their combat experiences or simply as an unprompted revelation of their time under fire.

In addition, men either turned to religion as a release and consolation or wrote of their atheist feelings after having fought in the war. Whatever the case with the soldier, it was clear that writing a letter home brought them a release. This sentiment from the soldiers has been confirmed by scientific research, proving that, in fact, a letter home was valuable for preserving their psychological well-being.

In letters home, men always anticipated the end of combat. They heralded the arrival of any news that might mean the end of combat in Europe, although they knew that they were likely to be sent to the Pacific Theater of Operations to continue the fighting. While in combat, however, they never gave up on the cause.

As the end of the war seemed more likely, soldiers developed a fascinating anti-German sentiment. This vehement hatred was not related to the atrocities being perpetrated by the Nazis in the Holocaust. Instead, the men seemed purely to be frustrated with the Germans for having
caused so much devastation in their lives and (so they thought) led to the death of their comrades-in-arms.

Finally, men anticipated the end of the war to such a degree that they carried out distinct and careful planning for their post-war lives when returning home. Emblematic of this was their desire to diagram their post-war house, receive an education courtesy of government funding from the G.I. Bill or simply settle down with their girl and look to a happier future.

In this thesis, I have demonstrated that soldiers discussed combat in a very frank manner, holding little back from the reader and leaving few details to the imagination. This situates itself importantly in a historical debate on the subject of letters home from soldiers. I argue that soldiers tended to describe their specific experiences in combat, unlike what Martyn Lyons argued. This is representative of a larger trend in scholarship finding that soldiers would discuss their war experiences in letters home. In that sense, the Tenth Mountain Division is no different than Victorian-England soldiers, American doughboys and French poilus in World War I or Wehrmacht troops in the Second World War.

Yet, in particular, the Tenth Mountain Division is interesting as it entered the war so late and fought for so short a time, sustaining a casualty rate of 25%. The Tenth were baptized under fire and continued to stay under fire for a short yet intense four months. Veteran and historian John Imbrie compared casualty rates from the Tenth with two other infantry divisions who fought in Italy. Despite fighting for 10 months less than the 88th Infantry Division and 16 less than the 34th Infantry Division, the Tenth suffered 396 and 279 (respectively) more casualties per month than the two other divisions. The men of the Tenth Mountain Division were thrown into

271 For a specific chart of the casualties suffered by the Division and what offensives those related to during their time in Italy, see Appendix C.
combat in 1945 at the very front of the Allied Campaign in Italy, which offers an interesting
dynamic in that the men experienced such dramatic combat in so short a time. They didn’t have a
large and gentle exposure to combat (if there can be such a thing); instead, they experienced the
vicious nature of combat at Riva Ridge and Mount Belvedere, which only continued the further
north they went. Recall that this is a division which never retreated or failed to secure a combat
objective.

This division merits further academic or scholarly research. The comprehensive letter
collection of Stan Cummings and his wife Jean in particular merits a close examination. These
letters have shown a distinct and definite look into the heads and minds of soldiers in the Tenth
Mountain Division while in combat. It shows them from their strongest to their weakest, most
emotional and psychologically fragile. It displays the often quotidian nature of combat for men
in the division, who would write letters home while under fire. Some letters contain menial or
ordinary details (such as the increased pay which resulted from receiving the Combat
Infantryman’s badge) but these letters display a remarkable look into the war from a unique
division.
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Appendix A: The Soldier Subjects: Biographies

As this thesis discusses letters home from soldiers, I find it important to provide a brief biography here of the soldiers I have included in my thesis. Note that soldiers who joined the division at Camp Swift were replacements and thus hadn’t gone through mountain training at Camp Hale.

The soldiers are arranged alphabetically by last name.

Private First Class Stuart E. Abbott (86-L) was with the Tenth from Camp Hale until Italy. He had graduated high school and was unmarried. He turned 20 while in Italy. He was Killed in Action February 20 on Mount Gorgolesco, near Querciola.\footnote{Stuart E. Abbott Papers, TMD50, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.}

Private First Class Melville W. Borders (87-A) joined the division at Camp Swift. He had completed one year of college and was unmarried. He was 20 in 1945. Wounded near Le Coste, April 15.\footnote{Melville Borders Papers, TMD160, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, And The Denver Public Library.}

T/Sgt., later 1\textsuperscript{st} Sgt. Albert Brockman (85-G) was with the Tenth from Camp Hale until Italy. He graduated high school and was unmarried. He was 20 in 1945. He received two Bronze Stars.\footnote{Albert N. Brockman Papers, TMD84, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.}
S/Sgt. Weldon “Bug” Chase (85-L) was with the division from Camp Hale until Italy. He was 20 in 1945. He received the Bronze Star for actions on Hill 913 near Castel D’Aiano and Purple Hearts for Belvedere and Hill 913.275

