

# Lessons from the Past



## The 10th Mountain Division and the 1st Brazilian Expeditionary Infantry Division during Operation Encore, 1945

LTC GUSTAVO T. NAKASHIMA, BRAZILIAN ARMY

World War II involved, directly and indirectly, countries from all continents. The formed alliances conducted multinational operations in different theaters of operations, which demanded a high level of cooperation and generated lasting relationships. The Italian campaign between 1943 and 1945 involved two Allied armies: the U.S. Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army. In addition to U.S. and British troops, units from France, Australia, Italy, Canada, Poland, New Zealand, Greece, South Africa, India, and Brazil also participated in the campaign.

During this period, the Allies sought to free Italy from German domination as well as to force the Axis to maintain part of its forces in this region, which would allow for better conditions for the Allies entering Europe from the north. After initially invading Sicily in July 1943, the Allied forces then continued to advance south-north, repelling the German defenses.

In the summer of 1944, the most experienced troops were redeployed for the invasion of France, the main Allied effort. At this point, the Allied advance in Italy had been stopped by the Gothic Line, a German defensive line that extended from east to west that took advantage of the Apennines Mountains to exert advantageous dominance over the attacker.

Between the second half of 1944 and January 1945, the 1st Brazilian Expeditionary Infantry Division (EID), the 10th Mountain Division, and the 92nd Infantry Division joined the present forces to recompose the Fifth Army. With little combat experience, these divisions took important steps to keep the Allies moving forward. Particularly, Operation Encore, which was led by the 10th Mountain Division with the participation of the 1st Brazilian EID, allowed the Allies to break the Gothic Line. This operation, in addition to its immediate results, strengthened the relationship between the U.S. Army and the Brazilian Army, assisting in an association that continues to the present day.

Activated in July 1943, the 10th Light Division (Alpine) was created to focus on mountain warfare. These first two years of intense training and tactical innovations would prove critical to success in Italy. Although it was atypical, the recruitment of

much of the division was carried out with the support of civilian organizations (National Ski Association and National Ski Patrol), prioritizing previous skills in climbing techniques and snow sports. This was very useful as the Soldiers already had technical knowledge and just had to adapt it to combat. In addition, the division now had highly educated, above-average military personnel. During this period, the division overcame several challenges in order to become combat ready: constant replacements of Soldiers; physical prepara-



U.S. Army photo

*Soldiers in the 10th Light Division (Alpine) train for mountain warfare.*



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Monte\\_Castello](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Monte_Castello)

**Soldiers of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force maneuver during the second assault of the battle of Monte Castello on 29 November 1944 near Corneta, Italy.**

tion for the rigors of high mountain combat; and specific training in mountaineering, skiing, and winter techniques. These challenges were in addition to the complications that came with organizing a new division with unique characteristics.

As the difficulty of advancement increased on the fields of Italy, the U.S. Army began to prioritize the preparation of the division, increasing its personnel and equipment. In November 1944, the division was reorganized as the 10th Mountain Division.

Totaling 14,101 men, the division had almost 1,000 more Soldiers than a standard infantry division. It included 85th, 86th, and 87th Mountain Infantry Regiments; division artillery with four field artillery battalions (604th, 605th, 616th, and 1125th); 126th Engineer Battalion; cavalry reconnaissance troop; anti-tank, medical, and quartermaster battalions; Special Troops; and the headquarters. This exclusive division also included the 10th Mountain Cavalry Recon Troop, a horse-mounted unit. Consequently, the 10th Medical Battalion included one veterinary company. The 10th Quartermaster Battalion also included three pack-mule companies and one truck company. The artillery had three 75mm howitzer battalions and just one 105mm full-tracked howitzer battalion.

The new 10th Mountain Division arrived in Italy in January 1945 and was incorporated into Fifth Army. With only the expertise of U.S. commanders and its recent training, the division needed to adapt its organization and equipment during its baptism by fire.

As the main effort in Operation Encore, the division had two weeks for reconnaissance, rehearsals, and preparation. Intense intelligence work made it possible to collect accurate data from the enemy and the terrain, which proved essential for the success of the operation. Data was collected mainly by surveillance patrols (using skiing techniques), dismounted patrols, and air reconnaissance.

