

NOT TO BE BROADCAST BEFORE 00.30 B.S.T. THURSDAY,
SEPTEMBER 9, 1943

INVASION OF ITALY:

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September 7th

Units of the Eighth Army were pressing on northwards today across GIOLA Plain. Their way lay across the rich plain where vineyards heavy with purple grapes, alternate with groves of huge olive trees big as fullgrown oaks. Roads are lined in places with planes and chestnuts and bushes of ripe blackberries grow within reach of the marching men. Some of the olive woods are carpeted with bracken; one might fancy oneself in one of the English woodlands that are so many weary miles away.

Our party of three correspondents caught up with leading troops and we found that routine the German delaying action was in progress. Germans had pulled out of GIOLA yesterday evening and gone right back. Our troops went after them and met little resistance until the place where the road turns the corner before bending back and climbing a small hill on which the village stands. When our leading carriers reached this corner, enemy guns and mortars previously ranged on it, opened fire and we were lucky to escape with the loss of two carriers and a few men wounded. This kind of ambush is the standard German practice on these occasions and had the usual effect of forcing us to deploy and carry out the attack. This time, however, the Germans were defending with rather more tenacity than they have shown so far in Italy.

We found our infantry lining the ditches on either side of the road and sat down with them to eat our lunch. Within five minutes enemy mortars had opened up on the left, worked steadily inward and were plastering the road. Army and Press withdrew round the next corner. While stretcher bearers went forward and came back we took stock of the situation. It appeared the German guns and mortars were on heights left of and behind the village and possibly in the village itself. It was decided to put in the infantry attack on these heights and the other on the right of the village. British machine-guns on our right opened up, firing diagonally across the road on the supposed position of enemy mortars which relapsed into what later turned out to be merely a temporary silence. Meanwhile, we looked at the road beside us and found it repaid observation. Clearly marked on it were tracks of German self-propelled guns, places where they had turned to fire and even patches of oil still wet. We felt like hunters following a still fresh spoor of wild animal.

Our infantry moved on and left the road on either side to carry out the attack and we went forward down the road to a point just short of the corner where wrecked carriers still showed ^{the} effects of German ambush. Then there was one of those long pauses which one gets used to. A distant burst of machine-gun fire on the left suggested our infantry were getting close to the German positions. The village lay before us in the sunlight quiet and apparently empty. The only sign of life was a single German soldier running from one patch/cover to another.

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Olive groves between us and the village hid all movement/our own troops. We lounged beside the road in the cover of a small farm and talked to a handful of gunners and various officers watching the progress of the attack. An ambulance came past from the direction of the town - and the driver gave us pleasant but possibly incorrect information that the Germans had mined the road and the Italians were furiously busily unmining it. We noticed a house in the village ahead which faced straight down the road towards our position. There was a lemon tree beside it and two women in gay dresses had propped a ladder against it and were busy picking lemons. A gunner sergeant muttered suspiciously about enemy observation posts and wanted to put a couple of rounds into the house. The women disappeared and again all was still. Not for long however.

Your correspondent had been taking advantage of the lull to have a short sleep on the top of the trailer of our jeep. By some happy chance he slept badly and soon got up and went round the corner of the farmyard to talk to one of the gunners. Suddenly there was a sound like the slamming of the biggest door ever imagined and the cloud of dust and debris descended on our heads. One of the gunners crumpled up as though his bones had been turned to water. A colonel standing near me did the wisest thing possible and dived straight through the cactus edge. Slam after slam followed while we dived for ditches or into the nearest dead ground. Enemy mortars had spotted us and were right on the target from the first shot.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION