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INVASION OF ITALY

From William Wilson Representing Combined Canadian Press

The withdrawing Germans are now about twenty four hours ahead of the Canadians advancing up the Italian toe and are attempting by means of demolitions to avoid contact rather than to maintain a rearguard action. There is not yet any visible indication whether German will fight here or not.

One of the strangest features of the German retirement is the fact that they are carrying out only/minimum of demolitions necessary to keep the British and Canadians well behind. They are making no serious attempt to delay them. The 8th Army advancing up San Stefano road have passed Delianuova encountering only three demolitions none of which were protected by mines. Two were excellent examples of bridge blowing but the third was a crater easily passed by a narrow mountain trail sufficiently good for any form of transport to proceed at a reasonable speed.

The only contact with the Germans by the Canadians was a skirmish with light force protecting engineers making a second demolition. After then they have gained several hours on us. One Canadian officer started out with a jeep and a tommygunner for the sake of speed and for two days followed up the Germans alone but he did not succeed in getting closer than ten hours behind them.

A Canadian captain commenting on the situation said "Its up to commanders to figure out what it means, but among us it is an armchair strategist's paradise - one man's guess is as good as another and nobody can prove anyone else wrong". A Canadian patrol which swung north on the coast road advanced without meeting opposition except from a small group of Italians strengthened by three or four German mortars. They withdrew as soon as night fell and the Canadians were about to clear them out. The Canadians were held up by a road block north of the town but were uncertain whether this was a demolition or a natural landside.

Other patrols advanced well up the coast road without meeting opposition. I drove up the road yesterday afternoon and finally turned back when doubtful whether there were any Canadians ahead but civilians said they had not seen either Italian or Germans recently. A patrol advanced miles ahead of us in search of the enemy, returning unshaven and bedraggled. A soldier with a tommy gun stopped a jeep and called four others out from a bush where they were hiding. They were survivors of one command group who had lived for nine days on the scantiest food and water after they landed.

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The Canadians' leader was Corporal Richard Pentall who after explaining that he was formerly a Brighton Borough policeman added "I hate to be standing talking to you with a whacking great bear like this". Others were Trooper Leslie Hammond of Guildford, Gunner Stanley Bradborne of Grappenhall, Warrington, Lancs., Lance-Corporal Thomas Wolbourn of Leicester and Lance-Corporal Andrew Duchan of 425, Rutherglen Road, Glasgow. Pentall and Hammond participated in a commando raid in the Molito area. Pentall said: "I volunteered for it because I wanted to be one of the first into Italy. I feel quite proud of being in so soon. I got back from the first raid about dawn, slept all day and came on this one. We landed a little way down the beach and an officer led us up a ravine between the mountains about a mile inland and down the other side near a village. We found about 160 Italian soldiers there and were sighted by them, so were forced to withdraw into the hills since we were hopelessly outnumbered. They got one of our men as he went into the ravine and the major went on reconnaissance the same afternoon and did not return. I do not know what happened to him."

They retired into a thick hedge nearby with Pentall cutting the way with a table knife. Italian patrols and civilians armed with shot-guns hunted them for three days. Pentall said: "We often had the enemy almost on top of us but they did not see us after the first time." An Italian civilian found them and brought four loaves of bread which consisted their main food supply for nine days, and sent his little daughter into the hills to fill their water bottles. One day she failed to turn up and two of them hunted through the hills for most of the night unsuccessfully, searching for water. The Italian returned next day and accompanied them when they searched for water so as to locate a supply. Pentall said: "He did what he could for us but was afraid to do very much. You cannot believe how good it is to see British uniforms again. We did not know Italy had been invaded until we saw a jeep and another car pass. I had a hard time convincing the others you were really British."

They were given rations and driven to artillery headquarters for a good meal.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION