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5TH ARMY ENCOUNTER GERMANS

BY BASIL GINGELL REPRESENTING THE COMBINED PRESS

Near Naples
Saturday

Although the advance of the 5th Army continues it is obvious that the German forces are not going to give up without a very real fight. It is known that at the time of the Allied landing there were many German divisions in the country, some north of Rome and others to the south. One young officer who left his car near here to go on foot to scout out the land found as he turned a corner two German tanks coming down the road. He leapt into a ditch with which this part of the country is liberally supplied while bullets whistled over his head and made his way back to his car and safety. The confusion operated to our advantage later when a major in one of our famous units took ten Germans prisoners single handed and captured an anti-tank gun. He was Major Eric Kearsley. He was standing behind a tree when he saw two Germans approaching with an anti-tank gun. He stepped out, covered them with his revolver and marched them down the road to his unit. He then returned to the tree and repeated the process four times.

In a little over half an hour he had ten Germans sitting in a row under guard without a shot being fired. Although within a small radius there are several German airfields near here enemy air activity has been very slight. There have been raids at night and a certain amount of strafing by day but the daylight effort has been on a small scale.

All the landing beaches are now operating although some grim stories are told of the struggle to get ashore in face of the barrage from the hills. One landing craft was hit by a shell which pierced the petrol tank of a vehicle on the upper deck and set it on fire. The vehicle crashed through on to the lower deck ablaze but almost simultaneously a water cart standing nearby was hit and the gushing water from this supply extinguished the blaze. I lost half my kit when the landing craft in which it had been stowed hit a floating mine and thick black oil flowed over the jeep containing it.

The countryside here is difficult for manoeuvring on any large scale. On the first day of the landing German Tiger tanks were operating almost down to the beaches. Today the nearest are some miles away. This position was presumably taken by the Nazis not only because of its strategic value in opposing an advance from the sea or the south but because, on two heights on the northern side of their position, our troops had established a hold. These units which made the landing at the same time as the others fought hard to gain positions which were now proving of the greatest importance. They overlook an important defile in the mountains which is the main outlet to the coast.

During yesterday the Germans fought hard to wrest the southernmost point from our holding force and by sheer weight gained some ground. By the afternoon, however, our men had restored the position. In the scenic beauty of Italy lies its strength for in these mountain vastnesses well positioned batteries with sufficient supplies might well keep at bay larger and much more powerful forces. At present they are being constantly shelled from the sea by Naval forces and tons of high explosives can be seen crashing down on the slopes where the enemy is known to be. It may well be that these positions may have to be winkled out as was done in the closing stages of the Tunisian campaign. All the time more and more equipment, supplies and reinforcements continue to arrive. More powerful guns, more vehicles and R.A.F. equipment are rolling up from the landing beaches. More and more troops swing along the dusty roads.

All are happy to have exchanged the aridness of the South for the fertility of Central Italy and even more, perhaps, the rolling sea for the firmness of the land. But for the menace of malarial mosquitoes against which the army has taken

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special precautions this would be ideal camping country. There is a profusion of fruit beyond belief. Apples, tangerines, grapes, tomatoes, walnuts and other fruits stretch out on all sides while, unlike the Middle East campaign, there is an abundance of water which flows from streams in the mountains and removes that menace of the empty water bottle to the thirsty fighting man. Every man has been issued with a soldier's guide to Italy which reads in places something like a modern guide book and to use the guide book language all are anxious to press on to those vistas beyond where the long view repays the ascent.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION