Battle of Monti della Riva - Battlefield Tour for the 205th Course of the Military Academy and U.S. Army

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In the early days of February 2026, among the ridges and woods of the Modenese Apennines, a civil and military rite was renewed that links operational history to the training of today's soldiers: the commemoration of the **Battle of Monti della Riva** (February 18, 1945), fought as part of **Operation "Encore"**, one of the decisive phases of the final stage of the war along the Gothic Line.

At the center of the ceremonies and activities on the ground, a clear message: remembering does not mean "looking back" out of nostalgia, but **understanding** choices, risks, and responsibilities that continue to define the ethics of service.

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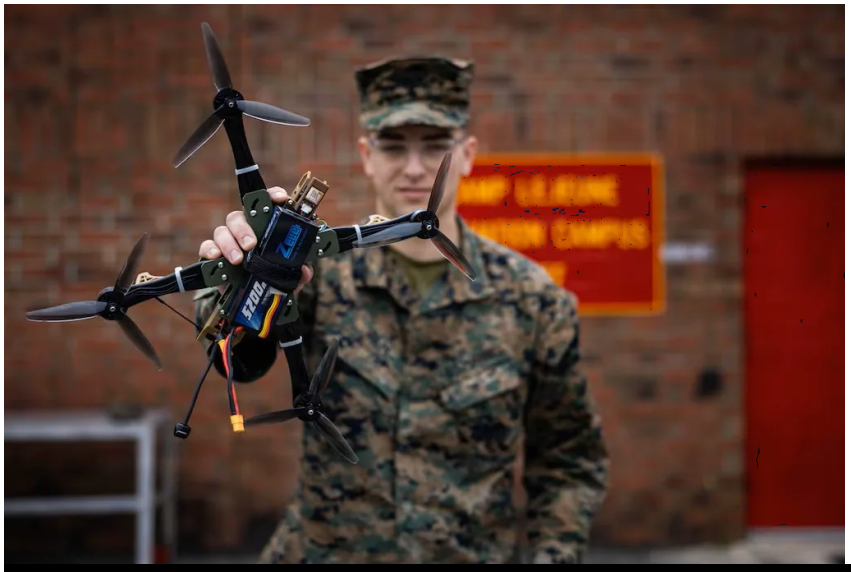
The 2026 commemoration: an international event on the battle sites

The most symbolic moment took place at **Pizzo di Campiano**, a theater of clashes and today a key stop on the “battlefield tours” dedicated to Riva Ridge. The ceremony was attended by military and institutional authorities from several countries: among those present, according to the Italian Army, were the United States Secretary of the Army Daniel Patrick Driscoll, the Commander of the Military Academy Major General Stefano Messina, and the Commander of the **10th Mountain Division** (U.S. Army) **General Scott Naumann**, along with Italian, American, and Brazilian representatives.

The “field” dimension was not just a backdrop: for the **Officer Cadets of the 205th Course** of the Military Academy and a significant representation of the 10th Mountain Division, the day was set up as a **training activity**: walking the same paths and observing in person the ridgelines, observation points, and attack routes allows for connecting manuals and maps to real constraints (slopes, visibility, cover, logistics), and especially to the human cost of decisions.

In parallel, the calendar of local initiatives related to the anniversary reiterated how deeply this piece of history is rooted in the territory: several municipalities in the area announced and hosted moments of remembrance and tours on the sites of Riva Ridge and Monte Belvedere.



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Why Operation Encore still matters: objectives and stakes in 1945

On the historical-military level, “Encore” was an Allied offensive launched between **February 18 and early March 1945** to break the German defense on the **Gothic Line** in the northern Apennines and secure dominant ground on vital axes towards the Po Valley. The action featured U.S. units of the **10th Mountain Division** and units of the **Força Expedicionária Brasileira**, in a context where the partisan contribution was also decisive in the broader framework of the area's liberation.

A crucial step was the conquest of the ridge known to Americans as **“Riva Ridge”**, which includes elevations and points like **Pizzo di Campiano**: that system of heights offered observation and fire possibilities over the **Monte Belvedere** area, making any frontal attack extremely risky if the ridge was not neutralized. U.S. historical summaries recall how the **night climb** and surprise attack on Riva Ridge paved the way for the next phase of operations, reducing the German observational and defensive advantage.

In recent years, this operational memory has also been revived by U.S. Army institutional communication, highlighting the value of the February 1945 enterprise (the climb, the surprise factor, the combat in a mountainous environment in the middle of winter) as a case study on adaptation, training, and leadership.

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General Stefano Messina: training, military ethos, and command culture

Within this framework, the presence of **Major General Stefano Messina**, as **Commander of the Military Academy**, is an element to highlight: the event was not just a ceremony, but a moment in which the **training of Officer Cadets** was directly related to a complex historical-operational episode.

In practice, the leadership of the Academy “brought the class to the field,” transforming the commemoration into a laboratory of:

- **operational contextualization** (why that ridge was decisive);
- **tactical reading** (choices, constraints, alternatives);
- **values** (responsibility towards subordinates, sense of duty, respect for sacrifice).

It is a concrete way to show that memory is not a ritual separate from training: it is part of the professional culture and strengthens the awareness of the “why” behind wearing the uniform.

Fanano and the closing of the celebrations: monuments, plaques, and community

The initiatives were completed with public moments in the center of **Fanano**, including a parade and ceremonies at the monument to the fallen and permanent markers (such as plaques

and commemorative stones) dedicated to the Allied troops and partisans who contributed to the local liberation. The regional press also highlighted the presence of the U.S. delegation and the symbolic value of the meeting between communities, military, and international representatives.

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A bridge between generations and allies

81 years after the events of 1945, the commemoration of the Battle of Monti della Riva and Operation “Encore” retains a dual function: **historical** (doing justice to the events and the fallen) and **current** (educating, consolidating ties, transmitting a shared grammar of discipline and responsibility).

And perhaps this is the strongest point of the 2026 edition: seeing **Italian Officer Cadets** and **soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division** walking together on Riva Ridge means transforming memory into relationship, and relationship into cooperation. Not an abstract symbolic gesture, but a way to remember that security and peace are also built this way: with study, respect, alliances, and awareness of the price of freedom.

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