With this intelligence, leaders chose the best trails to use with little enemy presence.

The detail of the data collected in the reconnaissance generated necessary revisions in the organization of the troops for the operation. Five trails were identified that could support the companies' movement. On each of them, the enemy presence and the ground were very well observed. With that information, plans for each trail were devised. Some required more rope and climbing assets while others required pioneer squads to support building hasty bridges. The daily details and updates allowed the rehearsals and combat preparation to be conducted very efficiently.

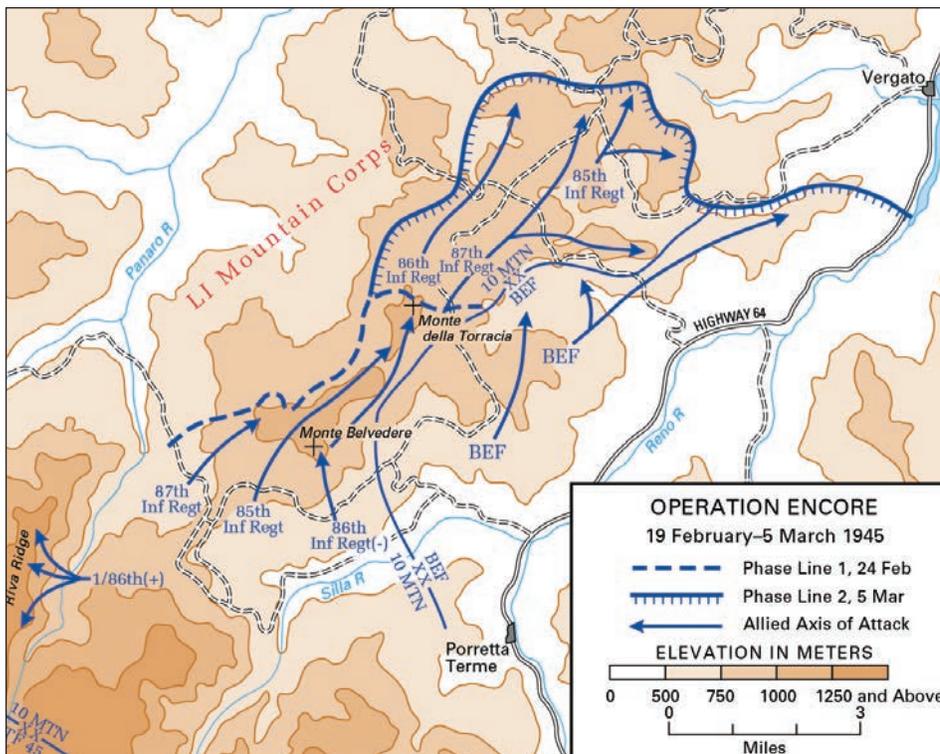
The path that led the 1st Brazilian EID to Operation Encore, where it met up with the 10th Mountain Division, was quite different. The division's WWII preparation was very precarious. Created in August 1943 (roughly the same period as the 10th Mountain Division), the division was supposed to be able to carry out small-scale, limited-time operations against terrestrial elements of any kind. Brazilian political and economic conditions hampered the mobilization and preparation of the 1st EID. In fact, much of the unit's equipment, armaments, and uniforms were delivered straight to the theater of operations.

The first contingent, out of a total of five, arrived in July 1944 and was incorporated into Fifth Army. This contingent received additional training in Italy before being employed in combat. The other contingents were trained during the fighting, which began in September 1944. The battles of Massarosa, Camaiore, and Monte Prano were followed by other victories in combat that gradually provided the Brazilian soldiers with experience and lessons learned.

In November 1944, 1st EID received the mission to conquer Monte Castello, part of the Gothic Line. Defended by the Germans, this line impeded the Allied advance towards the north. Between November and December, four attempts failed due to incomplete reconnaissance, mountainous terrain, deficiencies in coordination between forces, and poor tank, artillery, and aviation support. With the onset of winter, Fifth Army began the Winter Defensive, preparing for a future onslaught.

The fifth and last contingent arrived in February 1945. At that time, the 1st EID was organized in three infantry regiments (1st, 6th, and 11th), a division artillery with three 105mm field artillery battalions and one 155mm field artillery battalion, the 9th Engineer Battalion, a medical battalion, the 1st Flotilla of Communication and Observation, and a cavalry troop, totaling 25,334 soldiers.

