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CORDIAL WELCOME TO TROOPS

BY LLOYD WILLIAMS, REPRESENTING THE COMBINED BRITISH PRESS

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When the leading British troops entered Scilla last night - Scylla, of Scylla and Charibdis - they were almost swamped by welcoming civilians. Girls kissed them on both cheeks, children brought out jars of cool water, and practically every old man in the village insisted on shaking hands. There was no doubt about the enthusiasm being genuine.

Between Scilla and Bagnara the enemy blew up only one bridge, which was easily repairable, owing to the enforced speed of their withdrawal as the British raiding troops landed behind their lines. At this wrecked bridge I saw one British truck with the following slogan chalked on the back: "Rome, Berlin, then home to Mother".

As the infantry column neared Bagnara this morning German machine guns could be heard stammering nervously below us in the village. We could distinguish the sound of the German Spandau gun, and also, increasing in volume every moment, came the chattering of the sea raiders' tommy guns. More and more tommy guns came into action until they were silenced suddenly. The German machine gunners had been put out. But away up in the hills behind the town German rearguard 88 with one or two other guns, fired sullenly, but most of the shells either dropped harmlessly into the sea or crumpled down among the rubble of the bomb ruined railway station.

This was the first contact the Eighth Army had made with the Germans in Italy - it was in fact the first engagement of any sort in Italy, and it ended with the Eighth Army seizing Bagnara, which means they lopped off the entire toe of Italy.

Today, incidentally, a single German 88 gun crew impudently engaged British destroyers off the shore from the hills of Bagnara, but the destroyers came inshore and let the Germans have a steady fire for about half an hour. After that the Germans concentrated on dropping shells on the Eighth Army's road of advance through Bagnara, happily without causing any damage whatever.

From Reggio to Bagnara, a distance of nearly 32 miles, the coastline is strewn with wrecked enemy escape ships, while almost every little station on the coast railway is cluttered with burned out trucks and in some cases entire trains, which have been left exactly where Royal Air Force bombers and fighters found them some time ago.

The Eighth Army advance continues in this setting - wrecked enemy shipping and trains, magnificent scenery of mountain and sea, and past rich vineyards, heavy with purple grapes, while further back the British artillery fires into the mountains and sandy lemon groves and fig orchards.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION