

by J. Lawrence Smith

## Dolly Sods and Uncle Sam

The often brooding stillness of Dolly Sods and neighboring areas was shattered by thousands of soldiers on maneuvers during World War II in the summer of 1943. The U. S. Army established the West Virginia Maneuver Area in thinly-populated sections of five mountain counties. The similarity of West Virginia terrain to that of southern Europe was one reason the area was chosen to serve as training ground for the invasion of Italy.

Headquarters were established at Elkins for operations that extended as far as Seneca Rocks. The region soon became a beehive of activity with men and equipment on the move day and night. Some sixteen thousand personnel were being trained every two months by the end of 1943.

Artillery was positioned on Dolly Sods and in Canaan Valley with the west slope of Cabin Mountain serving as the impact area for shells fired from howitzers at these sites. Forest service rangers were kept busy putting out forest fires started by exploding shells and unattended campfires. Over a half century after maneuvers ended, unspent shells are rarely found by hikers and hunters that must be destroyed by army explosives experts.

Along with training in artillery and other armament, schooling in rock climbing and assault techniques was held at Seneca Rocks and Blackwater Canyon. Another enterprise was a "mule school" that trained in the Dry Fork area in using mules for transporting weapons and supplies in rugged and roadless countryside.

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