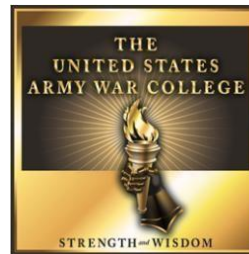


Creating the 10th Mountain Division: The National Ski Patrol's Role

by

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United States Army War College
Class of 2015

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01-04-2015		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Creating the 10th Mountain Division: The National Ski Patrol's Role				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel Curt R. Simonson United States Army National Guard				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Colonel Douglas Mastriano Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 7,237					
14. ABSTRACT The 21st century security environment is volatile and unpredictable. The United States faces a variety of threats to its national security interests. As the Army grows smaller, it must maintain the ability to regenerate capabilities to meet unforeseen threats. Regeneration of land forces includes actions taken to rapidly develop new capabilities. The creation of the 10th Mountain Division in World War II provides a case study in the force regeneration role played by the National Ski Patrol System (NSPS). Beginning in 1940, the NSPS petitioned President Roosevelt and Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall to create a specialized Army unit capable of operating in cold weather and in mountainous terrain. Once mountain infantry units were created, the War Department took the unprecedented step of contracting the NSPS to recruit qualified men. Military and civilian leaders employed strategic leadership competencies to work across public-private organizational boundaries. The visionary arrangement between the War Department and the NSPS provides an example of how a civilian organization can be leveraged to assist in creating specialized units to address emerging national security threats.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Force Regeneration, DOTMLPF, Contracting, World War II, Mountain and Winter Warfare					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 43	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Title: Creating the 10th Mountain Division: The National Ski Patrol's Role

Report Date: 01 April 2015

Page Count: 43

Word Count: 7,237

Key Terms: Force Regeneration, DOTMLPF, Contracting, World War II, Mountain and Winter Warfare

Classification: Unclassified

The 21st century security environment is volatile and unpredictable. The United States faces a variety of threats to its national security interests. As the Army grows smaller, it must maintain the ability to regenerate capabilities to meet unforeseen threats.

Regeneration of land forces includes actions taken to rapidly develop new capabilities. The creation of the 10th Mountain Division in World War II provides a case study in the force regeneration role played by the National Ski Patrol System (NSPS). Beginning in 1940, the NSPS petitioned President Roosevelt and Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall to create a specialized Army unit capable of operating in cold weather and in mountainous terrain. Once mountain infantry units were created, the War Department took the unprecedented step of contracting the NSPS to recruit qualified men. Military and civilian leaders employed strategic leadership competencies to work across public-private organizational boundaries. The visionary arrangement between the War Department and the NSPS provides an example of how a civilian organization can be leveraged to assist in creating specialized units to address emerging national security threats.

Creating the 10th Mountain Division: The National Ski Patrol's Role

The 21st century security environment is volatile and unpredictable.¹ In this uncertain environment the United States faces a variety of threats to its national security interests. Diminishing defense budgets driven by shifting fiscal priorities will be the norm.

As the Army grows smaller, it must maintain the ability to regenerate capabilities to meet unforeseen threats.² Regeneration of land forces includes three distinct actions. The first two relate to the existing Army, while the third action applies to forces that must be created. The first two actions are the reorganization and mobilization of the existing Army. The third action involves rapidly developing new forces.³ In an increasingly uncertain future the Army's ability to rapidly expand the force is essential to U.S. national security.

The creation of the 10th Mountain Division in World War II provides a case study in the force regeneration role played by the National Ski Patrol System (NSPS). Beginning in 1940, the NSPS petitioned President Roosevelt and Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall to create a specialized Army unit capable of operating in cold weather and in mountainous terrain.⁴ Once created, the War Department took the unprecedented step of contracting the NSPS to recruit qualified men to serve in mountain infantry units.⁵ Working across public-private organizational boundaries requires strategic leadership competencies. Leaders in the War Department and in the NSPS consistently demonstrated these competencies, which proved essential in building a strong public-private partnership.

The concept of creating a specialized unit for winter and mountain warfare had detractors among the Army's senior leadership.⁶ However, Army Chief of Staff General

George C. Marshall supported the idea from the beginning.⁷ His strategic vision paid off when the 10th Mountain Division was employed to break the stalemate in Italy's Apennine Mountains in February, 1945. Specifically, the application of technical mountaineering skills in the night attack on Riva Ridge validated the requirement for an infantry unit possessing specialized winter and mountain warfare skills.⁸ The visionary arrangement between the War Department and the NSPS provides an example of how a civilian organization can be leveraged to assist in creating specialized units to address emerging national security threats.

The Strategic Setting

General George C. Marshall assumed duties as Army Chief of Staff on September 1, 1939. As if to foreshadow his experience over the next six years, Germany invaded Poland the same day.⁹ The Army that General Marshall inherited consisted of roughly 200,000 Army and Army Air Force personnel. In spite of daunting challenges, by early 1945 he had grown the Army to a force of 8.2 million.¹⁰ The 10th Mountain Division would become a small but important part of Marshall's powerful new Army.

The NSPS Role in Creating the Force

The Russo-Finnish Winter War of 1939-1940 played an important role in the development of ski and mountain troops in the US Army. On the morning of November 30, 1939 Russia aircraft attacked Helsinki.¹¹ Soviet ground attacks soon followed. Though heavily outnumbered, the Finnish Army exacted a heavy toll on their Soviet invaders. In fighting near Suomussalmi, an ad hoc organization of Finnish ski troops defeated two Soviet divisions despite being outnumbered roughly 4 to 1.¹²

The Soviet forces that invaded Finland were not organized, trained or equipped to fight in winter conditions. They did not even have white camouflage for their tanks and soldiers.¹³ The Finns on the other hand were prepared to live and fight in this harsh Northern climate. They were comfortable outdoors in winter, and they were properly equipped. Additionally, most adults were “excellent cross-country skiers.”¹⁴

In early December, the Soviet’s 163rd Division was operating along a road network stretching for 25 miles north of Suomussalmi. Finnish Colonel Hjalmar Siilasvuo, regimental commander of JR-27, was given the mission to destroy it.¹⁵ Siilasvuo was a civilian attorney. However, he had served in the elite Jaeger Battalion in World War I.¹⁶ His regiment was reinforced to Brigade-strength, but had no heavy weapons, and was terribly outgunned.¹⁷ “What JR-27 did have was plenty of skis and men who knew how to use them.”¹⁸ His strategy was to leverage his ski troops’ mobility to attack the flanks of the 163rd Division, and to cut the roads to prevent Soviet movement. In his attack, 350 Finnish soldiers were able to “close the road to an entire reinforced Soviet division.”¹⁹ The dashing attacks of men on skis caught the imagination of skiers thousands of miles away.

Charles Minot Dole was known to his friends as “Minnie.” In addition to running a successful New York City insurance business, he served as the Chairman of the National Ski Patrol System (NSPS). In early 1940, following a day of ski patrol activity in Vermont, Dole and his ski patrol colleagues sat around the fire and discussed the Finnish ski troop’s remarkable success.²⁰ Bob Livermore, NSPS Vice-Chairman, remarked “it’s a perfect example of men fighting under conditions and on terrain with which they are familiar.”²¹ As the snow blew outside, they tried to imagine the US Army

operating in similar conditions. One of the men present that night was Roger Langley. Langley served as president of the National Ski Association of America (NSAA), a non-profit organization that promoted skiing in the United States. Langley decided to write the Secretary of War to offer the association's services.²² He penned the letter in late May.²³ The response from Secretary of War Woodring was polite, but not encouraging. It simply thanked Langley for his "patriotic suggestion."²⁴

Meanwhile, in April 1940 Germany invaded Denmark and Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands fell to Germany in May.²⁵ These events had a profound effect on both the White House and on Congress. Marshall's efforts to expand the Army bore fruit in May when President Roosevelt requested over a billion dollars in defense spending.²⁶

In early June, Dole decided it was time for action. On June 10, 1940, acting in his capacity as NSPS Chairman, he petitioned member patrols asking for their support in offering NSPS services to the War Department.²⁷ That same day Italy invaded France.²⁸ The membership overwhelmingly backed Dole's idea to support the War Department.²⁹ With a green light from the NSPS, Dole needed a point of entry into the military hierarchy. As Dole pondered his next move, France fell to Germany. The rapid German victory in Western Europe stunned military and political leaders in the United States. They were forced to address the growing reality that "Hitler was no longer merely a mad dictator disturbing the quiet of Europe; suddenly the Nazi threat loomed over the Western Hemisphere."³⁰

Roosevelt needed cabinet members to support his foreign policy. On June 22nd he named Republican Henry L. Stimson to replace Woodring as Secretary of War. Stimson had served as an Army Colonel and was a friend of Theodore Roosevelt. He

had also served as President Taft's Secretary of War, and as President Hoover's Secretary of State.³¹ Stimson was also senior partner in the New York City law firm of Winthrop, Stimson, Putnam and Roberts.³² But most importantly to the creation of US mountain troops, Henry L. Stimson was a long-time member of the American Alpine Club.

In late June Dole and NSPS Treasurer John Morgan made an unannounced visit to Governor's Island, New York. They met with Captain Christian Clarke Jr., the Second Corps Area Aide-de-Camp. Clarke discussed Dole's proposal with General Phillipson, the Second Corps Area Chief of Staff.³³ Phillipson requested a follow up meeting with Dole in early July.

The meeting, which included NSPS Treasurer John Morgan, took place on July 8th at Phillipson's headquarters.³⁴ Phillipson supported Dole's idea of leveraging NSPS member's experience in assisting the Army for two reasons. First, he believed if the Germans attacked the US they would "drive down the St Lawrence River to split Canada from the United States and then down the Champlain Valley to again split and destroy our industry."³⁵ Second, he had experience with winter training, having commanded the garrison at Pine Camp, NY during the winter months. Phillipson knew, however that Dole would have an uphill battle in getting anyone in the War Department to listen.³⁶

Dole decided to "take the bull by the horns" and wrote a letter directly to President Roosevelt.³⁷ His letter of 18 July described how a large part of the United States was covered by snow in winter, and highlighted the inability of our "tropical army" to operate in these conditions. He described the organization and function of the NSPS,

and pointed out there were 2,000,000 skiers in the United States. Dole then stated what would become the foundational argument in recruiting men for service in a specialized mountain unit. He contended “that it is more reasonable to make soldiers out of skiers than skiers out of soldiers. Skiing is an art not learned in one winter. Any men so trained would be specialized troops.”³⁸ Dole concluded by offering the NSPS’s services to the War Department in a joint training venture. Dole’s conception of a force trained to operate in winter conditions and in mountainous terrain would be validated in Italy’s Apennine Mountains in early 1945. However, in the summer of 1940 there were few believers.

Minnie Dole was arguably the perfect person to lobby the War Department. By his own admission he was obsessed with the idea of winter warfare.³⁹ This obsession, combined with his dogged determination to never give up, kept him motivated in spite of a seemingly endless parade of obstacles. He was also a master in the art of written correspondence. Dole’s daily letters and telegrams were impressive in both their volume and in their clarity of thought. Lastly, he was an accomplished salesman and insurance executive, and he had at his disposal a network of influential friends and business associates. Contacts from his college days at Yale University proved especially helpful in scheduling appointments with government officials in Washington, D.C.⁴⁰

Through friends from Yale, Dole made an appointment to meet Senator James W. Wadsworth, a Republican from New York.⁴¹ Senator Wadsworth, along with Senator Edward R. Burke, a Nebraska Democrat, had co-sponsored the bill that would become known as the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940.⁴² At the time of Dole’s visit, the bill was languishing in Congress. Wadsworth not surprisingly supported Dole’s

argument for winter training. The senator then arranged for Dole and Morgan to meet the following morning with Colonel Clarence Huebner, in the Office of the Chief of Infantry.⁴³

Dole's timing could not have been worse. Washington was baking in the summer heat. As the sweat poured from Colonel Huebner's face, he was not at all interested in winter training, especially winter training in the northern United States. He stated that the Army's plans called for training in the southern states during the upcoming fall and winter, which would obviate the possibility of training in winter conditions.⁴⁴ Colonel Huebner then summoned Major Bruce, who shuffled them to his office. Major Bruce asked a few questions, and then told them, "Hell, we have a hundred guys a day like you. They even want to show us how to shoot guns around corners."⁴⁵ At that point Captain Ridgely Gaither was summoned to show them out. On the way out, Captain Gaither seemed curious and asked if the NSPS could assist with equipment recommendations should the Army decide to pursue winter training. Dole replied that they certainly could, then left before he could be told his services were not needed.⁴⁶

Throughout the month of August John Morgan compiled every piece of information he could find regarding the development of mountain and winter troops, and organized it in a scrapbook. He and Dole then made another trip to Governor's Island to update General Phillipson. Phillipson was not surprised at their lack of success in Washington, and stated their only chance of success was to see General Marshall⁴⁷.

One of Dole's Yale classmates, Hayden Smith, was a partner in Secretary Stimson's New York law firm. Smith put Dole in touch with Arthur Palmer, Stimson's Special Assistant at the War Department. In early September Dole and Morgan met with

Palmer and Secretary Stimson's Military Aide, Major Regnier.⁴⁸ At the end of a two hour meeting, Major Regnier asked Dole what role the NSPS could play in defending the United States from the type of winter attack described by General Phillipson. Dole responded that his ski patrols could serve as guides, scouts, and if properly trained, they could conduct guerrilla warfare. Dole then asked for Palmer and Regnier's support in scheduling a meeting with General Marshall. Major Regnier believed the idea had merit, and he committed to discussing it with Secretary Stimson.⁴⁹ Given the state of world events, and General Marshall's busy schedule, getting an appointment with the Chief of Staff would be difficult at best.

The summer and fall of 1940 was a critical period in preparing the United States for war. On August 27th, Congress passed Public Resolution No. 96, authorizing the President to order the National Guard into active military service for a period of one year. A few days later President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8530, which ordered five National Guard divisions into active military service.⁵⁰ The order also activated numerous coast artillery units and air observation squadrons. For General Marshall it would double the number of divisions in the active force. This significantly increased the capacity of Marshall's Army, while at the same time creating challenges in equipping, housing, and training these units.⁵¹ Fortunately for Dole, Marshall was concerned about soldier morale as well, which proved essential in Dole's efforts to get the NSPS involved in national defense.⁵²

The telegram from Art Palmer arrived in Dole's New York NSPS office on 9 September. General Marshall had agreed to meet with Dole and Morgan, and a tentative appointment was scheduled for the next morning at 10:00am.⁵³ After a

congratulatory hand shake, Dole and Morgan each bought a clean shirt, and took the night train to Washington.⁵⁴

The short presentation to General Marshall went well. Dole and Morgan presented their most coherent argument to date on the need for winter training. The key points were summarized in a three page paper entitled "Winter Training."⁵⁵ Marshall listened attentively, and promised to get back to them "one way or the other."⁵⁶

This meeting was a water shed event in the NSPS's attempt to influence War Department actions with respect to mountain and winter warfare training. On September 12th Marshall sent a memorandum to the Assistant Chief of Staff G-3 (Operations and Training) outlining his thoughts on the utility of Dole's proposition. He also forwarded Dole's three page winter training paper. Marshall understood the value of training units for possible defense missions in the northern United States, Greenland, and Newfoundland. He also knew that the first National Guard divisions to be called up would be reporting for duty in a few days. Though Dole's paper did not mention recreational skiing or soldier morale, morale was Marshall's primary interest in pursuing the winter training concept. He wrote that "skiing with proper instructors and with available equipment would be very helpful to morale, and for that reason alone it merits serious attention."⁵⁷ He then empowered the G-3 section to take action as they saw fit. And take action they did.

