

We're In The Army Now

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HIGH in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, just north of the famous mining town of Leadville, is situated one of the U. S. Army's most specialized training centers. This army post is Camp Hale and its specialty is mountain and winter warfare.

Through Camp Hale's gates come men from all parts of these United States to receive an intensive training course in that type of warfare which will, in the end, qualify them for mountain infantrymen. Most of the men who come to Hale have been mountaineers or skiers in civilian life and are partially equipped for the rough, rugged training that lies ahead of them. The great majority come either from the New England states or the Far Western states where mountains are the most prominent feature of the terrain. Consequently, they already have mountain blood in their veins, so to speak.

To the new recruit, Camp Hale seems like a large congregating place for men and mules. On every street passed en route from the railway station at Pando to Headquarters, he sees marching men and mules. He may even find himself speculating as to which is carrying the heavier pack, the mule or the man. Indeed, after he has been assigned to one of the various training units and has been issued his mountain equipment, including a "rucksack", he ceases to speculate: the man's wins! However, he soon gets used to the weight and before long takes pride in singing that most famous of mountain troops' songs: "Ninety Pounds of Rucksack, a Pound of Grub or Two."

After a two-weeks acclimatization training program which consists of short climbs, calisthenics, lectures on mountain warfare and a variety of other subjects, the new recruit is ready for his basic infantry training. The basic training course is the same as that given to any other infantry soldier with a few modifications to meet the problems encountered by the difference in terrain. After his basic training is completed the recruit is no longer classed as a "Rookie" for he is now an efficient soldier who has mastered his assigned weapon. He then begins his mountain training which consists of rock, snow, and ice work and finally skiing. All of these courses are conducted by the most qualified instructors from many of the world-famous ski schools in this country and Europe.

Specialized instruction in mountaineering is systematically applied throughout the mountain trooper's period of advanced training which is so systematic and intense that the trooper may very well learn in a two-weeks course that which a civilian mountaineer may take several years to learn.

When the trooper has finally qualified in all the specialties of mountain warfare he then begins tactical training with his unit. Now he is subjected to long, hard marches with heavy packs, traveling at night without light, bivouacing in the snow in extremely cold weather, going without sleep for long periods, and the dubious pleasure of cooking for himself over a small gasoline stove. He learns to take his ski boots to bed with him at night to prevent the agony of trying to don two solid blocks of ice in the morning. Above all, during this period, he learns to function as part of a team and takes great pride in the various accomplishments of his squad.

The trooper, who has completed his basic, advanced and finally his unit training is now a competent mountain fighter and is ready for the more strenuous winter maneuvers.

Through all his training, the trooper either learns to love or hate his four-legged brother in the supply train. I am speaking of the mule and

his load of rations. The trooper who is called out of his warm sleeping bag about 0400 (4:00 a. m.) in the frosty morning air to go down to a truck head and help load mules is very likely a mule "hater." On the other hand the trooper who unloads the rations from a struggling mule's back and cooks a good supper is undoubtedly a mule "lover." One's attitude depends a good deal on whether one is on the "put" or "take" end of the situation. However, whether he likes or dislikes the animal, every mountain trooper is dependent upon the mule for his supplies. A man might carry enough rations for himself for four days on his back, but that is about the limit. Here the mule saves the day for he can carry rations for many hungry men. And though many will not admit it, even to themselves, nearly every mountain trooper appreciates the mule—especially at meal-time.

The equipment of the mountain infantryman is probably the most specialized in the army. He has a gadget for every occasion. Principally the equipment is very similar to that which civilian mountaineers and skiers used prior to the war, with several modifications and improvements to meet the requirements of mountain fighting. The A.M.C. has developed some fine equipment for extremely cold weather and has improved mountaineering equipment in many ways.

The men at Camp Hale don't confine their mountain training to the weekly schedule, but like all mountaineers go out into the peaks on week-ends to ski, hunt or climb. They put to practice the new skills learned and soon become seasoned mountaineers. Camp Hale is so situated that many week-end climbs can be made very easily in a day. Nearby is the Mountain of the Holy Cross which offers some very fine rock climbing on the north face. The rugged Arapaho range is only a 40-mile drive from the camp gate and certainly offers rock climbing comparable to anything in the United States. For those who like to venture further for their week-end climbing, the Rocky Mountain National Park is only 100 miles to the north. This park has many fine rock climbs including the east face of Long's Peak, a climb to test even the expert's ability.

To skiers, Camp Hale offers unusually excellent terrain and snow conditions. Many ski lifts have been erected by the Engineers near the Post and may be used by the personnel of the Mountain Troops on week-ends as well as during the week. There are enough downhill runs near these lifts to satisfy the appetites of any "kanonen." For the ski mountaineer, there are any number of fine trips to be taken. The ski racer may find one of the toughest downhill courses in the country at the "Rock Run" in the town of Aspen, approximately 40 miles from Camp.

A combination of teamwork, rugged training and discipline makes the mountain infantryman one of Uncle Sam's finest fighting men. The Mountain Trooper must be one of the most self-reliant, well-trained and hardy soldiers in the world, and he knows it. To survive in mountain warfare he must strive toward this end. When he has finished his training at Camp Hale he knows he is "tops" in mountain fighting.

The future of mountaineering is being insured and expanded at Camp Hale. The Mountain Infantrymen will carry the mountaineering skills they have attained back to their homes after the war. Since mountaineering is further instilled in their blood it is only reasonable to expect that a good many will carry on in post-war years for their own enjoyment and exercise. Camp Hale is now the ski school and the mountaineering school of the world. Never before have there been so many "students" of mountaineering. Just as our Mountaineer's Climber's Course developed from a handful to hundreds, so will these schools at Camp Hale develop. The future of mountaineering is most surely in good hands.