

THE INVASION OF ITALY

From Ralph Allen Representing the Combined Canadian Press

With The Canadians in Italy
September 6.

Along wild mountain ridges of the Aspromonte the battle for Italy is still a battle between man and nature and in the early hours of this bleak morning nature came up with her Sunday punch. The Canadians learned all they needed to know about the versatility of the country's terrain in their first forty eight hours of struggle with untamed gorges and sheer peaks above their landing beaches. Last night and today they learned about the versatility of its climate. As the sun dipped for cover beyond the still visible Straits of Messina plodding infantrymen's backs were still dark with sweat. Helmets were tilted back for ventilation as they plodded on too tired to talk but not too tired to throw an occasional epithet over shoulders at the heat. At twilight men still marched leaving their transport behind the demolitions that are still the only trace of human enemy. The mountain air cooled quickly as the columns already more than a mile above sea level trudged on. Here and there an anti-aircraft gunner standing by a stationary bofors gun on line of march threw a greatcoat over his thin summer drill. Even soldiers on march began pull on sweaters. Sullen splotches of purple closed in against night sky. Clammy grey wisps engulfed the columns as they passed the cloud line. They stopped to rest for the night on groundsheets and their single blankets.

And then it rained. Not soft Mediterranean rain of travel literature but a rain right out of a Canadian December as penetrating and persuasive as an Atlantic fog. The rain started at a tentative canter and then broke into full gallop washing down thirsty roads and overflowing in rivulets into deep canyons. Even slopes that had been crying for rain for months lost their capacity for absorption as the torrent saturated the subsoil and left frigid pools along the surface of the ground.

Some regiments marched through it and some tried to sleep. A few soldiers found cover and others discovered extra stores of blankets and waterproofs in abandoned enemy supply dumps but for the most it was the wettest coldest night they have known since the war began.

Slowly drying out as they pushed on this morning the soldiers began asking themselves who had started the campaign about those sweet siroccos and lovely dust roads of Sicily anyway.

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