Dole received a call from Lieutenant Colonel Nelson M. "Johnnie" Walker less than two weeks after his meeting with General Marshall. Lt. Col. Walker worked in the Operations and Training Division (G-3) of the War Department General Staff. The next day they met for lunch at the Yale Club in New York. Lt. Col. Walker was accompanied

by Lt. Col. Charles Hurdis.⁵⁸ Walker and Hurdis outlined the Army's initial concept for training during the upcoming winter, including a draft nine page training plan that outlined proposed ski training in eight infantry divisions. Each division would conduct either battalion-level training, ski patrol training, or recreational skiing.⁵⁹ Only the small ski patrol units would receive modern ski equipment. Units conducting battalion training would use regular Army boots and overshoes, coupled with older skis and leather toe strap bindings. While Dole and Morgan strongly preferred that all soldiers receive modern equipment, the fact that the Army was moving forward with the winter training project was more than they had hoped for.⁶⁰ They also discussed the NSPS's role. Lt. Col. Walker recommended that a larger NSPS office might be helpful. A few days later a check for \$2,500 arrived with a promise of additional funding as required.⁶¹ Dole and Morgan used the funds to establish a new NSPS office in the Graybar Building in New York.⁶² This office at 415 Lexington Avenue would serve as the hub of NSPS support to the War Department throughout the war.

On September 16th, President Roosevelt signed into law the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, otherwise known as the Burke-Wadsworth Act.⁶³ Burke-Wadsworth made males between the ages of 21 and 45 available for the draft, and provided Marshall the authority he needed to build a proper Army.⁶⁴

The Army announced its plans for winter training in early November, and a directive was sent to participating divisions shortly thereafter. G-3 designated the 5th Division as the primary recipient of winter training, and this division was given the most equipment and funding.⁶⁵ Shortly thereafter the 5th Division Quartermaster contacted the

NSPS requesting information regarding suppliers of ski equipment and winter clothing.⁶⁶ Dole's small but efficient staff provided appropriate sources for all requested items.⁶⁷

The same day President Roosevelt signed the Burke-Wadsworth Act, the citizen-soldiers of the first mobilized National Guard units reported to their armories for one year of active federal service. Over the coming weeks, units of the 41st Infantry Division, a National Guard outfit comprised of units from the mountain states of the Pacific Northwest, would concentrate at Camp Murray, Washington.⁶⁸ Specially selected skiers from this division conducted the nation's first ski patrol maneuvers on the flanks of Mount Rainier on November 22, 1940.⁶⁹ This event foreshadowed the eventual recruiting philosophy used in the formation of the 10th Mountain Division. The 41st Division ski patrol consisted of volunteers possessing civilian-acquired ski skills. They were already competent skiers when they arrived at Camp Murray. Meanwhile, the relationship between the War Department and the NSPS grew stronger.

The National Ski Association of America (NSAA) held its annual conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in late November, 1940. Lieutenant Colonels Walker and Hurdis attended as War Department representatives.⁷⁰ General Marshall wanted his officers present at the meeting of the National Volunteer Winter Defense Committee, which had been formed earlier in the year.⁷¹ This civil-military interaction further strengthened the growing relationship between the War Department and the NSPS.

In early December the War Department Adjutant General's office issued guidance to Army divisions involved in the winter training enterprise. The memorandum stated the National Ski Association of America (via the NSPS) was available to assist commanders with technical training and equipment selection, and to perform other

duties as directed by the War Department. It further stated that an accredited local official of the NSAA would contact division commanders to offer assistance.⁷²

The measured approach to winter training in the winter of 1940-41 was an example of Marshall's thoughtful approach to expanding the Army. His method was to deliberately build and train forces to meet future requirements. He referred to this approach as "sound development."⁷³ Marshall applied his sound development concept to all types of units, including the mountain troops the NSPS would help to create. In a January 1944 letter to Minnie Dole, who was by then the foremost recruiter of the men who served in the 10th Mountain Division, Marshall recalled their mutual efforts in 1940-1941 "to establish training for winter warfare on a sound basis."⁷⁴ This deliberate approach continued throughout the war, and the War Department expanded the NSPS role to meet emerging requirements.

The Army learned a great deal about mountain and winter training during the winter of 1940-41. Elements of six divisions conducted various forms of winter training. Two additional divisions received equipment for recreational purposes.⁷⁵ The NSPS assisted by supplying instructors and other assistance as requested by local commanders. This effort was experimental in nature, and was not intended to create trained mountain and winter warfare soldiers. Its primary purpose was to serve as a testing ground for future training.⁷⁶ Participating units submitted comprehensive reports when training was completed. This reporting confirmed what both Dole and the War Department G-3 had suspected. To effectively conduct winter operations, troops required special training, and special equipment.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, not all stakeholders agreed with this assessment.

The value of specialized mountain and winter warfare troops was not universally recognized within the War Department. During the summer of 1941 the War Department G-3 recommended the development of a mountain division table of organization.⁷⁸ The G-3 believed successful mountain operations required a unit that was organized, trained, and equipped for that specific purpose. The G-3 stated “while a division specifically organized and trained for combat in high mountain terrain can operate in the lowlands or in any terrain, the reverse is not true.”⁷⁹ The staffing process for this document reveals the controversy surrounding specialized units. It also illustrates the positions taken by General Headquarters (GHQ) and by the various War Department General Staff sections.