Private First Class John Parker Compton (86-G) was with the division from Camp Hale until Italy. He attended Princeton for two months before enlisting and was unmarried. He was 20 in 1945. He was Killed in Action March 3 near Iola.276

Lieutenant Stan Cummings (85-B) was with the division from Camp Hale until Italy. He received a Bachelor of Laws from University of Chicago Law in 1943 and was married. He was born in 1919, which means he would have been 25 or 26 in 1945. He received the Purple Heart.277

Corporal Martin L. “Marty” Daneman (85-2nd Battalion HQ) was with the division from Camp Hale until Italy. He had graduated high school and was unmarried. He turned 20 while in Italy. He received the Bronze Star.278

Private Thomas A. Dickson (87-E) was with the division from Camp Hale until Italy. He had completed high school and was married. He was 32 in 1945.279

275 Weldon A. Chase Papers, TMD35, 10th Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
276 John Parker Compton Papers, TMD42, 10th Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
277 Stan and Jean Cummings Papers, TMD7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
278 Martin L. Daneman Papers, TMD25, 10th Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
279 Thomas A. Dickson Papers, TMD54, 10th Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
S/Sgt. Arthur G. Draper (86-HQ, Third Battalion-Medical) was with the division from Camp Hale until Italy. He had gone through four years of college and was married. He was born in 1909, which means he would have been 35 or 36 in 1945. He earned two Bronze Stars.280

S/Sgt. Harris Dusenbery (86-HQ-1st Battalion) was with the division from Camp Hale until Italy. He was college educated, having earned a BA in Political Science in 1936, and was married. He turned 32 in 1945. He received the Bronze Star.281

T/Sgt. Hugh Evans (85-C) was with the division from Camp Hale until Italy. He was unmarried. He was born in 1924, which would mean he was 20 or 21 in 1945. He received the Silver Star for his actions on Mt. Gorgolesco in February and received the Purple Heart after being wounded near Castel D’Aiano in April.282

Private First Class Hyman Goldenberg (126th Mountain Engineer Battalion-C) was with the division from Camp Hale until Italy. He was married and hadn’t attended college. He was born in 1918, which would mean he was 26 or 27 in 1945.283

Private First Class Bernard J. Murphy (86-E) joined the division at Camp Swift. He was married. He was born in 1916; he was 28 or 29 in 1945. He was Killed in Action April 14, 1945 near Rocca Roffeno.284

280 Arthur G. Draper Papers, TMD199, 10th Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
281 Harris Dusenbery Papers, TMD57, 10th Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
282 Hugh W. Evans Papers, TMD4, 10th Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
283 Hyman Goldenberg Papers, TMD195, 10th Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
284 Bernard J Murphy Papers, TMD41, 10th Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
1st Sgt. Denis P. Nunan (87-C) was with the division since Fort Lewis. He was born in 1910; he was 34 or 35 in 1945.\textsuperscript{285}

Sergeant LaVern O. Trepp (10\textsuperscript{th} Medical Battalion-D) was with the Tenth since 1943. He had had two years of college. He was born in 1917; he was 27 or 28 in 1945. He received the Bronze Star.\textsuperscript{286}

\textsuperscript{285} Denis P. Nunan Papers, TMD33, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.

\textsuperscript{286} LaVerne O. Trepp Papers, TMD208, 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division Collection, the Denver Public Library.
# Appendix B: Military Ranks and Abbreviations

In order of superiority, here are the ranks and abbreviations in the U.S. Army during World War II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>General</td>
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<td>Col.</td>
<td>Colonel</td>
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<td>Lieutenant Colonel</td>
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<td>Major</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cpt.</td>
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<td>1st Lt.</td>
<td>First Lieutenant</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Lieutenant</td>
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<td>1st Sgt.</td>
<td>First Sergent</td>
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<td>M/Sgt.</td>
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<td>T/Sgt.</td>
<td>Technical Sergeant</td>
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<td>S/Sgt.</td>
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<td>Sergeant</td>
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<td>Private First Class</td>
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<td>Pvt.</td>
<td>Private</td>
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Appendix C: 10th Mountain Division Casualties

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<th>DATES</th>
<th>KIA &amp; DOW</th>
<th>NCD</th>
<th>WIA</th>
<th>POW</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>NO OF DAYS</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>APR 17 - APR 20</td>
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**ABBREVIATIONS:**
- KIA = Killed in action
- WIA = Wounded in action
- DOW = Died of wounds. The date assigned to a DOW is the date of wounding.
- NCD = Non-combat death

Figure 4 10th Mountain Division Casualties in Particular Battles

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