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DESPATCH FROM BRIGADIER GENERAL NOEL MONKS REPRESENTING  
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With General Mark Clark's Fifth Army in Italy

Italy is going to be a tough nut to crack - or rather I should say the Allies have a full time job on their hands expelling the Huns from Italy. The Germans are going to try and hang on to Italy's industrial north and airfields up to the last possible moment as the Nazis know full well what their possession by us will mean to greater Germany.

The ferociousness with which the Germans opposed the Allied landing at Salerno bay, south of Naples, provided the Allied High Command with a good indication of what to expect in the battle for northern Italy. It is not going to be any walk over, as have been our successes in southern and eastern Italy. Salerno Bay will go down in history as the Gallipoli of 1943 - without the evacuation of course.

The set up at Salerno was much the same as at Gallipoli when the Anzacs stormed the Turkish beaches 28 years ago. The beaches in both instances were perfect for landing purposes, but a powerful enemy lay in wait for the invaders behind positions that gave the defenders an almost overwhelming advantage.

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The world wondered how the Anzacs ever got a foothold at Gallipoli in face of such fierce opposition and can well wonder again how the British and American troops managed to get ashore in Salerno Bay. The landing was certainly the toughest amphibious operation of the war, particularly in the American section where I landed with a famous American infantry regiment, and was the grimmest assignment I have had in nearly nine years of war reporting. Spain was a holiday compared with it.

The wisdom of announcing Italy's capitulation a few hours before our troops climbed into their assault craft to storm Salerno's beaches is debatable, as it was natural that the troops would feel "let down" at the news that the shores on which they were about to fight were friendly as far as the Italians were concerned. Aboard some of the troopships soldiers were warned that the landing might not by any means be a pushover, in view of Italy's surrender, but all the same on my ship at least I noticed distinct easing of tension among the troops.

Going on to the beaches in the darkness in the landing craft the soldiers, who are usually grin and silent during the run in to the beaches on amphibious operations, were speculating as to the sort of reception they would receive. They had been warned not to fire on any Italians and were wondering how they were expected to distinguish between Italians and Germans in the pitch black. There was only one answer to their speculations -- German fire of all description from machine-guns to 88's. The Huns were waiting for us all right, British as well as Americans, and our troops were saved the trouble of making formal inquiries as to the nationality of "reception committees".

I cannot find words to praise sufficiently the heroism of the Americans I landed with. Untried before in actual battle -- though well trained -- they were unflinching, even when, before we hit the beaches, shells began to land in the water all around us. After dawn some dropped right in the middle of assault craft, killing and wounding tightly packed troops, but the little craft chugged inexorably on, steered by heroic young ensigns, and a British sub-lieutenant, who seemed to treat the wall of spray sent up by shell bursts merely as a nuisance to their correct navigation.

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At times you could not see the beaches through the smoke and spray kicked up by shell bursts. The Yanks dug in with their tiny shovels, their hands and their feet determined not to be thrown back from the beaches.

For a landing in a country that had just surrendered it was a most warlike affair. I leapt ashore, clutching my typewriter tightly in one hand and my rations in the other, and crouching low stroaked for the sand dunes a few yards up from the beach.

It must have been a lovely beach the day before with its white soft sands and gently lapping blue waters of the sunlit Tyrrhenian sea. But today war had turned it into a wilderness of death and destruction, and men's blood traced patterns in the white sands. For some reason the Germans had neglected to stud the beaches with their nefarious land mines, so common in Sicily, though party of U.S. engineers nabbed 50 German sappers just up from the beaches who were about to sew their deadly crop.

Salerno bay is on the most ideally situated defence points in Italy, as its great arc of shoreline is overlooked by mountains whose foothills run gently down to within two miles of the beaches. The flat cultivated country between the beaches and hills is very suitable for tanks - and remember Germans had their tanks well there before ours were even unloaded from the ships. Also the enemy had their artillery and mortar and machine gun posts dotted all over hilly slopes and in the mountains themselves. As one lanky Texan put it to me, "Those Guys are all set so they could drop a shell or a mortar on a dime on this beach".

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I saw many shells drop on men and landing craft and vehicles. But there was no deterring the Yanks. Wave after wave of support troops and supplies kept coming ashore on the shell torn beaches, and were rushed up behind the sand dunes. The "front" for the first day was as fluid as a running stream, seldom more than two miles up from the beaches and often, when German tanks infiltrated behind our infantry was back to the sand dunes. But the Americans clung to their hard won bridgeheads with a tenaciousness and bravery of seasoned fighters.