The War Plans Division (WPD) believed there was a “definite need” for a mountain division in the Army’s tables of organization. WPD also recommended that “one such division be organized at an early date and trained in high mountain terrain.”⁸⁰ The Chiefs of Infantry, Artillery, and Cavalry all concurred, as did the Chief Signal Officer and the Surgeon General. Each chief did, however provide specific recommendations for alterations to the tables of organization.⁸¹

General McNair’s GHQ staff nonconcurred, as General McNair was not a fan of specialization. He believed that soldiers should first be trained in basic combat skills, followed by training in their branch. He believed that at the unit level, training should include maneuvers to demonstrate effective collaboration among different types of ground forces. Throughout the war General McNair resisted attempts to create an overly specialized Army.⁸² Additionally, the GHQ maneuvers in Louisiana “were demonstrating what the high officers of the army already knew—that the Army of the

United States was not ready for combat anywhere or under any conditions.”⁸³ GHQ’s primary reason for nonconcurrence was that it did not believe a clear requirement existed for a mountain division. The War Department G-1 and G-4 nonconcurred for the same reason. However, they all supported the formation of a mountain battalion.⁸⁴ This essentially guaranteed the survival of the mountain and winter warfare enterprise for another year.

Minnie Dole sensed that things were bogging down.⁸⁵ On July 17, he met with Brigadier General Harry Twaddle, the War Department Assistant Chief of Staff G-3. They discussed the challenges inherent in mountain troop training and development.⁸⁶ BG Twaddle was enthusiastic about the project, but he could not promise results.⁸⁷ Dole followed up with a letter to General Marshall at the end of July. He applauded the G-3’s efforts to date, and urged Marshall to give G-3 the “GO AHEAD” to create a mountain unit.⁸⁸ Dole also addressed the importance of building a camp in the high mountains to support mountain division training. Dole knew that numerous soldier’s one year enlistments would expire in the fall and winter. He argued that if a mountain division were created, many skiers and mountaineers would extend their enlistments to transfer to this division.⁸⁹

In early October 1941 things went from bad to worse. On an early October visit to Washington, NSPS treasurer John Morgan learned that the mountain and winter warfare project “was blocked and had been relegated to those subjects to be given secondary consideration.”⁹⁰ Dole also received an after-hours phone call from Lt. Col. Johnnie Walker indicating the same. Walker believed that shelving the program was a

big mistake, but he could do nothing more to prevent it. He recommended that Dole intervene to get the project moving again.⁹¹

Dole and Morgan determined the only way to intervene was to go straight to the top. They drafted a resolution on behalf of the National Volunteer Winter Defense Committee. They addressed the resolution to General Marshall and sent copies to President Roosevelt, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, Brigadier General Harry Twaddle, and Brigadier General Frederick Osborn. After reviewing the necessity of creating a mountain unit, the resolution urged the War Department not to miss the opportunity to conduct winter training during the winter of 1941-1942. It also advocated for, at a minimum, the creation of a “test force” to be organized and trained during the upcoming winter. The resolution argued this was necessary to build the foundation for a future mountain division.⁹²

General Marshall replied on October 20th, informing Dole that the Army planned to establish a mountain training unit at Fort Lewis, Washington. The organization’s purpose was twofold: to test equipment and to build a nucleus of trained mountain soldiers.⁹³

Secretary Stimson’s response to Dole on October 24th was short but revealing. First, in referring to the “War Department’s decision to deal with winter training as outlined by Gen. Marshall” he indicated the decision had been Marshall’s to make.⁹⁴ Stimson and Marshall had a strong working relationship, and they respected the boundaries governing their particular areas of responsibility. Second, Secretary Stimson’s reaction to Marshall’s decision revealed that even at 72 years of age, he still loved the mountains. He found Marshall’s decision “most gratifying to us whose interest

in this form of training is keen.”⁹⁵ Dole was uncertain whether the National Volunteer Winter Defense Committee’s resolution had helped the cause, but it certainly hadn’t hurt.⁹⁶

The mountain division organization was eventually approved. In mid-November the Army constituted the 87th Infantry Mountain Regiment and activated 1st Battalion, (Reinforced) at Fort Lewis, Washington. The unit’s purpose was to develop mountain and winter warfare tactics, and to test the unit’s organization, equipment, and transportation. The battalion was also directed to develop instructor-level competencies in skiing, snowshoeing, mountaineering and in other mountain and winter warfare skills.⁹⁷ The unit was still in its infancy when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. The War Department also directed the establishment of a Mountain and Winter Warfare Board to be co-located with 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Mountain Regiment (Reinforced). The board’s purpose was to evaluate the mountain troop’s organizational structure, clothing, equipment, techniques, and doctrine.⁹⁸

The NSPS Role in Manning the Force

Dole viewed the activation of a mountain troop battalion as a double-edged sword. After more than a year of continuous work, he was gratified that his dream of US Army mountain troops had come to fruition. On the other hand, the job of recruiting qualified men to fill the unit would fall on him. In a report to the National Volunteer Winter Defense Committee shortly after the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry was activated, Dole wrote “on first thought it might seem that our job is done. The fact is it has just started.”⁹⁹ In a tone that belied his concern about the future, he noted there were still detractors in the Army who hoped the project would fail. Dole understood the mountain troop’s success or failure would depend upon the quality of men serving in its ranks.