A spring offensive was then planned for February 1945. With the milder weather and the arrival of the 10th Mountain Division, the Fifth Army — reorganized and resupplied — gathered more resources to break the German defensive line. It was necessary to conquer the line of elevations that dominated the Po River Valley to secure Highway 64. For



Graphic from *North Apennines, The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II*  
**Map — Operation Encore**

this, Monte Belvedere and Monte Gorgolesco were chosen as the main initial objectives, and later Monte Castello and Monte Della Torraccia.

The 10th Mountain Division received the mission to carry out the main attack. Its baptism by fire began on 18 February 1945, with the mountain Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry leading the way. Using the darkness, through previously recognized access routes with difficult access, the assault climber teams conducted a successful surprise attack on Riva Ridge, a position that would allow the attack on Monte Belvedere. Each assault climber team laid pitons and affixed ropes for follow-on forces to climb the rock.

After bolstering the position with supplies, ammo, heavy weapons, and artillery, the 10th Mountain Division assaulted Monte Belvedere on 19 February. This time, the Germans were prepared to repel the attack. With strong fire support, meticulous planning, and the commitment of units, leaders, and soldiers, the Allied attack was successful and allowed the 1st EID and the 10th Mountain Division to advance.

The 10th Mountain Division and 1st EID then attacked and conquered Monte Della Torraccia and Monte Castello. This time, after four failed attempts over the past winter, the attack was successful. Once Monte Belvedere was secure, the assault could be carried out with the flank protected. After 12 hours of a frontal attack, the 1st EID conquered Monte Castello.

From there, the two divisions continued their advances in a coordinated manner, with the Brazilian division protecting the

right flank of the 10th Mountain Division. From 23-25 February, the Brazilians occupied La Serra and supported the 10th Mountain Division to seize Monte Terminale.

In the second phase of the operation at the beginning of March, Fifth Army conquered a new line of elevations. Side by side again, the 10th Mountain Division conquered the line of hills (Monte Grande d'Aiano, Monte della Spe, Monte della Castellana, and Monte Valbura) while the 1st EID, on the right flank, conquered Castelnuovo.

On 8 March, Operation Encore ended. With satisfactory results, the 10th Mountain Division and 1st EID had advanced 25 kilometers from Bologna, a favorable position for the Allies.

The success of Operation Encore after the failed Allied advance attempts taught important lessons that are useful in modern combat. Unconventional environments require unique training. The mountainous environment where

the German defensive line was located provided a great advantage for the defender. To break it, it was necessary to employ climbing techniques in places of difficult access in order to surprise the German troops. The creation and employment of the 10th Mountain Division, a troop specializing in this environment, was critical to the success of Operation Encore. The need for specialized training can still be observed today in extreme cold, mountainous, and jungle environments, among others.

The detailed study of terrain and enemy led to the best choice of access routes that surprised the enemy. As a result, the achievement of initial goals occurred quickly and with few casualties. For this to happen, several patrols were launched in regions very close to the enemy's defensive line. Despite the numerous technological means that are currently available, reconnaissance troops are still indispensable.

The synchronization of available means was also a fundamental factor in the success of Operation Encore. This allowed for the flank security of both pieces of maneuver forces and allowed for mutual support between the two divisions in the first echelon. In addition, fire, air, and artillery support were synchronized, allowing the infantry to advance into hard-to-reach places. Currently, there are more sophisticated ways to perform synchronization. On the other hand, it is much more complex as it involves more means in different domains, including space and cyber, in multi-domain operations.

Shortly after World War II, both the 10th Mountain and 1st EID were deactivated. During the Cold War between 1948 and 1958, the 10th Mountain Division was reactivated without the "Mountain" status. In 1985, it was again activated under

the name of 10th Mountain Division but without the exclusive mountain warfare capability. Since then, it has sent troops to Operation Desert Storm in 1990 in Iraq; Operation Restore Hope in 1992 in Somalia; Operation Uphold Democracy in 1994 in Haiti; Operation Joint Forge in 1998 in Bosnia; and the war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The 1st EID has never been activated again. However, the 1st Army Division inherited its legacy and historical name. Since then, the division has sent troops to the United Nations Emergency Force in 1956 in the Suez Canal; the Brazilian Detachment of the Inter-American Armed Force in 1965 in the Dominican Republic; United Nations peacekeeping missions in 1993 in Mozambique, in 1995 in Angola, and between 2004 and 2017 in Haiti.

