

19/9/43 - No. 1

"FRANKIE'S" STORY

By Frank Gillard, representing the Combined British Press

With the Fifth Army,
September 17

This afternoon I spent some time with Frankie. Frankie is a man of sixty or so, an Italian born but one who has spent many years in the United States and speaks English with the ripest Middle West accent. He came back to Italy to spend his old age and settled in a little village just a few miles inland from the Salerno Gulf. Now, he is having a busy time acting as an unofficial interpreter between the British forces and Italian civilians.

When I first saw him today, he was surrounded by a small crowd of dusty looking men with whom he was deep in conversation. These, he told me, were refugees. They had walked for hundreds of miles to get into territory controlled by the Allies. He introduced some of them to me - men from Rome, from Bologna, even from Trieste. "I estimate that within the last few days, we have had a thousand at least of men like these coming into this village," he said. They were a grave problem, he went on, for there was little enough food to go round for regular inhabitants and none for extra mouths. These refugees were being obliged to live on what they could pick for themselves. They will not starve, nobody in this part of Italy at any rate need starve, for fruit and nuts are plentiful and will at least keep body and soul together until better food can be brought up. But all the same, these men are having a most difficult time.

I talked to several of them as they stood there around Frankie. Some had just been demobilised from the Italian Army.

The Germans had taken their arms and packed them off leaving them to find their way to their homes or wherever they wanted to go without any assistance. Most of them had come on foot tramping all the way over the dusty Italian roads. They had shed their uniforms and begged civilian clothing from houses on the way.

Most of them looked and smelt like tramps. Those who had come from Rome told us how Italian and German soldiers had fought in the streets there on the days following the armistice and how the German bombers had attacked the city during the time that the Italians were trying to hold out against the demands of their former allies.

One man had travelled about 150 miles to reach the village from Rome. He had come as far as possible by train and had walked the rest of the way. It had taken him just a week. He, like others, described how the Germans were looting and plundering in every place he passed through, treating the Italians shamefully.

There was one thing that all these men wanted to impress on us. The people of Italy were on the side of the Allies they said: they were sick to death of the Germans, and longing for the arrival of the British and American troops. "And that" said Frankie, "is what we all say. The sooner the Germans are driven out of Italy the better."

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