As I write this nearly a week has past since the landing, and the Americans are still clinging to their beaches with grim resolution. Carrier operated aircraft of the R.N. Fleet Air Arm and British and American fighters from Sicily had the beaches to themselves for the first two days, but the Luftwaffe put in an appearance on the third day, and the air war, reminiscent of the days of the Battle of Britain was waged right over the bridgeheads.

Even in this the Germans had the advantage of nearby airfields from which to operate. But our boys more than evened matters up in kills. While the Salerno invasion was not on the scale of <sup>the</sup> Sicily invasion. The landing certainly resulted in hurried German withdrawals from southern Italy, allowing British troops to capture the important naval bases of Taranto, Bari, and Brindisi intact in less than a week. The Germans quit these valuable bases so hurriedly, owing to pressure along the north-west coast, that they did not have time to carry out their usual destruction of vital installations. During those tough first two days of Salerno's beaches it was a comforting thought to know that "Monty" and his famous Eighth Army were fast moving up towards us from Messina, though we knew that as "Monty" moved further north towards us more and more Germans would be falling back into our "Hell Fire Valley" as the Americans christened it. Then we reasoned we would really be able to "squeeze" the Germans out.

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There is no doubt that from the day of Mussolini's fall to Badoglio's capitulation -- five weeks -- the Germans rushed many divisions and much equipment into Italy including air reinforcements. It is estimated that at least four German divisions are opposed to the Fifth Army in Salerno Bay area and that probably as many as eight more are preparing to defend the north.

The Allies task will be easier as we get control of airfields and ports through which to ship our troops. The landing in Salerno Bay was the hard way of entering Germanised Italy (it might have been just as easy had we landed two weeks earlier when probably only the Italians manned the defences) but as our forces move up both sides of the Italian coast the Germans will be gradually forced back <sup>on</sup> their extreme northern defences and the area of conflict will be considerably narrowed. Out of consideration for the Italian people the Allied navy did not "soften up" the Salerno area preparatory to landing though when it <sup>was</sup> found that the Germans were manning all the defences the Navy went to work with good effect. Only respite we had from the shelling on the beaches was when our warships plastered the hills with their big guns.

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Spotting was difficult owing to the heavily timbered nature of the hills and mountains. Strangely enough the only Britisher I met on the American beaches was a Canadian officer acting as an observer with the Americans. He had been at Dieppe and he told me that this "show" was worse than that famous raid because Dieppe was only an in and out affair and Salerno Bay was "in for keeps" as he put it. I liked the confident tone of his "in for keeps" Like me he was very much impressed with the dogged courage of the Yanks. Having been through Sicily with the Americans I have every confidence that they will be able to dish it out as well as take it in Italy given anything like an even break, and that they will more than get their own back for the tough time at Salerno.

There wasn't the slightest indication of any Italians taking part in Salerno battle. The few Italian families I encountered in our area had been told of the Armistice from Rome and were delighted regardless of the fierce battles being waged around them. Rather ironically they considered the war was over for them!

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By the occupation of Brindisi and Bari Hitler's Balkan flank along the Adriatic is wide open to attack both from the air and from the sea and the fact must be a headache for the Nazis who are finding the seething Balkans a heavy liability that is likely to become heavier as the Russians move nearer and nearer to Rumania and the Black Sea.

The meeting of the British and the Russian armies outside Belgrade is a spectre for the Nazis that must soon be taken seriously.

Italy's honoring her agreement to hand over her navy has given us the biggest prize from the Italian surrender. The Italians put to sea with the sure knowledge that the Luftwaffe would be after them and were fortunate only to lose one battleship seeing as they had no air cover.

The Mediterranean is still menaced however by German U-boats though it is not considered that many are operating. With the Allied capture of each Italian port U-boats will find it increasingly difficult to find bases from which to operate.

To sum up the most important thing about the Italian surrender is that the Italian navy is in our hands, and most important thing about the battles now going on to get Germany out of Italy is that from the Italian air bases the Allies will be able to blast the industries in Greater Germany -- Austria, etc., and Southern Germany morning, noon and night, allowing the full weight of the Allied bombers based in Britain to be thrown against the Fatherland. I hate to think of what is coming to the Reich. But I don't really.

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