

0030 B.S.T. 28/3/44

GUNNERS BUSY ON THE BEACH-HEAD

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With the Fifth Army in Italy

Allied Beachhead Forces

March Twenty-seventh

Gunners on both sides are doing the bulk of the work and most of the damage in the beachhead at present. Shells crash on water or land near Anzio as regularly as number thirteen buses bustle down the Strand. Now and then some one is unlucky but it takes a lot of shelling to kill or damage soldiers. The turn around of ships bringing in new men is so quick and the handling on the quays is so well organised that there have been very few casualties to men stepping ashore although, obviously, the Germans try to shoot on them.

Once away from the port area, they are soon in 'dug-out land', where there are thousands of slit trenches or sandbagged sleeping quarters scooped out of the brown soil. Soldiers of the last war would nod approval if they could see how effectively these beachhead men get to ground during shellfire. Yesterday one headquarters area had one hundred and twenty shells down on it in fifty minutes. Some gear was damaged but there wasn't a casualty among the men. That was daylight shelling. The night shelling causes no more casualties but it does increase the strain by breaking sleep, although some men here have gone on sleeping even though shellbursts were only fifty yards or less from them.

This tight beachhead warfare has induced in the soldiers the habit of steelhelmet wearing. Steel helmets are compulsory as soon as a soldier reaches the beachhead. Experience of the Germans 'harassing fire' from the guns and the use of butterfly and other anti-personnel bombs makes men ready enough to carry out orders. The seventy square mile beachhead area is riddled with slit trenches. I found men have high confidence in the protection of a few feet of earth and the first thing they do when they move in to a new area is to start digging. Here in Anzio there is an endless supply of sand right on the beachhead doorstep, the strip of sand running along the edge of the town. Sandbags are used to give blast protection in many towns, shaky shell-punched buildings. It is comical to find in a forward area, soldiers who, although themselves under shell and mortar fire, frequently seemed to regard living in Anzio as quite an heroic thing to do. I invited one officer twice decorated and brave as two lions to be my guest at dinner in the war correspondents mess. He smiled and said: "Old boy, do /you know

you know I am not so sure I like the idea of going into Anzio". He was half serious. The idea of driving by night over our shell slapped roads partly accounted for his reluctance. He turned up anyway.

The present situation brings out the capacity of both the American and British soldier to adapt himself to circumstances.

In the building where I sleep with other war correspondents a young American soldier managed to produce excellent coffee on the fire and had one fire made with a handful of sticks every morning.

The other morning, he proudly produced doughnuts, supplied by the American Red Cross. Two or three times a week, in the same windowless kitchen there is a meeting of the 'steak club'. Everyone living or working in the building is an honorary member and ^{has} slabs of excellent steak and round pieces of toasted bread. The steak is grilled over bits of chopped up ration boxes and the room is filled with blue smoke. The steak club is a great success. Another name for this kitchen is 'Luigi's Ristorante' because a local named Luigi usually gives a hand. It was at one of these sessions I heard a new comer noting two aircraft flying towards Anzio ask "What kind of planes are those?"

A British soldier answered: "They're two bees (letter B) - too bad, if they're not ours".

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION