

Bill Berry Hard News

McKay Jenkins

McKay Jenkins' *The Last Ridge* is the latest in a series of books about World War II where we see the war from the viewpoint of those who fought it.

The 10th's story is a familiar one unless you've never heard it. The brain-child of "Minnie" Dole (no relation to later 10th Member and future senator Robert Dole) who struggled against the stodgy Army bureaucracy before gaining General Marshall's ear. Marshall, seeing that mountain troops were being used by all the belligerent armies, decided that a Mountain unit would be useful to the U.S. Army. So the 87th Mountain Regiment was born.

Later, the 85th and 86th Regiments were added and thus, the 10th Mountain Division was born. After over two years of rigorous training, they finally saw action in Italy in 1945. Passed over by Ike's Chief of Staff Walter Bedell Smith, Mark Clark, the commander of the Allied field armies in Italy snapped up the 10th. It was one of his greatest moves.

The 10th, in a series of daring maneuvers and risky night climbing seized enemy held ridges and finished 114 days in combat suffering higher casualty percentages than other divisions.

Jenkins' book views the 10th's actions from both the high command and the soldiers who did the fighting. He mainly sticks to the fighting men for most of the book. Minor errors creep into the text. General Truscott's first name was Lucian, not Lucien and it's General Walter Bedell Smith, not just Bedell.

Still, it's a solid, fast moving story and a first rate war adventure.

McKay Jenkins has backpacked, paddled, bicycled, and skied in wilderness all over the world. He has written for *Outside*, *Outdoor Explorer*, and *Orion*, among many other publications. He has a master's degree in journalism from Columbia and a Ph.D. in English from Princeton. A former staff writer for *The Atlanta Constitution*, he currently teaches literature and nonfiction writing at the University of Delaware. Jenkins lives in Philadelphia with his wife and two dogs.

