Gebirgstruppen Bergkampfen

Alpine Combat Training for Mountain Infantry



German Mountain Warfare Doctrine

Specially trained mountain troops may influence decisively the outcome of a larger campaign,

even though the decision is almost always sought and achieved on the flat by the main forces

Offensive

 Specialized troops secure the advance of main force through the mountain passes.



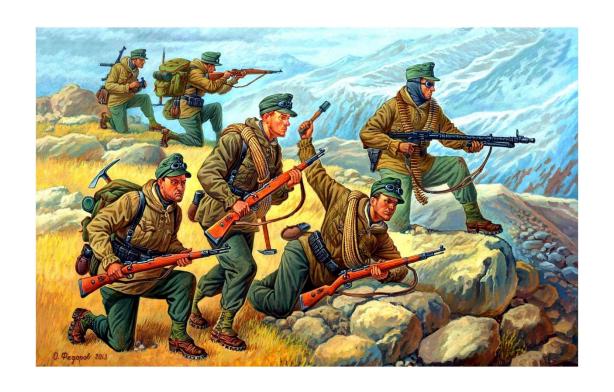
Offensive

 Main force reaches terrain of its own choice in the highest state of combat readiness



Defensive

 Wear down enemy power: Prevent, impede, harass or channel main enemy force through the valleys



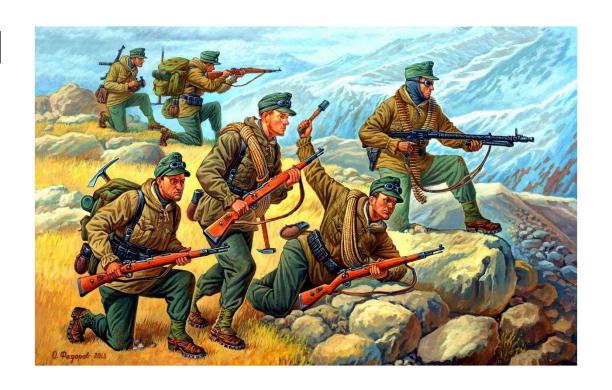
Defense

 When enemy main force is engaged by friendly main force he is exhausted and forced to fight decisively on unfavorable terms.



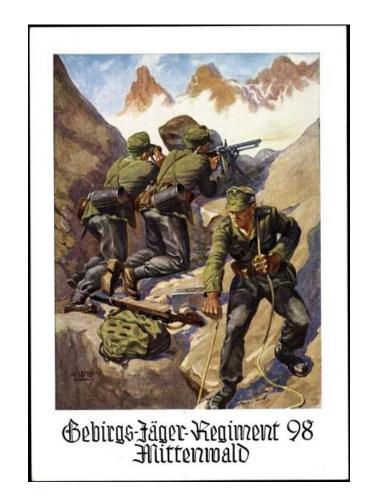
Focal Point of Mountain Combat: The Heights

 Mountain troops must gain and maintain control of the mountains



Focal Point of Mountain Combat: The Heights

 Can only be seized by <u>surprise</u>



Focal Point of Mountain Combat: The Heights

- Observation posts
- Gun emplacements



Strategic Differences

 Infantry/artillery is ascendant over armor and air power (opposite on the flats)



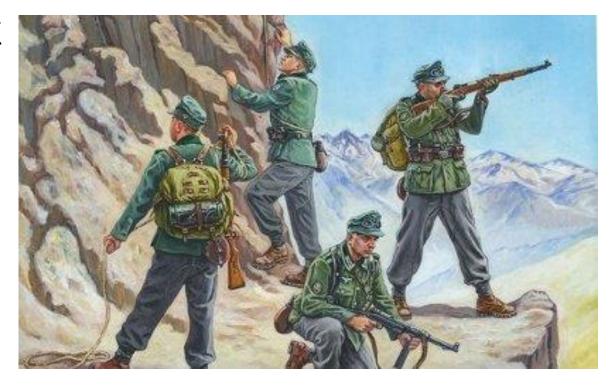
Strategic Differences

 Heavy weapons difficult to move, so the brunt of battle falls on infantry



Strategic Differences

 Shock action, close combat and smaller task units become more important



Tactical Differences

- Basics same as on the flat
- Modify to adapt for sudden weather extremes in high terrain:
 - Movement slower
 - Signals unreliable
 - Supply problems acute



Bundesarchiv, Bild 1011-031-2424-08 Foto: Maier, K. F. | 1942/1943 Winter

Movement Slower

- Attack proceeds slowly due to rugged terrain.
 - Artillery & heavy weapons cumbersome
 - Good defensive positions with scarcity of roads fosters defense
 - Keep reserves close as a result



Signals Unreliable

- Limited communication once battle engaged.
 - Initial plan must be thoroughly conceived
 - Commander stays close to decisive point.
 - Junior NCOs & Officers must be able to act independently



Supply Problems Acute

- Few routes: limited or no alternatives if blocked
- Food, forage and ammunition on narrow roads and trails
- Motor transport gives way to mules/horses then on the backs of soldiers
- Carry only what is essential
- Cannot live off country in mountains



Implications For Re-enactor Training

Objectives:

- Physical fitness adequate to lower Appalachians
- Movement in steeper, densely covered terrain
- Executing surprise
- Securing the heights
- Observation & FO for Artillery
- Junior NCO decision-making



"Classic Impression"

- Early War
 - M36 Bottle Green Collar
 - Steingrau Berghosen
 - Short-brimmed Bergmutz
 - Rucksack and belt hooks vs. Y strap and field gear on belt



Impression Variations

- Garrison with M36 Mantel
- Fallschirmjäger in joint mountain operations (Italy, Norway, Crete)
- NCO Unteroffizier



Impression Variations

- NCO with Windjacket
- General with long Wickelgemaschen
- NCO in Meditterranean HBT
- Officer variations



Eastern front, 1942-43 1: Oberfeldwebel