And the responsibility for recruiting those men fell squarely on Dole and the National Ski Patrol System.¹⁰⁰

Dole knew the majority of qualified men would be found in the mountainous and cold regions of the United States stretching from California to Maine. The NSPS had a presence in most of these areas, and Dole leveraged this organizational structure to contact qualified prospects. To ensure a standardized selection process, the NSPS developed a three page questionnaire, which Lt. Col. Johnnie Walker assisted in creating.¹⁰¹ Applicants were asked to summarize their skiing and mountaineering experience. Specific questions included an inventory of skiing and mountaineering experience, where it had been done, and for how many years. Questions also included years of experience as a professional or amateur skiing or mountaineering instructor. The final question provided an opportunity for applicants to list other mountaineering-related professional qualifications in fields such as geology and meteorology.¹⁰² In the fall of 1943, as recruiting expanded to fill the ranks of two new mountain regiments, the range of desired skills and experience expanded to include forestry service, packing horses and mules, mountain and forest guiding, trapping, and prospecting.¹⁰³

The NSPS also requested that substantiating character and skiing references from local club officials accompany the completed questionnaire.¹⁰⁴ The reference requirement later changed to three letters of recommendation that focused on physical stamina and the applicant's ability to take care of himself in the mountains.¹⁰⁵ Over the next four years the NSPS processed over 12,000 applications for men wishing to serve in the units that became the 10th Mountain Division.¹⁰⁶ Ironically, the NSPS was not authorized to recruit anyone.¹⁰⁷

The War Department first contracted the NSPS's advisory services in March, 1941.¹⁰⁸ Since the NSPS was not incorporated, but functioned as an operating committee of the National Ski Association of America (NSAA), War Department contracts went through the NSAA. Initial NSPS efforts included advising the War Department on issues concerning ski training and winter warfare equipment. The NSPS began recruiting qualified men for the mountain troops following the activation of 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Mountain Regiment (Reinforced) in late 1941. The War Department's contracts with the NSPS reveal an enlightened approach to accomplishing this unique recruiting task.

The War Department consistently used broad contract language to allow the NSPS to perform a wide range of services. The absence of the word "recruit" in the NSPS contracts reveals the creative use of a civilian organization to perform a task the War Department was not well-suited to perform.¹⁰⁹ While the Army had an in-house recruiting organization, it did not have direct contact with the population segment from which qualified mountain men must be drawn. The NSPS and similar organizations were perfectly positioned to perform this task. The War Department G-3, in conjunction with the Quartermaster General, overcame this challenge by contracting the NSPS to provide consultative and advisory services. These advisory services included the selection of men qualified to serve in the mountain troops.

The January 1942 contract used to recruit qualified men for 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry stated the Secretary of War wished to "utilize the investigations, research, and consultative facilities" of the NSPS.¹¹⁰ The contract required the NSPS to "consult with, assist and advise...with respect to technical training of troops in the field of skiing

operations and the selection of skiing equipment for said troops.”¹¹¹ The contract also required the NSPS to provide technical studies and to assist with home defense preparedness, among other things.¹¹² Future contracts employed similar language.¹¹³

The NSPS understood that to avoid conflict with the Army recruiting system discretion was required. One example is found in the words chosen for NSPS letterhead. The NSPS’s identity statement is “Consultant to War Department for the Selection of Specialized Personnel for Mountain Troops.”¹¹⁴ It is ironic that in a bulletin intended to update stakeholders on recruiting procedures, recruiting is not mentioned. Rather, the bulletin states the role of the National Ski Association is to “recommend men for assignment.”¹¹⁵ While Dole felt the need to tread lightly to avoid trouble, War Department non-contract communications revealed a clear understanding of the NSPS’s actual role.

The War Department temporarily suspended recruiting for the mountain troops in early July, 1942.¹¹⁶ In September, Brigadier General H.B. Lewis informed the NSAA that recruiting would resume. In the letter he acknowledged what was widely known, but not reflected in the NSPS contract: The NSPS’s primary role was to “assist in recruiting for the Army.”¹¹⁷ This view was also reflected in the Army’s official World War II history on mountain and winter warfare training. In referring to the formation of the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, Army historian Captain Thomas P. Govan wrote that “additional volunteers were recruited by the National Ski Association.”¹¹⁸ Official history notwithstanding, not everyone in the Army understood or appreciated the NSPS’s role in selecting qualified men for the mountain troops. Dole sometimes found Army bureaucracy inexplicable.

In mid-1943 Dole sent a memorandum to his divisional and regional chairmen. He explained a recent incident involving NSPS efforts to partner with the 6th Service Command to identify potential mountain troop recruits already serving in the ranks. The local NSPS representative asked the 6th Service Command to borrow a jeep for use with a mountain troop display. The 6th agreed it was a good idea, and sent a request to Washington asking for approval. The G-1 disapproved the request on grounds that only the Army Recruiting Service should be recruiting. The Army Ground Forces, who supervised the NSPS contract, and who wanted the NSPS to recruit qualified mountain troops, told Dole to get the job done without asking Washington for help. Too much official visibility could put their contract arrangement at risk. Dole referred to their predicament as “an incongruous situation,” while reminding his organization of the critical role they were playing in placing qualified men in the mountain troops.¹¹⁹ With the activation of additional mountain infantry units, the NSPS was continuously challenged to find sufficient numbers of qualified men.

The Army completed construction of Camp Hale, Colorado in November, 1942. Set high in the Rocky Mountains, it was designed to garrison an entire mountain division.¹²⁰ In late December the 87th Regiment relocated to Camp Hale.¹²¹ By July 1943 the dream of a mountain division had become a reality. The War Department activated the 85th and 86th Regiments, along with the 10th Light Division (Alpine) headquarters.¹²² As the need for qualified men dramatically increased, the relationship between the War Department and the NSPS evolved, and the NSPS’s responsibility and authority grew.

In 1942 the NSPS had demonstrated its ability to select large numbers of qualified men to fill the ranks of the 87th Regiment at Fort Lewis, Washington. By 1943,

the War Department's trust in the NSPS was made manifest in a policy change intended to streamline the recruiting process. The Adjutant General directed induction centers and reception center assignment officers to accept NSPS-provided assignment letters presented by incoming soldiers.¹²³ In so doing, The Adjutant General effectively delegated authority to the NSPS not only to recruit qualified men, but also to assign those men directly to the mountain troops. His trust was well-placed. From April to December, 1943 the NSPS selected and assigned over 1,900 qualified men to Camp Hale's mountain troops.¹²⁴ Over the next year, these men would execute one of the most rigorous pre-deployment training regimens in US Army history. In December 1944 and January 1945, the division's regiments embarked for Italy.¹²⁵

Employing the Force: Mountain Troops in Combat

The 10th Mountain Division consolidated on Italian soil in January 1945.¹²⁶ The 10th's first large-scale mission was to capture Mt. Belvedere, and to seize the high ground to the east.¹²⁷ The 10th was not the first unit to attempt to seize Belvedere. Three previous attacks had failed.¹²⁸ General George P. Hays, the division commander, believed the key to capturing Belvedere was to seize Riva Ridge first. Riva was a precipitous ridge located to the Southwest of Belvedere. From Riva's heights, artillery observers could direct fire against troops on the front, western, and back side of Belvedere. General Hays gave this task to Colonel Tomlinson and the 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment.¹²⁹

On the night of 18-19 February the 1st Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment (plus one company from 2nd Battalion) conducted a night attack against German forces on Riva Ridge.¹³⁰ The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Henry J. Hampton, indicated the battalion seized all objectives by morning, without firing a shot, and without suffering a

single casualty.¹³¹ His official report highlights the importance of specialized mountain training and its resulting esprit de corps in achieving the battalion's objectives during the Riva Ridge operation.¹³² One of his company commanders provided even greater insight into the technical nature of the operation.

Captain Erwin G. Nilsson, Commander of the Heavy Weapons Company (Company D), was tasked with supporting assault elements across the battalion.¹³³ This provided Nilsson a broad perspective on the battalion's operation. He noted Company C's route up Mt. Serrasiccia, one of Riva's many peaks, was a "mountaineering problem, first, a combat problem, second."¹³⁴ He described the night climb on that route, by 230 men up a rugged 2,550 foot slope in winter conditions, as a "first class mountaineering feat in itself."¹³⁵ First Lieutenant John A. McCown II did much of the work in pioneering this route. He was given the task because he was the "best qualified and experienced mountaineer within the battalion."¹³⁶ McCown was a member of the American Alpine Club, and had run the Army's Assault Climbing School at Seneca Rocks, West Virginia.¹³⁷ He, like most men in the 10th, possessed a variety of skiing and mountaineering skills *before* he joined the Army. While men like McCown demonstrated the value of a unit organized, trained and equipped for mountain and winter warfare, the unit would not have existed without civilian and military leaders exercising strategic leadership.

Strategic Leadership Competencies

In a 2003 report, Dr. Leonard Wong and a team of US Army War College students identified six strategic leader metacompetencies. These metacompetencies include identity, mental agility, cross-cultural savvy, interpersonal maturity, world-class warrior, and professional astuteness.¹³⁸ General George C. Marshall, Roger Langley,

Minnie Dole, Captain Ridgely Gaither and Lt. Col Johnnie Walker successfully employed strategic leader metacompetencies in creating the 10th Mountain Division. The most important strategic leadership metacompetencies in this case study were mental agility, cross-cultural savvy, interpersonal maturity, and professional astuteness.

The ability to adjust learning and alter actions in accordance with environmental conditions is an important aspect of mental agility.¹³⁹ Minnie Dole routinely exercised mental agility in his relationship with the War Department. In the uncertain environment of 1940-41, he and John Morgan frequently altered the approach they used to convince military and government leaders of the value of mountain and winter warfare. These approaches included using NSPS patrols as scouts, guides, material transporters, trainers, guerrilla fighters, and as an anti-parachute and air-raid warning service.¹⁴⁰ This flexible approach gave War Department leaders a variety of reasons to involve the NSPS in mountain and winter warfare training.

Captain Ridgely Gaither and Lt. Col. Johnnie Walker demonstrated cross-cultural savvy by leveraging the unique capabilities of the NSPS. Neither officer was a strategic leader by rank or duty position, yet they both employed strategic leadership competencies in their interactions with the NSPS. Captain Gaither was one of the first Army officers to interact with Minnie Dole, and he immediately saw the potential benefit of partnering with the NSPS. Lt. Col. Walker also recognized the potential benefits of partnering with the NSPS, and he carefully developed this strategic relationship during its most critical period. Dr. Wong's report indicates that while "not all colonels or general officers are in strategic leader positions, they still can (and should) possess a level of strategic leader capability."¹⁴¹ The roles played by Captain Gaither and Lt. Col. Walker in

the creation of the 10th Mountain Division reinforce the necessity to develop strategic leader capabilities in non-strategic leaders.