In 2013, the 1st Army Division turned one of its brigades into the 4th Mountain Infantry Brigade. Based on the expertise of the 11th Mountain Infantry Battalion, which participated in the 1st EID campaign in World War II, this brigade started to develop specific techniques for the peculiar environment as well as continued to act as a regular light infantry brigade.

Since the joint effort in World War II, relations between the Brazilian and the U.S. Army have been strengthened through agreements, doctrinal exchanges, military equipment, and

partnerships. More recently, in 2021 a joint training exercise was carried out with a Brazilian infantry company inserted into a U.S. battalion. It is hoped that this training will take place periodically, further strengthening the link between the Brazilian and U.S. Armies. The historic bond forged between the 10th Mountain Division and the 1st EID continues to bear fruit, and joint training is most significant in light of the pervasive threats of modern combat and the need for multinational operations.

### References

Justin J. Chabalco, *Forging the 10th Mountain Division for War, 1940-45 – How Innovation Created a Highly Adaptive Formation*, *Art of War Papers* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2019).

O Exército Brasileiro na 2ª Guerra Mundial, Brazilian Army, 2020.

Derreck T. Calkins, "A Military Force on a Political Mission: The Brazilian Expeditionary Force in World War II," Georgia Southern University, 2011.

Gordon L. Rottman, *US 10th Mountain Division in World War II* (UK: Osprey Publishing, 2012).

Elonir J. Savian, A Operação Encore e a conquista de Monte Castello: Análise da relevância das ações da Força Expedicionária Brasileira no âmbito do XV Grupo de Exército Aliados. XXIX Simpósio de História Nacional, Brasília-DF, 2017.

U.S. Army Center of Military History Publication 72-34, *North Apennines*.

*Fifth Army History, Volume VIII – The Second Winter*, U.S. Army, 1947.

**LTC Gustavo Nakashima, Brazilian Army**, currently serves as a foreign liaison officer at the Maneuver Center of Excellence on Fort Benning, GA. His previous positions include serving as a platoon leader in the 11th Brazilian Mountain Infantry Battalion and instructor at the Agulhas Negras Brazilian Military Academy. LTC Nakashima graduated from the Maneuver Captains Career Course at Fort Benning and also earned a master's degree in military operations from the Escola de Aperfeiçoamento de Oficiais, Brazil.

*The artwork at left is from the U.S. Army Center of Military History poster collection; its description reads: Because of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (BEF), Brazil had the distinction of being the only Latin American nation whose participation in World War II was represented in division strength... In 401 days of continuous operation as part of the IV Corps, the Brazilians took part in the liberation of 24,580 square miles of Italian soil, including more than 600 towns and cities. One of the unit's more memorable engagements was an attack in support of the IV Corps' 10th Mountain Division assigned to take a series of mountain peaks and ridges which had been used by the Germans to observe U.S. troop movements along one of the two main arteries to Bologna and the Fifth Army's front.*

*Two objectives of the Mountain Division's attack were Riva Ridge and the Monte Belvedere-Monte della Torraccia. Riva Ridge was a cliff that rose almost 1,500 feet from the valley floor, all of which had to be scaled prior to gaining access to Monte Belvedere. Covering on the right, the BEF was to hold a three-mile sector between the Mountain Division's right flank and the Reno River in front of the Fifth Army. During the operation, the BEF seized Monte Castello, about one mile southeast of Monte della Torraccia. Soon after nightfall, on 23 February 1945, the Brazilians assaulted the crest and seized their objective, thereby protecting the Mountain Division's right flank from enemy counterattack.*

*Featured in the painting are members of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force in the final stages of defeating the enemy on Monte Castello. The men of the BEF are firing an 81mm mortar and are attired in typical American uniforms of the World War II period: wool trousers, M1943 field jacket, and the modified M1910 individual equipment which included the M1 rifle, M1 carbine, and the M1A1 Thompson submachine gun.*



Artwork courtesy of the U.S. Army Center of Military History