

## *Peace in the Valley*

In Colorado, the road from Vail to Leadville provides a great adventure – fascination of the beauty of God’s handiwork, as well as a trip into the past. Lola and I took that journey last week as part of our vacation in that great state. Minturn, with its quaint shops and antiques galore, is one of the first stops along the way. After that, the road climbs high into the mountains, with sheer rock faces and stately aspen trees posted like sentinels.

In the road ahead, a red fox with a rabbit in its mouth, starts to cross the highway, and then, seeing the traffic, darts back into the underbrush. Below the road, mountain streams have been controlled by beaver dams, evidence of the industriousness of these animals of the wild. Bridges cross deep mountain gorges, and any motorist wonders, “How did construction crews ever do that?”

Then the road drops into a long, peaceful valley. And there is the avenue into yesteryear. It is the site of Camp Hale.

Camp Hale was established in 1942 in west-central Colorado to provide winter and mountain warfare training during World War II. The site was acquired by purchase from private owners and by use permits from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. The cantonment (or living area) for Camp Hale was constructed in Eagle Park, east of U.S. Highway 24 between Leadville and Red Cliff. The camp was placed here because of the natural setting of a large, flat bottom, surrounded by steep hillsides suitable for training in skiing, rock climbing and cold weather survival skills. The size of the camp varied between 5,000 and 247,243 acres while it was an active military installation. Originally designed for 20,353 military personnel and 11,288 animals, Camp Hale eventually housed about 16,000 soldiers and 3,900 animals.

Military use of Camp Hale included the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, which fought in the Apennine Mountains of Italy, the 38<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team, 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion and soldiers from Fort Carson conducting mountain and winter warfare training exercises from 1942 to 1965. Throughout this time, the Army tested a variety of weapons and equipment at Camp Hale. From 1959 through 1965, the Central Intelligence Agency secretly trained Tibetan soldiers at Camp Hale. In July 1965, Camp Hale was deactivated and control of the lands returned to the Forest Service in 1966.

On this day, as we passed through the valley in our automobile, all signs of a once-thriving campsite were gone, save for the plaques that tell the story beside the highway. The Eagle River courses through the underbrush and the rock. High above the valley, a stately bird – a hawk or perhaps an eagle – drifts lazily here

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and there on the breeze uplifts, no doubt searching for a late-morning breakfast. A solitary motor home is parked near the center of the valley. Perhaps it provides more comfortable accommodations for a veteran of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division who has brought his family here to reminisce.

But there is a certain awe that is heavy in this valley. Perhaps it has to do with the patriotic fervor brought to this place by enthusiastic young men and women, ready to go anywhere in the world to defend our freedoms. Maybe it is there as a reminder of the sacrifices they and their families made for their generation and those who come behind them. Likely, it is a sense of reverence for the 25 percent of these soldiers in the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division who became casualties of the war – including the 5 percent who were killed.

Now, there is peace in the valley. Oh, that it could be so in the world.

--Beecher Hunter