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ITALIAN BRIDGEHEAD: FROM JOHN REDFERN REPRESENTING THE COMBINED BRITISH PRESS.

Fifth Army Allied Beachhead Forces,
- April 7th,

They were together in the dug-out that was hit. They are together now in the brought in casualty clearing station. Three north country lads. They were from the operating theatre to the long tent one after the other, the fairhaired, blue-eyed Bradfordian, the dark Tynesider and the muscular man from Stockton. Their beds were put close together at the far end of the tent. Privates in a famous northern county regiment Bradford, Tyneside and Stockton were lying there to-day dozing and looking very young.

That is how they looked when the shell landed smack on the sand bags at one end of their dug-out a mile behind the front. Their company had been at the front until three a.m. that morning. Then they were moved back. The three comrades were dead tired when they reached the rest place. But not too tired to think of the essential cover. The dugout was all ready there, a few yards from their halting place. Tyneside saw it first and yelled to the other two.

It had been made by other soldiers by scooping into the gentle slope so that the sides were about four feet deep at one end but fell down to about three feet at the entrance which was protected by a double row of sandbags. The three comrades squatted inside and shared a tin of bully from which the one sliced pieces for all with his army knife. Then a N.C.O. came along and said they'd better bed down because they would be going back to the front line about 7.30, after nightfall. The three stretched out side by side. Their feet nearly reached the sandbags. There was boarding over the dug-out and pieces of bushes over that. In the shadows they slept.

They were still asleep at five past five o'clock when the shell burst at their feet. They woke choking, their mouths filled with dirt from the steel slashed soil and burst sandbags. Lying back this morning inside the brown tent - the ward - one said "we were very fortunate. If that shell had come the other end we would have had it." As we talked there was the occasional 'whoosh' of shells going over to the port. Another cocked his head one side "oh that. That doesn't worry. It's night time when you hear the planes and the ack ack that you feel a bit bothered sometimes. It's funny it seems to set all the nerves in my legs tingling." He didn't tell me but I knew that he has no legs now. They had to be amputated at the knee.

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He didn't mention that his chum had also had both legs amputated, or that the other lad had lost one foot. Nor did he tell me that after the shellburst with his legs horribly gashed and useless he managed to work his way with elbows out of the mess to call aid because he thought that during the shelling no one would hear their shouts from the inside.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION.