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THE CAPTURE OF BAGNARA

By Montague, representing the Combined British Press

Bagnara, September 4

This pretty little seaside town on the northern coast of the toe of Italy was captured this morning by special raiding troops who were landed on a beach just beyond it before dawn.

Unluckily their approach must have been observed for just before they landed they heard a heavy explosion in the town which they later found to be caused by the demolition of an important bridge. They met no opposition on the beach itself and as they left it they heard the sound of German transport retreating to the northeast along the coast road but a certain number of the enemy with machine guns and light mortars still remained in the town and had to be dealt with piecemeal.

The chief resistance was in and around the mouth of a railway tunnel on the southeast side of the town. All this however was cleared up with very small casualties and the Germans lost a number of prisoners and a considerably larger number of killed.

There were a small number of Italian troops in the town too, but these surrendered readily and even volunteered information about the German gun positions.

Meanwhile our infantry were working steadily along the coast road from San Giovanni in the Straits of Messina through Scilla to join the raiders in Bagnara, which they did soon after midday.

Two other correspondents and I accompanied the leading platoon the whole way from Scilla onwards and so can say with certainty that they met no resistance whatever. It was just a pleasant though rather arduous walk through magnificent coast scenery with an occasional pause to reconnoitre round the next corner.

The road from San Giovanni passes first through narrow but fertile coastal plain where pleasant seaside homes, surrounded by orchards, stand beside white beaches littered now with bombed or burnt out wrecks of German evacuation barges.

The railway runs between the road and the sea and at three stations we saw whole trains completely burnt out. More remarkable still was the sight of unharmed rolling stock which the Germans had presumably had no time to remove.

As one approaches Scilla the coastal plain dwindles to nothing and one travels along the Corniche road where terraced hills climb precipitously on one side and fall sheer on the other side to unbelievably clear blue water.

Scilla itself is a lovely little fishing town with boats drawn up on the beach and an ancient castle on a rocky promontory. We had a shock here for the entire population were out on the streets, clapping and cheering us. They said the Germans had left the town last night.

For a short time after we left Scilla the proceedings took on that air of farce which is forever intruding on these Sicilian and Italian campaigns. We were taking things seriously sending carriers ahead to reconnoitre and bringing up infantry after them in single file hugging cover of cliff face. The citizens of Scilla, however, had no mind for these precautions.

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