

DESPATCH FROM S. SALE, REPRESENTING THE COMBINED PRESSSalerno, Friday,

Knowing their situation was desperate with Italy out of the war, the Germans are still fighting resolutely to delay the enlargement of the Fifth Army bridgehead. Today, German infantry and tanks are operating across the line which is now three to four miles forward. Close range fighting centred on the road parallel to the coast, which was one of the objectives set the British, who now hold part of it. More British infantry are on the way to clear the Germans out. With the road in British hands the bridgehead will be secure.

Watching the massive accumulation of men and weapons on this beach strip and knowing their own long communications are jeopardised, the Germans cannot hope to do more than gain time and link up with the southern forces for a withdrawal northwards. They are using all their strength and ingenuity to that end. German pockets behind the British advanced positions still hold out and tanks of the 16th Panzers have made bold forays to the right of the British sector, where the situation is confused. The British today moved up to counter these moves.

German tanks in this area are now probably depleted. Before British anti-tank measures could be developed they caused a great deal of trouble with dashes towards the beach. The Luftwaffe, too, is being used against us but it is the allies who rule the skies. Intermittently the big anti-aircraft guns near which I am camping open up against odd raiders. The Luftwaffe saved its strength for raids upon the beaches and shipping last night. Three or four times heavy barrage thundered. Generally a droning in the sky means that Spitfires, Seafires and Lightnings are around. Nearly all the shells going over are directed against the enemy.

After the confusion of the first day's fighting the picture is now clearer. Though the craft in which I came ashore in the middle of the night met with little opposition some later arrivals were shelled, and troops had to make their way along the beaches under the fire of mortars, 88's and machine-guns. Pioneers came well from one such situation. An advance party went ahead to a strong machine-gun post, wiped it out and captured probably the first German prisoners of this operation.

In another sector a company of British came under a heavy attack and were almost overrun, but stabilised the position. More hard fighting marked the progress of British infantry moving up the road. Here, as elsewhere, Germans skilfully used 88 millimetre guns, and today the British who fought their way to the road are clinging on under a keen fire as reinforcements move up.

German snipers, too, have stuck to their posts until completely surrounded. For a long time a number of them held out in a large building overlooking an important road. Hours after their main forces had left them well behind snipers stayed in an apple orchard and tobacco patches. More than once I have heard their bullets whipping past. Prisoners I have seen along the roads reflect this German stubbornness.

These were young men with hard faces showing no disposition to fraternise with their guards. One walked painfully with a wounded leg. A guard said "Never mind, you're out of it now". The German made no reply though if he did not know the language he must have understood the tone.

Driving round these roads, where dust rises in thick white clouds, you see a huge movement of traffic of war. In 24 hours order has come out of apparent chaos. Lumbering convoys of lorries and guns move to appointed destinations along sign-posted ways. Headquarters that yesterday were single trucks are quite large camps today. And the men are everywhere - in slit trenches, in the empty fields, hidden among tobacco and maize, or snaking along roadsides to the front.

Now and then you see civilians who have been hiding heaven knows where. They are mostly farmers anxious for their crops and orchards. They tell their woes to the British Tommy who, with his amazing understanding of every known language, shepherds them to where they need to go. One such guide led two Italians with horse and cart munching grapes they had given him. The war here has other touches of the comic. In the second wave coming ashore was Chicot, a white rabbit found by a medical officer in a German dugout in Enfidaville. He was then a small white creature, only as big as the doctor's fist. He is now a large handsome Angora, with freedom of the cookhouse.

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