Dr. Wong posits that the most important interpersonal skill is empowerment.¹⁴² Roger Langley, President of the National Ski Association of America (NSAA), gave Minnie Dole “carte blanche” to pursue his obsession with mountain and winter warfare.¹⁴³ Since the NSPS functioned as an operating committee of the NSAA, the War Department contracted NSPS services through its parent organization. Langley’s empowerment of Dole and the NSPS played a critical role in the 10th Mountain Division’s creation. General George C. Marshall demonstrated the importance of empowerment when he allowed his G-3 to take action as he saw fit regarding Dole’s initial winter training proposal. General Marshall articulated his thoughts on the matter, then directed the G-3 to proceed “as seems wise to your section.”¹⁴⁴ Marshall’s empowerment quickly led to the development and execution of the 1940-41 winter training plan, which was essential in moving the mountain troop project forward.

Political astuteness includes skills such as political savvy and knowing when to compromise.¹⁴⁵ Minnie Dole was strenuously opposed to the use of skis with leather toe straps for use in battalion-level training in the winter of 1940-41. He believed the use of functionally obsolete equipment was detrimental to both training and to morale, and he outlined his position in a memorandum to the War Department.¹⁴⁶ Following Lt. Col. Walker’s explanation of why this equipment was the best overall solution, Dole compromised and supported the War Department plan.¹⁴⁷ This initial disagreement also demonstrated Lt. Col. Walker’s political savvy. He understood Army bureaucracy, and he told Dole they should follow the old Polish saying “that nothing is eaten as hot as it is

cooked.”¹⁴⁸ Lt. Col. Walker planned to create momentum utilizing available resources, then expand the program over time.

Conclusion

In 1940 the Army did not possess specialized mountain and winter warfare units. Realizing that protecting US interests might require this capability, visionary men like General George C. Marshall and Charles “Minnie” Dole worked to turn an idea into reality. Given the current global uncertainty combined with decreasing defense budgets, today’s Army must maintain the ability to regenerate capabilities. Select capabilities may reside in the civilian sector. Therefore, the Army must remain ready to partner with civilian organizations to develop capabilities to meet emerging threats. Working across public-private organizational boundaries requires strategic leadership competencies.

Leaders in the War Department and in the NSPS demonstrated the strategic leadership metacompetencies of mental agility, cross-cultural savvy, interpersonal maturity, and professional astuteness. The employment of these metacompetencies played an important role in the successful War Department-NSPS partnership. Future land force leaders must possess these skills to succeed in uncertain environments. This case study indicates that officers at the company grade level and higher may be required to employ strategic leadership metacompetencies.

The creation of the 10th Mountain Division provides a case study in the force regeneration role played by the NSPS. War Department contracts with broad language allowed the NSPS to perform a wide range of consultative tasks. The most important task was the recruitment of thousands of qualified men to serve in the mountain troops. In conjunction with the War Department, the NSPS developed and executed an efficient recruiting and assignment process that handled over 12,000 applications from

December 1941 to July 1945.¹⁴⁹ The NSPS maintained quality control by requiring potential recruits to submit a detailed questionnaire along with letters of recommendation from competent authorities. As the War Department's partnership with the NSPS evolved, it empowered the NSPS with increasing levels of responsibility and authority. In 1943 the War Department gave the NSPS the unprecedented authority to recruit qualified men, and to assign those men directly to the mountain troops. This increased authority enabled the NSPS to recruit and assign men to the ranks of the newly activated 85th and 86th Regiments and to the 10th Light Division (Alpine) headquarters. These mountain soldiers executed one of the most rigorous pre-deployment training regimens in US Army history prior to embarking for Italy in December 1944 and January 1945. Employing technical mountaineering skills, units of the 10th Mountain Division successfully seized Riva Ridge in their first offensive combat action. They then seized Mt. Belvedere, fought their way across the Apennines, broke out into the Po Valley, and were headed for the Alps when German forces in Italy surrendered on May 2, 1945.¹⁵⁰

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¹²⁷ Imbrie and Imbrie, *Chronology of the 10th Mountain Division*, 13.

¹²⁸ William E. Neidner, *The Operations of Company A (Less One Platoon), 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment (10th Mountain Division) in Attack on Mancinello-Campiano Ridge, Italy, 18-22 February 1945 (North Apennines Campaign), (Personal Experience of a Company Commander)*, (Fort Benning, GA, 1949-1950), 2, 10th Mountain Division Records, Series 3, Box 7, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

¹²⁹ George Price Hays, *Personal Memoirs of Lt. General George Price Hays, 1892-1978*, (n.d., n.p.) 33, George Price Hays Papers, TMD61, Box 1, 10th Mountain Division Collection, The Denver Public Library.

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¹³² *Ibid.*, 199-200.

¹³³ Erwin G. Nilsson, *The Operations of the First Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment (10th Mountain Division) on Riva Ridge 17-22 February 1945 (North Apennines Campaign, Italy), Personal experience of a Heavy Weapons Company Commander*, (Fort Benning, GA, 1946-1947), 14, Unit Histories, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

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¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁷ David Brower, *Remount Blue: the Combat Story of the 3d Battalion, 86th Mountain Infantry* (Berkeley, CA: n.p., 1948), 13, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

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¹⁴¹ Leonard Wong et al., "Strategic Leadership Competencies," 1.

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¹⁴⁴ Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, "Skiing," memorandum for A.C. of S. G-3, Washington, DC, September 12, 1940, Marshall Papers, box 20, folder 44, Marshall Library, Lexington, VA.

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¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ National Ski Association of America and The National Ski Patrol System, "Analysis of NSPS Recruiting for Mountain Troops December 1941 – July 1945" n.p., Charles Minot Dole Papers, WH1001, Series 2, Box 8, Western History Collection, The Denver Public Library.

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