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INVASION OF ITALY

By Daniel Deluce representing the Combined British Press

With British Eighth Army,
Italy,
4/9/43.

Astoundingly weak defences of the foot of Italy permitted British Eighth Army scouts to thrust beyond the invasion bridgehead on Messina Straits without encountering more than stray machine-gun fire or a few or a few badly-aimed shells.

British warships stopped shelling the Cape yesterday when civilians waved white flags from the shore. The approach along the north coast road to Scylla, fabled habitat of irresistible sirens, was defended, at last reports, by little more than one machine-gun, which Eighth Army veterans are capable of dealing with in short order.

As yet the Eighth Army ^{have} encountered no enemy demolitions of highway bridges and other vital facilities, nor has the enemy laid mines to cover his retreat.

The British movement across the Straits went so swiftly, untroubled by more than a flicker or two of enemy air action, that this correspondent who was left out of the assault party was able to get his motor transport into Sicily well ahead of schedule nevertheless.

Two German prisoners were captured in all operations in Italy yesterday.

Three German graves were found in Reggio with crosses dated 1/9/43. They were apparently killed by the artillery barrage from across the Straits or an air raid.

Officially it is stated "Services normal" in this war-wrecked city. That will be good news to the inhabitants, many of whom are still refuging in the countryside. There is water at the community water fountains, but hardly one store has opened. The great majority of the houses are badly damaged.

Even this early censorship may permit general observations on the weaknesses of the enemy revealed by the invasion of Italy.

The Luftwaffe is a feeble shadow of itself, incapable of defending the extremities of the Continental fortress, because of the need to keep fighters for the defence of inland centres.

The Germans are very short of bombers for any form of counter-offensive in the air.

The Italians are fighting even less well in Italy than in Sicily. The vast majority are happy to surrender without resistance.

Italian civilians are anxious to ingratiate themselves with the Allies and the police especially put themselves immediately at the disposition of the Allied military commanders.

A tremendous artillery barrage, big naval support and the heavy assault force sent across the Straits yesterday by Montgomery were like an elephant stepping on a gnat. One battalion might have done the job of seizing the coast from San Giovanni to Reggio. But the gigantic softening-up process did save Allied lives and must have impressed the retiring Axis divisions.